

15 marks:

1. Exposition till the appearance of Oswald.

Ibsen's *Ghosts* creates an arrangement of its story by providing the beginning of the story, followed by contradiction which develops into conflict. After that, it develops into rising action. Finally, it reaches the most crucial point with climax. Lastly, this crisis will be resolved. The setting of the play is in Norway in a spacious garden room on a rainy day of the Alving household. The exposition of the play unfolds and we are introduced to all major and minor characters. The conversations between the characters prepare us for the web of lies, deceit and hypocrisies that each character find oneself embroiled in. As the exposition 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 exposition 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, the maid, warns her father, Engstrand not to come in any further for fear of getting water in the room. She does not want to be seen talking to him even though he is her father, but he insists. 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 says he knows he has fallen prey to the wiles of drink before, but tomorrow, at the dedication of the orphan asylum, he will not do so. Pastor Manders will be in town, and Engstrand won't give him or anyone else cause to speak ill of him. Regina wonders what he's trying to trick Manders into, which Engstrand scoffs at. He does explain, though, that he is going home and wants Regina to come with him and keep house for him. She knows she is better than that because she has been brought up by Mrs. Alving, a chamberlain's wife.

Engstrand curses her and mutters that her mother always thought she was also so important on account of being part of the Chamberlain's household as a maid. Regina bitterly retorts that he drove her mother to her death. After a moment, she asks why he even wants her to come with him. Engstrand tries to give her piffle about wanting his daughter, and he begins to explain his plan: he wants to open a very nice place for seamen in the town—the good ones like mates and captains—and having his daughter around would be good because there have to be women around for entertainment and companionship. Besides, he adds, nothing will come of Regina here: working in the orphanage when it opens is useless. Engstrand asks if she will come and she refuses to do so, even when he suggests that she might luck out and find a nice captain to marry. Regina doesn't want to marry one, but he says that just being with one might pay off as well. She lunges at him to push him out, telling him not to wake young Mr. Alving or to let Pastor Manders see him. Engstrand turns to leave, but he tells her to talk to the Pastor; he'll set her straight in regard to her duty towards her father.

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 phrasemongering rather than integrity of thought and action as a standard of moral respectability.

After he is gone, Regina straightens herself up before Pastor Manders enters. Pastor Manders is welcomed by Regina, who works in Mrs. Alving's service. They exchange pleasantries and talk about the weather. The Pastor settles himself down and compliments Regina on how she has "grown" since he last saw her, which she corrects to "filled out"; yes, she shrugs, she has. He asks about her father and states that he does not have a very strong personality and needs a guiding hand. He suggests that her duty might be to him, but she says she can never leave Mrs. Alving, and she doesn't think it's appropriate for her to tend house for a single man, even if he is her father. She asks if the Pastor has any situation he might know of for her. He demurs and asks for Mrs. Alving. Pastor Manders' 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.

Mrs. Alving enters the room and they greet each other. She wants to get right down to business, but they talk for a few moments about how thrilled she is that Oswald is home from Paris and still seems to have “a place in his heart for his mother” (74).

Manders takes a sheaf of papers out of his bag in preparation, and he asks Mrs. Alving about the books he noticed in her room. He is surprised she reads this sort of thing; she says simply that she does, and that she has no problem confronting things others don't want to. She thinks it's silly for him to condemn books he's never read. He thinks that there is fascination, yes, but that one must rely on the opinions of others sometimes and conclude that they are wrong ideas. He tries to counsel her that she has to be wary of sharing ideas, especially since she is opening this children's home. 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.

