



A Postmodernist Reading of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*

UNE LECTURE DE MODERNE DE GHOSTS D'HENRIK IBSEN

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Received 1 April 2011; accepted 6 June 2011

Abstract

In this study, we look at Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* through a postmodernist window. In addition, a modest attempt has been made to analyze the theories of postmodernist literature in the play. In *Ghosts* there are both modern and postmodern characters as well as those oscillating between them. Using Derrida's Deconstruction, religious ideas, dead beliefs and old traditions *Ghosts* can profit new looks from different angles. Sense of non-ending and sense of displacement are also spread all over the play. By the same token, fall of the grand-narratives, as an important postmodern element, is very tangible in the play. The importance of fall of the grand-narratives as a bump key, which opens the complicated locks of the play, persuades us to delve into *Ghosts* within postmodern bedrock.

Key words: *Ghosts*; Postmodernist literature; Grand narrative; Meta-narratives; Deconstruction; Binary oppositions

Résumé

Dans cette étude, nous examinons le fantôme Henrik Ibsen à travers une fenêtre du moderne. En outre, une modeste tentative a été faite pour analyser les théories de la littérature de la post-moderne de la pièce. Dans les fantômes, il ya deux personnages modernes et post-modernes, ainsi que ceux oscillant entre eux. En utilisant la déconstruction de Derrida, les idées religieuses, les croyances et les vieux fantômes morts traditionnel qui peuvent être tirer du profit de nouveaux looks à partir

d'angles différents. Sens de la non-clos et le sens de déplacement sont également répartis sur tout le jouer. Par la même occasion, chute de la grand-récits, comme un élément important postmoderne, est très tangibles dans la pièce. L'importance de la chute des grands récits, comme une clé bosse, qui ouvre les serrures compliquées de la pièce, nous persuade de se plonger dans *Ghosts* dans le substratum postmoderne.

Mots clés: *Les Fantômes*; La littérature post-moderne; Le grand récit; Les méta-récits; La Déconstruction; L'oppositions binaires

Noorbakhsh Hooti, Amin Davoodi (2011). A Postmodernist Reading of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*. *Canadian Social Science*, 7(4), 1-7. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/j.css.1923669720110704.030> DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720110704.030>

INTRODUCTION

The study begins with a brief look at postmodernism and after having a short summary of *Ghosts*, it will move forward to have a postmodern analysis of the play.

1. POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is a move against all the black gardens where the dominating superpowers have planted their victimizing beliefs and norms and keep on insisting adamantly to make the ordinary people take care of their fruitful crops. It is a move against all those metanarratives, which have given birth to some inhumane terms like slavery, racism, ethnicity and nepotism. It is a helping hand to those who are left fluctuating in the murky and slippery wells of modernism.

Indeed postmodernism and modernism cannot be disintegrated so easily since the importance of postmodernism can be recognized by comparing and

contrasting it to modernism. Therefore, the postmodern has not been instituted at the price of a complete denial of the modern. Now, keeping in mind the promise of the postmodern of the modern, one is perhaps better prepared to become postmodern. As Lyotard explains:

What, then, is the postmodern... it is undoubtedly a part of the modern... a work can [now] become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant. (1984:79)

The issue of postmodernism has strongly attracted most of the post Second World War critics. According to Hooti & Shoostarian (2011: 78) “for most critics, the easiest way to start thinking about postmodernism is by thinking about modernism, the movement from which postmodernism seems to grow or emerge”.

2. IBSEN AND HIS GHOSTS

Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906) was the Norwegian dramatist and social critic who fought fearlessly for women's rights. He is the father of modern drama. He is the one who rightly introduced Realism in the world of literature. He did care a lot about individuality and individual rights. Lyons describes him as “the realist, the iconoclast, the successful or failed idealist, the poet, the psychologist, the romantic, the antiromantic.” (Quoted in Suleiman, 2011: 5)

Written in 1881 and first staged in 1882, *Ghosts* is a play about how old beliefs and clichés, if not justified, can destroy human life. The power of Ibsen is in creating stories full of shocks and “...discussions of incest, venereal disease, sexual exploitation, and illegitimacy... [Which]... made him an infamous international celebrity” (Lyons, 1991: 8). Throughout the play, we see how a few characters try to act based on cultural and religious superstitions as well as unjustified beliefs in society. Consequently, at the end of the play, each one suffers the aftermath.

