Ibsen, *Ghosts* (1881)

*Cloud Nine*; Melies project; *Oresteia* at Berkeley Rep

Ibsen (1828-1906)

bankrupt father, religious mother
auto-didact; 23, appointed head of Bergen Theater (1851)
leaves theatre & Norway (1864); stays abroad 27 yrs.
most of the “major” domestic dramas written then

*A Doll House* (1879); *An Enemy of the People* (1882);
*The Wild Duck* (1884); *Hedda Gabler* (1890)

Development as playwright
melodramas of coincidence & intrigue; epic/symbolic national
   dramas; domestic “problem plays”; late symbolist dramas
ok chronology, but all these elements present in *Ghosts*
Act I.
Sc.1: opens w/ intrigue between “workers,” Engstrand and Regina
not so much traditional comic intrigue of servants
Engstrand like the villain of melodrama
manipulates situations
but this is not abstract evil; he wants capital & property
wants daughter as property, not erotic villain
Anti-heroic melodrama
where a universal moral combat between good and evil
seems replaced by a social conflict over health vs illness
& Regina wants to talk French
aspires; cross-class identification
This intriguing & plot-making in odd mix of realistic/symbolic setting
background greenhouse w/ skylights & somber fjord landscape
Ibsen uses same effect in *The Wild Duck*
attic where duck stays; skylights for photo studio
atmospheric lighting; slightly obscured symbolic space
the Garden, Nature en chambered
sin in the Garden leading to Fire & Apocalypse
histories unveiled by end
Sc. ii-iii
Manders uses vocab of piety to put Regina’s duties, not rights to her
satirical portraits of Engstrand & Manders
reminiscent of Nietzsche’s critique of morality
how is morality used as a repressive deadening
Manders, the priest of renunciation
characters’ search for light away from dead ghosts
& Manders’ concerns revealed as largely social, not theological
argues against insurance based on public opinion, scandal
Mrs. Alving, the free-thinker, still submits
iv-vi: rebellious Mrs. Alving & bohemian son Osvald
(58-59): ghosts & memories of past in present
what is inherited in the play: ideas, disease, property
social revolution turns inward
self-fulfillment, self-change, self-liberation
how get away from “bad conscience” (68); pervasive guilt
Mrs. A: “I didn’t want Osvald . . . to inherit the least little
thing from his father” (69).
But can ghosts be repressed? Always return of repressed?
“Ghosts. Those two from the greenhouse – have come back” (70).
Adam & Eve; use of hyphen – the unspoken
Act II

Mrs. A: “I’m anxious and fearful because of the ghosts that haunt me . . .” (76) *

Manders & Engstrand, the guilty guilters
use pity, guilt, & shame on people

Light imagery

“The twilight gradually deepens” (86)
into O’s confession of syphilis

vermoulu; worm-eaten
plays on Genesis & yet suggests otherwise

“Bring the lamp in” (90)

Osvald’s profound angst, fear

longs, mistakenly, for salvation through woman

thinks Regina is cure, the “joy of life”

Mrs A.: “A vale of tears, yes. And we ingeniously
manage to make it that” (95).

misery a historical inheritance, also like a
Freudian self-fulfilling prophecy

“that light in the sky” (97)

Fire & Rain
Ibsen, “To My Friend, the Revolutionary Orator”

I won’t play at moving chessmen.
Knock over the board; then I’m with you.
You furnish the deluge for the world.
I’ll gladly torpedo the Ark.- From Michael Goldman, The Dramaturgy of Fear (2)

“Everything will burn.” (103)
Apocalyptic tenor of Ibsen

Michelangelo, Pietà