

1. Significance of title

Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghosts* is a highly controversial play and the title can be interpreted with multiple layers of meaning. The supreme significance of the title can be attributed to the worn ideals and principles of law and order so misapplied that they have no actual significance. Deception is one of the major themes of this play. Different characters in the story conceal truths and keep secrets from each other, resulting in a long-term effect of lying as the central theme in the plot.

All most all characters are manifested by ghosts that they are unable to control. There are five living characters in Ibsen's *Ghosts*. Mrs Alving, a widow, and the play's protagonist; Oswald, her son; Pastor Manders, her denied love; Regina, the maid and half-sister of Oswald; and Engstrand, Regina's supposed father. Regina's true father is Captain Alving. Both Captain Alving and Regina's mother Johanna are dead, yet both are accountable for the unfolding tragedy. They are instances of the ghosts.

Mrs. Alving, though an emancipated idealist follows some of the instances of superficial morality and social standards. The greatest quintessence is the alleged covering of her spouse's infidelity through benign acts which are again ghosts of empty social standards. She is well acquainted with the immoral nature of her husband. But instead of courageously facing the truth, she opts to cover her husband's licentiousness.

The second meaning is applied to those ghosts who are the sins of the past, firmly rooted into the present and haunting the future. An ancient axiom goes like this "Every family has a skeleton in its cupboard". Thus every family has its own secrets of the past which if unearthed will dishevel the future. The major characters namely Mrs. Alving, Oswald and Regina are subjected to the sins of the past and the ghostly imagery is of the late Captain Alving.

The spectre which haunts Mrs. Alving is of the infidelity and bad character of her husband. She is forever traumatized by the indecent actions of her husband. Therefore, she starts seeing the ghost of her husband's vices in other people. When she views Engstrand a drunkard, she immediately associates it with an avatar of her husband who too was a drunkard. After witnessing Oswald and Regina in a near incestuous relation, the ghost of her husband's past start haunting her. This ghostly imagery of the past was the seduction of the maid Johanna by Captain Alving.

Oswald is the next recipient who too, is haunted by his father's past and by the "legacy" his father bestowed upon him. He represents the doomed product of a diseased society. As the old doctor rightly says, "the sins of the father visited the son", Oswald has become the recipient of genetic syphilis. Due to such grave illness he has become a "living vegetable", incapacitated and enfeebled. He is forever displayed in a sickly

manner unable to live a youthful life. His only joy of life is her paramour Regina who upon learning the truth leaves him to a life of prostitution.

Regina is the last receiver of Captain Alving's illicit sexual life. She is the daughter born out of the illicit union of the captain and his housemaid Johanna. The housemaid is later married to Engstrand in order to save Alving's reputation which eternally devastates the legitimate right of Regina as the daughter of the house. She is forced to live a penurious life under a carpenter's name and become the nurse of her half-brother. The obfuscation of events leads to her unknowingly make her half-brother her lover and ultimately turning to prostitution.

The final interpretation of the title is through the dwindling character of Oswald. Nothing is permanent and thus like Oswald, we ourselves are ghosts, just waiting for our deaths. He knows he is going to die, and waiting for death makes him a lunatic wheedling for euthanasia. He repeatedly pleads in front of his mother to emancipate him so that he can embrace the sun. Thus, the sun is the symbol of inevitable truth which reflects the evanescent nature of life and that we all have to die one day. On the other hand, the sun is also a symbol of hope which Oswald yearns. He is hopeful that in the next life he will truly be blessed like an artist exploring the bounties of God freely and ultimately attaining "the joy of his life".

2. Art of characterisation: Helen Alving; supporting characters: Oswald, Regina

Mrs Alving Character:

Like Bernard Shaw, the themes of Henrik Ibsen's plays are pertaining to a number of social issues which are relevant in the present situation. In other words, it can clearly be said that themes of his plays are timeless. The themes of the plays cannot be limited to a specific time period. He is also said to be a realistic playwright who highlights everything without any biasness in world of English literature. His famous plays are Brand , Pillars of Society , A Doll's House , The Lady from the Sea, Hedda Gabler and When We Dead Awaken . All these plays are concerned with the different social problems. Although Ghost is not one of his successful plays which place him in the list of renowned playwrights but the relevance as well as the importance of the play named Ghost (1881) cannot be ignored or overlooked just because of its unsuccessful response. The story of the Ghost is believed to be a continuance of Nora's life, a major female protagonist in A Doll's House (1879). Edward Beyer writes that "In Ibsen, the inner continuity from work to work is often marked, but never more so than between A Doll's House and the work which followed" (Ibsen XXXI)