They turn to the deeds Manders reads off the properties and titles, saying that he chose “Captain” instead of “Chamberlain” for the “Captain Alving Memorial” home. He asks her if they should be insured and she says yes, of course, but he stops her and asks her to reconsider. He says that the Memorial is consecrated to a higher purpose and that insuring the

buildings suggests that they do not have faith in God. It also might damage the Pastor's reputation in town. Mrs. Alving agrees, even though not insuring the buildings mean that nothing could be done if something happened to the property. Manders is assured that they have luck on their side and are making the right choice. Mrs. Alving does muse that it's a bit interesting he's brought this up: there was a small fire yesterday in the carpenter's shop where Engstrand works. He is careless with matches, she comments. Manders admits that Engstrand has a lot on his mind, but he is confident that Engstrand is committed to now leading an irreproachable life. He tells Mrs. Alving of how vulnerable and humble Engstrand seemed when he came to him asking for Regina to live with him. At this, Mrs. Alving starts and says there is no way Regina will go with him. She absolutely refuses to send the girl.

The arrangement of character introduction in exposition 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

2. Impression of Mrs. Alving and Manders.

Pastor Manders is a deeply principled and judgmental man of God who has agreed to manage the financial aspects of the orphanage that Mrs. Alving is opening to honor her late husband, Captain Alving. Believing that wives have a duty to respect and support their husbands, Pastor Manders told Mrs. Alving to return to Captain Alving when she ran away from him many years ago. He knew that Captain Alving was at that time leading an immoral life, but he insisted that Mrs. Alving should return home nonetheless. This decision also had to do with his fear that people might pick up on the romantic feelings running between him and Mrs. Alving, which could have ruined his reputation as a pastor. On the eve of the orphanage's grand opening, Mrs. Alving tells Manders that her husband never changed his wretched ways, despite the fact that he eventually gained a good reputation in society. Pastor Manders also learns that Captain Alving impregnated the Alvings' maid, Johanna, who gave birth to Regine, the young woman who currently works for the Alvings. This troubles Manders, partially because he realizes that Engstrand—whom he has always liked—lied to him when he claimed to be Regina's father.

In Act I of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, we see Pastor Manders lectures Mrs. Helene Alving, as he has done in the past, claiming that duty to religion, society, and public appearances trump personal happiness, even if it means living a life of lies. This conflict between duty and happiness is a key tension in the play. Happiness plays a significant role in the life of human beings, but one character of Ibsen's play considers that a person doesn't have a right to be happy. As Manders says, life is given to people to do their duty. But what is a life without the pursuit of happiness? Yes, Ibsen contends, people must do their duty; however, when duty completely supplants happiness, it is no longer worth pursuing. The Manders way of life is much more deadening, ironically, than the Oswald/Captain Alving one.

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. 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.

In *Ghosts* there are at least two different extrapolations of duty which are not simply incompatible, but even definable and understandable in opposition to each other. Pastor Manders holds forth an idealized notion of duty that must be upheld always and by everyone. Mrs Alving’s idea of duty is directed towards the attainment of happiness for herself and her son regardless of abstract principles. Manders’ Stoic and Christian understanding of duty and Mrs Alving a position closer to the one that sees duty as a product of the social possibilities within each individual.

Manders’ religious rhetoric never wavers, whether he is addressing a 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.

Pastor Manders, simple-minded and self-involved like Torvald Helmer in *A Doll’s House*, exists in an imaginary world where people and events conform to his stereotypes. Depositions such as “It is not a wife’s part to be her husband’s judge” and “We have no right to do anything that will scandalize the community” show how he accepts all the verbal expressions of social principles but is unable to deal with instances where doctrine does not apply. When he states, for instance, “A child should love and honor his father and mother,” Mrs. Alving tartly replies, “Don’t let us talk in such general terms. Suppose we say: ought Oswald to love

and honor Mr. Alving?" To this conflict of principle and reality which she suggests, the reverend has no response. Hypocritical and prideful, Manders' only reaction to the story of Joanna's scandalous marriage to Engstrand is indignation that he was fooled. Because of the power that his clerical status accords him, Manders is the most destructive creature in the drama. Incapable of spontaneity, devoid of any intellect, he readily sacrifices individual integrity and freedom of expression to maintain empty social standards. The major incident in a life devoted to hypocrisy occurred when Manders persuaded Mrs. Alving to return to her husband. Delighted to show the world his victory over temptation, he neglected Mrs. Alving's plight. His indifference to the needs of the individual sacrificed the love of a sensitive young woman and doomed her to lifelong despair. Although he is a believable figure in the present play, Manders is too much a stereotype. He speaks for all of society and represents its evils.

