Regina Engstrand, a young girl in service for Mrs. Alving, appears in the garden. She tries to prevent her father, Jacob Engstrand, from entering. Engstrand has come to ask Regina to live with him and work for him in his planned "seamen's home." He says he has saved enough money from doing carpentry work on the new orphanage to begin this enterprise and now that she has grown into "such a fine wench" she would be a valuable asset. He clearly implies that this seamen's home will be a high class brothel. Regina says she has her own plans for the future, especially since Oswald Alving has just returned from his studies in Paris.

Pastor Manders enters after Engstrand has left. He talks with Regina about her father. Since Engstrand requires a strong influence to keep him from drinking, Manders suggests that Regina, out of filial duty, return to live with him and be "the guiding hand" in her father's life. Regina says she would rather seek a place in town as a governess.

While the girl goes to fetch Mrs. Alving, Manders peruses some books on the table. He gives a start after reading the title page of one, and with increasing disapproval looks at some others. Cordially and affectionately, Mrs. Alving comes in to greet him. Politely inquiring after Oswald, Manders then asks who reads these books. Shocked to find they are hers, he wonders how such readings could contribute to her feeling of self-reliance, as she puts it, or how they can confirm her own impressions. What is objectionable about the books, she asks. "I have read quite enough about them to disapprove of them," he answers. "But your own opinion — " she pursues. He talks as if to a child:

My dear Mrs. Alving, there are many occasions in life when one has to rely on the opinions of others. That is the way in the world, and it is quite right that it should be so. What would become of society otherwise?

He now wishes to discuss their mutual business — the Captain Alving Orphanage — built by Mrs. Alving in honor of her late husband. Although she has left all the arrangements to Manders, he wants to ask whether they should insure the buildings. To her prompt "of course," he raises objections since the orphanage is dedicated to "higher causes." He points out that his fellow clergymen and their congregations might interpret the insurance to mean "that neither you nor I had a proper reliance on Divine protection." As Mrs. Alving's advisor he himself would be the first attacked by "spiteful persons" who would publicly slander him. She assures him that under these conditions she would not wish the buildings insured.

Speaking of insurance, Mrs. Alving mentions that the building nearly caught fire yesterday from some burning shavings in the carpenter's shop. She says she has heard that Engstrand is often careless with matches. Manders makes excuses because the "poor fellow" has so many anxieties. "Heaven be thanked," he says, "I am told he is really making an effort to live a blameless life. Why he assured me so himself." Manders thinks it would be best for Engstrand if Regina returned to live with him, but Mrs. Alving's firm "No!" is definitive.

Oswald appears, bearing so much likeness to his dead father that Manders is startled; Mrs. Alving quickly insists that her son takes after her. During their conversation, Oswald shocks the pastor by depicting the fidelity and beauty of family

life among the common-law marriages of his fellow painters in Paris. Disapproving of artists in the first place, Manders sputters indignantly at such circles "where open immorality is rampant." He cannot understand how "the authorities would tolerate such things" and is even more dismayed when Mrs. Alving later declares that Oswald "was right in every single word he said." In her loneliness, she continues, she has come to the same conclusions as her son, that the married men of good social standing are capable of the greatest acts of immorality.

It is his duty to speak now, but not just as a friend, Manders says, "it is your priest that stands before you just as he once did at the most critical moment of your life." He reminds her how she came to him after the first year of marriage, refusing to return to her husband. She softly reminds him that the first year was "unspeakably unhappy." To crave for happiness is simply to be "possessed by a spirit of revolt," he answers. Bound in marriage by a "sacred bond" her duty was "to cleave to the man you had chosen"; though a husband be profligate, a wife's duty is to bear the cross laid upon her shoulders by "a higher will," Manders continues. It was imprudent for her to have sought refuge with him at the time, and he is proud to have had the strength of character to lead her back "to the path of duty" and back to her husband.

Having defaulted in her wifely duty, she also neglected her duty as a mother, Manders goes on. Because she sent Oswald to boarding schools all his life rather than educating him at home, the child has become a thorough profligate. "In very truth, Mrs. Alving, you are a guilty mother!" Manders exhorts.