The play begins when Mrs. Alving with Pastor Manders discusses about the opening of the Orphanage to remember and commemorate the name of Captain Alving who is not alive. They discuss whether they should insure the Orphanage for future unwanted disaster and finally they come to the conclusion of not insuring the Orphanage. During their dialogue, the readers come to know about his arrival of Oswald, the only son of

Mrs. Alving. Oswald has come to his mother's home after the gap of many years from abroad. The relationship between Mrs. Alving and Captain Alving is not good. They do not lead a happy married life just because of the immoral behavior of her husband. She endeavours to dissuade him from indulging in extramarital affairs but she fails. She then decides to leave Captain Alving but Pastor Manders persuades her not to abandon him and advises her to perform her social responsibilities in her married life. She eventually tries to follow the path suggested by Manders but here she also fails because her husband is not ready to quit his ways of life. Through the dialogue between Mrs Alving and Manders, a bitter truth regarding the biological father of Regina Engstrand is disclosed. The father of Regina is not Engstrand but Captain Alving who had extramarital affairs with the mother of Regina named Johanna, the then maid of the Alving household.

This truth is not known to anyone except Mrs. Alving. Not having a good relationship with her father, Regina lives with Mrs. Alving. With passage of the time, Mrs Alving comes to know about the incestuous relationship between Regina and Oswald. She very well knows marriage between both is not possible because Regina is Oswald's step-sister. When they discuss the whole matter, they get shocking news regarding the fire in the Orphanage. The fire destroys everything. The blame of fire is partially imposed upon Pastor Manders for his negligence towards the safety of the Orphanage. After this disastrous incident, Engstrand and Manders leave the home and plan to establish a business for the tourists. Now the climax of the play comes. There are only three characters including Mrs Alving, Oswald and Regina who lead the play to the end. Through the discussion, Regina comes to know about her real biological father being Captain Alving and decides to leave Oswald because he is her step brother and due to his being fatally ill and leaves him permanently. Finally Mrs Alving becomes aware of Oswald's illness named syphilis that he inherited from his father. Oswald knows the disease is not curable and he is going to die. Perhaps he is in the last stage of the disease. Finally the attack of the disease sets in but his mother cannot decide as to whether she is capable of administering the fatal dose of morphia to her son to give him a merciful end. The play has an open ending. It is now the responsibility of the reader to decide what happens in the future of Mrs. Alving and Oswald.

After reading the story of the play, now the whole scenario of the play is clear to the readers and they now can better understand and fathom the situation of Mrs. Alving's failure in her domestic life. The play ostensibly show Mrs. Alving is not directly or indirectly responsible for her failure but the circumstances which she has to undergo are responsible. Firstly, when she comes to know about her husband's illicit relationship with other women, she decides to leave her husband but cannot take such a bold decision because she is not expected to leave her husband in the society. The society has made exploitative and biased social codes which do not allow women to live an independent life. They have to live according to the social rules and regulations and are trained to follow these anti-feminist social ideas. Prmod K. Nayar also writes the same aspect of the patriarchal society by saying that "gender roles are pre-determined and the woman is trained to fit into those rules. This means that role like 'daughter' or

'mother' are not natural but social because the women has to be trained to think, talk, act in particular ways that suit the role" (Nayar 83).

The same situation happens with Mrs. Alving when she explains to Manders about her tragic and traumatic condition with her husband. It is ironic that when Manders becomes aware of the whole situation, he does not recommend her to abandon her husband but instead persuades her to continue her married life with her husband. It is a well known accepted fact that sometimes the changed situation whether it is positive or negative may bring positive changes in the behavior of the targeted or desired person. A person who is in the wrong track may believe that the changed situation is not in her/his favour, it would be good for him/her change her attitude according to situation. But the situation does not arise in the case of Captain Alving because Mrs. Alving's views are changed by Paster Manders. Manders can be described as a person who is patriarchal in nature. He thinks it is the duty of Mrs. Alving to serve her husband in every adverse condition. It does not matter in which condition she has to live. His mental set up becomes clear when he says to her in the following line: "What right have we to happiness? No Mrs. Alving, we must do our duty! And your duty was to remain with the man you had chosen and to whom you were bound by a sacred bond" (Ibsen 26).

