

## History of the Play

Henrik Ibsen wrote *Ghosts* in 1881, in Norway. It was originally titled *Gengangere* (or *Gjengangere*, in Norwegian), which directly translates to English as “The Walking Again” or “The Ones Who Return”. (Ibsen was even unsatisfied at the fact that the English translated the title to *Ghosts*.) The play was written in the fall of 1881 as a follow up to Ibsen’s 1880 play, *A Doll’s House*, to show his audiences what life for a woman like Nora would have been like if she had returned to her husband.

It was originally staged in 1882 in Chicago, Illinois, for a Danish company that was taking the show on tour, starting at the Aurora Turner Hall. After its premiere in Chicago, it then was performed in Sweden at Helsingborg in 1883. After that it was performed in Berlin, then London, and several other European countries until it became a hit, even in the United States, over time. Its first production in New York City was in 1894.

*Ghosts* was not necessarily received well by audiences when it first premiered; sexually transmitted diseases were not mentioned in public, so the fact that the entire play practically revolved around that subject made the show incredibly scandalous—not to mention the actual scandals that take place in the play. *The Daily Telegraph* called it, “Ibsen's positively abominable play entitled *Ghosts*.... An open drain: a loathsome sore unbandaged; a dirty act done publicly.... Gross, almost putrid indecorum.... Literary carrion.... Crapulous stuff.” But overtime, of course, the play began to become regarded as not only a great play, but a masterpiece.

In 1962, the play was done again in Mexico and revived again on Broadway in 1982, at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, starring Kevin Spacey as Oswald. Soon it would go on tour, and be produced multiple times in the 2000s in London and at the West End. The 2014 production was adapted and directed by Ricked Eyre, and it starred Leslie Manville and Jack Lowden, who received awards for their performances. Eyre won an award for his direction, and the entire production won the Olivier award for “Best Revival”. This production was later filmed and even adapted for radio by Eyre.

## Historical Context

Norway in 1881 was a place and time of industrialization and rapidly developing technology. Railways and the industry/shipping business were growing more popular than ever before.

The monarch was Oscar II, King of Sweden—until the Norwegians impeached the government and dethroned the king in 1905.

Religiously, the country was mostly dominated by Pietism. However, there was much religious freedom by 1881, as opposed to how strictly Lutheran the country

used to be. Protestant, Lutheran congregations, other Christian congregations and even Atheism was now allowed in Norway.

Medically, there was desperation to find a cure for syphilis, since the disease was spreading like wildfire throughout Europe.

### **This Production**

I've decided to have this production of *Ghosts* take place in Larkhall, Scotland, in the late 1880s. Scotland was one of the last places in Europe to be affected by the spread of syphilis near the turn of the century, so it would make sense that Helene doesn't quite understand what the sickness is that Oswald has at first, or at least never actually says the illness aloud. And the idea that Helene, in fact, had syphilis and passed it down to her son would have meant a tarnish on the family's reputation if anyone in town were to find out.

Scotland was also considered far from the rather social countries, such as France or Italy. Larkhall, in particular, was a very small town, southeast of Glasgow. This play begs for a small town where everyone knows everyone—and a small house, where the walls feel as if they're closing in throughout the play. So a cottage in the tiny town of Larkhall struck me as a perfect location for the traffic of our stage.

Catholicism still dominated the area, with all that entails strictly enforced by the town's pastor—so that gives Pastor Manders the tremendous say in what goes on in the town that the play calls for.

Oswald also mentions several times how dark and gloomy his home is compared to France—he longs for the sun, and the love of life. It makes sense that he would long to stay in France and paint, where there are lively people and lots of new bright colors. (Stunning new fashions and vibrant colors of paint and house decorations were beginning to boom in France.) That would certainly seem like a much better option to Oswald than this dark, gloomy small town in Scotland, with drab colors and mostly wilderness for miles.

France also had access to morphine much faster than Scotland did—another reason for Oswald to miss France. That's where he would have gotten the twelve capsules from.

And lastly, painters in France were flourishing at the time. French art in the Victorian age was booming. Art in Scotland, though it was growing in the major cities, was not quite as popular in small towns, like little Larkhall.

Therefore, with the above reasoning for setting our play in Victorian Scotland, the majority of this dramaturge research shall be that of life in that time and place.

### **Politics**

Scotland's monarch in the 1880s was Queen Victoria. The country had entered a political union with the UK in 1707 and was now officially apart of the UK. Other than that, not too much was happening in Scotland politically, in the 1880s.

## Religion

Religious freedoms were growing more and more popular throughout Europe during this era. However, small towns like Larkhall were exceptions. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church was Larkhall's church that everyone in town would have attended. Though mostly Roman Catholic, Scotland was experiencing the allowance of religious freedom in most of rest of the country—mostly the major cities. For a small village or town, however, the head of the town's church (Pastor Manders, for our play) was essentially the head of the town, in general. The pastor kept a close eye on everyone in the area, making sure they were going to church on Sundays and were keeping up on their prayers and religious practices. They also determined the outcome of major business matters—for individual people, as well as for the whole town—and personal business, if desired, such as marrying couples.

