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HAUNTED BY ABSENCE - THE FAILURES OF PERSONAL, SPIRITUAL AND DIVINE PATERNITY IN HENRIK IBSEN'S *GHOSTS*

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Abstract. *The paper explores the multifaceted absence of fatherhood in Henrik Ibsen's Ghosts, offering insight into its personal, social and divine dimensions. Through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework incorporating psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung, Greenson, Modell), sociology (Coltrane), philosophy (Nietzsche, Kierkegaard), and archetypal psychology, the paper underscores the impact of absence on the characters' emotional, moral and social realities. The first section explores personal fatherhood and the vacant roles of the patriarchs in the lives of the characters. It discusses failures of traditional family structures to provide guidance and protection, emphasizing the consequences of parental vacuity on identity formation and psychological development. The second section focuses on the concept of symbolic fatherhood and the development of father substitutes. It argues that religious institutions, represented by Pastor Manders, fail to embody the parental archetype. The third section examines divine fatherhood, the sense of divine orphanhood and abandonment in the play, caused by the lack of divine justice within it. The paper provides a reading of the play and reflects on the interconnectedness of the threefold fatherhood and emotional and existential crises depicted in the play.*

Key words: *Henrik Ibsen, Ghosts, parental absence, psychoanalysis, symbolic fatherhood*

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the father has long been discussed as a symbol of authority, stability, justice and moral responsibility, and its importance has been recognized across historical periods and cultures. The compromised or absent parental figure leaves behind a profound emotional void that reverberates through individuals and society at large. Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* interrogates and deconstructs the traditional parental role of fatherhood, expanding

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the traditional understanding of fatherhood across three dimensions: personal, spiritual and divine. Figures in the play fail to fulfill their archetypal roles, leaving the characters adrift in perpetual cycles of emotional and spiritual suffering and alienation. Freud's psychoanalytic theory serves as the framework for understanding the consequences of corporeal absence of the father and introduces the idea of the parent substitute. Jung highlights the symbolic influence of the father archetype in shaping one's identity and the grave consequences of a shattered parental image. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche discuss the failures of religious and social institutions that are rooted in guilt and oppression to embody the parental archetype. The theories explore the despair that arises from the disconnect between the idealized parental figures and their flawed realities. Ibsen's *Ghosts* not only builds upon these scholarly discussions but also illustrates the interconnected failures of personal, spiritual and divine fatherhood. In the play, the notion of personal fatherhood is examined through both physical and psychological consequences resulting from paternal neglect, illustrated by the character of Captain Alving. Characters like Pastor Manders, who act as inadequate parental figures, ultimately sustain cycles of guilt and moral rigidity and do not capture the essential qualities expected of a spiritual father. Finally, the idea of divine fatherhood discusses the deep sense of existential orphanhood that arises from the absence of a benevolent higher power, God the Father. This tripartite framework reveals the failures of individual father figures and exposes the wider social and philosophical effects of the breakdown of patriarchal systems. This paper examines the interconnected aspects of fatherhood and its absence on personal, symbolic and divine levels in Ibsen's *Ghosts* and looks into the implications of vacant parental roles on characters' emotional and existential crises. By employing an interdisciplinary approach incorporating psychoanalysis, sociology, philosophy, and archetypal psychology, the paper provides a profound insight that contributes to the ongoing discussions on the role of the father in literature.

2. FATHERHOOD

Personal fatherhood refers to the tangible and biological aspect thereof and discusses the genetic and physical relationships between a father and the offspring. Coltrane (232) states that children with "actively participant fathers" enjoy benefits in social, intellectual and emotional development relative to children raised in father-absent households. The implications of patriarchal vacuity have been discussed since the early developments of psychoanalysis. Freud introduced the Oedipus complex, a universal psychological phenomenon based on the Greek myth of Oedipus, who was abandoned in his infancy, and later was unknowingly led to kill his father and marry his mother. This act symbolically fulfills the tragic fate of a man who falls in love with his mother and seeks to conquer the father, the feared rival for the mother's love. The father serves the function of abolishing the child's cathexis with his mother and, should this function be neglected, the incest taboo would be weakened for the boy (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 222–226). Psychoanalysis, building upon the Freudian foundation, has observed the moment of disidentifying with the mother as a crucial step towards reaching emotional and psychological maturity. Greenson (370–374) observes the mother-child dyad as the first source of identification and highlights the role that identifying with the father plays in healthy psychological and sexual development. Further, Modell (29–38) builds on Freud's idea that the superego develops through the father's authority and discusses the consequences of a failed identification with the father. He describes a patient