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. 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.

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, Regina chasing Manders after "her" money.

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.

3. Why do you think Regina is headstrong?

No individual has the perfect life and while some people have long given up trying to lead the perfect life, others such as Regina Engstrom and Helen Alving in *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen, stay in pursuit of the perfect life and have their own individual visions of what they believe to be the ideal life based on their personal experiences and desires.

Regina relies on her hope for a better future through her employment under the kind and generous Mrs. Alving in order to idealize what she wants her future to be like in a perfect world where she isn't tied to her demeaning social class. Especially during the Victorian era where romantic love increasingly became viewed as one requirement for marriage in comparison to the flawed, more serious traditions of a loveless marriage in past generations, it is not surprising that Regina and Helen, two prominent and strong-willed female characters in *Ghosts* who have not experienced true love or happiness, stand strongly behind their personal beliefs and ideals for the perfect life amidst their internal and external hardships. Regina Engstrand is one example of the lower class in *Ghosts*.

All her life she has had very little to no solid promise of upward mobility or security while working as the Alving's family maid; however, as Regina develops and grows older she realizes that she wants happiness and she is unable to find happiness doing housework. Regina's desire to stay with the Alvings, but use them in order to get ahead in her life and eventually get married is one struggle that Regina deals with and it is through this difficult time in her life that she believes in a hope for a perfect life for herself in the distant future.

During the Victorian era of traditional conservatism and strict social classes in the late 1800's, it is clear that she feels as though she has received the short end of the stick. Regina feels that has to work twice as hard as the upper class gentry in order to gain any kind of status increase which was the only way that one could move forward positively in life, but with no absolute guarantee of a comfortable life. In fact, it is almost unheard of at the time for someone of Regina's social status to have even the smallest chance for upward mobility because it would be a disgrace to the wealthier family. Regina's view of a fantasized, perfect life consists of her being able to move upwards in life through her social class in order to gain some level of recognition and attain happiness while still in her youth. Regina mentions in the text that "a poor girl must make some use of her youth, otherwise she may easily find herself out in the cold before she knows where she is" (Ibsen 54).

Regina also hopes to get married someday to the man of her dreams who will whisk her away from her dull, repetitive life and help her attain the goal of having the “joy of life” in her (Ibsen 54). As a single young woman, Regina is like many women who seek the perfect spouse and the perfect life with her future husband which is even relevant and widespread in today’s society. Regina desires opportunities and ultimate happiness that an increase in social status can certainly provide; however, generations of continuous reinforcement and history tell us that the likelihood of her dreams coming true is slim.

According to one source that discusses Women’s place in 19th century Victorian society, a woman who prepares for courtship and marriage is “groomed like a racehorse” due to the exceptionally high standards that are put in place by society. The general belief is that “married or single all Victorian women were expected to be weak and helpless, a fragile delicate flower incapable of making decisions beyond selecting the menu and ensuring her many children were taught moral values. Furthermore, there was great emphasis put on young women in the Victorian era to become “a gentlewoman [who] ensured that the home was a place of comfort for her husband and family. ” Naturally, the pressures put on young women to uphold these duties were immense, which resulted in Regina’s desires to stay with the Alving safe household environment and unrealistically hope to marry a good man through the Alving family.

Also, Regina’s upbringing is not one that is cultured and sophisticated such as that of Mrs. Alving’s. Therefore, Regina is even further shunned in the gentry class and noble society where she secretly desires to be a part of. Regina’s idealized notion of a perfect life involves her marriage to Oswald Alving. Oswald remembers a time when he once dismissed her thoughts and her presence because of her working class status, but towards the end of the play he comes to the realization that her simplicity is just what he needs to restart and refresh his life when he is feeling down and sick. He learns that she desires to join him some day to go to Paris and explore the world with him and while he did not take her very seriously, it was evident that “she had taken the thing seriously, and had been thinking about me [Oswald] all the time, and had set herself to learn French” in order to be with him (Ibsen 44).