Ghosts has many things to offer to the readers in the 21st century. The reader can feel and see how hiding the truth will result in huge and irrecoverable disasters. Unfortunately, in everyday life, hiding and manipulating the truth are used as scapegoats to feign “respect” in the eyes of people.

Pennington and Unwin (2004: 39) have the following opinion on Ibsen's *Ghosts* “the action of the play is a slow unveiling of the truth. If the central theme of Ibsen's work is how to be true to yourself, in *Ghosts* he shows the pain of that pursuit”.

The name “*Ghosts*” is highly symbolic. Ghosts are the old beliefs in society that are very problematic for people. They are like oil stains; it is hard to remove them but not impossible. It needs sacrifice and hard work. Mrs. Alving thinks of them as “what we have inherited from our father and mother” (*Ghosts*: 44).

MRS. ALVING: Ghosts! When I heard Regina and Oswald in there, it was as though ghosts rose up before me. But I almost think we are all of us ghosts, Pastor Manders. It is not only what we have inherited from our father and mother that “walks” in us. It is all sorts of dead ideas, and lifeless old beliefs, and so forth. They have no vitality, but they cling to us all the same, and we cannot shake them off. Whenever I take up a newspaper, I seem to see ghosts gliding between the lines. There must be ghosts all the country over, as thick as the sands of the sea. And then we are one and all, so pitifully afraid of the light. (Ibsen, 2011: 44-henceforth *Ghosts*)

Having characters with different philosophies and personalities in *Ghosts*, allows the reader to analyze and interpret it from different angles. Considering Pastor Manders as a leading character in the play, with his interests in public opinions and interpretations, may persuade the reader to name *Ghosts* as a “modern play”. By the same token, the emphases on what people in a society believe and the necessity to adapt with those superstitions can also approve the idea of *Ghosts* as a “modern play”.

On the other hand, one can justify the idea of labeling *Ghosts* as a “postmodern play” by referring to several falls of grand-narratives in the play which will be discussed later. As a postmodern element, the fall of the grand-narratives is very influential in the play and causes the main climaxes of *Ghosts*, like burning of the uninsured orphanage and revealing Mr. Alving's true character by his wife, to name a few.

3. THE FALL OF GRAND NARRATIVES

Metanarratives are fossilized beliefs, which have been passed on from one generation to another and try to remain irresistible and invincible. These beliefs and interpretations have lost their credit and validity in the postmodern bedrock; that is why Lyotard defines postmodernism as “incredulity towards meta-narratives” (1984: xxiv).

To build upon what Lyotard says regarding the issue, one can focus on the importance of changing or updating in the 21st century; we upgrade our computers, change the decoration of our furniture, and update our outfit styles, to name a few. However, no one knows why modern people never try to upgrade their old beliefs i.e. meta-narratives. People follow some superstitions and are biased about them without a clear reason.

The fall of the grand-narratives is one of the important, if not the most important, concepts of postmodernism. However, it should be born in mind that postmodernism is not against beliefs and old traditions of people with different cultures; rather, it tries to modify those beliefs and ideas, which are enchained within some presupposed frames and circles. Using Derrida's Deconstruction, people can change their views and think about the world around with new perceptions without being the victim of the predetermined preventive meta-narratives. That is

why Derrida's Deconstruction can be interpreted as the ability to see the world from different angles. Therefore, Deconstruction has nothing to do with destructing the beliefs or traditions; it is not either reconstruction of the old beliefs, but tilting the angle of approach based on the prevalent circumstances. It should be also born in mind that "the promise of deconstruction would be that in encountering the other, justice ought to be done, even if the progressive structure of the promise relied on the necessary, in principle, ability for promises to be broken or to fail." (McQuillan, 2008:128)