All these patriarchal and anti-feministic sentimental ideologies prevent her from abandoning her husband. It is not that she doesn't like her freedom and individuality in her personal life. She wants to live an independent life in which she is free from any social obligation. She also makes her position clear when she says to Manders that "But I can't stand being bound by all these conventions. I can't! I must find my own way to freedom" (Ibsen 37). It is clear that she is not ready to live with Captain Alving but social conditions do not allow her to follow her feeling of freedom. Moreover it is not that she does not try to bring changes into her husband's behavior. She undoubtedly does everything she can do but finally fails. She does what her husband commands her to do. She starts spending most of her time with him so as not to let him follow his own way of life. She also begins to drink. All these critical situations she explains to Manders: "There I had to sit alone with him, had to cling my glass with his and drink with him, listen to his obscene and senseless driveling, had to fight with my fists to haul him to bed-" (Ibsen 31).

These lines clearly says that she does not leave any stone unturned to save her husband from treachery and illicit relationship with other women. What more she can do except giving her life. More important point is that she does hide all these facts about her husband's immoral life from the society. She does not want to tarnish the fake image of Captain Alving:

Mrs Alving: And now I had to fight a double battle, fight with all my strength to prevent anyone knowing what kind of a man my child's father was. And you know what a winning personality Alving had. No one could believe anything but good of him. He was one of those people whose reputation remain untarnished by the way they live (Ibsen 29)

From a different point of view, perhaps Mrs Alving is responsible for her failure just because she does not determinately raise her voice against the misconduct of her husband. If she would be a strong woman in nature, she would have changed her husband. She lives with her husband like a typical wife who accepts everything that her husband does and it does not matter whether his conducts are wrong or right. She should not bend and yield before her husband. Through her defensive and aggressive attitude, she would possibly succeed in her doing. If she is not responsible for all such adverse circumstances directly, she can't be acquitted from the blame that to some extent she is also responsible. It is also believed that sometimes people do not get changed by positive behavior. Negative forces also sometimes play a significant role in changing the behavior of people. If Mrs. Alving applied the negative enforcement to her husband's attitude, to some extent she would be able to bring desired changes in her husband. It can be said that she lacks critical power and prowess.

The second or the final failure of Mrs. Alving in her life is the failure of her son, Oswald who is the only son of Captain Alving and Mrs Alving. Oswald is the only reason to live for Mrs. Alving. She expresses her love towards Oswald by saying: "Of course I will, my dearest, my only boy. I've nothing else to live for. Only you" (Ibsen 71). This is the only situation in the play which makes the reader feel pity and sorrowful towards Mrs Alving because her husband is dead and no one is present on the earth for Mrs Alving except her son, Oswald. From the very beginning of the play, she has unduly expectation from her son that her future life would be happy and peaceful because her son has recently arrived from abroad. But she does not know something bad is waiting for her. She feels that after a long period of painful and traumatic experience of life, new rays of hope and prosperity would reach to her. But it is a paradox that everything becomes worse when Oswald returns home. Firstly, the Orphanage which is being built to commemorate her husband is destroyed by an unknown incident of fire. She doesn't know who is responsible for the fire in the Orphanage.

Then she becomes aware of the illicit relationship between Oswald and Regina. Both Oswald and Regina love each other but are not aware of the fact that both are half brother and sister. To some extent, she succeeds in separating them by revealing the truth regarding the biological father of Regina; she fails in protecting her son from everything which is inappropriate for her son. She sends him abroad so as to save him from inheriting the immoral as well anti-social features of his father. As she says to Manders: "And I had another motive. I wanted to make sure that my own son, Oswald, should not inherit anything from his father" (Ibsen 31). But she does not know that inheriting the characteristics from parents is natural and it cannot be confined by anyone. And Oswald is not exceptional. Oswald inherits fatal disease from his father which can't be cured and this disheartening fact is known to Oswald. From the moral point of view, it is not the failure of Mrs. Alving because she can't do anything to prevent the process of inheritance as it is a natural process. The most disheartening thing is that she failed the exam to become a good mother. The intention of Mrs. Alving to bring Oswald on the right track is not wrong but her way or method of doing this is completely wrong.

It is a well known truth that if one wants to protect one's child, the best way of doing this is to love children and share their problems. It is also the duty of the parents to remain with their children so that children can have discussion with their parents. But this does not happen in the case of Mrs Alving. She runs from her motherly duties. She deliberately keeps her son away from her care. This method is wrong. This is not the final and ultimate solution to the problem. The solution lies in caring for Oswald. There is a well known saying that a mother knows everything about her son. But it is pathetic that Mrs Alving is not aware of the illness from which Oswald is suffering. Oswald's traumatic mental condition can be observed in the following lines which he says to his mother: "That's the dreadful thing. Beyond cure – ruined for life – because of my own folly. Everything I wanted to accomplish in the world - not even to dare to think of it – not to be able think of it. Oh, if only I could start my life over again and undo it all!" (Ibsen 52). Through the discussion between Mrs. Alving and Oswald, the readers become aware of the truth that there is real love in Oswald towards his mother. Even Mrs. Alving also accepts the truth by saying: "I realize it now. You are not mine. I must win you" (Ibsen 70).

