



Archetypal Elements in Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*

Riccardo Gramantieri*

*Independent Researcher,
grama@racine.ra.it

CITATION

Gramantieri, Riccardo.
"Archetypal elements in Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*." *Essence & Critique: Journal of Literature and Drama Studies*, vol. II, no. II, 2022, pp. 70–82, journalofcritique.com.

ABSTRACT

Ghosts is one of Henrik Ibsen's best-known dramas. The reason can also be found in the central theme of the play that caused a scandal to its appearance: the luetic disease transmitted from father to son. Ibsen does not explicitly declare the pathological component but that critics have identified as hereditary neurosyphilis. Some critics such as Derek R. Davis in the Sixties and Russel E. Brown in the Nineties, proposed a pathology other than the luetic one. Starting from the symptoms described by Ibsen, they proposed that Oswald was suffering from schizophrenia.

It is difficult to expect a literary character to behave exactly like a person. It often represents for the author a symbol or an idea to be developed. Therefore, it is not possible to subject a fictitious character to a psycho-pathological analysis as if he were a real person. However, it is possible to use him as a model and offer a different interpretation of the literary work in which he moves. That being said, the purpose of this work is to provide further support to the schizophrenic theory of Oswald's illness proposed by Davis and Brown, using Jung's archetypal theory. A psychological interpretation can be provided here of what happens on stage to the characters in *Ghosts* and highlight the psychological symbol of the emerging Self.

KEYWORDS

Archetypes, Ghosts, Henrik Ibsen, Carl Gustav Jung, schizophrenia

Introduction

The characters that animate the works of playwright Henrik Ibsen, which are so complex and tormented, are particularly suitable to be analyzed psychologically. Many psychiatrists and psychoanalysts have been doing so in considerable detail since the late nineteenth century.¹ Conversely, Carl Gustav Jung only gave brief reference to the play *The Lady from the Sea*, by pointing out the archetypal nature of Ellida Wangel's² behavior, and leaving out the rest of the extensive, though symbol-laden, Ibsen production.

Ghosts is among Henrik Ibsen's best-known dramas and has not gone without psychoanalytic interpretations, mostly Freudian and post-Freudian³ in nature. The reason for using the Freudian model is primarily due to the problematic relationship between Oswald (son) and his mother Helene Alving during the play and, retrospectively, between Oswald and Chamberlain Alving (father). On this last tie there is a pathological component that Ibsen does not explicitly declare but that critics have identified as hereditary neurosyphilis. Some critics, such as Derek R. Davis in the Sixties and Russel E. Brown in the Nineties, proposed a pathology other than the luetic one. Starting from the symptoms described by Ibsen, they proposed that Oswald was suffering from a serious mental illness, schizophrenia.

— 71 — It is difficult to expect a literary character to behave exactly like a person. It often represents for the author a symbol or an idea to be developed. Therefore, it is not possible to subject a fictitious character to a psycho-pathological analysis as if he were a real person. However, it is possible to use him as a model and offer a different interpretation of the literary work in which he moves. That being said, the purpose of this work is to interpret the plot of *Ghosts* and to provide further support to the schizophrenic theory of Oswald's illness proposed by Davis and Brown, using Jung's archetypal theory. A psychological interpretation can be provided here of what happens on stage to the characters in *Ghosts* and highlight the psychological symbol of the emerging Self.

¹ We can here remember the most important writings from the end of 19th century to the first decades of the past century: Nordau (1892); Lombroso (1893); Rank (1912); Freud (1916); Reich W. (1920); Vogt R. (1930).

It is to be noted that Otto Rank was born as Otto Rosenfeld and in 1909 he changed his surname to Rank to distinguish himself from an alcoholic and violent father: "Apparently Otto Rosenfeld took the pen name Rank from a character in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*" (Lieberman 4).