These conclusions are unjust, Mrs. Alving answers, for Manders knew nothing of her life from that moment on. He must know now "that my husband died just as great a profligate as he had been all his life." In fact, she tells him, a disease he contracted from his lifelong excesses caused his death. Manders gropes for a chair. To think that all the years of her wedded life were nothing but "a hidden abyss of misery" makes his brain reel. She says that her husband's scandalous conduct invaded the walls of this very house for she witnessed Alving's approaches to the servant Joanna. "My husband had his will of that girl," Mrs. Alving continues, "and that intimacy had consequences." Only later on does Manders discover that the "consequences" are Regina.

Mrs. Alving goes on to describe how she sat up with her husband during his drinking bouts, being his companion so he would not leave the house to seek others. She had to listen to his ribald talk and then, with brute force, bring him to bed. She endured all this for Oswald's sake, sending him to boarding schools when he was old enough to ask questions. As long as his father was alive, Oswald never set foot in his home.

Besides thoughts of her son, she also had her work to sustain her, Mrs. Alving tells Manders. Too besotted to be useful, her husband depended on her to keep him in touch with his work during his lucid intervals. She improved and arranged all his properties, and she is converting his share of the estate into the "Captain Alving Orphanage." By this gesture Mrs. Alving hopes to "silence all rumors and clear away all doubt" as to the truth of her husband's life. None of his father's estate shall pass on to Oswald; "my son shall have everything from me," she states.

Grumbling at "this everlasting rain," Oswald returns from his walk. When Regina announces that dinner is ready, Oswald follows her into the dining room to uncork the wines. Meanwhile Manders and Mrs. Alving discuss the dedication ceremony for the opening of the orphanage tomorrow. She regards the occasion as the end of "this long dreadful comedy." After tomorrow she shall feel as if the dead husband had never lived here. Then "there will be no one else here but my boy and his mother," she declares. They hear a quiet scuffle from the next room, then Regina's whisper, "Oswald! Are you mad? Let me go!"

Horror-struck, Mrs. Alving hoarsely whispers to Manders, "Ghosts. The couple in the conservatory — over again." He is bewildered. Then knowledge dawns. "What are you saying! Regina — ? Is she — ?" His hostess nods helplessly. The curtain comes down.

Analysis

As the first act functions to introduce the characters, the central problem of the play, as well as the essential story line, the playwright carefully forewarns his audience of the themes he will develop in subsequent acts. In fact, the first scene of a well written drama often presents a complete analogy of the whole play. With this in mind, the author imparts special significance to the order of appearance of his characters.

Regina is the first to appear, showing by dress and demeanor that she is a properly reared servant maid. As she talks with her father, the audience recognizes that, though she is of vulgar stock, she has aspirations to gentility. This is shown as she uses her little knowledge of French.

Engstrand's appearance keynotes the theme of a depraved parent who ensnares his child in his own dissolution, especially as the carpenter asks Regina to join him in his planned enterprise. Implying that she is not his true-born daughter, Ibsen also introduces the theme that children, although unaware of their origins, inherit qualities from their parents. As Regina accuses her father of being able to "humbug" the reverend, and later on showing how Manders accepts Engstrand's hypocrisy for fact, Ibsen introduces the idea that society recognizes phrase-mongering rather than integrity of thought and action as a standard of moral respectability.

Pastor Manders appears next; suggesting that Regina return to live with her father shows how he allies himself with Jacob Engstrand. The respectability and social orthodoxy which he expresses in phrases like "daughter's duty" rather than defining his principles through thoughtful investigations, show that Manders supports anyone whose cant agrees with his own.

After Manders peruses the books, Mrs. Alving enters. The audience senses that she is separated from the pastor by an abyss created by her intellect and experience, as symbolized by the books. Arranged on the table which stands between them, these volumes are in fact their first subject of dissension. One does not have to read them to denounce them, Manders states. He is content to accept the opinions of others. By her answers, Mrs. Alving shows she is no longer satisfied by dogma; she must learn truth through her own experience.

Since Manders indicates no ability to learn anything not expressed in pious formulas, we cannot expect his character to change during the drama. Mrs. Alving, on the other hand, welcoming controversy and opposing the results of her experience to what she has always been taught, is fully prepared to face the full impact of events forthcoming in the rest of the play. This quality marks Mrs. Alving as the protagonist of the drama. Having established these intellectual qualities of the mother, Ibsen now brings forth Oswald. As the entire product of Mrs. Alving's life, he presents the greatest problem she will confront.