who experiences paralyzing guilt about pursuing an independent life, led by the belief that separating from the mother would cause her death. Modell explains that the irrational fear of matricide arises because the father failed to successfully encourage the son to identify with him, thus allowing the identities of mother and son to intertwine and merge. Jung (*Freud and Psychoanalysis*, 693–744) applied his theory of archetypes to fatherhood and concluded about its decisive importance in the development of any adult. He believed that the father archetype was a part of the collective unconscious and was present in all individuals. The father archetype represents the powerful, responsible authority, the figure who provides and protects. The personal qualities of the father are amplified by the archetype, Jung explains, making his influence on the child more impactful and thus, the consequences of a patriarchal failure more devastating. Jung notes that a person's complex feelings towards the parents remain attached to their inner representation of them, to the "parent imago". He writes "these fantasies are not concerned any more with the real father and mother but with subjective and often very much distorted images of them which lead a shadowy but nonetheless potent existence in the mind of the patient" (*Freud and Psychoanalysis*, 305). For Jung these effigies of the parents operate almost like ghosts, continuing to influence the patient's inner world even when beyond the parent's corporeal presence (*Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, 294).

2.1. Spiritual Fatherhood

The notion of spiritual fatherhood is premised upon the creation of father substitutes and symbolic paternity that is formed as a response to the absence of paternal authority. Jung (*Freud and Psychoanalysis*, 744) suggests that the father figure takes on a mythical or "daemonic" quality in the psyche, akin to a god or a supernatural being. This results in investing the role of a physical father with divine or authoritative symbolism, and viewing fathers as godlike or representing moral authority. However, Jung was not the first to assign mythical qualities to personal fatherhood. Freud (*Totem and Taboo*, 233–237) writes about the "primal horde" in which a violent father monopolizes sexual power over all the women, whose sons overthrow, slay him and symbolically identify with him in a cannibalistic ritual. He writes that this totem feast was the origin of "social organization, moral restrictions and religion". Namely, the group of brothers dominated by an ambivalent mixture of admiration, remorse and hatred towards the father, declared that the father substitute, a totem, was not allowed to be killed and denied themselves the liberated women. The physical fatherhood shifts into a symbolic presence, making the dead "stronger than the living had been" (*Totem and Taboo*, 236). According to Freud (*The Future of an Illusion*, 30), children's internalization of the father's authority continues into adulthood and is often transferred onto religious figures or concepts of God. Freud views God as an extension of the superego which enforces social norms and order, provides a framework for containing anxiety and serves as a parental substitute. Green (99–135) wrote extensively about "thirdness" and mirrored the idea of the formation of a symbolic fatherhood caused by the corporeal absence. He asserts that the father is not only the biological requirement for childbearing but also a role in the child's life that is filled by substitutes regardless of the absentee status of the physical father. Freud (*The Future of an Illusion,* 18) concludes that religion serves to fill the void left by this vacant role and that the individual's longing for security, guidance and authority is projected onto a divine being, system of belief or religious leaders. However, he concludes, the failure of the symbolic or religious parent substitute can lead to the sense of

spiritual orphanhood. The Western society's reliance on a punitive, fear-based concept of God the Father and its framework for providing the symbolic father substitute does not align with the protective, loving and patient parental archetype. Nietzsche (*On the Genealogy of Morality,* 85–92) introduces the notion of the "ascetic priest" who through sin finds the opportunity to maintain systems of self-denial and guilt, making "the herd" weak and obedient. In fact, religious morality is rooted in guilt and "ressentiment", Nietzsche (*On the Genealogy of Morality,* 20–25) agrees with the aforementioned psychoanalysts. The noble morality celebrates strength and creativity, while the slave morality emerges from self-denial and imaginary revenge and redefines the values or creation and activity as morally evil. The ascetic priests maintain the system of the imposed passivity and conformity, instead of fulfilling the archetypal role of guidance and compassion. This disparity causes the father imago to be shattered and it produces the sense of divine orphanhood.

