

EDWARD ALBEE AND HENRIK IBSEN:
SOME PARALLELS BETWEEN *GHOSTS* AND *TINY ALICE*

"Edward Albee and August Strindberg," an article by Marion A. Taylor published in the first issue of *Papers in English Language and Literature*, Carbondale, Illinois, pointed out such marked parallels between Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* as to constitute a case of borrowing that seems far from accidental.¹

It now appears that Edward Albee must have been borrowing again in his late play, *Tiny Alice*. For this play shows marked parallels to Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*, written in 1881.

But before we take up in detail the parallels between Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *Tiny Alice*, let us point out the "Guess the Source" games the Broadway critics played when *Tiny Alice* first appeared in 1965.

For example, an article entitled "Broadway: a Tale Within a Tail" says of *Tiny Alice*:

There is a butler in it, for example, named Butler. Ah, so. When Marilyn Monroe was a starlet, she had a bit part in **All About Eve**. At a party in the film she called out, "Oh, waiter!", and George Sanders, at her elbow, said to her, "That isn't a waiter, my dear. That's a butler." — "Well," said Marilyn, "I can't yell, 'Oh, butler,' can I? Maybe somebody's name is Butler." ²

This same article then proceeds with more "Guess the Sources" games:

¹) Marion A. Taylor, *Papers in English Language and Literature*, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, Winter, 1965, pp. 59-71.

²) *Time*, January 15, 1965, p. 68.

When the audience first sees Irene Worth as Alice, the play's only woman, she is pretending to be an old hag, wearing a mask and leaning on a couple of canes. "How do you do?" says Gielgud to her. "How do I do what?" she says. That bit of dialogue was exchanged between Snow White and Grumpy in Walt Disney's **Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs**. Ah, so, heigh-ho. Gielgud is Snow White, and sensual Alice is Grumpy. But isn't she really the Virgin Mary? Doesn't she wear the Madonna's blue and hold him in the precise attitude of the Pieta as he dies? So he must be Grumpy then, and Grumpy must be Christ. Which Walt Disney never even suspected.³

One of the high points of *Tiny Alice* is the scene where Alice seduces a lay brother named Julian, whom she eventually marries. Broadway has a "Guess the Source" for this one too.

The seduction scene owes a discernible if unintentional debt to Tennessee Williams' **The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More**. In that play, Mrs. Goforth, also an enormously wealthy woman, nakedly tempted a poet-saint in her offstage boudoir. From stage center, Miss Alice tempts the lay-brother saint. With her bare-shouldered back to the audience, she whips open her black negliges and naked faces Julian. As he drops to his knees before her, she gives three orgiastic cries of triumph. If Worth and Gielgud were less impeccably disciplined or tasteful, the scene would verge on sexual parody.⁴

Naturally the title, *Tiny Alice*, leads many critics to *Alice in Wonderland*. Says the author of "The Tiny Alice Caper":

Many reviewers have confessed a complete inability to find meaning in it at all, while others have discovered parallels to the Bible, to **Parsifal**, and to **Alice in Wonderland**.⁵

³) *Ibid.*

⁴) "Tinny Allegory", in "The Theater", *Time*, January 8, 1965, p. 32.

⁵) In "Broadway Postscript", *The Saturday Review of Literature*, January 30, 1965, p. 38.

This Lewis Carroll source - Albee himself has denied. He says that,

The title **Tiny Alice** occurred to him some time later but was not consciously arrived at from any literary source such as **Alice in Wonderland**, any more than the protagonist's name Julian, had any relation to an actual Julian such as the emperor who renounced Christianity for paganism, or the off - Broadway producer who recently martyred himself by going to jail.⁹

Yet the Alice in Wonderland "*Guess the Source*" parallels persist.

... Is the major clue a large, onstage model of the castle in which most of the play occurs, a world within a world?