This arrangement of character introduction suggests the opposing tensions of the play. Regina, her dead mother, and Engstrand parallel Oswald, his mother, and the dead Mr. Alving. One side represents that part of society whose members have loose morals, aspirations to gentility, and who grab at whatever opportunity for self-betterment they can; the other side represents the best in society, a group whose members are cultured, propertied, and have strong ethics. In the middle, as if he were a fulcrum balancing the extremes, stands Pastor Manders. Already appearing as a moralizing but empty-headed standard of society, denouncing Mrs. Alving's intellectual inquiry and supporting Engstrand's hypocrisy, the character of Manders allows the audience to foresee the thesis of the drama: that a society which unwittingly destroys individuality and encourages deceit perpetrates disease — physical as well as emotional — upon its youthful members.

Ghosts Summary and Analysis of Act Two

Summary

Act Two

After dinner, Osvald goes out for a bit and Mrs. Alving sends Regina down to the laundry room to help with decorations. She and Manders discuss Osvald and Regina. She doesn't think anything has happened yet, but Regina must leave the house now. Manders suggests she go to her father's, but realizes the truth: Engstrand isn't Regina's father.

Mrs. Alving sighs and explains that Regina's mother, Johanna, came to her, told her the truth, and Mrs. Alving took care to cover it up. She gave Johanna $300; Johanna revived a relationship with Engstrand and lied to him that it was some foreigner who got her pregnant. Manders is full of contempt for this sham marriage and for Engstrand agreeing to marry a "fallen woman" for money.

Mrs. Alving asks him, vexed, if he thinks the same of her because she was only doing her duty and did not want to be married, and says that he can't think Alving was pure when they married. He doesn't think it is the same. She is a bit melancholy when she thinks of where her heart actually was and how she didn't pay attention to what *she* wanted. Manders maintains that her marriage was based on law and order and was, therefore, right.
She muses that she should have never covered up Alving's behavior, that she was cowardly, and that she should have told Osvald about his father. Manders is horrified and says that Osvald must honor his father and that she was doing her duty.

The two disagree with each other. She scoffs that Osvald should know the truth, while he says there is something to be said for not shattering ideals. Mrs. Alving wishes she hadn't built his father up so much to Osvald, but then she states that, right now, she has to think about how Osvald simply cannot fool around with Regina.

She does muse, though, that it would be easy if the young people could just marry and be honest about it. This shocks Manders, but Mrs. Alving says that she knows many people who are that closely related. Manders acknowledges that family isn't as pure as it should be.

Mrs. Alving admits she is terrified; the dead among them haunt her. When Manders asks what she means, she says that when she heard Osvald and Regina, she heard "ghosts." Ghosts are their parents and things like old ideas and beliefs—things that didn't exactly live inside them but are sitting around all the same. She sees ghosts everywhere she turns.

Pastor Manders is exasperated by her comments and blames her progressive readings. He is stunned, though, when she accuses *him* of being the one who was responsible for her doing her own thinking. When he sent her back to her husband with numerous reasons, she looked into them and found them specious. She tugged on the proverbial knot and the whole thing came undone.
He is saddened to hear this, and both realize they never understood each other. He makes her feel worse when he says he never thought of her as anything but another man's wife.

She sadly changes the subject to Regina. They decide she must go, and Manders reiterates that it must be to Engstrand.

At that moment, Engstrand himself arrives, asking for a word with the Pastor. He begins by saying that, now that work is finishing up at the orphanage, he thinks the Pastor should come by for a prayer tonight. He humbly says that he's an ordinary man, or else he'd do it himself.

Manders sharply asks about Engstrand's conscience, which Engstrand waves off. Manders then pushes Engstrand to admit the truth about Regina, which Engstrand does—with numerous protestations that he was doing the right thing. He argues that it is a Christian's job to lift the fallen, which was what he did for Johanna. It broke his heart to hear her story, so he righteously married her. He never cared about the money, and it all went to the child. He is sure that he has been a good father. He never said anything because he didn't want to get any credit for the good deed.