2.2. Divine Fatherhood

Divine fatherhood refers to the parental archetype when applied to the sense of justice, protection, guidance and belonging with God. A moral and spiritual void is left in the individual that has been betrayed by both physical paternity, material absence, and symbolic paternity, the ascetic priests and leaders overseeing and upholding an oppressive and corrupted system. This void can be interpreted as the response to the archetype not being congruent with reality. Jung (*Answer to Job,* 557) viewed religious symbols as archetypal figures to the collective unconscious. He suggests that the statements made in the Holy Scriptures are reflections of a more profound dimension of the soul. The image of God represents the Self and wholeness of the psyche, thus balancing the conscious and unconscious. In "Answer to Job" he explores "the shadow", the spiritual and psychological crisis that individuals face when symbolic fathers fail to model the wholeness. He describes Job's conflict which stems from his realization that God is a prosecutor and a savior, the two roles being mutually exclusive. Jung explored the effect of spiritual figures, such as God, failing to embody their archetypal roles and concluded that perceived divine inconsistency causes profound existential and psychological struggles (*Answer to Job*, 560–557). Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead" illustrates the loss of meaning, moral authority and justice (*The Gay Science*, 120). As critical as he was of traditional religious values, Nietzsche was concerned with the fact that they were gradually declining and not being replaced. He believed that the decline of religious belief will bring about a crisis of values and meaning. He writes "Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder? Isn't night and more night coming again and again?" (*The Gay Science*, 120) describing the void that the absence of divine fatherhood leaves. He ultimately warns of nihilism as the response to the void. Similarly, Kierkegaard (*Fear and Trembling,* 5–14) defines despair as a sickness of the spirit, a state of being disconnected from God or authentic meaning. He explores the idea of a world devoid of higher purpose in which everything is a product of chaos in which life would be aimless and futile. Kierkegaard writes of a deep exploration of the individual's relationship with the concept of God, expressing a profound sense of longing and belonging, ultimately recognizing God as love. In "Fear and Trembling" he expands on this idea, writing about the human need for an existence of something beyond himself that can intervene and offer hope. The believer, through the trust in divine justice, has access to the "antidote to despair" (*The Sickness Unto Death*, 61). The fatalist who has lost God and his sense of self is in

despair and his god is "necessity", a concept that removes agency, freedom and possibility of transformation and salvation (62). The moral and emotional vacuum that spiritual fathers fail to fill result in the feeling of divine abandonment. The loss of order and existential purpose that follows exacerbate the devastating effects of the personal and spiritual orphanhood, creating cycles of repression and suffering, trapped individuals and disintegration of personal social and moral orders.

The following chapter provides a reading of Henrik Ibsen's Play *Ghosts* that applies the theoretical models discussed. It focuses on the tripartite dimension of fatherlessness in the play, seeking to understand the interplay between personal, symbolic and divine aspects of fatherhood. The discussion aims at uncovering how the absence of fathers reverberates through the emotional, moral and spiritual crises experienced by the characters. Drawing on the interdisciplinary framework afore discussed, the analysis will attempt to explain the lingering influence of absent fathers on the characters' lives. It discusses the haunting presence of parental vestiges, both physical and symbolic, that underscores the play's exploration of identity, loss and human longing for guidance and justice. By addressing the impact of patriarchal voids, the discussion reveals how fatherhood becomes the central force driving the play's emotional tension. The examination of the paradox of absence will not only provide a deeper understanding of the characters' crises but also offer broader insight into implications of fatherlessness in social and divine contexts.

3. Personal Fatherhood and Captain Alving

The influence of the father is paradoxically premised upon his absence (Freeman, 114). Firstly, the child's initial identification is with his mother and this identification is only possible due to the fact that father is initially absent from the mother-child dyad during the preoedipal stage of the child's development. The father later appears as the child's rival and the source of the superego and moral order. The Oedipus complex is resolved only under the condition that the child identifies with the father upon his absence. Oswald's feelings towards Regina could be interpreted within the context of unaddressed familial tensions and unresolved Oedipus complex. The fact that he returns home with the intention to ask his mother to euthanize him and decides to assign this task to Regina, his half-sister, speaks of his identification of the two women and their roles. However, this does not imply that Oswald develops romantic feelings towards either of them; he sees both women as a way out of his misery and both relationships illustrate the culmination of his suffering and emotional exhaustion. His interactions with Regina and Mrs. Alving underscore his psychological confusion and dysfunctional identification with his mother and his half-sister. Ultimately, Oswald assigns the responsibility of ending his life to his mother, his primary caregiver and admits her as the final authority in his life, in terms of comfort and control. This ties back to the unresolved Oedipal complex, and his identification with his mother is rooted in his dependency and the unresolved desire for a release and escape. Psychoanalysts have highlighted the importance of disidentification with the mother and separation of the mother-child dyad through the father's authority (Freud, Greenson, Modell). However, Oswald and Mrs. Alving did not reach the point of disidentification. Oswald expresses that his mother is "best friend [he has] in the world", highlighting his emotional dependency on her and indicating that he has not fully separated from the