Ibsen uses different kinds of meta-narratives in *Ghosts*. There are cultural, religious, and traditional meta-narratives all over the play. Maybe it is the reason that many scholars label this play as a "modern play." Nevertheless, fall of the meta-narratives that, gradually occurs in the play, plays a crucial role in the flow and growth of the story in order to analyze it from a postmodern standpoint. From the beginning of the play, filial piety, the sense of responsibility of a child to show respect and courtesy to his/her parents under different circumstances, is quite vivid and tangible. It is said that a child must respect his or her parents' notions and beliefs no matter if they deserve it or not. This meta-narrative can deviate a child from truth by forcing him or her to obey blindly what his or her parents believe to be correct.

Pastor Manders, who is a priest and a very modern character in the play, insists on the idea of filial piety repeatedly with different characters. In the first act of the play, he tries to persuade Regina to respect her father, Engstrand, as her innate duty, as it can be seen as follows:

MANDERS: He [Engstrand] requires some one near him whom he cares for, and whose judgment he respects. He frankly admitted as much when he last came to see me.

REGINA: Yes, he mentioned something of the sort to me. But I don't know whether Mrs. Alving can spare me; especially now that we've got the new Orphanage to attend to. And then I should be so sorry to leave Mrs. Alving; she has always been so kind to me.

MANDERS: But a daughter's duty, my good girl... (Ghosts: 17)

Pastor Manders speaks with clichés and believes that Regina must help her father because it is the duty of every daughter to help her father. However, he does not know that Engstrand, as her father, asked Regina to prostitute herself. Engstrand also marries a "fallen woman" just because of money and then, using the money he saves, he wants to open a place for sailors as a debauchery hangout.

Does such a father deserve filial piety? Through the play, we see the fall of this meta-narrative when Pastor Manders comes to know the truth.

MANDERS: But such a piece of duplicity on his part! And towards me too! I never could have believed it of Jacob Engstrand. I shall not fail to take him seriously to task; he may be sure of that.--And then the immorality of such a connection! For money!--! How much did the girl receive?

MRS. ALVING: Three hundred dollars.

MANDERS: Just think of it--for a miserable three hundred dollars, to go and marry a fallen woman! (Ghosts: 40)

It becomes clear that Engstrand wants everything, even her daughter, simply to achieve his financial ambitions. When everyone is sad for the burning of the orphanage, he only thinks about his benefits and persuades Pastor Manders to let him run, what he calls, "home" for sailors.

MRS. ALVING: Do just as you please. The whole matter is now completely indifferent to me.

ENGSTRAND: Give a thought to my Sailors' Home, your Reverence.

MANDERS: Upon my word, that is not a bad suggestion. That must be considered. (Ghosts: 68)

After knowing these facts about Engstrand, the reader of *Ghosts* would come to this conclusion that Regina is right and such a father does not deserve filial piety.

In the first act of the play, Pastor Manders advises Mrs. Alving to do her duty as a wife and try to keep Mr. Alving's reputation and not to judge his husband because he thinks that it is not the job of a wife to judge his husband.

MANDERS: It is the very mark of the spirit of rebellion to crave for happiness in this life. What right have we human beings to happiness? We have simply to do our duty, Mrs. Alving! And your duty was to hold firmly to the man you had once chosen, and to whom you were bound by the holiest ties.

MRS. ALVING: You know very well what sort of life Alving was leading--what excesses he was guilty of.