² This does not mean that analytical psychology cannot be applied to the interpretation of the symbols present in Ibsen's works. Some literary critics close to Jung's theory identified archetypal complexes at the base of the behaviors of the characters that animate Ibsen's dramas: think for example of "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths" (1957) by Northrop Frye and *Mythic Patterns in Ibsen's Last Plays* (1970) by Orley I. Holtan, just to mention the now classic critical works that are analytical in nature.

³ It may be referred to the interesting interpretation made on the basis of Freud's death drive by Erik Østerud (1996) "Tableau and Thanatos in Henrik Ibsen's *Gengangere*". *Scandinavian Studies*, 68, 4:473-489; and the Lacanian interpretation of Anne Marie Rekdal (2005) "The Freedom of Perversion", *Ibsen Studies*, 5:2, 121-47.

***Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen**

The drama *Ghosts* (*Gengångare*) was published in December 1881 and did not fail to generate scandal. Ibsen's previous play, *A Doll's House* (1879), had also sparked great debate, but the stir that followed rewarded the play and the performance with success. This time, however, the play raised a scandal, especially because of the disgust that the implied theme of degeneration due to a sexual disease aroused.⁴ To give an idea of the enormous scandal raised by the text, it can be said that, following the reviews, many copies remained unsold, and it took more than ten years to sell out the first edition. This was unusual for Ibsen whose dramas were, and would later be, always not only awaited and read in Scandinavia, but promptly translated into the main European languages. Such an unusual theme caused the first performance to take place not in Scandinavia but in the United States at the Aurora Turner Hall in Chicago on May 20, 1882, staged by a nearly amateur theatre company; other amateur actors staged it in Copenhagen and only the following year was it represented by professionals in Scandinavia: August 22 at Stadsteater in Helsingborg and August 28 at the Folketeatret in Copenhagen.

The plot of *Ghosts* is as follows. The young Oswald, aged twenty-seven, returns to his family's house on the occasion of the inauguration of a kindergarten dedicated to his deceased father, Chamberlain Alving. Helene, Oswald's mother and Chamberlain's wife, built it to rehabilitate the name of the man who, though being dead for ten years, was the source of rumors due to his vicious conduct. It was this very conduct that led Helene to give up her son when he was seven years old, the latter leaving home at sixteen, to live in Paris where he became a painter.

Oswald, now back home, is attracted to the maid Regina and attempts to seduce her. This relationship, however, is promptly interrupted by his mother who reveals to her son that Regina is actually his half-sister. As a matter of fact, she is the daughter of Chamberlain Alving and Johanna, a maid who had served him many years before (the episode of the maid's seduction was the one that led Mrs. Alving to give up Oswald). This revelation, and the outbreak of a fire that destroys the kindergarten before its opening, breaks the balance that was thought to be solid in the house: Mrs. Alving sends Regina away from the house; and Regina, on her part, decides to go to work in the brothel for sailors that her stepfather wants to open near the docks. Finally, Oswald confesses to his mother that he has a fatal disease, probably transmitted to him by his father and

⁴ "The real shock must have been the actual experience of being confronted by a world suffused with the ugly, the degenerate and the hopeless, and one conjured by the exercise of a complete mastery of dramatic means. In particular, the portrayal of the dying Oswald must have seemed like a mockery of all human dignity – this 'repulsive mollusk in human form'. Unease at the character of Oswald was heightened by a scientific determinism that mercilessly propels the characters in the play towards this ruin. At a time when the theory of evolution was emerging as a threat to the prevailing view of the world and of human beings, it was difficult to see the syphilis theme as just a simple parallel to the mental determinism involved in the power of 'dead thoughts' over people" (Figueiredo 429-30).

now in the final stage. The drama ends with Oswald being catatonic, in full hallucinatory delirium in his mother's arms.

To this main plot, Ibsen adds subplots and retrospective explanations. This is a usual technique for the writer. In his dramas he always describes a past that clarifies what happens in the present and whose function is to send forward the stage action.⁵ This technique makes sure that the protagonists of Ibsen's dramas are always forced to relive their past.