traditional mother-child relationship (Ibsen, 115). Additionally, Helen repeatedly infantilizes Oswald, reinforcing this dependency and imbalance.

MRS. ALVING (Bending over him) It has been a dreadful fancy of yours, Oswald--nothing but a fancy. All this excitement has been too much for you. But now you shall have along rest; at home with your mother, my own blessed boy. Everything you point to you shall have, just as when you were a little child. (157)

The "dread" that Oswald feels is deeply tied to the unresolved issues in his family, particularly about his father and his legacy (115). He is unable to reconcile his memories of his father with the idealized image of him upheld by his mother and the society. Society holds Captain Alving in great esteem and religious leaders reinforce the romanticized perception of him. Pastor Manders explains to Oswad that he has "inherited the name of an energetic and admirable man", praising his father's supposed virtues and projecting them onto Oswald (50). His comment reflects the social pressure and the illusion of respectability that Captain Alving's name carries, despite his many moral failures. Oswald is painfully aware of his father's flaws and he vividly recalls a careless and inappropriate anecdote with him. Oswald pieces together his fragmented understanding of his past in his yearning for clarity about his father he barely knew. Mrs. Alvings immediate dismissal of Oswald's memory as a dream illustrates her deep denial and her desperate attempt to preserve Oswald's image of his father.

OSWALD. Yes, I recollect it distinctly. He took me on his knee, and gave me the pipe. "Smoke, boy," he said; "smoke away, boy!" And I smoked as hard as I could, until I felt I was growing quite pale, and the perspiration stood in great drops on my forehead. Then he burst out laughing heartily-
MANDERS. That was most extraordinary.
MRS. ALVING. My dear friend, it's only something Oswald has dreamt.
OSWALD. No, mother, I assure you I didn't dream it. For--don't you remember this? You came and carried me out into the nursery. Then I was sick, and I saw that you were crying. (50)

Manders believes that Oswald's ideals and his perception of his father will be destroyed if he finds out about Captain Alving's flaws. He considers these ideals to be the foundation of Oswald's moral and emotional being. He criticizes Helen for wanting to uncover the truth to her son, asking "Is there no voice in your mother's heart that forbids you to destroy your son's ideals?" (80). However, the idealized father archetype in Oswald's psyche had clearly been shattered before his mother revealed Captain Alving's true nature. Regardless, the vestiges of the parent imago haunt the children throughout their whole life, influencing their lives and decisions (*Two Essays in Analytical Psychology,* 294). Seeing traces of her late husband in Oswald's behavior threatens to undo Mrs. Alving's efforts to shield Oswald from his father's legacy.

MANDERS. When Oswald appeared there, in the doorway, with the pipe in his mouth, I could have sworn I saw his father, large as life.
OSWALD. No, really?
MRS. ALVING. Oh, how can you say so? Oswald takes after me.
MANDERS. Yes, but there is an expression about the corners of the mouth--something about the lips--that reminds one exactly of Alving: at any rate, now that he is smoking.
MRS. ALVING. Not in the least. Oswald has rather a clerical curve about his mouth, I think. (Ibsen 2005: 48)