Naturally, her discovery as Oswald Alving's half sister proves that not only was she a lower class than what her rightful class should have been, but has no hope to marry her newly-discovered half-brother and is stuck in a position where she must resort back to an even lower, less respectable life with her drunken, unstable father, Jacob Engstrom where at best she could become a bar entertainer at her father's idea of a comfortable sailors' abode by the water.

This discovery ultimately changes the entire direction of where Regina had hoped her life would go, however, Regina's determination to change the direction of her life when all had seemed lost is very strong and motivating. She declares that she cannot stay in the countryside and wear herself out "looking after invalids" and takes the next step in declaring her independence and securing her future by hoping to seek Mr. Manders's guidance once she leaves the Alving household (Ibsen 54).

All in all, the sudden information given to Regina in a brief time changes the entire course of her life and where she wants it to lead to. Regina's vision of a perfect life which she had held up to such high standards comes to a disappointing halt when she discovers that she could not marry her half brother and therefore, live a perfect, carefree life. Regina remains headstrong and fluidly takes measures to rebuild her life in hopes of attaining the "joy of life" (Ibsen 54).

4. Why does Mrs. Alving scream Ghosts at the end of Act I?

In Act I of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, we find Oswald returning from his walk due to the constant pouring of rain. When Regina announces that dinner is ready, Oswald follows her into the dining room to uncork the wines. Manders and Mrs. Alving discuss the dedication ceremony

for the opening of the orphanage tomorrow. Pastor Manders launches another round of criticism at Mrs. Helene Alving, condemning her as a bad wife and mother. Mrs. Alving listens, and then it is her turn. She tells Pastor Manders dark secrets about her marriage, explaining that Captain Alving lived a debauched life until he died. Pastor Manders is shocked. He is still reeling from this news when she tells him that Regina Engstrand is the illegitimate child of her husband and her maid. Mrs. Alving relates to the Pastor that she eventually caught her husband trying to seduce their maid, Johanna. When he finally got his way with Johanna, Mrs. Alving was horrified and sent the seven-year-old Oswald abroad, so that he would not have to witness his father's debaucheries. She continued to maintain the Captain's reputation, however, especially in her letters to Oswald. She sent Johanna away with a large sum of money to keep her quiet. The memorial orphanage is another attempt to make sure that the truth will never come out. It is also a way for Mrs. Alving to purge herself of her former husband all of his money is going into the memorial orphanage; her son's inheritance will consist of her money only. The Pastor is shocked by Mrs. Alving's divulgements and apologizes for his opinions. He concedes that Mrs. Alving has had to endure a great deal.

She regards the inception of the orphanage 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. The Pastor confesses that it will be difficult to give a speech tomorrow in honour of Captain Alving, but he says that he must do it in order to avoid scandal. Suddenly, Mrs. Alving and the Pastor hear Regina call out from the kitchen, asking Oswald to let her go. 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. Just as Mrs. Alving thinks she is putting the past behind her by telling the truth, Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders hear Oswald making advances toward Regina. They are horrified. Mrs. Alving says that it is ghosts. As they enter the dining room, she insists that the Pastor say nothing. Captain Alving's illicit affair with the household maid is echoed in the advancements made by Oswald towards Regina. History repeats itself in the Alving household and it seems as if the ghost of the past has returned to haunt the present as evident by the unwitting incestuous affair between Oswald and his step sister cum maid, Regina.

It is clear that Regina is the daughter of the Captain and Johanna. This extra-marital birth was, understandably, the last straw for Mrs. Alving. She tells the Pastor that once she caught them, she immediately took over complete control of all household affairs. Her entire life has been marked by this sort of control: control over her husband's reputation, keeping her husband home at night, keeping her son ignorant of his father's failings, keeping Regina ignorant of the identity of her real father. Mrs. Alving makes two difficult decisions regarding her husband. The first is her decision to maintain his reputation. The second is her decision to completely protect Oswald from his father. These strategies are connected: her son could not remain ignorant of his father's faults if he had a bad public reputation. Yet her desire to keep up his reputation is also motivated by a desire to save her own reputation. If the marriage were viewed as a failure, she could potentially be seen as the cause; indeed, later in the play she blames herself for not being able to match Captain Alving's "joy of life," his verve and spirit. At the very least, she may feel guilty for having temporarily abandoned her husband.