## Society

Victorian society was very heavily class-based. It was a time of high propriety and strict social class. Even the things one owned in the house was judged by who came in the door, and it all displayed your level of social class. There were three denominations of social hierarchy—upper class, middle class, and lower class.

- *Upper Class* – they were very wealthy (also usually some sort of nobility), owned a lot of land, had several servants, and typically inherited all of their money.
  - Mr. Alving
  - Helene
  - Oswald
- *Middle Class* – slightly lower on the scale under upper class. They could usually afford a decent-sized manor and a fair amount of land, had a few servants but would still do some of the work alongside them, and usually had to work a job, though it would be high-paying.
  - Pastor Manders
- *Lower Class* – they lived poorly, worked poorly-paying jobs, and were typically very dirty and usually accepted their level in society.
  - Engstrand
  - Regina

## **Dwellings**

A house like Mr. Alving's is the epitome of an upper classman's home. It usually consisted of a living room/lounge room, approximately four or more bed chambers, a gallery or music room, the drawing room, parlor, dining room, (nursery if there were children), the privy and the kitchen/servant's quarters.

A middle class home would consist of a living room/lounge room, about four bed chambers, music room or parlor, a privy and a kitchen. Manders would probably have a very simple middle class home, if not a clergy house or a manse.

Lower class homes were usually small cottages either all in rows right next to each other, or completely isolated from the rest of town. Engstrand might be quite nearby the heart of town—probably in a working home area, with the rest of the lower class.

## **Technology**

The Victorian age was approximately the time of the Industrial Revolution—technology was progressing at a rapid rate. The telegraph system was improved, electrical lines were built on middle class streets, railroads were booming (especially in Scotland) and homes began to include new technological developments. Running water was now available on the bottom floor and basements of many upper and middle class homes, and at least one privy, or bathroom, with plumbing was required in each home. Cast iron stoves were still used for cooking food and fireplaces were still the most convenient source of heat. But in not long from the time of our play, the most common form of indoor lighting (the oil lamp) would be replaced with the first gas light bulb! (1890) The post office system was also gaining popularity. Even little Larkhall had a post office in the 1880s.

## **Education**

School, in general, usually started at age 3 and continued until around age 12, where the students could either choose to continue their education or start working. Boys (and sometimes upper and middle class girls) typically had schooling in a single room schoolhouse. The lower class typically couldn't afford to attend school unless they were individually schooled, or if a girl was sent to a dame school. Dame schools were informally set up by a widow or spinster and taught reading, sewing and cooking. (Regina might have attended dame school.)

If they chose, boys could attend universities at age 17, after taking an entrance exam. Then they would study for a minimum of two years, choosing which lectures they wanted to attend (as long as it was in accordance with their field of study) and then would graduate with qualifications to pursue middle or upper class professions.

## **Fashion**

Victorian everyday fashion for women typically consisted of the following: a full dress gathered at the back (or button-up chemise and skirt), a bustle, hoopskirt, petticoat or slip and tight cinched corset. The dress would often have a collar and cuffs that were detachable. (It was the first time women's clothing was beginning to include certain aspects of men's clothing.) Sometimes, depending on the occasion, the dress would include a sash around the neck, or a matching jacket that buttons up on the side. Hats or bonnets were always a must, along with gloves and jewelry if she was of upper class. Shoes were flat boots that buttoned up all the way to the knee.

In Scotland, the dress may have often been tartan material, or if wearing a skirt, the skirt would be the design of her family's tartan. Women also often wore lace around the neck, over the dress.

For upper and middle class men, Victorian everyday clothing typically consisted of a single-breasted frock coat with three buttons, a white drill collar vest (colors of the vest varied depending on the occasion), a tie and trousers. Lower class men would usually just wear a chemise and trousers. Hats were always worn and sometimes gloves, if upper class.

In Scotland, this would have remained the same, except men would often wear kilts with their regular shirts and coats. A belt was always worn, from which would hang their purse or satchel, in the center where the buckle was. Shoes were black and worn with knee socks—sometimes the knee socks would even match the tartan design on his kilt.

Color was also rather dreary in Scottish fashion. England, France and Italy used new, brighter colors, while Scotland used more browns, grays and blacks—aside from their tartans, of course.

## **Transportation**

The upper and middle class rode horses, horse-drawn carriages, or used public transportation. This would mean either a train or a carrier, which was a carriage driver that delivered the passenger wherever they wanted to go for payment, much like a modern day taxi cab. The lower class walked practically everywhere, unless they could afford a horse.