This interaction with Manders triggers the anxiety that Oswald might have inherited not only physical traits but also the moral flaws of his father. She clings to the belief that Oswald is a product of her upbringing and reflects her values and virtues, rather than his father's vices and misdeeds. Her rebuttal, claiming that Oswald has a "clerical curve" to his mouth, is an attempt to shift the comparison to something she deems positive and hopeful. The physical likeness becomes the symbol of the inescapable hereditary consequences of Captain Alving's actions. Helen recalls the day she first became aware of her husband's affair and admits the affair's resemblance to Oswald's relationship with Regina. "Ghosts!", she cries out having realized that his father will inevitably haunt Oswald regardless of her wishes to protect him (83). Mrs. Alving paradoxically strives to maintain her husband's image while simultaneously trying to erase all the influence he has on their son. She invests all of her inheritance money into constructing an orphanage to honor her late husband and preserve appearances, while also seeking to sever any connection between Oswald and his father. As Shideler (290) writes, "Mrs. Alving attempts to dissociate herself from the Name-of-the-father, from the Symbolic Order of the Dead Father" and she does this by maintaining the image of a devoted wife and attempting to remove her husband's influence and legacy. Helen says, "I do not choose that that money should pass into Oswald's hands. My son shall have everything from me—everything" (Ibsen, 69). Further, she adds, "No. But then this long, hateful comedy will be ended. From the day after to-morrow, I shall act in every way as though he who is dead had never lived in this house. There shall be no one here but my boy and his mother" (71). Helen's diligent ritualistic attempt to erase her husband from Oswald's life reflects her painful realization of the fact there is in fact something to be erased.

> MRS. ALVING. The truth is that my husband died just as dissolute as he had lived all his days. MANDERS. [Feeling after a chair.] What do you say?
> MRS. ALVING. After nineteen years of marriage, as dissolute--in his desires at any rate--as he was before you married us.
> MANDERS. And those-those wild oats--those irregularities--those excesses, if you like--you call "a dissolute life"?
> MRS. ALVING. Our doctor used the expression (64).

Through this interaction with Manders, Helen alludes to her husband's syphilis acquired through his "dissolute" deeds. Further, she was aware that their son might inherit the illness. This proves to be her primary motivation to absolve her son of any connection with her father, believing that in a symbolic, almost mystical way, he would be spared from the disease. To the fact that she fears this fate will befall Oswald testifies her reaction upon realizing that he is feeling unwell. Helen, white and trembling, immediately assumes the worst, "You are not ill, Oswald?" (104). Oswald adamantly defends himself against the implication that his illness is a result of his own dissipation and his statements reflect his internal conflict and frustration. Oswald must confront the harsh truth that his father's immoral actions have left him with a biological and emotional inheritance that he can neither fully comprehend nor escape. "I have never led a dissipated life never, in any respect. You mustn't believe that of me, mother!" (104). Oswald's words reveal his anger and confusion over the injustice of his situation. Oswald is aware that "there has been something worm-eaten in [him] from [his] birth" (107), but he still seeks to protect the father imago.

MRS. ALVING. The whole thing burnt!--burnt to the ground!
REGINA. The basement is still burning.
MRS. ALVING. How is it Oswald doesn't come home? There's nothing to be saved. (126)

The orphanage that was built in the memory of Captain Alving burns to the ground and, symbolically, so does Oswald's image of his father. The fire signifies the irreversibility of Oswald's condition and the collapse of the illusion that both Mrs. Alving and Oswald have maintained for so long. The fragments of the father archetype that used to keep Oswald intact are lost, and in Jungian terms, the discrepancy between the idealized father archetype and the reality is so profound that any possibility of a positive resolution is utterly obliterated. Oswald inevitably dies, though the only burden he carried was being born as the son of Captain Alving.

4. Spiritual Fathers and Pastor Manders

Regina's father imago is also deeply fractured, as both her biological father, Captain Alving, and her guardian Engstrand fail to provide her with guidance, security and protection. On the one hand, her biological father has never been involved in her life. Regina is unaware of her true parentage, and the notion of Captain Alving as her father is not revealed to her until the end of the play. On the other, Jacob Engstrand fails to successfully embody the father archetype. The irony of Jacob's name lies in the stark contrast with his biblical namesake and his own fatherhood. As it is noted in Acts 7:8, Jacob was the father of twelve sons, and was foundational to the establishment of the twelve tribes of Israel, while Engstrand was a father of none. Regina recounts the patterns of neglect and manipulation that undermine his parental role. She recalls the use of derogatory language to express his frustration and disdain at her and his emotional degradation (Ibsen, 17). Furthermore, Engstrand's disregard for Regina's well-being is evident when he suggests a business venture within his "sailor's tavern" which is highly suggestive of prostitution (21). Regina longs for connection and protection and seeks parental guidance within the Alving residence. She states that she is "treated almost as a daughter" there and expresses her yearning for the love and acceptance that comes with being a fully integrated member of the family (17). Regina's lack of security, both emotional and financial, traps her in an endless cycle of manipulation and insecurity and lead her to seek protection even at the expense of her morals. Her desire for Oswald is rooted in her aspirations for a life of comfort in Paris and she left him as soon as she realized he was an "invalid". The idea of spiritual fatherhood, as described by Freud and Green, relies on the creation of father substitutes and symbolic paternity in response to the absence of corporeal paternity. Given the absence of a guiding patriarchal figure in her life, she subconsciously looks to Oswald as a substitute father. Having realized that he is unfit to fulfill this role, she turns to Pastor Manders, trusting him with the role of her spiritual parent (Ibsen, 144).