Pastor Manders is touched and humbled; he asks Engstrand for forgiveness for misjudging him. Engstrand uses this opportunity to tell him about his plan for the seamen's place in town, a place he claims will be free from vice. Manders says he would love to hear more, but now is the time to light the candles for the prayer. Engstrand thanks him, fakes a tear for Regina growing up so well thanks to Mrs. Alving, and leaves.

Manders is pleased with Engstrand and remarks that one must be careful judging another. Mrs. Alving replies wryly that Manders is, and always has been, a child, and she wishes she could hug him.

A bit confused, Manders gathers his things to go. He says he will return later.

Alone now, Mrs. Alving turns and, to her surprise, sees Osvald with a cigar and drink at the table. She stammers that she thought he was going out. He shrugs that the weather is bad.

She invites him into the garden room, saying he can bring his cigar even if he doesn't think he can. He is restless, complaining about the weather and how he can't work. He suddenly asks his mother if his being home really makes her happy, saying she got along just fine without him. She assures him that she loves having him.

To her surprise and growing anxiousness, he tells her he must tell her something. He has been keeping it for some time now, but now it must come out. His tiredness is not ordinary tiredness. He isn't sick in the traditional way: rather, his mind is sick and broken, and he will not work again. His eyes fill with pain as he says this. Mrs. Alving intuits that he means he has syphilis; she asks how he got it, and he says he does not know. He has not led too wild of a life, so he is surprised that this terrible thing has happened to him. She tries to comfort him, and she urges him to tell her everything.

He explains that it started the last time he got to Paris. He had a piercing pain in his head and he thought it was a normal headache, but he realized it was different. He couldn't work anymore: his strength was paralyzed, and he couldn't concentrate. He saw the doctor and learned the truth. The doctor asked many questions that didn't seem pertinent and finally told him that he'd been "worm-eaten since birth" (104). When Osvald asked him to explain it, the doctor said, "the sins of the father are visited on the children" (104). At this, Mrs. Alving slowly rises.

Osvald continues that he almost hit the man for impugning his father, then showed him all the letters where his mother bragged of his father. Osvald felt better about that, but he rued that he had lived his own life as he did. The truth was that he should have been more careful and less irresponsible. He wrecked himself; he is the only one to blame.

Osvald throws himself down mournfully, crying out that he wished his curse had been something he had inherited instead of something he did to himself.

After a minute, he adds that he is so sorry to be upsetting his mother, and he can see that she loves him a great deal. He begs her for a drink so he can drown out his thoughts. She acquiesces and pulls the bell-rope.

In the meantime, he complains about the incessant rain and how he never sees the sunshine.

Regina comes down and Mrs. Alving tells her to bring them a half-bottle of champagne. Osvald weakly thanks his mother. She says she can never deny him anything. His eyes light up and he asks if she really means that. His tone disconcerts her.

They drink a bit. Osvald asks his mother what she thinks of Regina, adding that he finds her magnificent. Mrs. Alving hesitantly suggests that Regina has problems, but she is fond of her. Suddenly, Osvald jumps up and says Regina is his only hope. He has to live a different way; he has to leave his mother. He cannot live with this dread all the time.

Mrs. Alving is worried and confused. Osvald barrels on, saying how beautiful and healthy Regina is. Mrs. Alving tries to calm him and rings for Regina to bring them a whole bottle.

Osvald admires Regina's retreating figure but then sadly recalls a wrong he did to her: once, they were talking about Paris, and he said they could go there together; it seems she took that to heart. When he realized she had been hoping for this, he actually saw her magnificence for the first time and decided she was his salvation—she was life.

Regina returns, and Osvald tells her to get a glass for herself as well. She is surprised, especially when Mrs. Alving reluctantly says that this is okay.

In her brief absence, Mrs. Alving tells Osvald he can't do this, but he firmly says it is decided.

Regina returns and sits. Mrs. Alving asks Osvald what he was saying about the joy of life, and he admits that he's never felt that at home. He felt it when he painted, and he believes that every one of his works springs from that. In his works are "light and sunshine, and a holiday spirit" (109). He is afraid to remain here at home for fear of losing that. When asked what he means, he explains it as "afraid of everything that's best in me degenerating into ugliness" (109).