Mrs. Alving goes to great lengths to keep Oswald in the dark about his father. She lies to him in her letters and she sends him away as soon as he is old enough to ask embarrassing questions. Just as she tries to be the perfect wife to her husband—sticking by him and enduring most of his faults, all the while improving his reputation—she tries to give Oswald a perfect pair of parents. The dangers of upholding such a fiction will be revealed when Oswald and Regina unwittingly fall for each other.

The close of the first act is almost fantastical in nature. The past mirrors present in disastrous ways. Oswald woos Regina, just as Captain Alving wooed Johanna. Although Oswald and Regina do not know that they are half-siblings, the knowledge of their close relationship causes Mrs. Alving and the Pastor to be severely shocked when they overhear Regina's cry that Oswald has tried to touch her. Mrs. Alving attributes Regina's cries to ghosts; indeed, Regina and Oswald are the children of a man who similarly tried to seduce a maid a generation earlier. Captain Alving's ghost seems to reveal itself through them. Once again, Mrs. Alving feels that she has lost control of the situation. Yet she does not scream or rush into the kitchen. Her first impulse is to tell the Pastor not to utter a word, to keep up appearances, just as she did the last time such a seduction was taking place.

This scene is key to the play's action. A series of important revelations begins here with two bombshells, the truth about Captain Alving's behavior and Regina Engstrand's illegitimacy.

Pastor Manders speaks first and in his ignorance presents a scathing assessment of Mrs. Helene Alving's character. He calls her "undisciplined" and "lawless," a selfish woman who acts "carelessly and irresponsibly." He condemns her for wanting to leave her marriage as a newlywed; he upbraids her for coming to him for support; he downplays her young love for him and his feelings for her; he calls her a bad mother. When Mrs. Alving wanted to leave her husband early in her marriage, Pastor Manders "bent her will to duty and obedience." He takes pride in the fact that he convinced her to return to a husband and marriage she abhorred. She, in turn, has come to regret her devotion to duty and the lies she has told to protect her husband's reputation as well as her own. Pastor Manders's initial indictment of Mrs. Alving rings hollow after she reveals the depths of her husband's depravity and the struggle of living with him. Her greatest sacrifice was sending Oswald Alving away as a child to protect him from the "poisoned" atmosphere of their home. Mrs. Alving thus becomes a sympathetic character, and Henrik Ibsen shows she has great reserves of strength. In this exchange with Pastor Manders, Mrs. Alving takes her first steps toward living a truthful life. She is eager to open the orphanage, because then "it will really seem as if the dad had never lived in this house." But before her life can be transformed, the ghosts of her husband and maid return as Oswald pursues Regina.

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

In *Ghosts* Act II, we see Mrs. Alving walking toward the dining room but stops in the doorway, seeing Oswald. He is drinking. He says he is drinking so as not to feel the dampness. He has to be told twice that the Pastor has gone down to say prayers at the orphanage. He enters from the dining room, patting his mother and telling her how nice it is to be home. He then begins to complain about the weather and how he can't do any painting without sunlight. He paces and asks permission to sit next to his mother. He tells her that he has something to tell her: he is sick. He sometimes feels a piercing pain and becomes giddy and senseless whenever he tries to work. He went to a doctor in Paris, who, instead of a diagnosis, simply declared, "The sins of the fathers are visited on the children." But Oswald convinced the doctor that this was wrong, showing him his mother's letters, in which she described what a good man Captain Alving was. The doctor then decides that Oswald must simply be over-exerting himself in his enlightened, bohemian lifestyle. Oswald is crushed by the knowledge that he has ruined his own health with his living habits.