Mrs. Alving turns to Pastor Manders as a symbolic father and his moral authority and religious figure give him a mythical quality in her psyche, mirroring Jung's notion of the father figure embodying divine and authoritative figure (*Freud and Psychoanalysis*, 1961). Captain Avling and Pastor Manders function as symbolic figures who maintain authority from a distance – Alving through the weight of his legacy and Manders through his religious and social influence. Mrs. Alving describes her married life as a "ceaseless struggle" of maintaining social appearances, while battling the reality of her husband's depravity (Ibsen, 65). She was forced to navigate the consequences of his actions on her

own, without the protection or guidance of either a father or a husband. Ibsen hints at the absence of Helen's biological father, explaining that her marriage was planned by only "[her] mother and [her] two aunts" who were motivated by financial stability (77). The fact that Mrs. Alving was not able to sever the ties with her abusive husband and return to her father motivates the plot, her decision to look to Manders for guidance and protection and put faith into him as a spiritual father. Pastor Manders reflects the ascetic ideal that Nietzsche critiques, perpetuating cycles of duty and guilt, and serving as an agent of social control. The spiritual father in the play fails to align with the nurturing parental archetype and causes a sense of spiritual orphanhood. Moreover, Oswald's and Helen's pursuit for liberation from the system that values submission and passivity mirrors Freud's "primal horde" rebellion, though it does not result in liberation. Pastor Manders' and Oswald's stage entrances reflect their relationship with the social climate they inhabit. Manders is wearing an overcoat, carries an umbrella and his attire and demeanor suggest his assimilation and readiness to navigate and sustain the structures of the existing order (25). On the other hand, Oswald's light overcoat and his large meerschaum suggest his lack of preparedness for the harsh realities of the environment, both literally and symbolically (45). The two men belong to entirely different worlds—one of conformity and oppression and another of artistic freedom and individuality.

Pastor Manders is a product of a rigid, religious society in which obedience and adherence to established norms are paramount and for him morality is synonymous with compliance with social and religious standards. He views the sanctity of Christian marriage and family as the foundation of a moral existence and his interactions with Mrs. Alving and Oswald reveal his inability to comprehend or accept perspectives that deviate from his framework. Manders is critical of the "artistic circles" operating beyond the compounds of Christian "well-ordered homes", which only exist through marriage governed by religious principles (54). Oswald challenges this notion, proposing the possibility of genuine love, stability and family outside conventional structures.

> MANDERS. [Continuing.] How can the authorities tolerate such things! Allow them to go on in the light of day! (Confronting MRS. ALVING.) Had I not cause to be deeply concerned about your son? In circles where open immorality prevails, and has even a sort of recognized position--!
> 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!
> OSWALD. Isn't that the day to enjoy one's self? Well, never have I heard an offensive word, and still less have I witnessed anything that could be called immoral. (55)

Manders is appalled by the idea of "irregular homes", condemns the society that allows such conduct and enforces his moral standards without truly understanding or engaging with the people he is judging. Oswald attempts to inform Manders of the depravities of the paragons of virtue, the "respectable men" from home, who, after visiting Paris, would return to their families and speak out against immorality they supposedly encountered abroad (56). Moreover, upon Hearing Helen's troubles, Manders' continues to uphold the sanctity of "law and order", emphasizing that her marriage was legitimate according to the stifling and harmful rules of their society (48). Pastor Manders reflects on the choices he made on behalf of Mrs. Alving, positioning himself as the virtuous guide, "a poor instrument in a Higher Hand" who led her back to the "path of duty" (60) and admits-