Oswald's character

Regina's character

Regina represents two important forces in this play: upward mobility and sex. She uses the latter to get the former. Regina is the illegitimate daughter of Mrs. Alving's husband and her former maid, Johanna. As such, Regina is a daily reminder of Captain Alving's wayward life. She's young, vivacious, and attractive. None of the men in the play fails to comment on how she's "grown." Mrs. Alving knows it too, which is why she tries to protect Regina both from Engstrand – probably sensing his shady motives – and from her own son.

Regina doesn't mind using sex to get what she wants: security. She's already scheming to attract Oswald and almost lets it slip to Engstrand: "No; if things go as I want them to – Well there's no saying – there's no saying" (1.69). But we see early on that it's not about love, because just a few moments later she is asking Pastor Manders (indirectly of course) to consider her as a partner:

"Now, if it were in a thoroughly nice house, and with a real gentleman [...] Then I should be glad to go to town. It's very lonely out here; you know yourself, sir, what it is to be alone in the world. And I can assure you I'm both quick and willing. Don't you know of any such place for me, sir?" (1.130-134)

Regina works all angles, and, like Engstrand, excels in giving people what they want. She's learning French for Oswald and acting pious for Pastor Manders. She would deny the association with Engstrand, though; "that filthy carpenter" is the last person with whom she wants to associate. When he asks her to come to town with him, she almost spits at him: "Me, that have been brought up by a lady like Mrs Alving! Me, that am treated almost as a daughter here! Is it me you want to go home with you? – to a house like yours? For shame!" (1.33).

Engstrand's brothel is the last place Regina wants to go, yet she's quick to recognize how things stand at the end of the play. She can't marry Oswald, so that door has been closed. Best to run after the other possibilities – Manders and Engstrand – who are leaving on the ferry. Mrs. Alving fears her demise, and Ibsen gives Regina a rare moment of emotional power. She looks sharply at Mrs. Alving and says, "I think you might have brought me up as a gentleman's daughter, ma'am; it would have suited me better" (3.150). And with that, she's on the steamer, most likely on her way to work at "Chamberlain Alving's Home", a brothel.

2. Plot construction

As in most of Ibsen's problem plays, *Ghosts* begins at the collective climax in the lives of its characters. The play deals only with the consequences of these past lives and does not need to take place in more than one twenty-four hour vigil. Although the relationships among the characters are close and lifelong, only the crowding of emotions and events within the three acts forces each one to face the truth about himself and about his society.

Captain Alving's character bears this out. The source of the hereditary flaw which destroys his children, his presence pervades each scene of *Ghosts*. As each living character illuminates the nature of the diseased profligate, he finally stands as clearly and as well-drawn to the audience as if he were constantly active on stage. Almost as a "secondary" protagonist, Alving undergoes a change of character until he is presented to the spectator as an individual whom society has wronged. Finally, when Mrs. Alving recognizes how she destroyed his "joy of life," the dead husband is no longer a ghost, but a humanized victim of the social conventions.

3. Ibsen's use of modern realism in *Ghosts*

Naturalism came into being in the 19th century when authors and playwrights started to do something against the social situation back then. In contrast to the plays people wrote before, naturalists focused their stories onto common problems that happened all the time mostly among middle-class people. Naturalists wanted to rebel against the hierarchy of their society and most of all they wanted to show the higher-class people what life was like in poorer classes. They presented them poverty, miserable children, unhappy marriages and adultery, the situation of illegitimate children, the exploitation of workers, alcoholism, violence, crime and much more. By opening the readers' eyes, naturalists wanted to evoke the conscience of wealthy people. Emile Zola (1840-1902) and Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) can be regarded as one of the most important naturalists that have ever lived. Zola wrote down a theory, "Le roman experimental" which said that people's fate was determined by their genes, their race and the social environment they grew up in. In his plays, Henrik Ibsen draws the audience's attention onto the "life-lie" in general. He wants his audience to understand that the truth is always better than wearing a mask for a life-time. His most famous books were "Ghosts", "A Doll's House" and the "Wild Duck". Ghosts is a typical naturalistic play. It shows the world as it was in the 19th century and teaches the audience that you cannot escape the truth. The plot is simple which makes it even more realistic. At the beginning of the play, Mrs. Alving, the widow of Captain Alving who was a well-known and respected man in the village, is planning to open a children's home dedicated to her husband. Mrs. Alving receives Pastor Manders, an old friend of hers, to discuss the bureaucratic details and the opening event itself. In the course of their conversation the Pastor accuses her of not having led a moral life due to the fact that she left her husband a short period after their marriage and even tried to seduce the Pastor. ...read more.