MANDERS: I know very well what rumours there were about him; and I am the last to approve the life he led in his young days, if report did not wrong him. But a wife is not appointed to be her husband's judge. It was your duty to bear with humility the cross which a Higher Power had, in its wisdom, laid upon you. But instead of that you rebelliously throw away the cross, desert the backslider whom you should have supported, go and risk your good name and reputation, and-- nearly succeed in ruining other people's reputation into the bargain. (Ghosts: 32)

When Mrs. Alving displays the real character of Mr. Alving, by saying that he had love affairs with their maid, Johanna, Pastor Manders apologizes to her and another meta-narrative falls in the play. However, Pastor Manders still believes that a son must respect his parents and warns Mrs. Alving not to open the secret and let Oswald think of his father as an ideal.

MANDERS: But what about the ideals?

MRS. ALVING: Oh--ideals, ideals! If only I were not such a coward!

MANDERS: Do not despise ideals, Mrs. Alving; they will avenge themselves cruelly. Take Oswald's case: he, unfortunately, seems to have few enough ideals as it is; but I can see that his father stands before him as an ideal. (Ghosts: 42)

Pastor Manders, as a priest, believes in strict rules of religion and stands against Oswald's ideas about unmarried couples who live together. Pastor Manders believes that couples must marry officially before a priest in a church; however, Oswald, as a postmodern character does not believe in that. While Pastor Manders calls those marriages "irregular", Oswald disagrees and supports them by saying that marriage costs too much that many young boys and girls cannot afford.

MANDERS: Then it is illicit relations you are talking of! Irregular marriages, as people call them!

OSWALD: I have never noticed anything particularly irregular about the life these people lead.

MANDERS: But how is it possible that a--a young man or young woman with any decency of feeling can endure to live in that way?--in the eyes of all the world!

OSWALD: What are they to do? A poor young artist--a poor girl-- marriage costs a great deal. What are they to do? (Ghosts: 22)

A very strong religious belief is that on Sundays people should go to church and do not sin; however, Oswald rejects it:

OSWALD: Let me tell you, sir, that I have been in the habit of spending nearly all my Sundays in one or two such irregular homes

MANDERS: Sunday of all days! (Ghosts: 30)

It seems that Pastor Manders never wants to be realistic about society and is only interested in dealing with different issues from the point of view of religion, law, and rules. By putting emphasis on self-restraint for those who cannot afford to get married, it seems that he oversimplifies important issues like marriage and the necessity of sex in human life.

OSWALD: What are they to do? A poor young artist--a poor girl-- marriage costs a great deal. What are they to do?

MANDERS: What are they to do? Let me tell you, Mr. Alving, what they ought to do. They ought to exercise self-restraint from the first; that is what they ought to do. (Ghosts: 29-30)

One of the issues of "modern life" is that people try to live for other people. It means that people are interested in "showing off" and drawing other people's attention. For modern people, the grass is always greener at the other side of the fence. As a result of that "modern people" buy new furniture to show off; wear clothes the way that other people do; walk as they walk; talk as they talk. We do these entire things without referring to our own interests and needs. It seems that every one is a puppet and a strong puppeteer, people, moves it wherever he wants. In addition, as a common habit among people, when one cannot bring logical reasons he or she tries to support his or her ideas via manipulating religion. Pastor Manders does the same when he talks about the insurance of the orphanage. Manders insists on the idea that believing in God is enough for the orphanage to remain intact and the house should not be insured, otherwise people would think that they do not believe in Higher Providence:

MANDERS. I really think, too, we may trust that such an institution has fortune on its side; in fact, that it stands under a special providence.

MRS. ALVING: Let us hope so, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: Then we will let it take its chance?

MRS. ALVING: Yes, certainly.

MANDERS: Very well. So be it. [Makes a note.] Then--no insurance. (Ghosts: 24)

In the final part of the second act, however, the orphanage burnt to the ground and Manders' ideas prove to be wrong.

REGINA: [Cries out.] The Orphanage is on fire!

MRS. ALVING. [Rushing to the window.] On fire!

MANDERS: On fire! Impossible! I've just come from there.