MANDERS. It was my greatest victory, Helen--the victory over myself.
MRS. ALVING. It was a crime against us both.
MANDERS. When you went astray, and came to me crying, "Here I am; take me!" I commanded you, saying, "Woman, go home to your lawful husband." Was that a crime?
MRS. ALVING. Yes, I think so.
MANDERS. We two do not understand each other.
MRS. ALVING. Not now, at any rate. (84)

Mrs. Alving and Manders struggle to understand each other as they operate within fundamentally different moral frameworks. Manders plays the role of a symbolic father who wields authority from a distance, but he fails to satisfy the parental archetype, ultimately being unfit to be a spiritual father. Having guided Helen to the path of duty back to her lawful husband, he abandoned her, as revealed by Mrs. Alving (63). This reveals the distance between Manders' idealized, detached view of morality and the complex lives of real people who were left to navigate on their own without any physical or spiritual parental guidance.

5. Divine Fatherhood and Existential Orphanhood

Finally, God's omnipresence paradoxically depends on his material absence as he is the figure whose authority is simultaneously intangible and deeply influential. In Christian tradition, Jesus, begotten by God the Father, is the mediator between humanity and the invisible, distant and all-powerful God, manifesting the divine in the human form. Jesus personifies the moral and spiritual ideas that God commands from afar and through him the intangible divine justice and love become tangible and corporeal, creating a profound synergy between the absence of the Father and the Presence of the Son. The absence of physical and spiritual fathers in the play mirrors a broader existential and moral void, the absence of divine justice and God the Father. Typically corporeally absent, though symbolically present through the character of the Son, God is absent from the story-world in both respects. Firstly, in *Ghosts*, Engstrand serves as a mock scapegoat and a distorted, false Jesus figure. His willingness to fabricate stories, such as falsely portraying himself as Regina's father to cover for her mother's "fall", essentially redeeming her and saving her, illustrates that his actions lack any genuine transformative, self-sacrificial quality (Ibsen, 92). He embodies a false Christ figure, mimicking aspects of Christ's role as a redeemer but distorting them into a self-serving caricature. While he portrays his actions as altruistic and projects an image of moral uprightness and devotion, he manipulates the situation to serve his interest, and support the establishment of his "Sailors' Home". His deeds define him as a false Christ figure, a character who mimics the outward appearance of selflessness and righteousness, but lacks the genuine moral substance that defines true sacrifice.

ENGSTRAND. Jacob Engstrand may be likened to a sort of a guardian angel, he may, your Reverence (134).

Secondly, the lack of divine justice underscores the absence of divine fatherhood within the play. Justice, often associated with divine authority and moral order, is missing from the lives of the characters, mirroring the absence of a guiding, parental deity, a benevolent Father figure. In Christian theology, the Son reveals the Father to humanity and connects them through his physical presence. Without the Son, there can be no Father. Engstrand's role as a false scapegoat reveals the absence of authentic spiritual authority and hints at the

absence of God the Father in the play. Ibsen evokes the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11–32, which tells of a father who forgives and restores his wayward son after he repents, illustrating God's grace over a sinner's return. Oswald refers to himself as a Prodigal Son, but he has no benevolent father to return to, neither in personal, spiritual nor existential sense (46). Moreover, Oswald's name means "God's power" and it adds a layer of tragic irony to his struggle (Astoria, 227). Instead of being protected or empowered by a compassionate divinity, Oswald is physically and spiritually debilitated. His name becomes a cruel inversion of the promise inherent in his name and is one of the ways in which the absence of divine justice manifests in the play. Further, the fire that consumes the orphanage can be interpreted as a symbolic act of injustice against the innocent. The fire eradicates a space built for vulnerable children, without any trace of divine retribution or moral resolution. Finally, the ultimate moral injustice and the final sign of divine absence is Oswald's plea to his mother to spare him from further suffering. Mrs. Alving is faced with two irreconcilable moral imperatives, with her love as a mother and the necessity of ending his pain (148).