Middle

Shortly afterwards Oswald has his final attack and dies. Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) was one of the most important theorists in theatre history. In 1906 he developed the "System" a theory that would later on help many actors to act convincingly. The System consists of 9 points: "action" (as an actor you have to know why your character is doing what he does, or what your purpose is when entering the stage), "If" (think about how you would react in a certain situation and then reflect this feeling onto your character), "the given circumstance" (an actor should create an environment before acting out a scene), "imagination" (imagine all different aspects of your character), "unit and objectives" (what is the character thinking, feeling? when would you end one scene and start another?), "super-objective and through-line action" (what is the character's goal? What is the theme of the entire play?), "emotion memory" (can you remember a situation in which you felt like your character? Were you in a similar situation?) and "tempo-rhythm in movement" (decide who are the quiet and slow characters! Who goes hurriedly through life?). At the beginning of Act 2 Mrs. Alving has just discovered that her son and Regina are starting to have a relationship. She is shocked because of her knowledge that Regina is actually

Osvald's halfsister. Still she tries to comfort Pastor Manders because his view of the world as he has known it, has definitely fallen apart. The dinner must have taken place without much talking, it's unlikely that Pastor Manders and Mrs. Alving were very communicative. I'm sure that Mrs. Alving thought intensely about whether or not to tell Regina and Osvald that they were so closely related to each other. She thinks that again, she will not have the courage to tell Osvald the truth. She feels she has already gone too far. MRS. ALVING: If I had true courage I would take Osvald aside, look him in the eye, and say, "Listen, your father was a disgusting, degenerate human being." ...read more.

Conclusion

Take me." She will never forget his reaction. He drove her back into the paths of duty and righteousness, even though it was her husband who had come off the way from the beginning. But the Pastor only blamed her and never stopped telling her about her duty. Maybe this was his way to cope with that hopeless love. MANDERS: To expect happiness in this life is a form of arrogance, Mrs. Alving. It is the sign of a rebellious soul. What right do we have to happiness? We must do our duty, Mrs. Alving, and your duty was to stand by the man whom you had chosen as your husband, the man to whom you were bound by the most sacred bonds... It was your humble duty to bear the cross which a higher power had chosen for you. But instead, that rebellious soul of yours flings down that cross[...] I was only a humble instrument in the hand of a great purpose. You returned to your duty and to obedience: hasn't that proved a blessing for you ever since? The GHOSTS from her past will never leave Helene Alving. In his Drama Henrik Ibsen demonstrated the passive society of the 19th century or even nowadays and the hypocritical morals of the Church back then. The climax at the end prevents any illusions of bourgeois conventions. People can't cope with the truth because they would then realize that their whole life was a lie, which leads us on to the often discussed matter of the life-lie. If someone finally admits the truth to himself and his fellow citizens, he will have the freedom to actually change his life and not only complaining about it. All in all Ghosts is another play that shows us that the truth will always sooner or later come to the surface and that it's better to see things the way they are, than be disillusioned later on. Written by Verena Pichler ...read more.

4. Major themes highlighted: thematic appraisal

Ghosts is a revolutionary play which sceptically challenges those social truths assumed to be self-evident. Character and plot explore bourgeois morality and its

consequences. *Ghosts* was initially constructed as an attack upon marriage. Irony is consistently used to scrutinise religion, class, and gender relations as pillars of society. The symbolic use of “ghosts” does not simply refer to legacies of guilt and the central characters’ burdens, it is symbolic of the haunting, decaying value system which remains in the present though it belongs in the past. James McFarlane called Ibsen an “indisputable leader in the campaign for a modern, radical and realistic literature who most powerfully challenged the values of the existing middle-class society” (69), and I’m inclined to agree. Ibsen created a social laboratory to depict the social, economic, and psychological tensions of the society he was commenting on. The small cast and static set lend themselves to this in stunning ways.

Georg Brandes’ criticism of Victorian society as a facade of false morality and a manipulation of public opinion was shared by Ibsen. *Ghosts* is concerned with liberty of thought and individual truth, contrasted with the narrow religious dogmatism that Pastor Manders personifies. Manders is presented as a feeble servant of orthodoxy. His readiness to bow to public opinion in matters of literature and morality characterises him as arguably the least free individual within the play, his role is to reinforce the existing social and moral structure, even to the extent of knowing “absolutely nothing about what you are condemning” (101). He never commits or expresses himself, and his individuality becomes less pronounced as the play progresses.