Helene Alving in the past was a religious woman who now opens up to the innovative ideas of the time. In retrospect, it is said that she resented the licentious life that Chamberlain Alving used to lead. However, this impatience remained within the domestic walls, so as to maintain a respectable appearance in the eyes of the people.

This behavior prompted her in the first year of her marriage to estrange herself from her husband and seek help from the family friend, Pastor Manders. Unfortunately, Manders proved to advocate an outward respectability and objected to Helene's escape. Therefore, Helene had no choice but to return home to her husband and go along with him in order to maintain the appearance of a respectable family. However, she managed to give her son a better chance for honesty, by sending him far from home so that he would not imitate his father's behavior.

Regina was born when Oswald was seven or eight years old. She is a young girl, little more than a teenager, in love with Oswald, whom she met when he occasionally came home from Paris to visit his mother. The woman kept Regina in the house as a maid and secured her a job in the kindergarten. His mother had been a serving maid in service at the Alving home nearly twenty years earlier and had become pregnant by Chamberlain, who managed to convince Jacob Engstrand, for a fee, to take her as his wife and therefore to be considered as the father of the future child. Engstrand is the carpenter who is building the kindergarten and who would like, at the same time, to open a club for sailors, actually a brothel, in which he would like Regina to play the role of *entraineuse*.

Pastor Manders is a sort of director of what is happening: he is the one who persuades Helene not to insure the kindergarten; it is probably the one who set out the fire, and the one who will help Engstrand to open his brothel, using the funds that, now that the kindergarten is destroyed, are no longer usable. In the past he was a friend of Mrs. Helene, who was probably in love with him.

⁵ As early as in 1895 Scalinger described with insight the structure of Ibsen's dramas, although he considered it a flaw because he judged it "not very useful": "throughout its course, the drama proceeds swiftly, rapidly, without unnecessary detours, without dangerous delays; but it never sets out from its beginning, it never begins naturally. The causes that generated it are unknown, along with the conditions of the characters' souls that produced it. It is always an antecedent that must be demonstrated, a precedent that must be considered as clearly developed and that some characters are obliged to recount in the first scenes of the drama, so that the reader or the listener participates in an indirect way" (Scalinger 84-5). It is almost a structure of the modern detective novel.

Osvald's illness

Osvald's illness initially comes on as a headache when he is a teenager. There are also other physical symptoms such as neck pain and difficulty concentrating. The symptoms are repeated in Paris and there the young man sees a doctor who tells him that, probably, since his childhood, Osvald must have had something like "vermoulu". Back home the degeneration is striking. At the end of the third act Osvald collapses, the body becomes flaccid and the behavior (posture, language, etc.) catatonic.

The symptoms are unquestionably psychiatric (headaches, difficulty concentrating, speech disorders, catatonia). The term "vermoulu" refers to the micro-lesions that are typical of syphilis, which appear to be caused by the bite of a woodworm (it means worm-eaten; Hoenig 2018). Evidence of syphilis would be strengthened by the prognosis of cerebral softening, one of the symptoms stated in Alfred Fournier's manual *La Syphilis du cerveau. Lecons cliniques recueillies par E. Brissaud* (1879), probably consulted by Ibsen, who had also used it two years earlier to describe the symptoms of the end-stage disease of Dr. Rank, Nora's confidant in *Doll's House*. Ibsen did not explicitly define the disease for at least two reasons: firstly, because he wanted to only represent symbolically the passage of blame within the bourgeois family; secondly, because "in those days it could not be mentioned in print in any journal that a woman might read or in any play that a woman might see. The word was banned [...]" (Sprinchorn 2004, 191-2).⁶