OSWALD: Where's my hat? Oh, never mind it--Father's Orphanage--! [He rushes out through the garden door.]

MRS. ALVING: My shawl, Regina! The whole place is in a blaze!

MANDERS: Terrible! Mrs. Alving, it is a judgment upon this abode of lawlessness.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, of course. Come, Regina. [She and REGINA hasten out through the hall.]

MANDERS: [Clasps his hands together.] And we left it uninsured! [He goes out the same way.] (Ghosts: 64)

Mrs. Alving has been exposed to Manders ideas about duty for many years. Actually, the kind of duty that Manders talks about is obeying blindly without any logical reason. Therefore, it can be considered as the slavery of the cemented unjustifiable notions. As a result of that, Mrs. Alving only thought about doing her duty towards her husband that finally ruined their life. How following a meta-narrative without a reason destroys a life is obvious here:

MRS. ALVING: Your poor father found no outlet for the overpowering joy of life that was in him. And I brought no brightness into his home.

OSWALD: Not even you?

MRS. ALVING: They had taught me a great deal about duties and so forth, which I went on obstinately believing in. Everything was marked out into duties--into my duties, and his duties, and--I am afraid I made his home intolerable for your poor father, Oswald. (Ghosts: 72)

Although Mrs. Alving explains the illegal relationship of her husband with Johanna, she still asks Oswald, as Manders did previously, to respect his father.

MRS. ALVING: This is terrible to think of! Ought not a son to love his father, whatever happens?

OSWALD: When a son has nothing to thank his father for? has never known him? Do you really cling to that old superstition?--you who are so enlightened in other ways? (Ghosts: 74)

During history, poets and writers, in different parts of the world, have been accused of deviating people from religion. On the other hand, readers of literature books have been considered as irreligious people, not open-minded, by many strict religious figures. They think of literature as the number one enemy of religion. In *Ghosts*, Manders becomes angry when he saw Mrs. Alving's books.

MANDERS: ... Tell me, Mrs. Alving, how do these books come to be here?

MRS. ALVING: These books? They are books I am reading.

MANDERS: Do you read this sort of literature?

MRS. ALVING: Certainly I do.

MANDERS: Do you feel better or happier for such reading?

MRS. ALVING: I feel, so to speak, more secure.

MANDERS: That is strange. (Ghosts: 19- 20)

Mrs. Alving comes to the conclusion that some old beliefs and "dead ideas" in society are "ghosts" that really bother her. She is not interested in following those beliefs and superstitions anymore. But Manders thinks that her

new way of thinking is because of reading what he calls “horrible, revolutionary, free-thinking books”:

MRS. ALVING: Ghosts! ... It is not only what we have inherited from our father and mother that "walks" in us. It is all sorts of dead ideas, and lifeless old beliefs, and so forth. They have no vitality, but they cling to us all the same, and we cannot shake them off. Whenever I take up a newspaper, I seem to see ghosts gliding between the lines. There must be ghosts all the country over, as thick as the sands of the sea. And then we are one and all, so pitifully afraid of the light.

MANDERS: Aha--here we have the fruits of your reading. And pretty fruits they

Are, upon my word! Oh, those horrible, revolutionary, free-thinking books!

MRS. ALVING: You are mistaken, my dear Pastor. It was you yourself who set me thinking; and I thank you for it with all my heart. (Ghosts: 44)

Metanarratives are spread throughout the *Ghosts*. After introducing a metanarrative indirectly by a character, mostly Manders, the story flows and something happens to persuade the reader that fall of those old beliefs, ideas, traditions and superstitions, which are not logical and practical, is necessary.

4. IRONY

Abraham defines Irony as: “a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed” (quoted in Hooti, 2011:329)

Using irony, as a modern element, is very common among writers in different genres, especially in drama. Even in postmodern works, use of irony is very popular. To put it in a nutshell, irony shows how a writer is able to convey his or her message indirectly to the reader. By the same token, writers use irony to challenge the readers' mind and make them think and find out the message of the irony.