Mrs. Alving, meanwhile, is highly agitated, wringing her hands. She repeatedly bemoans the fate of her "boy." He asks for something to drink. His mother asks Regina to bring in the lamp and then some champagne. She is worried that he will leave home again and tells him he can have whatever he wants. He speaks of Regina, saying she is the only one who can help him. Mrs. Alving offers her own assistance, but Oswald says that, although he considers his mother his best friend in the world, he cannot accept her help as he does not want her to have to witness his torment. Mrs. Alving calls for another bottle of champagne. Meanwhile, Oswald describes how he once casually told Regina that she should visit Paris and that now she had her heart set on it. She reminded him of it when he returned and when he saw her looking expectantly at him, he saw that she was full of the "joy of life."

Regina brings the bottle, and Oswald asks her to join them. After asking "madam's" permission, she does. Oswald continues to speak about the joy of life and work, lamenting that people in Norway assume incorrectly that the world is a "vale of misery." He says he always paints with an eye toward happiness, and he feels that in Norway all that is best in him is deteriorating. Suddenly, Mrs. Alving rises, exclaiming that she now understands how everything fits together and that she can explain everything. The Pastor enters and is convinced that Regina must return to Engstrand. He asks why she is drinking with the other two, and Oswald says that they may marry. Then, Mrs. Alving declares that she has

something to say. The Pastor protests, but she assures him that she will not disillusion anyone. Then, they all notice a bright light and a clamor of voices emanating from outside. Apparently, the orphanage has caught fire. They all rush out. Even while the Pastor exclaims that the fire is an act of judgment upon the sinful Alving house, he also complains bitterly that the orphanage is not insured.

The play almost comes to its climax but is suddenly interrupted by a fire. The fire is one of two sources of light that acts as twisted symbols in this act. The other is the lamp. Mrs. Alving calls for it amid Oswald's complaints that he cannot work in this land without sun or the joy of life. Yet his complaints continue—Mrs. Alving cannot provide enough light to help his current mood, just as she can do little to help him in general. The fire, on the other hand, actually obliterates a falsehood, the fiction of Captain Alving's good reputation. Yet it is still purely destructive, not a source of enlightenment.

Oswald's sickness makes little sense to the modern reader, but perhaps in the late 19th century it was more plausible to blame an illness on a lifestyle. One possible explanation is that the sickness is syphilis, contracted through imprudent sexual relations. At any rate, the sickness's significance lies in its connections to the play's larger theme of hauntings and ghosts; the illness would seem to prove Mrs. Alving's theory that her son is actually haunted by his father.

Oswald's attitude toward his mother is ambivalent. On the one hand, he tries to convince her that he is a loving son. He pats her and calls her his best friend in the world, but he is also obliged to ask her permission to sit next to her. To a certain degree, they are strangers, as the Pastor pointed out earlier. However, Oswald is desperate, and he looks to his mother for help even though he suspects that Regina is a better alternative. In part, his preference for Regina's companionship may merely be an expression of lust for her, a manifestation of his lust for her merely because he is doomed to repeat the sins of his father, but he may also sense that his mother is in many ways confused.

She certainly has a confused reaction to the revelations he makes. She is shocked, and her first reaction is to emphasize her maternal roll: by calling him "boy," and by getting him whatever he wants. At the same time, she listens with rapt interest to his thoughts on "the joy of life." And after he finishes, it seems that she finally has enough courage to tell everyone the truth regardless of public opinion, to break free from the ghostly laws that keep her quiet. But then she says that she will not disillusion anyone or break any ideals.

6. Conclusion analysis.

We see the tragic unfolding of the play's conclusion unfolding before us with the characters revealing their innermost secrets to each other. The Pastor leaves, and meanwhile Oswald has entered. He predicts Engstrand establishment will burn, just like all that remains of his father. He gathers his mother and Regina close to him, telling them that he needs a "helping hand." His mother says that she will now remove the basis of Oswald's self-reproach. She begins to tell how Oswald's father was full of "the joy of life"; she says he was full of untamed energy for which neither the small town nor she could provide an outlet for, so he had to take up with drunkards and become a broken man. She also admits that Regina "belongs in the house." Regina guesses her meaning immediately and asks to leave. She is bitter that Mrs. Alving hired her as a maid when she should have raised her as a gentleman's daughter. She goes to catch the Pastor and demand her inheritance from the money that would have gone to the orphanage and will now fund Engstrand's sailor's inn.