Back at the time of publication, there were critics who agreed with the luetic hypothesis. There were, however, those who, even at that time, contested it:⁷ Max S. Nordau complained about Ibsen's scientific unreliability in the medical field. He cited several examples, but the one he most emphasized was that of Osvald's cerebral softening. Nordau pointed out that a person suffering from congenital syphilis would not have the strong build that is described by Ibsen. For this reason, he believed paralytic dementia to be a more plausible cause, considering symptoms such as excitability and mood swings as described in the play.⁸

⁶ Sprinchorn adds that syphilis in the late nineteenth century was widespread in Scandinavia to the point that sixteen to twenty percent of young men had venereal disease, one in eight had gonorrhea, and one in fifty had syphilis.

⁷ James Joyce imagined, albeit ironically, that Osvald's father was actually Manders, and therefore there would be no syphilis. In his Epilogue to Ibsen's 'Ghosts' (1934) he wrote that Osvald could be the pastor's son. The epilogue is written as if narrated by Chamberlain Alving's ghost who points out: "My spouse bore me a blighted boy, / Our slavery pupped a bouncing bitch. / Paternity thy name is joy / When the wise sire knows which is which" "The more I dither on and drink / My midnight bowl of spirit punch / The firmler I feel and think / Friend Manders came too oft to lunch" (Joyce 384).

The clue to Manders' paternity would be found in the scene in which Osvald comes down the stairs and, while Manders sees in the young man the image of old Alving, his mother Helene sees in him the face of a priest: "No, it's nothing like him, not at all. To me, Osvald has more of a minister's look about the mouth" (Ibsen 221).

⁸ Nordau also adds that "The poet has naturally no need to understand anything of pathology. But when he pretends to describe real life, he ought to be honest. He should not get out of his depth in scientific observation and precision simply because these are demanded or preferred by the age" (Nordau 346).

In the Sixties, the hypothesis of mental illness re-emerged thanks to Derek Russell Davis (1963) and was also recovered years later by Russell E. Brown (1992). According to Davis, Oswald is not affected by syphilis but by schizophrenia. The diagnosis is made partly by ruling out syphilis infection and partly by deciphering Oswald's behavior. First of all, Davis clarifies the definition he uses: "dementia, i.e., loss of mental powers" (Davis 370) emphasizing that Ibsen speaks of "degeneration or softening – of the brain" (370). The critic points out that Paris, the city where Oswald lived for ten years, was at the time the city of modern psychiatry with Bénédict-Auguste Morel and Valentin Magnan studying various forms of dementia; the physician to whom Oswald turned could follow that new paradigm for brain disorders. According to Davis, therefore, Oswald's disease is what was called secondary dementia" (373) in England at that time, a chronic, hereditary form of dementia. This last factor would make it possible to keep valid what was important to Ibsen, that is, the passing of the blame of the fathers onto the children. Moreover, in the "Addendum" of 1969 Davis mentions precisely "disorder of the communication between them [parent and child]" (383). In this case he refers, even if not explicitly, to the theory of the Double Bind, developed in Palo Alto in the 1960s, according to which schizophrenia would be caused by the conflict that the child observes in the behavior of the parents; in this case between his lustful father and his mother fully devoted to the family.

Other critics examined the issue of syphilis: Brown pointed out that if Oswald had inherited the disease from his father, then he should have contracted it when he was still in his mother's womb. If that were the case, then his mother should have been affected, too. Helene confesses to Pastor Manders that she was forced "to keep him home in the evenings—and nights, I had to become his drinking companion as he got sodden over his bottle, holed up in his room. There I had to sit alone with him, forcing myself through his jokes and toasts and all his maundering, abusive talk, and then fight him bare-handed to drag him into bed" (Ibsen 230), therefore she could be sick herself, but this is not stated. Regina too, who is Alving's daughter as well, should be syphilitic, but she is not. Conversely, if syphilis was not contracted in the womb but afterwards, the only contact between Oswald and his father occurred when the latter made him smoke a pipe: the contagion is now considered highly unlikely, but when Ibsen wrote the play, "in Scandinavia it was assumed the disease could be transmitted through oral contact, a drinking glass or a pipe" (Sprinchorn 313).

