

GHOSTS

1. Opening stage Direction

In 1882, Ibsen wrote in a letter to Sophie Adlersparre:

Ghosts had to be written; I couldn't remain standing at A Doll's House; after Nora, Mrs Alving of necessity had to come...

Ghosts is a domestic tragedy play by Henrik Ibsen. Henrik Ibsen is 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 Alnø, 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).

Ghosts 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". Ghosts was a play that hit European society hard; almost the whole of Europe denounced the play with theatres refusing to stage it, and thousands of copies of the text were returned to the publishers. Only four people defended him: Georg Brandes in Denmark, Bjørnson in Norway, the feminists Camilla Collett and Amalie Skram. In this play, Ibsen adopted the classical analytic structure. The action spans only a few hours. The play concerns itself with past deeds and events leading up to the present crisis.

Stage directions are important to Ibsen. He uses them to drop clues about characters and themes.

The stage directions tell us we're in Mrs. Alving's country house next to a large fjord in Western Norway. A fjord is a steep inlet cut into the land by glaciers. This setting evokes a sense of being in the middle of nowhere which gets echoed by the characters who are lost in life too. The majority of the play takes place in a big garden-room. There are three doors leading out to other rooms. As the curtain is removed the audience finds an elegant drawing room with aristocratic settings in dark colours. The furniture not only signifies upper-class status, but also fashionable taste of the Alvings as it contains "a hint of French verve and esprit". The darker colours indicate compatibility with local choice. Ibsen had specificities of the room in mind as he wrote in a letter to Duke George of Meiningen, in 1886: "The living-rooms of the oldest family seats of this type sometimes have dark coloured wall coverings. The lower halves of the walls are clad with simple wood panels. The ceilings, doors and window surrounds are treated in a similar fashion. The stoves are large, cumbersome and generally made of cast iron. The furniture is often empire in style; but the colours are consistently darker". A round table is in the middle of the room, with the books, periodicals and newspapers that Mrs. Alving has been reading. There's a little sofa and worktable where Mrs. Alving keeps her knitting – she's part-intellectual, part-homemaker. The round table in the living room becomes a field of slaughter littered with evidence of all the battles in the play. It holds the books that symbolize Mrs. Alving's new ideas, the Orphanage papers that represent the enormous lie of Captain Alving, and the champagne that Oswald requests (a symbol of the joy of life). It is also the resting place of the lamp, the artificial light Mrs. Alving gives Oswald when he complains of the dark. What Oswald really needs is the sun (i.e., the truth). He gets it. This happens just as he slips into delirium and Mrs. Alving turns off the lamp.

Behind this room is a conservatory or greenhouse with the walls all made of glass. Through it we can see a rainy landscape. The weather in Norway is often rainy and gray. In the opening stage directions, Ibsen establishes a big wall of glass through which a "gloomy fjord landscape" is visible. The rain never stops. It particularly oppresses Oswald, who complains that it keeps him from thinking and walking. He drinks in order to deal with it.

The perpetual rainy weather adds theatrically to the grim atmosphere of the play. But it also could be interpreted as a symbolic expression of the oppressive atmosphere Mrs. Alving has created. In her iron willed determination to bury her husband's memory, she doesn't want truth – traditionally represented by the sun – anywhere near this house. And

interestingly, once she accepts and acknowledges the truth of her life with her husband and her son, the sun breaks into the room. Visual symbolism is used extensively by Ibsen in the play. Often characters discuss the rains outside; a steady outpour accompanied with lightning ensures a heavy grey atmosphere that reflects the guilt-laden heaviness of the characters within. However, flowers and plants in the upstage conservatory holds out possibilities of hope. The flowers also inspire the characters to yearn for light. This space is most utilized by the two youngsters in the play, Oswald and Regine. When characters are enveloped in chilling misunderstandings the action engages in lighting of lamps. When the orphanage burns, at the end of Act 2, its fierce red glow reflects Oswald's state of mind. The beautiful sunrise at the denouement, a reflection of Mrs Alving's relief, is cruelly juxtaposed with Oswald lapsing to madness and slumping in his chair.

The stage direction of Ibsen is very meticulous in *Ghosts*, just as is characteristic of the playwright. He made marvellous use of theatre space. Emotive scenes, as the intense interaction between Mrs Alving and Oswald in Acts 2 and 3, necessitating closeness between audience and the actors, were planned for downstage enactment. In the centre of the stage was placed a circular table with chairs around it. Neutral scenes were scheduled for this space either at the table or somewhere near it. This facilitates characters to use the space in front when they get up from discussion and have to enact an agitated state of mind. Actions requiring special focus, as when Oswald enters smoking his father's pipe, or when Mrs. Alving hears her son attempting to kiss the maid in an adjoining room, made use of the upper-stage.