Dramatic Irony is when “...a character on stage or in the story of the play is ignorant, but the audience or the reader knows his or her eventual fate as a matter of juxtaposition of two time frames”. (Hooti and Shooshtarian, 2010: 7) Ibsen uses dramatic Irony in different parts of the play that let the reader be curious about the characters' reactions to the events in the play, as the reader knows some facts but some characters do not. For instance, in the very beginning of the first act, the reader becomes aware that Engstrand wants to open a tavern, not a “home”, for sailors.

ENGSTRAND: ... I thought of putting the money into some paying speculation. I thought of a sort of a sailor's tavern

REGINA: Pah!

ENGSTRAND: A regular high-class affair, of course; not any sort of pig-sty for common sailors. No! Damn it! It would be for captains and mates, and--and--regular swells, you know. (Ghosts: 13)

However, in the second act, Manders does not know the truth and thinks that Engstrand wants to open a

“home” for sailors. As Manders says, “we must stand by Engstrand and his Sailors' Home. Regina must go to him and help him”. (Ghosts: 63)

In the beginning of the first act, the reader knows that Mr. Alving had illegal relationships with Johanna and Regina is her real daughter.

MRS. ALVING: The girl left our service at once, and got a good sum of money to hold her tongue for the time. The rest she managed for herself when she got to town. She renewed her old acquaintance with Engstrand, no doubt let him see that she had money in her purse, and told him some tale about a foreigner who put in here with a yacht that summer. So she and Engstrand got married in hot haste. Why, you married them yourself. (Ghosts: 40)

Nevertheless, Regina and Oswald hear the story in the third act from Mrs. Alving, as she says, “And then; day after day, I dwelt on the one thought that by rights Regina should be at home in this house--just like my own boy”. (Ghosts: 72)

Tragic Irony, a type of dramatic irony, is the unexpected results of a character's actions that are against his or her desires. To show his faith in the Higher Providence and to avoid misinterpretations, Pastor Manders decides not to buy insurance for the orphanage.

MANDERS: There, you see! In town we have many such people. Think of all my colleague's adherents! People would be only too ready to interpret our action as a sign that neither you nor I had the right faith in a Higher Providence. (Ghosts: 23)

However, an unexpected event, burning of the orphanage, proves him to be wrong and creates a tragic irony. As ENGSTRAND says “not insured! And then to go straight away down and set light to the whole thing! Lord, Lord, what a misfortune!” (Ghosts: 66)

5. BINARY OPPOSITIONS

By introducing and highlighting the opposing and discriminatory elements we cannot reach an amicable agreement to have a world free from inferiority and superiority complexes. Binary oppositions, which are the dominating instruments of modernism, are doomed in the postmodern world. Indeed the postmodern world replaces them with binary concepts, which can help us reach a cordial and affable settlement in this world of terror and harassment where security and peace of mind seem to be archaic terms.

In *Ghosts* we deal with such dichotomies throughout the play. Ibsen creates situations where two opposite ideas live alongside each other. For instance, the argument about regular and irregular marriages between Manders and Oswald can be considered as binary oppositions. Each one tries to support his idea by denying those of the other person. Manders and Oswald never agree on the issue because they have totally different philosophies.

MANDERS: Then it is illicit relations you are talking of! Irregular marriages, as people call them!

OSWALD: I have never noticed anything particularly irregular about the life these people lead.

MANDERS: But how is it possible that a--a young man or young woman with any decency of feeling can endure to live in

that way?--in the eyes of all the world!