Another theory is the one proposed by Roberto Alonge (1988): Oswald is not the innocent person he wants to appear and possibly contracted syphilis while living a *bohemian* life in Paris.

This is ambiguous: on the one hand, we see that when the mother says her son is innocent, heminimizes⁹ it as if he were indeed guilty of having led a dissolute life. On the other hand, however, if this were the case, the symbolism of guilt being transmitted from father to son that Ibsen was interested in would be lost.¹⁰

Nordau would then be right when he wrote as early as in 1892 that Ibsen was wrong in representing the disease, even though the author was interested in symbolizing a family illness.¹¹ If the schizophrenic theory is assumed, not only can it retain the hereditary character Ibsen was interested in, but it can also be corroborated from the standpoint of psychiatry and analytical psychology. Davis and Brown posit a psychiatric etiology.¹² What we want to assume here is a similar diagnosis starting from the archetypal symbols that Ibsen distributes throughout the text, symbols that, interpreted according to Jung's way of thinking, would confirm the schizophrenic hypothesis.

At the end of the nineteenth century, neurosyphilis was a frequent diagnosis for certain degenerative states leading to catatonia and dementia. Mental illnesses only constituted the subject of a small branch of medicine, and their etiology was still considered degenerative, especially in the German school of psychiatry. Psychoses, as conceived by the French school, were not considered the result of degeneration of brain tissues. Carl Gustav Jung, who was Swiss, borrowed from this school his own ideas about brain diseases. His main area of study was *dementia praecox*, the term used at the time to refer to schizophrenia, and therefore his theory of

⁹ MRS. ALVING (beaming with pleasure). I know one who's kept both his inner and outer selves incorruptible. You only have to look at him, Mr. Manders.

OSVALD (pacing about the room). Yes, all right, Mother dear—that's enough. (Ibsen 220)

¹⁰ Many physicians of the beginning of the past century wrote on heredity. For example, Leo Loeb took Ibsen's play as an example for hereditary diseases; according to the pathologist, it was Ibsen's play that made the concept of hereditary disease widely known to the public: "the influence of a modern writer, Henrik Ibsen, who very powerfully, although from a scientific point of view incorrectly, first presented on the stage the tragic consequences of the heredity of disease" (Loeb 574). Lombroso was also interested in Ibsen and reviewed *Ghosts*: Ibsen's geometries (repeated words, characters' gestures) in *Ghosts*, as famous Cesare Lombroso wrote: "are more than defects, symbolic caricatures, to better fix in the spectator and reader the true and most correct idea that the defects and diseases of the fathers are inherited as doubled or even tripled in the children, until the race is extinguished" (Lombroso 17). Lombroso agrees that a father devoted to vice generates "a girl who, as soon as the opportunity is offered, will subject herself to prostitution, and a boy who, even if taken away from his father when still a child so as not to be affected by the paternal vice and environment, will still fall ill with cerebral congestion and then paralytic dementia, abruptly subject himself to Venus and die early" (17).

¹¹ Regarding proposals that emerged a few years after the publication of the drama, it should be noted that Paolo Rindler and Enrico Polese Santarnecchi, in their first Italian edition (Milan: Max Kantorowicz, 1892) translated as atavism the disease of Oswald in the first Italian edition (70). Another Italian critic, Scipio Slataper, pointed out in 1916 that the question of syphilis should be considered symbolic, and that which Chamberlain Alving transmitted to his son closely resembled the Christian original sin, which is passed on from father to child (209).

¹² The schizophrenic theory, besides being plausible from the point of view of diagnosis, also has another element to its advantage: as Brown himself states, "With my analysis *Ghosts* becomes more pessimistic than Greek drama, which isolated evil in a single individual or constellation, leaving society in general without guilt, able to regenerate after the fall of the great ones" (Brown 102).

the collective unconscious is particularly suited to making a psychological interpretation of what happens on stage to the characters in *Ghosts*.