Manders’ life is centred on the protection of his status and reputation in the community, not the development of his self and intellect. This is perhaps best exemplified in his proposal to not insure the orphanage on grounds of faith in divine providence. This literalism betrays the equally humorous “tempting of fate”, and much of *Ghosts*’ power derives from the contrast between the absurd and the comic. Ibsen relentlessly ridicules orthodoxy and the fear of public opinion. The amount of time devoted to the insurance discussion hints at the significance of the decision later in the play, and provides dramatic irony through Manders’ repetition of “higher protection”. The burning orphanage symbolically represents the failure of conventional beliefs and the fragility of false reputation.

In challenging bourgeois values, the relationship of each character to money and “respectable” marriage is important. Manders’ self-interest in reducing the “burden on the rates” (104-5), Engstrand and Regine’s pursuit of financial security, and Mrs Alving’s funding of the orphanage being driven by her desire to rid herself of the financial bargain her marriage represented. It is her desire to provide for herself and Oswald without wealth generated by Chamberlain Alving, and as insurance against the truth coming out. Its purpose is to cleanse herself of the “ghosts” that haunt her, rather than the public preservation of the Captain’s name, hence the ease with which she agrees to not take insurance. Oswald alone shows no regard for wealth. He

speaks of happy relationships conducted outside of marital convention on grounds of poverty, which far from being “blatant immorality” or “sham marriages”, involve “eager young people in love” (111). It is this eternal truth that still resonates with me in the twenty-first century.

Ibsen’s challenge to religious conformity rests on the naivety of the Pastor, evident to all but himself. He is fooled by Engstrand, eventually blackmailed into financing his prostitution house. He rages at Engstrand’s deceit in his marriage to Johanna, and “the immorality of a match of that sort” (122), but is easily persuaded to a more charitable view, swayed by Engstrand’s use of “pious” language. Mrs Alving’s tease that Manders is “a great big baby” (134) alludes to his gullibility. The Pastor is a morally bankrupt hypocrite.

Even after learning Alving’s true nature, Manders would rather praise him than risk scandal should the truth come out. The obsession with avoiding a scandal dictates many of the choices made: preserving Alving’s “good name” with the orphanage, the Pastor’s refusal to take Mrs Alving in when she fled her husband. Reputation and order are crucial within the play, the bourgeois facade Ibsen attacks mercilessly. Dramatic irony is used to show that decisions based upon public opinion are catastrophic. With the burning orphanage, the truth will come out, as it does ironically with Engstrand’s parting remark that by calling his “saloon” the Captain Alving home there’ll be a place worthy of his memory.

Mrs Alving’s character shows the limited freedom and choice for women in nineteenth-century conventional society. Her marriage is a financial calculation made by others; her duty is to sacrifice herself to her husband, her actions are policed. Despite this she is presented as thoughtful in her view that law and order is the cause “of all the trouble in the world” (123), and her acceptance of her own cowardice in the face of Manders’ defence of duty and responsibility. She also demonstrates independent judgement, sending her son away even though this sacrifice casts her as a bad mother and in her real motivation for building the orphanage.

Mrs Alving’s opinions are her emancipation, it is precisely her vocalising that combats the hypocrisy and conventionality of such respectable pillars as the Pastor. Yet any view of her as a heroine is simplistic, her concern regarding reputation preserves the appearance at the expense of truth, and she is too often silenced by her pragmatism.

Helene alone develops throughout the play revealing unorthodox beliefs on marriage, truth and happiness. Her desire to liberate her and Oswald with the truth presents the

great struggle of the play, and she, like her son, genuinely challenges the values imposed by society; her willingness to accept a potential relationship between Oswald and Regine despite the incestuous implications of it, her deserting her husband, or her desire to confess the whole truth to the children. An initial reading of her warning to the Pastor “not a word” indicates the same fear of public opinion that controls many of the decisions made in the play (120). A more developed character analysis reveals preparation for arguably her most significant moment of practical radicalism, revealing the truth, “now I can speak plainly... nobody’s ideals are going to suffer by it”. When she reveals the truth, her reference to Alving’s “joy of life” reinforces the idea of the sins of the father revisiting the son, to an extent excuses her late husband, while taking partial responsibility herself. Truth, finally, is complex.