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”. 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.

2. Exposition

The setting is in Norway in a spacious garden room on a rainy day. Regina, the maid, is warning 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.

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.

After he is gone, Regina straightens herself up before Pastor Manders enters. They exchange pleasantries and talk about the weather. Talk then turns to the orphanage being opened tomorrow and [OsvoldAlving](#) being home.

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.

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 Osvold 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.

They turn to the deeds now. 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.

3.Regina- iv been brought up by mrsalving **Summary**

[Mrs. Helene Alving](#)'s household is getting ready for the opening of the orphanage. Regina [Engstrand](#) has an unwelcome talk with Engstrand that shows they clearly have different views of Regina's future. She says she wants to see the world and improve her social position. Engstrand has no qualms with his daughter working at the "hotel for seamen" he wants to establish. He makes sly innuendos about Regina's parentage before she forces him to leave, worried that he will wake [OsvoldAlving](#). Engstrand goes out one door as [Pastor Manders](#) arrives through another.

Analysis

[Henrik Ibsen](#) sets the stage with people and conversations that hint at topics to come. Conflict, secrets, and hypocrisy infuse even this brief conversation between Regina and [Engstrand](#), whose physical deformity is quickly seen to mirror his moral depravity. Regina scorns her "father" and he curses her, showing little regard for her outside of how he can use her for his own ends. He seems to revel in his duplicity, mocking the idea of being a loving father as he looks for the next strategy he can pull on [Pastor Manders](#). [Regina Engstrand](#) sees her father for what he is: a hypocrite and a drunkard.

Regina tries to distance herself from her past as it is represented by her father. Her use of French and her contempt for Engstrand's suggestion that she work in the brothel he wants to build reveal she has better plans for herself. There is the hint that her plans involve [Oswald Alving](#). Her manner and ideals irritate Engstrand, in part because they remind him of her late mother, whom he also derides for attempting to "make herself so refined." Ibsen uses the gloomy rain outside and the ugliness between Regina and Engstrand inside to create a grim tone.

4.manders- your are right

5. well I seem to find explanation

Pastor Manders comes to see Mrs. Helene Alving about business concerning the orphanage, but first he comments on the books she is reading. Mrs. Alving defends her choice of books and the progressive message they contain. Although Pastor Manders has not read the books, he harshly judges their contents as well as Mrs. Alving's opinions. When talk turns to business, Pastor Manders questions whether Mrs. Alving needs to insure the orphanage. He tells her that some in the community might see insurance as a lack of faith in God's protection. He recommends against insuring the building, and Mrs. Alving eventually agrees, although she sees this as a great risk. Their conversation winds down with Pastor Manders expressing support for Engstrand.

Analysis

Pastor Manders is at his condescending worst as he condemns not only Mrs. Helene Alving's opinions about morality, but also her past conduct as a wife and mother. After expressing his disapproval in a sanctimonious tone, they turn to business. The key components of his personality are presented in this scene. He is judgmental. He endorses conventional concepts of morality. He is gullible. Although Pastor Manders presents a grave attitude about Mrs. Alving's behavior and his reputation, he is almost cartoonish in his belief in Engstrand's good intentions. Most noticeably, however, he is acutely concerned with people's opinions of himself. He is worried that insuring the orphanage will cast doubt on his religious devotion and put him in a "painful" position with the "best circles in town." Mrs. Alving, as she has done in the past, goes along with his advice against her better judgment. Their discussion about the insurance shows that she has sound ideas but lacks the courage to act on them. Pastor Manders reveals his ability to construct a position that looks like it is about the common good but is really about protecting himself. The decision not to insure the orphanage also introduces a sense of foreshadowing. Henrik Ibsen intends that such a specific detail will be revisited in the play he constructs toward a climax.

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.

*6. But this is the very essence of the rebellious spirit, to crave happiness here in this life.
What right have we human beings to happiness? No, we must do our duty, Mrs. Alving!*

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

7. ghosts from the conservatory risen again

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.

OswaldAlving leaves to take a walk, and 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. 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.

Analysis

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 [OsvoldAlving](#) 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 Osvold pursues Regina.