MANDERS. Terrible! Mrs. Alving, it is a judgment upon this abode of lawlessness. (125)

Manders' concludes that the orphanage fire is a sign of divine judgement upon the corruption and depravity, but it symbolizes the absence of such justice. In *Ghosts*, the sun and Oswald's lament about the lack thereof carries profound symbolic significance – the absence of meaning, hope and divine intervention from the world of the play (101). Shideler concludes that Oswald's final cry to the sun invokes the image of the parent, the sun-god, the mother of life (293).

In John 8:12, Christ is referred to as the "light of the world". The absence of light signifies a world in which divine justice has failed to manifest, and the named injustices become a testament to the cruelty of an indifferent or absent God. The world devoid of light becomes a metaphor for the absence of meaning and justice and reinforces the existential despair and the sense of spiritual orphanhood. The characters are left adrift in a world where suffering and injustice prevail and the lack of divine intervention contributes to the growing nihilism, which Nietzsche and Kierkegaard warn against. In *Ghosts*, the inadequacies of personal fathers, spiritual leaders who serve the role of father substitutes, and God the Father to fulfill the father archetype, cause profound moral and emotional crises within the characters. The realization of the death of the father in a world in which justice is not only absent but unattainable leaves individuals with no personal, spiritual or existential anchor and no "antidote to despair" (Kierkegaard *The Sickness Unto Death* 60).

6. Concluding Remarks

This paper explored the triadic parental absence in *Ghosts* across personal, symbolic and divine dimensions. It revealed the psychological consequences of Captain Alving's neglect and abuse alongside the physical scars left by his legacy, as symbolized by Oswald's mental and physical decay. The examination of the father-son dyad highlighted the role of the father in identity formation and underscored the dire consequences of parental vacuity. Symbolic fatherhood, embodied by Pastor Manders, reflects the failure of the father substitute through the character's moral unfitness to provide emotional and spiritual guidance. Divine fatherhood, marked by the absence of God the Father and divine justice, exposed a profound ontological

void and the sense of existential orphanhood. The aspects of absence are interconnected and interdependent, each contributing and amplifying the grave consequences of the others. The corporeal absence of a physical father invites a symbolic father substitute, whose failure to fulfill the parental archetype uncovers the inadequacies of religious figures to perform the patriarchal role. The effects of the dual absence of guidance and protection are amplified by the sense of divine abandonment in the world devoid of providential intervention and justice. Drawing from psychoanalysis, sociology, and philosophy, the paper positions *Ghosts* within a broader literary and philosophical tradition that examines the psychological, spiritual and social implications of patriarchal failures. The paper offers an interdisciplinary approach to the study of fatherhood as both a literal and symbolic construct, showcasing how absent fathers can become 'ghosts' haunting an individual's psyche. The reading of the play hopes to invite discussion about the ramifications of ruptured family structures, institutional failures and spiritual disillusionment in modern society. Future research could apply the proposed framework to a broader range of contemporary theatrical work. Ibsen writes an intricate examination of human experience, illuminating broken archetypes and the repetitive cycle of trauma stemming from the absence of the father.

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DUHOVI ODSUTNIH OČEVA – NEOSTVARENO LIČNO, DUHOVNO I BOŽANSKO OČINSTVO U DRAMI HENRIKA IBSENA *AVETI*

Ovaj rad predstavlja osvrt na dramu „Aveti" istaknutog norveškog dramskog pisca Henrika Ibzena, polazeći od interdisciplinarnog okvira koji obuhvata književnu kritiku, psihoanalizu, sociologiju i filozofiju. Rad istražuje trostruku odsutnost roditeljskog autoriteta u drami kroz lične, simboličke i božanske dimenzije očinstva. Tumačenje drame nastoji da podstakne diskusiju o posledicama narušenih porodičnih struktura, institucionalnih neuspeha i duhovnog razočaranja u savremenom društvu kroz likove prikazane u drami. Odsustvo biološkog oca otvara prostor za formiranje simboličke očinske zamene, čiji neuspeh da ispuni arhetipsku funkciju razotkriva nedostatke religijskih figura u ispunjavanju očinske uloge. Efekti dvostrukog odsustva očinske zaštite dodatno se pojačavaju osećajem božanskog odsustva u svetu lišenom providonosne intervencije i pravde, što vodi neminovnom epilogu tragične sudbine likova.

Ključne reči: *Henrik Ibzen, Aveti, odsustvo očeva, psihoanaliza, simbolično očinstvo*