

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Bert Cardullo, my fellow Contributing Editor on *The Hudson Review*, writes in the Spring issue of *JDT&C* that to his knowledge, "no critic has ever asked why specifically Ibsen ended *Ghosts* precisely at Mrs. Alving's moment of decision and did not show what that decision was. Most Critics, of course, take the play, for better or for worse, as Helene Alving's tragedy" (82).

In my book, *Patterns in Ibsen's Middle Plays* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell, 1981), I deal with precisely these issues at great length. I note how the play zeroes in on Oswald about halfway through (124), making him, if not exactly a tragic hero, certainly the tragic focus. I spend several pages (132-34, *et passim*) dealing with the ambiguous ending, which I relate to the Kierkegaardian patterns that inform the work, as they do all of Ibsen's middle plays. The choice thrust upon Mrs. Alving echoes, among other things, Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, where he deals with Abraham's decision to kill *his* son, Isaac. It exposes the weakness in her ethical level of existence, since no categorical imperative can point to the proper action; the openness of the choice is not only no flaw in the play, it is the correct ending that has been carefully prepared since the first act.

The hard thing about writing dramatic criticism these days is not so much getting published, but getting read!

Sincerely,
Richard Hornby