OSWALD: What are they to do? A poor young artist--a poor girl-- marriage costs a great deal. What are they to do? (Ghosts: 22)

6. THE SENSE OF DISPLACEMENT

According to Hooti and Shoostarian sense of displacement is "...the sense of not being in a place where one person or thing belongs to be" (2010: 15). The sense of displacement can be easily found in *Ghosts* through focusing on Oswald's character. Oswald was sent to Europe when he was a child and has recently come back to his mother's house. Because of Pastor Manders, his mother's house is full of religious beliefs, superstitions and tendencies to act the way that people believe to be correct. However, Oswald does not believe in such things and always denies them. It seems that he belongs to that house but not that home. Not only does he have his own different beliefs, interest (painting) and philosophy of life, but also he cannot tolerate the atmosphere of the house, which is full of meta-narratives. Actually, Oswald has nothing in common with that house except his surname, Alving. He only lives there because of his mother and later his beloved Regina. As an idealist, if he were asked to choose a place to live, definitely he would not like to live in a house where a pastor always comes with his strict and unjustified beliefs i.e. metanarratives.

Regina works as a maidservant in Mrs. Alving's house. She does not like her father, Jakob Engstrand, a carpenter, because she believes that working in Mrs. Alving's house, even as a maid, is very prestigious so that she does not like to lose her social position through talking to a carpenter, no matter he is her father. She really has a sense of non-belonging to her father. (In the first act she does not know that Engstrand is not her real father)

REGINA: Very well; only be off now. I won't stop here and have rendezvous's [Note: This and other French words by Regina are in that language in the original] with you.

ENGSTRAND: What do you say you won't have?

REGINA: I won't have any one find you here; so just you go about your business.(Ghosts: 11)

In the third act, when Regina hears the truth that her real father is Mr. Alving's, she becomes angry by saying that she should not have been treated as a maid when she is Mr. Alving's daughter, though illegitimate.

REGINA: [Looks hard at her.] I think you might have brought me up as a gentleman's daughter, ma'am; it would have suited me better. [Tosses her head.] But pooh--what does it matter! [With a bitter side glance at the corked bottle.] I may come to drink champagne with gentlefolks yet. (Ghosts: 73)

Now she thinks that she does not belong to that house and wants to get her rights and, using Manders help, leaves there to enjoy the rest of her life with the money she gets.

REGINA: [Busied in putting on her shawl.] Well then, I'd better make haste and get away by this steamer. The Pastor is such a nice man to deal with; and I certainly think I've as much right to a little of that money as he has--that brute of a carpenter. (Ghosts: 73)

7. THE SENSE OF NON-ENDING

According to Egan (2003: 51)

Ibsen belongs to the class of authors who cannot be driven to produce by the force of outward circumstances; even the want of the bare means of existence failed to urge him when the spur of transient inspiration had ceased to stimulate. He exercised moreover a degree of self-criticism, which caused him to alter and reject, not only plots, outlines, and imperfect works, but larger finished productions which on a colder, more mature consideration did not satisfy his fastidious taste.

The ending of *Ghosts* is both "open" and "close". It can be considered "close", like the Victorian works, if we conclude that Ibsen finishes his play by telling us how hiding the truth can cause problems that are shown in *Ghosts*. However, the ending of *Ghosts* can be considered "open", like modernist works, because it is not clear what happens to neither Oswald's illness nor the desire of Regina to get her share from the house. According to Hooti and Shoostarian (2010: 10), "the endings of postmodernist works are a hybrid..." of "open" and "close". Therefore, from this point of view, *Ghosts* can be considered as a "postmodern work" that has "multiple or circular" ending. As Mc Hale asserts:

Endings constitute a special case of self-erasing sequences, since they occupy one of the most salient positions in any text's structure. Conventionally, one distinguishes between endings that are closed, as in Victorian novels with their compulsory tying-up of loose ends in death and marriage, and those that are open, as in many modernist novels. But what are we to say about texts that seem both open and closed, somehow poised between the two, because they are either multiple or circular. (1987: 109)

8. OSCILLATING CHARACTERS BETWEEN MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

In *Ghosts*, we have characters with different natures. Pastor Manders is a real modern character who believes in meta-narratives of all kinds. He always advises others and is afraid of people's reactions about things around. It seems that if he were in an unsettled island, he would not be able to even make a small decision. When he is talking about "irregular marriages" he refers to people's ideas. As MANDERS says, "then it is illicit relations you are talking of! Irregular marriages, as people call them!" (Ghosts: 22)