Mrs. Alving is dismayed to hear this and rises to announce the truth. Before she can say anything, Pastor Manders enters. He states that Regina must go with Engstrand. Osvald cuts in and says she is going with *him*. Mrs. Alving begins to say that neither of these things will happen, but she does not get far.
Suddenly, shouts are heard, and, looking out the windows, Regina screams that something is burning in the asylum. Everyone runs out. Pastor Manders claims this is a "fiery judgment on this wayward house" (111) and adds that it is a shame there is no insurance

Ghosts Summary and Analysis of Act Three

Summary

Act Three

It is still night in the same garden room. Mrs. Alving and Regina are standing together, stunned that the whole orphanage burned down. Mrs. Alving goes to look for Osvald and the Pastor comes in. He sighs to Regina that this is the most terrible night he's lived through. He also begins to complain about Engstrand being after him to talk about something; then, Engstrand himself enters.

Gleefully and slyly, Engstrand states that it is a shame Pastor Manders is to blame for this, as he was the one responsible for the candles. He claims that he saw the Pastor take one, snuff the flame, and throw the wick into some shavings. The Pastor is uncertain and paces about in disbelief that he could have accidentally done something like that, even though he does not remember.
Engstrand continues, painting a picture of the press mistreating him. Mrs. Alving returns and says that Osvald will not be talked out of leaving the ruins. In a clipped tone,

she says that maybe this is all for the best, and that the "Home" would not really have been that for anyone. She tells Manders, who is due to take the next steamer out, to take the papers so she can be done with it all. Engstrand jumps in and reminds the Pastor about the seamen's home.

Pastor Manders begins to despair that he might have to resign because of the inquiry that will happen. Engstrand sidles up to him and says he will go with him because he cannot abandon his benefactor. In fact, he will take the blame for the fire if Manders will help him with the seamen's home. Incredulous and grateful, Manders agrees.

The Pastor bids goodbye to Mrs. Alving. Engstrand tells Regina she'll know where to find him; then, he announces to all that he plans to name his home "Captain Alving's Home." Manders and Engstrand exit.

Osvald returns and glumly says that Engstrand's home will probably burn just like this one since nothing of Father's memory gets to remain. He sits down, wet from the water used to extinguish the fire. Mrs. Alving fusses over him and asks if he wants to sleep; he fitfully says that he never sleeps anymore.

Regina asks if he is okay. Osvald simply calls for all the doors to be shut and begins to say how helpful Regina will be to him: she will give him a helping hand when he finally needs it. Confused, Mrs. Alving offers, but he smiles that she couldn't do what he needs.

Mrs. Alving sighs, knowing that this is the moment to tell all. She begins by saying that she is going to relieve Osvald of a burden: his self-reproach and self-blame. She paints a picture of the Chamberlain, full of the joy of life. Osvald was born of this joy of life because his father could never find the outlet he needed, and Mrs. Alving never gave him the sunshine he needed either. She knew about duty, yes, but she did not make the house bearable for his father. She never wrote about it because she didn't think it was proper to tell Osvald that his father was a broken man before he was born. Finally, she implies that Regina belongs here in this house just the same as he does.

The two young people are shocked as recognition dawns. Regina immediately asks for permission to leave, and Mrs. Alving sadly obliges. Regina claims boldly that she's got her youth and also the joy of life and has to see to that now. She cannot stay with a sick man—and, now that she knows the truth, she definitely has to leave. She complains that she should have been brought up as a gentleman's daughter, not subserviently. Mrs. Alving suggests that she is welcome to stay, but Regina waves her away and says that she can turn to Manders or another house (implying her father's) where she knows she will always be welcome. Mrs. Alving shakes her head that Regina is heading for disaster, but Regina does not care and leaves.

Osvald shares his feelings about what he's learned about his father, saying simply that it's a surprise but it doesn't much matter to him. All he remembers about his father is that he made him throw up. It is an old superstition that a child has to love their parent no matter what. He even suggests that he doesn't love his mother, but that he does at least know her and how much she cares for him.