Social class and the notion of respectability dictate the language used by characters in interacting with each other, and the play is essentially an extended debate on the assumed moral codes of the era. The foul-mouthed colloquial speech Engstrand uses when addressing Regine switches piously from “damned” and the devil to “Lord” when persuading Manders to fund his enterprise. Coupled with Ibsen’s use of asides, the audience always has a more complete view of the linguistic and moral contradictions that dominate the play than any character. By demonstrating stark difference between the private and public facade, Ibsen creates suspense. A similar effect is created through Engstrand’s dress, he opens in his dirty work clothes, but attempts to appear pious in act two, in his “Sunday best” reinforcing “I often used to say a prayer or two myself down there in the evenings”. This manipulation is evident, and highlights Engstrand’s awareness of public reputation. Engstrand is evidently not “respectable”, unlike his “daughter” with her early attempts at educated conversation. He does, however, display realism about his own self-interest amidst the “unreal” value system of the community. As does Regine, leaving upon discovering the truth, demonstrating her primary concern of climbing the social ladder. Manders’ religious rhetoric never wavers, whether he is addressing as friend or priest. The repetitiveness of his language in referring to “law, order, or public opinion” all demonstrate the dull conformity he personifies. His “godly” life has negated his individuality, and his beliefs in duty and obligation, patriarchy and respectability are irrelevant, and are presented as such. Oswald, on the other hand, is driven by the aesthetic. Even his softening of the brain is described as “cherry-red velvet curtains, soft and delicate to touch”. The sensuality of this alludes to his artistic nature and humane individuality, in contrast with the other characters.

Ibsen emphasises the complexity of family relationships beyond the one dimensional idea of respect for one’s elders that governs Manders. Regine’s disgust for Engstrand, Manders’ assertion that Mrs Alving had a duty to keep her son in the family home, and his remarks that Oswald resembles his father all enable a complex representation of the family to develop and reveal deeper truths. It is with regard to the family that Mrs Alving displays her most enlightened attitudes, claiming little

difference in the position of “the fallen”, Johanna and Captain Alving. Oswald describing the innate love one supposedly has for one’s father as “old superstition” reflects the truth of his experience.

Where *Manders* portrays the conventional concreteness of his ideals, Oswald’s use of illuminating adjectives displays his idealism, “that glorious free life out there... smeared by this filth”. As an artist, he has, like Ibsen, freedoms to state, value and enjoy. His condoning of “illicit” relationships shocks Manders, “to think the authorities tolerate such things”. Oswald occupies an intense sense of self, a stark consciousness, and it is this that makes the play so shocking, and human. Oswald’s health is crucial to an understanding of his position within the play. His revelation that he is ill and will never be able to work again, “like a living death”, illustrates that “the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children” (137-8), and contrasts with the other living death represented by the society he now finds himself in. Oswald’s relationship with Mrs Alving is the most important within the play. While all characters have a role in displaying the problems with the decaying values of the late-nineteenth century, they are the only two characters who really question/change their positions and values within the play. The fire prevents Mrs Alving revealing the truth at the end of act 2. Her final confession is perhaps more reflective than the earlier one would have been. Oswald’s father had “plenty of the joy of living”, and both their lives seemed “to come down to duty in the end”. This is a landmark moment in herself, their relationship, and the play. By admitting this failure to Oswald, Mrs Alving is challenging the nature of her marriage, and liberating her son from a lie. The final act shows both of Captain Alving’s children concerned with their inheritance, Oswald deliberating his future, Regine chasing Manders after “her” money.

The natural world frames the themes within the play, the rain, gloom and lack of view contributing to the feeling of stagnation and decay. The continual reference to the “joy of life” in Oswald and his father counter the bleak surroundings, symbolising Scandinavia suffering from the failure of intellectual and social enlightenment. By staging the entire play in two rooms overlooking the mist, Ibsen’s setting allows the social value system to seem alienated from reality. But Oswald does not disdain human existence, he accepts that there is genuine joy and life to be lived without the crippling moral, artistic, and intellectual decay typified by Manders’ morality. It is no coincidence that Ibsen ends the play with the “prodigal” son monotonously yearning for “the sun...the sun”, as he bemoans the darkness and his lack of creativity in such bleak surroundings. Oswald ends the play unable to work because of his debilitating illness. Ironically as the truth is revealed and he enters his living death, the sun and light he craves appear. This is highly symbolic of the challenge the truth presents to conventional intellectual bleakness. It is a problem we continue to face today, albeit in different circumstances. Helene Alving ends the play refusing to be controlled by the respectability which drives bourgeois existence. Ibsen’s decision to end the play before Helene has decided whether to administer morphine to Oswald reinforces this

living death that we all bear some relationship to. Ibsen invites the audience to look beyond the tragic for a more advanced reading which considers the irony of the helplessness of the one liberated individual within the play. I, like Ibsen, refuse the label of tragedy. Ibsen called the play "a domestic drama". I think that only begins to touch on the profound sociological, moral, and intellectual questions it posed, and continues to pose. Oswald's subsequent fate is less important than what he personifies, he is the object, the personified human warning against the consequences of conformity, of his time and ours.