Labeling his actions as religious ones, he even imposes his strong belief of doing based on people's interpretations on Mrs. Alving by persuading her not to buy insurance for the orphanage

MANDERS: There, you see! In town we have many such people. Think of all my colleague's adherents! People would be only too ready to interpret our action as a sign that neither you nor I had the right faith in a Higher Providence. (Ghosts: 23)

When Mrs. Alving continues to ask him why they should let the orphanage uninsured, Manders shows us how much he fears from people's misinterpretations. As

MANDERS says. “No, that is just the point; we really cannot do otherwise. We ought not to expose ourselves to misinterpretation; and we have no right whatever to give offence to the weaker brethren” (Ghosts: 24).

In contrast to Manders, Oswald is a true postmodern character. He hates dead beliefs and interpretations in society. By referring to high costs of marriage, he supports irregular marriages. As OSWALD says “I have never noticed anything particularly irregular about the life these people lead”.(Ghosts: 22)

He does not even believe that praying must be done on a special time. As he explains, he used to go to “irregular homes” on most of his Sundays in Europe. As OSWALD says, “let me tell you, sir, that I have been in the habit of spending nearly all my Sundays in one or two such irregular homes”. (Ghosts: 30)

Oswald does not believe in filial piety when he becomes aware that his father was a debauchee, as he says, “when a son has nothing to thank his father for? has never known him? Do you really cling to that old superstition? --you who are so enlightened in other ways?” (Ghosts: 74)

Mr. Alving is like a woman who is swinging from modernism to postmodernism. She acts as a modern woman by hiding the truth to keep her husband’s respect among people. As another example, although she feels ashamed of what her husband did in the past, she still believes that Oswald must respect her father. As MRS. ALVING says, “this is terrible to think of! Ought not a son to love his father, whatever happens?” (Ghosts: 74)

By opening the orphanage with all Mr. Alving’s money that she summed, she wanted to let him remain a respectful man in society. As MRS. ALVING says, “ yes. The sums I have spent upon the Orphanage, year by year, make up the amount--I have reckoned it up precisely--the amount which made Lieutenant Alving “a good match” in his day”. (Ghosts: 37)

She moves towards postmodern values when she criticizes “law and order” that are unjustified., as she says, “[At the window.] Oh, that perpetual law and order! I often think that is what does all the mischief in this world of ours”. (Ghosts: 41) She also wonders why she had hidden the truth because of superstitions, as she says, “yes; in my superstitious awe for duty and the proprieties, I lied to my boy, year after year. Oh, what a coward-- what a coward I have been!” (Ghosts: 42)

As a postmodern character, she says that she agrees with the marriage of Oswald to Regina though they are half-siblings.

CONCLUSION

Ghosts is a play full of postmodern elements. The presence of fall of the grand narratives in *Ghosts* gives the reader the opportunity to revise about the old traditions,

dead beliefs and superstitions that are present in almost every society. It is also vivid that following those unjustified beliefs can create terrible disasters for a family.

Binary oppositions and the existence of characters with different natures make *Ghosts* a play full of opposite dichotomies like religiosity/irreligiosity, lie/truth , dependence on people’s ideas/independence from people’s ideas, to name a few.

Applying the postmodern elements to *Ghosts* helps each and every individual in the 21st century to understand the necessity of revising his/her ideas about the dead beliefs in society. To get rid of the grand narratives and those who have power and misuse it, people should unite so that they can have a better life. As Novack says (2006: 158)

People can rise above the status quo and help change it for the better by acquiring insight into the reasons for their personal situation and the agonizing predicament of humankind. And then, on that basis, they can unite with others and act in concert with them to overcome the reactionary forces that misuse power today.

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