In this model castle, there is a real mouse. In the dialogue, the mouse is alluded to as a kind of deity that does not exist but is "all that can be worshipped." In **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**, Alice and a mouse go swimming together. Alice, who is getting "quite tired of being such a tiny little thing," respects the mouse for his apparent authority. In dialogue, the mouse's personal tale is printed in the shape of his tail, as the mouse recites what is to a considerable degree the plot of **Tiny Alice**:

"We must have
the trial;
For really
this morn-
ing I've
nothing
to do."
Said the
mouse to
the cur.
"Such a
trial, dear
sir, With

⁹) Ibid.

no jury
 or judge,
 would
 be wast-
 ing our
 breath."
 "I'll be
 judge,
 "I'll be
 jury,"
 said
 cun-
 ning
 old
 Fury;
 "I'll
 try
 the
 whole
 cause,
 and
 con-
 demn
 you to
 death."

And that's not the whole clue, either.⁷

But there is one more source the Alice of Albee's title might have come from besides *Alice in Wondrland*. In Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*, that play which shows so many similarities to Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the chief characters are Alice and the Captain. Albee chose to name his chief characters Martha and George (echoes of the George Washingtons?). But Alice could well have been a name that stayed in his mind when he began to write his next play. Especially since Alice is a name so close to Alving, the name of the family in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, which we are about to discuss.

⁷) See "Broadway: A Tale Within a Tail", p. 69.

All these "Guess the Source" of *Tiny Alice* games the Broadway critics have been playing have one thing in common with the "Guess the Source" of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* game played by the article mentioned in the first paragraph of this discussion. Everyone seems to be playing these games because Albee seems to be an author who definitely works from sources.

Now let us turn to that source for *Tiny Alice* which the Broadway critics seem to have completely by-passed, but which yields more parallels than any other sources yet suggested — Ibsen's *Ghosts*.

In the first place, both plays are three acts long and both have casts of five characters each.

Ghosts : Engstrand, the carpenter
 Regina, the maid
 Pastor Manders
 Mrs. Alving
 Oswald, her son

Tiny Alice : Lawyer
 Cardinal
 Julian
 Butler
 Miss Alice

Three acts and five people in each play could very easily be accidental. But when we begin to study the castes of characters for archetypes, we come across some striking parallels.

Take Albee's Lawyer and lay him beside Ibsen's Engstrand, the carpenter, for example. Both men appear in the opening scenes in their respective plays. Both men are not only reprobates, but both are unsavory ghosts rising up out of the pasts of the young women central to each plot. The Lawyer in *Tiny Alice* is presently the lover of Alice, but she calls him a pig who is utterly repulsive to her physically, and she is casting him off for a younger, more attractive man, the lay brother named Julian, secretary to the Cardinal.⁸ Similarly Engstrand, Ibsen's

⁸) See Edward Albee, *Tiny Alice*, New York, Atheneum, 1965, p. 55.

carpenter, is the supposed father of the young servant girl, Regina, central to the plot of *Ghosts*, but she loathes him, finding him physically repulsive because of his bent, deformed leg. Later she learns that he is not only not her real father but, has designs on her.

In the opening scene of *Ghosts*, we see Engstrand forcing his way into the Alving mansion, and Regina, who serves as the maid there, telling him he'll waken the young master (with whom she is in love).

REGINA. Well, what is it **you** want? No! stay where you are - - you're dripping wet!

ENGSTRAND. It's only God's rain, my child.

REGINA. The devil's rain you mean!

ENGSTRAND. How you talk, Regina (Advances into room a few steps.) But, here's what I want to tell you...

REGINA. Don't go clumping about with that foot of yours! The young master's upstairs asleep.

ENGSTRAND. Asleep at this hour - - in broad daylight?

REGINA. It's none of your bussiness.

ENGSTRAND. Now, look at **me** - - I was on a bit of a spree last nothing

REGINA. That's nothing new!

ENGSTRAND. Well - - we're all frail creatures, my child.

REGINA. We are that!... Now, get out! I can't stand here having a rendezvous with you.

ENGSTRAND. What's that?

REGINA. I don't want anyone to see you here - - so get out!

ENGSTRAND. Damned if I go till I've had a talk with you... Tomorrow's the opening of the Orphanage, they'll all be celebrating - - sure to be a lot of drinking too - - I'll prove to them that Jacob Engstrand can keep out of the way of temptation.

REGINA. Ha!

ENGSTRAND. Lots of **grand** people'll be here — Manders is expected from town...

REGINA. What are you going to try and put over on him this time?

ENGSTRAND. Are you crazy? ... I'm going back home tonight.

REGINA. You can't go soon enough to please me!