Mrs. Alving moans that she will try to make him love her, but he dismisses her, saying that he has no time to think about others. She assures him that she will be patient and

calm. Osvald is comforted a bit, but he asks who will take away the dread. Mrs. Alving does not understand.

Osvald then asks if it is late, and Mrs. Alving replies that it is early morning, it looks to be a clear day, and he will be able to see the sun. He rallies a bit, saying that there can be things to live for even if he can't work. He will feel better when he gets through the next thing too, and then the sun will rise and he will not have the dread.

Mrs. Alving asks what he means. He asks her if she really meant she'd do anything at all for him, and she says "Of course." He tries to prepare her, asking her not to react irrationally or emotionally. She agrees. He then says that his being tired and not working are the *symptoms*, not the illness. The illness is his inheritance from his father and it is in his brain; it is ready to break out at any time. This stuns her, but he presses on. He says that he had one attack and it subsided, but he dreads another. He is revolted, but it's not that he is afraid of dying—rather, he hates the idea of being a helpless child, to have to be fed and have other things done for him.
Mrs. Alving interjects to say that she can care for him, but he swiftly leaps up and says he does not want that. He cannot fathom the idea of being a vegetable and just lying there. It is a softening of the brain and will not be fatal right away, but his next attack will probably put him beyond hope. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out what he identifies as morphine powder tablets.

Mrs. Alving cannot contain her horror, but her son presses on. He knows that if Regina had seen him like that, she would have helped him; now, however, she is gone, so his mother must give him a helping hand instead. She shakes her head, wondering how someone who gave him life could take it from him. He retorts that he did not ask for life and does not want it.

In a frenzy now, Mrs. Alving leaves the room, claiming that she will go to the doctor. Osvald begs her to accept that she would not want to see him this way. Finally, she turns to him, gives him her hand, and says she'll do it if necessary, but she is convinced it *won't* be necessary. He thanks her sadly and says that he hopes it won't.
Osvald sits in the armchair in front of the window, his back turned to the outside. The lamp is still lit. but the day is beginning to break. His mother bends over him, telling him that he will be fine, that he will get better, that it is a beautiful day with brilliant sunshine, and that he can finally see his home. She puts out the lamp and admires the view.

In a dull tone, Osvald says that he wants to see the sun, repeating the words again and again. In terror, Mrs. Alving looks at him. His muscles are slack, his face expressionless. She screams, shakes him, and tells him to look at her. He simply repeats "the sun" over and over again.

She tears her hair and screams that this is unbearable, then she fumbles for the pills. She whispers "no" and "yes" to herself. She steps closer and stares at him. He repeats "the sun" twice more.

Analysis

All the "ghosts" alluded to in the prior acts reveal themselves by the end of the play, manifesting themselves in both tragedy and farce. Engstrand, true to his devilish nature, manipulates Manders and most likely Regina into doing what he wants them to do; Regina strikes out on her own, most likely headed to ruin; Manders, ever concerned with his reputation, ends up unwittingly supporting a brothel.

The real tragedy, though, is what happens to Osvald and Mrs. Alving. He loses everything, and, right when he thinks with a modicum of hope that there might be something to live for, his mind breaks. She has to tell her son the truth about his sickness, destroy the myth of his father that she'd been cultivating, learn that Osvald doesn't even really love her very much, see him fall into obsolescence, and then grapple with whether or not to ease his suffering by administering him morphine.

Looking more deeply at Mrs. Alving, it is clear that she has spent her life in a state of silence and repression. She did not want to marry Alving but she did, repressing her own desires, and she then spent the rest of her life rejecting him and everything he stood for. Her son turned out to be just like his father, but as she started to come to terms with the fact that Osvald and her own (via the books she'd read) progressive ideas and espousal of the "joy of life" were perhaps worth lauding and even emulating, the legacies of she and her husband's bad decisions reared their heads. Though she may have been at the point where she was wondering if she had done wrong in treating her husband as she did, hearing what has happened to Osvald precludes her from moving further into this conviction. She descends back into denial. As Joan Templeton writes, "All [Osvald's] complaints of headaches, fatigue, and even attacks and near collapses only strengthen her powers of denial. Her consistent refusal to listen to her desperate son shows the force of her determination to succeed in her thirty-year campaign to think one life and live another."