Carl Gustav Jung's psychiatric and archetypal theories

It is true that by conducting a psychological analysis we would risk treating characters as if they were real people; it is equally true, however, that the imaginary characters of a drama can provide examples of patterns of behavior that are typical of a given disease. In the play we see that Oswald says he experiences a “damnable fatigue, you know” (Ibsen 224). Later, he tells his mother: “Mother, it’s my mind that’s broken down” (249), as if to say that it is divided into pieces, split, that is, schizophrenic.

Oswald’s illness initially shows up as a headache when he is a teenager. Then a doctor tells him that, surely, he had been “*vermoulu*” (250) since his childhood. However, Oswald does not seem to give credence to the hereditary evil received from his father, whom he considers virtuous, but thinks he himself is the source of the problem, unable to believe “Oh, that the beautiful freedom of that life—could be made so foul!” (224), a life he imagined his father to lead out of home. Indeed, from an early age he was to have absorbed the gloomy family environment that lay before his eyes and from which he was removed. The dismal atmosphere at home and in the country where he lives allegedly contributed to the development of the mental disorder: “Yes, the joy of life, Mother—you don’t know much about that here at home. I never feel it here” (256); and on: “And this interminable rain. Week after week it can go on; whole months at a time. In all my visits home, I never once remember seeing the sunshine” (252). Additionally, consider what Oswald confesses to his mother at the end of the third act: his inability to work stems from anguish, a term Oswald uses over and over in the second act: “and the great deathly fear. Oh, this hideous fear!” (254); at the beginning of the third act: “And shut all the doors! This racking fear!” (265); and at the end, before falling into a catatonic state, on addressing his mother: “Have you no mother-love for me at all—to see me suffer this unbearable fear!” (274). Finally, also in Act III, a delirious beginning foreshadows the tragic end of both himself and the kindergarten: “It’ll burn up like all this here. [...] Everything will burn. There’ll be nothing left in memory of Father. And here I’m burning up, too” (265).

Time and again does Oswald say that the harm he has received is not his father’s illness but is “that’s seated here” (272) and then touches his forehead, as if to say that it is a psychological problem. To remedy this malaise, the young man gives his mother morphine so she may administer it to him and make him lose consciousness and not suffer. In the final scene, Oswald is catatonic and hallucinates the sun, a word he repeats at length. It is precisely this hallucination that is enlightening in understanding the diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Jung states that during an individual's maturation process, which he calls the individuation process, atavistic tendencies may happen to exert excessive dominance and "drag the relationship down to a primitive level" (Jung, *Transference* § 448). This regression can be seen in the delusions of the schizophrenic person. Jung extensively studied schizophrenia, which was then called *dementia praecox*, during his apprenticeship years and later, during his profession at Burghölzli, the psychiatric clinic of the University of Zurich. He saw that this psychosis is characterized by an associative tension disorder, i.e., difficulty in associating words during tests, and by the splitting of basic mental function. With regard to its etiology, schizophrenia would not depend on a weak consciousness but on the strength of the unconscious that leads to the splitting of psychic complexes which, no longer linked to the ego (which is the preeminent complex) acquire dominance over it; it could also be associated with a biological etiology, i.e., a toxin that could cause the disease.¹³

The psychic split is revealed by the surfacing of images that can be traced back to archetypal complexes of the unconscious. These are visible to the physician through the narration of hallucinations experienced by the patient. The symbols that emerge can be related to archetypes of the individual unconscious (closer to consciousness) or the collective unconscious (on a deeper level). The former ones are experienced by neurotics, who are less severe patients; the latter by psychotics and schizophrenics.