ENGSTRAND. But I want you to come with me, Regina...

REGINA. You'll never get me to do that!

ENGSTRAND. Well, we'll see.

REGINA. Yes! You'll see all right! After being brought up here by Mrs. Alving, treated almost like one of the family, do you suppose I'd ever go home with you -- back to that kind of house? You're crazy!⁹

Now let us examine the scene in *Tiny Alice* in which Alice is trying to repulse the Lawyer's advances and at the same time warn him that young Julian will soon be up.

MISS ALICE

Let go of me!... Keep off! Keep off me!

LAWYER

... Don't be hysterical.

MISS ALICE

I'll show **you** hysteria. I'll give you **fireworks!** KEEP!
Keep away.

⁹) Henrik Ibsen, "Ghosts", trans. by Eva Le Gallienne, in *The Play*, ed. Eric Bentley, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1961, pp. 523-524. (This translation has been used because wording similar to Albee's *Tiny Alice* and Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata*, which immediately follows, makes one believe that this book may very well be the one that Albee used).

LAWYER

(Soothing, but always moving in on her) A simple touch
an affectionate hand on you; nothing more...

MISS ALICE

(Quiet loathing)

You're degenerate.

LAWYER (Steely)

An affectionate hand, in the privacy of a hallway...

MISS ALICE (Almost a shriek)

THERE ARE PEOPLE! (Note similarity to use of word
people above in Ibsen.)

LAWYER (Feigning surprise)

There are no people. (To a child) Ahh! (Walks toward the
model, indicates it) Unless you mean all the little people
running around inside here. Is that what you mean? ... Why
don't we show them a few of your tricks, hunh?

MISS ALICE

(Moving away, clenched teeth again) Keep ... away ...
from ... me.

LAWYER (Without affection)

To love is to possess, and since I desire to possess you,
that must mean conversely that I love you, must it not?
Come here.

MISS ALICE (With great force)

PEOPLE!

LAWYER

Your little priest? Your little Julian? He is not...

MISS ALICE

He is not a priest!

LAWYER

No. And he is not nearby - - momentarily! (Hissed) I am
sick of him day after day, sick of the time you're taking. Will
you get it done with!

MISS ALICE

No! He will be **up**.

LAWYER

Oh, for Christ's sake, he's a connoisseur; he'll be nosing around the goddam wine cellar for hours!

MISS ALICE

He will be **up**.¹⁰

The similarities between the reprobates keep on multiplying. Each has dealings with the church figure in his play and can bend him to his will. In *Tiny Alice*, the Lawyer knows all about the Cardinal's past, his mother who was a whore, his homosexuality, his greed for money - and he uses this information, blackmail fashion, to keep the Cardinal in line, as can be seen in Act I, Sc. 1.

CARDINAL

... We — and here we speak of **ourselves** and not of our station -- we ... we reserve the the first-person singular for intimates ... and equals.

LAWYER

... And your superiors.

CARDINAL

(Brushing away a gnat)

The case does not apply.

LAWYER

(Matter-of-factly; the vengeance is underneath)

You'll grovel, Buddy. (Slaps his hip hard) As automatically and naturally as people slobber on that ring of yours. As naturally as that, I'll have you do your obesiance. (Sweetly) As you used to, old friend.

CARDINAL

We ... (Thinks better of what he was about to say) You **were** a swine at school... A cheat in your examinations, a liar in all things of any matter, vile in your personal habits - - unwashed and indecent, a bully to those you could intimidate and a sychophant to everyone else. We remember you more

¹⁰⁾ Albee, pp. 71-72.

clearly each moment. It is law you practice, is it not? We find it fitting.

LAWYER

(A mock bow, head only)

We are of the same school, Your Eminence.

CARDINAL

And in the same class... but not of. You have come far - - in a worldly sense... from so little, we mean. (Musing)
The law.

LAWYER

I speak plainly.

CARDINAL

You are plain. As from your beginnings.

LAWYER (Quietly)

Overstuffed, arrogant, pompous son of a profiteer. And a whore. You are in the Church, are you not? We find it fitting.