Oswald is mildly shocked but reminds his mother that he didn't know his father and, indeed, is just as troubled as before. When his mother tells him that every child should love his father, he asks how she can believe in such a "superstition." Mrs. Alving realizes that she is just propagating another ghost. She asks whether he loves her; he says at least he knows her, and that he is very thankful for all her help. Oswald admits that she has relieved him of his

self-reproach, but he says nothing can alleviate his dread. She reassures him that soon the sun will come up. He sits her down, telling her that his dread results from the lapses he suffers, the fits of gloom that lurk in his mind and come upon him suddenly, rendering him helpless as a child. His mother tries to reassure him, saying that, as his mother, she is there to care for her child. But this is just what Oswald doesn't want. He savors the doctor's description of his illness as a "softening of the brain," finding the image charming—like red velvet curtains, supple when stroked.

Mrs. Alving is horrified. Oswald blames her again for scaring away Regina, who could have helped him. He says that the doctor predicted his next attack will be his last, and he shows his mother twelve morphine capsules—a lethal dose. He wants his mother to administer them when his attack comes—he knows that Regina would have done so had he asked her. Mrs. Alving finally promises to do so if necessary. He says that soon the sun will come and she will see the torment he suffers. She tells him that he has only been suffering from delusions and that now that he is home with his mother, they will go away. The sun rises over the glistening mountains, and she goes to turn out the light. Oswald says, "Mother, give me the sun." His muscles loosen and he slips in the chair. His mother panics and searches for the pills, screaming all the while.

Mrs. Alving finally tells the truth, if only partially. When she paid such close attention to Oswald's talk of "the joy of life," it was because she was finding an excuse for her husband's behavior. By explaining his sins by saying that he had too vibrant a spirit and no outlets for it, she is not only providing an excuse for the husband who made her miserable, she is shifting the blame to herself. She says that it was her boring sense of duty that stifled him, when, in fact, it was her sense of duty that made her stay with him and has driven her to preserve his reputation, even as she does with this speech.

Regina's reactions are not unpredictable. We are not surprised that she so unhesitatingly chooses to leave Oswald: throughout the play, she seems less interested in Oswald himself than in climbing the social ladder. Thus, she speaks in bits of French; thus, she is just as interested in charming the Pastor as Engstrand. Her actions also provide a new insight,

however, as they also serve to expose and protest against Mrs. Alving's failure to think of Regina as a human. Instead, she wants to think of her as a child to be cared for and controlled.

Mrs. Alving's treatment of Oswald in the concluding part of the play is similarly unrealistic. She continually tries to talk him out of his troubles; she will not accept that he is actually terribly ill. She mothers him, even and especially when he expresses disgust at being reduced by his illness to a childish level of helplessness. She also insists on the ideas of filial piety, of a son loving his father and of the nuclear family in general, that the Pastor has used on her throughout the play. When Oswald is able to call them superstitions—ghosts—she begins to recognize the horrible irony of her behavior.

If Mrs. Alving is inconsistent, so is Oswald. He reassures her but also threatens to leave and blames her for driving Regina away. In the end, he is right to doubt her. When he finally relapses, she is terrified, and the play ends before we learn whether she will give him the morphine or simply go mad herself.

The sunrise is a final symbol of light. It clears away the gloom; all the facts are on the table. Yet the result is not enlightenment but madness. Neither dark nor light is perfect. The dismal aspects of Norwegian society will persist. Oswald, who has always known the joy of living, now also knows the truth about the pain of living; under the weight of these combined truths he goes crazy.

The end of the Ibsen's tragedy, *Ghosts* sees a ruthless, revelatory sun spilling over the scene. Mrs. Alving, an articulate woman throughout the play, 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. Ibsen doesn't tell us whether Mrs Alving can administer the fatal dose to her son.