It is of importance here to report on a hallucination that Jung identified in a psychotic patient. It is very similar to Oswald's:¹⁴ "I once came across the following hallucination in a schizophrenic patient: he told me he could see an erect phallus on the sun. When he moved his head from side to side, he said, the sun 's phallus moved with it, and *that was where the wind came from*" (Jung, *Symbols* § 151).

Jung's patient was a schizophrenic in his early thirties (thus, about Oswald's age), suffering from a paranoid form of *dementia praecox* since his early twenties. He spent a modest life, as he

¹³ Even the physiological degeneration of the brain is not entirely alien to Jungian thought: he always thought that among the causes that justify the severity of schizophrenia, the psychological causes also went along with the use of some toxic substance. In his letter to Freud of April 18, 1908, Jung writes: "But I won't go on philosophizing. You yourself will have thought out the logical consequences long ago. The whole question of etiology is extremely obscure to me. The secret of the constitution will hardly be unveiled from the psychological side alone" (Jung, *Letter* 83J). This is because he does not know whether it is the toxin that enhances the strength of the archetypal complex, or whether it is the complex that induces the release of the toxin into the organism.

¹⁴ That very hallucination convinced Jung of the existence of a collective unconscious. The observation of the patient took place in 1906. A few years later, in 1910, Jung came across the so-called *Paris magic papyrus*, a papyrus reporting a ritual of the cult of Mithras, which describes a reed, the origin of the beneficial wind, hanging from the sun disk. The patient's vision was dated 1906 and the Greek text was edited in 1910; therefore, any assumed case of cryptomnesia on the part of the patient could be ruled out. Besides being a publication for specialists, the article was also recent and therefore his patient would be unable to have come across it. Therefore, it had to be the symbol of the solar phallus in the unconscious of every man; it had to be a collective symbol. The famous hallucination of the solar phallus has been attributed to Johann Jakob Honegger, a young and brilliant psychiatrist and Jung's assistant at Burghölzli who had had psychological crises and committed suicide on March 28 (Noll).

was suffering from hallucinations. Once Jung saw him standing at the window while watching the sun. As he looked out, he moved his head in a strange way and said that he was seeing the sun's penis. One can interpret the symbol of the sun as the father. The sun, but also the rays and the flames are the symbols of the paternal figure, one of the archetypes of the collective unconscious. In the book, the flames that destroy the kindergarten, the attempt to redeem it in the eyes of the community but also of the family, are the rays of this symbolic image. Oswald's deification of his father, whom he always seeks to justify by minimizing his faults, generally results in an increase in the importance and power of the individual who performs it.

However, Oswald has a weak Ego and introverts his own libido; that is, using classic psychoanalytic terminology, he removes his libido from the external object, and reverts it to the past, to the paternal image. The slightest difficulty is enough to reawaken and reactivate the ancestral image of the sun, which precisely represents the paternal figure. This psychic activation annihilates consciousness, that is the word.

According to Jung, in psychosis a private world emerges that is characterized by non-individual images, which have nothing to do with consciousness (Forrester), and therefore have nothing to do with the word (*logos*). Thus, in the end, Oswald, in his mother's arms, can only utter a few words, and those words are "The sun– the sun" (Ibsen 276).

Conclusion

Among the many dramas by Ibsen that are liable to psychological interpretation, *Ghosts* is the most exemplary one, so much so that Halvdan Koht defined it as "*hospital literature*" (Koht 328), that is, a clinical case in which a pathological behavior unfolds as in an extremely precise theatrical mechanism: Helene, who had given little Oswald in foster care, at the end can have him back physically and mentally regressed to a child-like state, in her arms.