Ibsen's sun/fire/light imagery comes to its apotheosis in this last act. In the transition from dark to light, Osvald reveals the truth about himself and Mrs. Alving does as well. The orphanage's burning destroyed earlier illusions and hopes, and in its ashes, there is the potential for rebirth—or for continued desiccation. When the sun rises at the end of the play and Mrs. Alving extinguishes her paltry lamp, the reality of what has happened to Osvald and her household is clear and undeniable. Errol Durbach describes the scene thusly: "the denouement is essentially ambiguous in tone and vision, a revelation of tragedy as the paradoxical co-existence of exhilaration and catastrophe: the brilliant light of the sun and the desolation it reveals, the affirmation of an experience simultaneously creative and destructive." Evert Sprinchorn deems it the "pagan sun of pleasure," not the "sun of enlightenment," whereas Robert Corrigan claims that "For Mrs. Alving the sun has risen and just as she cannot give Osvald the sun, so the light of the sun has not been able to enlighten her." She still fumbles with the pills and does not want to administer them to her son, even though she should. The sunrise in this modern tragedy does not hold joy: rather, it is a "sunrise of futility" that "sheds its rays as an ironic and bitter joke on a demented boy asking his equally helpless mother: 'Mother, give me the sun, The sun—the sun!'"

We want to believe that, in the light, "she will affirm the image that she has of herself as a liberated human being by an action that is expressive of that freedom, even if that action is the murder of her own son. We want to feel that the light and heat of the sun will have the power to cauterize the ghosts of her soul. But if we have been paying

attention to the developing action…then we realize that there can be no resolution." The power of ghosts, heredity, and the past is too strong.

Symbols: Sun and Fire

The sun, fire, and light imagery (e.g., the burning orphanage, the sun at the end, the lamp, the lit pipe) represents destruction, enlightenment, energy, joy, illumination of truth, rebirth, and purification. They are associated with Apollonian truth and purity, but also with Dionysian energy and destruction.

Symbol: Pipe

The pipe that Osvald is smoking when he first enters the scene is his father's pipe, and is thus a symbol of that man. Captain Alving forced Osvald to smoke it when he was a child, symbolically transforming (or rather, completing the transformation of) Osvald into himself. Mrs. Alving didn't like it then and she doesn't like it now, revealing her antipathy toward her late husband. The pipe, some critics theorize, may also have been Ibsen's intended vehicle by which the father transferred syphilis to the son, again confirming the object's symbolic function as the "sins of the father."

Symbol: The Orphanage

The orphanage is the symbol of the ghosts, the lies, and the repressions Mrs. Alving has carried with her or perpetrated as she tried to expunge her husband from her life and consciousness. It is a perverted symbol, though, for it contains elements of Engstrand's devilishness and Manders's hypocrisy. It is mirrored by the brothel Engstrand wants to start of nearly the same name, and it never could have functioned as Mrs. Alving wanted it to. When it burns down, it destroys her hopes and sets in motion enlightenment and destruction in her and her son.

Ghosts Syphilis

One of the things that made Ibsen's *Ghosts* so controversial when it was written and first staged was its relatively frank treatment of syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease. We will take a deeper look at the history of this disease, some of the early ideas on how to treat it, and where it came from. Historian John Frith says succinctly, "From its beginning, syphilis was greatly feared by society—because of the repulsiveness of its symptoms, the pain and disfigurement that was endured, the severe after effects of the mercury treatment, but most of all, because it was transmitted and spread by an inescapable facet of human behaviour, sexual intercourse."

In 1495, Niccolo Squillaci wrote a letter concerning a disease sweeping Europe, now known to be one of the first records of a syphilis epidemic: "There are itching sensations, and an unpleasant pain in the joints; there is a rapidly increasing fever. The skin is inflamed with revolting scabs and is completely covered with swellings and tubercules, which are initially of a livid red color, and then become blacker. It most often begins with the private parts." Erasmus opined, "If I were asked which is the most destructive of all diseases I should unhesitatingly reply, it is that which for some years has been raging with impunity … What contagion does thus invade the whole body, so much resist medical art, becomes inoculated so readily, and so cruelly tortures the patient?"