No character is unambiguously moral or immoral, what Ibsen attempted to do was utilise interactions between a few characters in a confined space to comment on the contradictions within society and the reactionary elements hindering progress. All characters are distinct products of their environments, and the individualism and conformism each represents have their respective flaws, and virtues. Ibsen presents no concrete solution, he challenges us to reflect on ourselves and our own societies. It is this universality and extraordinary utilisation of language that I adored when I first read *Ghosts*, and continue to adore today.

5. Social moral realism in the play

Unlike *A Doll's House*, where there are servants and a sub-plot between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde, only five characters appear in *Ghosts*. No one is included who has not a place in the main action itself. In this way, an atmosphere of austere grandeur is given to the whole drama providing it with an intensity suggestive of classical plays. Professor Koht describes the play's further relationship to ancient drama for Greek tragedy, often called the fate, or family drama, shows a tragic flaw inherited through the generations. *Ghosts* is also a "family tragedy," he writes, "but it is also a social drama — the ancient tragedy resurrected on modern soil."

Ghosts is a domestic tragedy play by Henrik Ibsen. This play was written and published in 1881. However, it was not performed until May 1882 due to controversy towards the word "Ghosts". The translator William Archer wanted to use the word "Ghosts". On the other hand, the Norwegian "Gengangere" is more exactly translated as "The Revenants", which means "The Ones who Return". From the title itself, this play has shown its appealing side. *Ghosts* deserves to be observed and analyzed since it provides knowledge about life by showing the characters' perception towards temptation of the world, happiness, joy of life, and fear, which certainly owned and experienced by human beings. This play is frequently deemed to be scandalous because it raises topics related to moral issue, such as having an affair, and having an illegitimate child.

The playwright of Ghosts is Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright and poet. He is well-known as a father of Modern Theatre as well as the father of realism, who has affected other playwrights and novelists such as George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Miller, James Joyce, Eugene O'Neill, and Miroslav Krleža. Henrik Ibsen was born on March 20th 1828 in Skien, Norway. His father, Knud Ibsen, was a rich merchant, while his mother, Marichen Alternbug, was a daughter of a rich merchant in Skien. During his childhood, he experienced discouragement. Having a rumor that he was an illegitimate of another man influences his works. He began his career in the year 1851, when his first drama, The Burial Mound, was performed. His plays are considered to be controversial, such as A Doll's House (1879), Ghosts (1881), and An Enemy of the People (1882).

This play raises issue related to domestic life. There are several important issues to be analyzed in this paper. First of all, it will clarify what Ghosts actually means in this drama, or what the word "Ghosts" refers to. Secondly, it will explain the hidden intention of Mrs. Alving's building an orphanage as a memorial of her husband. Thirdly, it will describe how Mrs. Alving lives with her family, and express the idea of why she sends her child to another country since he was still seven. Lastly, it will discuss the playwright's thought based on some views on the statement expressed by the characters.

15 marks:

1. Exposition till the appearance of Oswald.
2. Impression of Mrs. Alving and Manders.
3. Why do you think Regina is headstrong?
4. Why does Mrs. Alving scream Ghosts at the end of Act I?

5. Elaborate upon the complication which intensifies when Oswald talks about his 'disease' to his mother.

6. Conclusion analysis.

a ruthless, revelatory sun spills over the scene. An articulate woman, she ends the play screaming monosyllables: "No. no; no!--Yes!--No; no!," and tearing her hair. Her life of calm, reasoned arguments is over. Her son Oswald has demanded action – he wants her to help him kill himself.

Just before his final meltdown, Oswald argues to his mother that common genes don't necessarily lead to love. It's a hard lesson for his mother to learn. He doesn't love her, but sees how she can be useful. Oswald asks her to take back the life she gave him: "I never asked you for life. And what sort of a life have you given me? I will not have it! You shall take it back again!" (3.245). The mother-child bond is the last ghost Mrs. Alving may have to give up.

What does she do? Ibsen doesn't tell us. If you were a director making that decision, what does it mean for the play? Will Mrs. Alving accept her solitude (think about it, she's all alone in that big, dark house) and kill her son? Is Oswald another "ghost" she has to get rid of? Will she keep him, nourishing an image of herself as a caregiver? What happens next? It's quite a cliffhanger and we have to fill in the missing pieces.