The interpretation given of Oswald's hallucination does not conclude the issue of *Ghosts* and Jung's psychology. Jan Knott notices the correlation between the onset of psychoanalysis and Ibsen's modern dramas (Knott). Here we want to further highlight how Ibsen had posited that there were older thoughts and ideas in people's minds than those learned from their parents. This concept calls to mind that of Jung's collective unconscious: at a certain point Oswald tells his mother that the idea of the father as a figure to admire is "one of these ideas that materialize in the world for a while" (Ibsen 270), as if to say that a collective idea can exist. This statement is just one of the ideas that Ibsen introduces here and there in the text regarding the functioning of the mind and the symbols it uses in mental processes. The playwright can be said to have had his own theory on how the mind works. This is what Mrs. Alving tells Manders at one point:

But I almost believe we *are* ghosts, all of us, Pastor. It's not only what we inherit from our fathers and mothers that keeps on returning in us. It's all kinds of old dead doctrines and opinions and beliefs, that sort of thing. They aren't alive in us; but they hang on all the same, and we can't get rid of them. I just have to pick up a newspaper, and it's as if I could see the ghosts slipping between the lines. They must be haunting our whole country, ghosts everywhere—so many and thick, they're like grains of sand. And there we are, the lot of us, so miserably afraid of the light. (Ibsen 238)

Ghosts can therefore be understood as patterns of behavior that return from the world of the dead; and the dead are those who, through the memories of their existence, created the collective memory to which each person links his or her own existence.

Works Cited

- Alonge, Roberto. 1988. "Introduzione a *Spettri*." In *Spettri* by Henrik Ibsen, 5-36. Milano: Mondadori.
- Brown, Russel E. 1992. "Taking Ghosts to the Doctor." *Tijd Schrift voor Skandinavistiek* 13 (1): 91-103.
- Davis, Derek R. 1963. "A Re-Appraisal of Ibsen's *Ghosts*." In *Henrik Ibsen. A Critical Anthology*, edited by James McFarlane, 369-83. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.
- Figueiredo, Ivo de. 2019. *Henrik Ibsen: The Man and the Mask*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Forrester, John. 1980. *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Freud, Sigmund and Carl Gustav Jung. 1974. *The Freud/Jung Lettes. The Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung*, edited by William Mcguire. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hoening, Leonard J. 2018. "The Meaning of Vermoulu in Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*." *The American Journal of Medicine* 131 (12): 1524-5.
- Ibsen, Henrik. 1881. *Ghosts*. In *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, edited by Rolf Fjelde, 197-276. Plume: New York 1978.
- Joyce, James. 1934. "Epilogue to Ibsen's 'Ghosts'." In *Henrik Ibsen. A critical Anthology*, edited by James McFarlane, 383-5. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1912-52. *Symbols of Transformation*. CW 5.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1946. *The Psychology of the Transference*. CW 16.
- Knott J. 1986. "Ibsen Read Anew." In *The Theatre of Essence, and Other Essays*, 31-60. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Koht, Halvdan. 1971. *Life of Ibsen*. New York: Benjamin Blom.
- Lieberman, E. James. 1985. *Acts of Will. The Life and Work of Otto Rank*. The Free Press, New York 1985.
- Loeb, Leo. 1923. "Disease and Heredity." *The Scientific Monthly* 16 (6); 574-87.
- Lombroso, Cesare. 1893. "Gli Spettri di Ibsen e la psichiatria." *Vita moderna* II (3): 17.
- Noll, Richard. 1999. "Jung the *Leontocephalus*." In *Jung in Contexts. A Reader*, edited by Paul Bishop, 51-91. London: Routledge.
- Nordau, Max S. 1892. *Degeneration*. Frankfurt am Mein: Outlook Verlag.
- Østerud, Erik. 1996. "Tableau and Thanatos in Henrik Ibsen's *Gengangere*." *Scandinavian Studies* 68 (4): 473-9.
- Scalinger, Giulio Massimo. 1895. *Ibsen: studio critico*. Naples: Fortunio.
- Slataper, Scipio. 1916. *Ibsen*. Turin: Fratelli Bocca.

BIO

Riccardo Gramantieri is an independent researcher.