Some historians believe that the disease was carried over to Europe by Christopher Columbus and his New World travels. This seems to be backed up by the fact that there were no records of it before, but other historians suggest that blaming other nationalities for diseases was common among Europeans (it was called “the Neapolitan disease,” "the Gallic disease,” “the Turkish disease,” "the Christian disease,” and many more), and syphilis could have existed earlier but not have been known for what it was. A study from Emory University reported in 2008, “It is not clear whether venereal syphilis existed in the New World prior to Columbus’s arrival. While it is possible that Columbus and his crew imported venereal syphilis from the New World to Europe, it is also possible that the explorers imported a non-venereal progenitor that rapidly evolved into the pathogen we know today only after it was introduced into the Old World.” Overall, both theories have a modicum of evidence but nothing truly conclusive.

In the Victorian era, the time in which the play debuted in the major theaters in the Western world, public censure was shifting from prostitutes as the primary carriers to debauched, affluent men who brought back the disease to their own families. Historian of medicine Anne Hanley offers insights into the patriarchal component of the disease among respectable Victorian couples: “If a husband infected his wife with syphilis or gonorrhea, a doctor went to great lengths, usually at the behest of the husband, to conceal the cause of her illness. She would know that she was ill, but she wouldn’t necessarily know that she had VD. Doctors who withheld information from women claimed that they were bound by patient confidentiality—a doctor couldn’t tell a wife that she was suffering from syphilis because doing so would reveal that her husband also had syphilis. A degree of pragmatic paternalism informed these decisions: doctors believed that they knew best and prioritized expediency. After all, a woman who discovered that she was infected with VD might cause a fuss and make her husband’s life difficult. And since the husband was usually the one paying the doctor’s fee, his interests took priority.”

The first symptom of syphilis for most people would be a painless ulcer usually on the genitals, but it would clear up quickly. Oftentimes during this latent stage, people assumed the infection had passed or considered it to be something else. Secondary-stage symptoms could include rashes, ulcers, pustules, and swollen glands. In some cases without treatment, syphilis became tertiary, meaning that patients could have developed acute cardiovascular disease and have an aneurysm, develop necrotic facial gummas, or have neurosyphilis (Osvald Alving), in which case they might have experienced paralysis, locomotor ataxia, aphasia, and imbecility. Many people ended up in asylums or otherwise exiled from society. Also, syphilis could cause infertility, induce miscarriages and stillbirths, cause babies to die in infancy, or, amazingly, never produce any signs of infection at all.

There were innumerable treatments and supposed palliatives and cures, many of which were rather dubious. Some people took morphine injections, other elixirs, drugs, or even mercury pills. One Hungarian doctor suggested a soup of vegetables and grains that wreaked havoc on the digestive system. Julian Barnes described some of the 19th-century French writer Alphonse Daudet’s experiences: “He saw a range of specialists and visited a range of thermal establishments, taking the waters and mud-baths. He tried all the latest treatments, no matter how violent and outlandish. Charcot recommended the Seyre suspension, in which the patient was hung up, some of the time by the jaw alone, for several minutes. This was intended to stretch the patient's spine,

loosen his joints, and thus combat the effects of ataxia. Daudet was suspended 13 times, in excruciating pain, until he began coughing blood. He noted of the treatment: 'No observable benefit.'" Daudet wrote volubly of his experience. He wrote, "Every evening, a hideously painful spasm in the ribs. I read, for a long time, sitting up in bed—the only position I can endure. I'm a poor old wounded Don Quixote, sitting on his arse in his armour at the foot of a tree. Armour is exactly what it feels like, a hoop of steel cruelly crushing my lower back. Hot coals, stabs of pain as sharp as needles. Then chloral, the tin-tin of my spoon in the glass, and peace at last. This breastplate has had me in its grip for months. I can't undo the straps; I can't breathe."

The cure for syphilis did not come about until 1943 with the invention of penicillin.

Rain

Ibsen describes "A gloomy landscape [that] is faintly visible, veiled by steady rain." This steady rain gives the feeling of the dark and sorrowful atmosphere, foreshadowing the mood of Ibsen's play. In literature, weather often serves as a mirror for the characters within the story: in this case, the dismal weather reflects the characters' dismal lives.