In a town like Larkhall, however, one would likely walk most places.

*Specific to our production:*

## **Larkhall**

In the 1880s, Larkhall was a mining town, with weaving and textiles as its primary industries. Its location is just southeast of Glasgow (it's now considered

part of South Lanarkshire) giving it a little more popularity near the turn of the century since Glasgow was becoming one of the most major cities in Scotland for commerce and trade. By the Victorian era, Larkhall had developed into more than just a singular village—its population had grown, making it more of a town—but it was still very small compared to other towns in southern Scotland. Houses and business were, and still are, spread out every which way throughout the area—there is a part of the town where most of the shops and businesses are, along with several homes, and there is a part of the town that's mostly country and wilderness. The Alvings would have lived in country area, since Regina and Engstrand mention several times being located somewhat away from the rest of town. There is also the Barren River Lake, near Larkhall and Glasgow—so the fact that Engstrand wants to set up a sailor's house makes sense, since sailors would often come down that river when they needed to go inland.

## Syphilis

Syphilis, or *grande verole* (great pox) is a disease that can either be sexually transmitted, or passed on into your DNA from birth. There are ways to heal from it but it can also be fatal—and it was especially considered so before the 1900s.

It began as an epidemic that began in the late 1400s, within the army of Charles VIII of France during their invasion of Naples. Some (France's rivals, mostly) called syphilis the "French disease". Overtime, it went in and out of popularity. Throughout the 1500s, it spread throughout France and into Italy, as well as a few other neighboring countries. The answer, however, as to what was causing the disease was boggling everyone's minds. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some physicians declared it to be a divine punishment for one's sin, and refused to treat patients. And as discoveries of the New World began to arise, the theory even developed that perhaps this disease came from the Americas.

In Scotland, and several other areas of Europe, the disease was named "GPI", or "general paralysis of the insane". Scotland was one of the last European countries to inhabit the disease, since the UK is separated by water from the rest of Europe and Scotland is further up north.

Eventually in 1905, Germany discovered *Spirochaeta pallida* (white, spiral shaped bacteria) to be the main organism of syphilis. This led to more discoveries about what the disease exactly entailed, what caused it and how it might possibly be cured. As mercury was previously thought to be a treatment for the disease, this new discovery led scientists to claim that a newly made compound drug, which they called Drug "606", might potentially become the cure for syphilis. But it wasn't until 1943 that penicillin was discovered and was realized to be the cure, which has remained a cure to this day.

In the meantime, morphine (amongst other medications) was prescribed to patients to help with pain. For our production of *Ghosts*, we should note that morphine wasn't introduced to Scotland until around World War I. Oswald would have had to have gotten his doses of morphine from France, which had access to it since the 1820s.

## *The Stages of Syphilis*

**Stage 1 – Primary Stage:** a painless sore is developed where the bacteria entered the body. This usually occurs within three weeks, or at least within 90 days—the person is highly contagious during this stage. The sore (or chancre) appears in the genitals or in swollen lymph glands.

**Stage 2 – Secondary Stage:** a rash appears 2 to 8 weeks after the chancre develops. The rash often includes warts or open sores containing pus. After about two months, the rash heals without any trace of scarring.

**Stage 3 – Latent Stage:** This is the stage where the disease remains dormant, hidden in the body without any sign. This can last up to 20 years—which makes sense of the fact that Oswald’s syphilis randomly appears in his adulthood, even though he’s had it all his life without knowing it.

**Stage 4 – Tertiary Stage:** This is the late stage where, if the disease goes untreated, it can affect the organs, brain and entire inside of the person. Symptoms can include headaches, migraines, seizures, heart attacks, and more—all of Oswald’s symptoms.

## **Art and Painters**

Art was flourishing in the Victorian age—especially in France. The period of Romanticism was just coming to a close as the beginning of Modernism took place. Claude Monet and Edouard Manet were painting the famous pieces many of us hang in our homes today. Vincent van Gogh was beginning expressionism, and George Seurat was beginning pointillism. It was a very exciting time for artists.

In Scotland, painters and art weren’t necessarily as popular, but they were certainly on the road to get there. Art was just then beginning to become very popular, particularly in the big cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh. Two major schools in Scotland were opened for the study of art, including the Royal Scottish Academy of Art. The Glasgow School of Art was founded in 1845 and the National Gallery of Scotland opened in Edinburgh in 1859. Landscape painting was the major form of painting, and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, art in Scotland was flourishing. In small towns, however (like Larkhall), art wasn’t necessarily as popular. Men were expected to go into professions that would benefit the rest of the town. Practical jobs were essential. So it wouldn’t be surprising for someone like Pastor Manders to seem a little skeptical of Oswald’s decision to pursue painting, and to criticize his “artist’s life” that would seem so immoral to the pastor of a strict Catholic town.