CARDINAL

(A burst of appreciative laughter) You're **good!** You **are!** **Still!** Gutter, but good...¹¹

In *Ghosts*, Parson Manders has been urging Regina to go to live with the carpenter because he thinks he is her father and it is her duty. But when the parson learns the carpenter is not Regina's real father and that he married Regina's mother to get at the money given her for bearing another man's child, the parson is shocked. Yet the carpenter tells lies and gets himself back into the parson's good graces.

ENGSTRAND. Well then, sir, I married her - - I made her an honest woman - - so no one would know of her reckless behavior with the foreigner.

MANDERS. All of that was very right and good of you, Engstrand; but I don't understand how you could have accepted money.

¹¹) Ibid., pp. 8-9.

ENGSTRAND. Money? Me? Not a penny.

MANDERS But ---?

ENGSTRAND. Oh yes ... now I remember: Johanna did say something about some money ... but I wouldn't hear about that! "Get Thee behind me Satan," I said, "it's Mammon's gold" (or bank-notes or whatever it was), "we'll throw it back in the American's face," I said. But, of course, he had disappeared ... over the vast ocean...

MANDERS. Yes, I see -- my dear Engstrand.

ENGSTRAND. Yes, sir. And then Johanna and I agreed that every penny of that money should go to child's upbringing; and so it was; and I can account for every cent of it, sir.

MANDERS. But this puts things in an entirely different light...¹²

Yes, each reprobate out of the leading lady's past in each of the plays can bend the man of the church to his will.

Nor is this the end of the echoes of the Ibsen carpenter in the Albee play. In the passage about the butler whose name is Butler (already quoted from the Broadway critics), there is a strange allusion to a carpenter.

JULIAN

... You **are** the butler, are you not, but...

BUTLER

Butler. My name is Butler.

JULIAN (innocent pleasure)

How extraordinary!

BUTLER (Putting it aside)

No, not really. Appropriate: Butler... butler. If my name were Carpenter, and I were a butler... or if I **were** a carpenter and my name were Butler...¹³

¹²) Ibsen, p. 556.

¹³) Albee, p. 30.

Why a carpenter? Why not a miller named Miller? Or a tailor named Taylor? Why not a carpenter? we ask, when the Ibsen play *Albee* must have been reading had in it a carpenter named Engstrand who opened the play?

The second archetype we must now consider is the church figure in both plays, the man of cloth as he is called. In *Ghosts*, as we have just seen, this is Parson Manders, and in *Tiny Alice*, the Cardinal.

Also, as we have just seen, each representative of the church is far from being a good man. Manders is smug, overbearing, rather stupid, and above all so afraid of any kind of scandal rising up in his parish to assail his reputation as a pastor, he once forced the rich widow, Mrs. Alving to continue in her unfortunate marriage with Captain Alving, whose excesses were so dissolute he passed on his venereal disease to his son. Like the citizens of Dachau, who denied the knowledge of a concentration camp in their midst, when Manders says that he had no notion that the captain was anything but a good man, we find this hard to believe.

Even if one does choose to believe Manders, there is Mrs. Alving's accusation that Manders deliberately shut his eyes to her plight and only opened them when Mrs. Alving's plans for building an orphanage would make available to Manders a large sum of money for him to handle and he wanted to get back into her good graces:

MRS. ALVING. You've just talked a great deal about my married life after you — as you put it — “led me back to the path of duty.” What do you know about it? From that day on you never set foot inside this house — you who had been our closest friend.

MANDERS. But, you and your husband left town, almost immediately.

MRS. ALVING. And you never once came out here to see us during my husband's lifetime. It wasn't until this Orphanage business, that you felt compelled to visit me.

MANDERS, (with some embarrassment.) If that is meant as a reproach, my dear Helene, I beg you to consider - - -

MRS. ALVING. I know -- you had to protect your reputation! After all, I was a woman who had tried to leave her husband! One can't be too careful with such females!

MANDERS. Oh, my dear! -- Mrs. Alving -- what a gross exaggeration!

MRS. ALVING. Well, never mind about that; the point is this: your opinions of my married life are based on nothing but hearsay.

MANDERS. That may be so; what then?

MRS. ALVING. Just this: that now, Manders, I am going to tell you the truth; I swore to myself I would tell it to you— one day.

MANDERS. And what is the truth?

MRS. ALVING. The truth is this. My husband died as he had lived: a degenerate and a drunkard! ¹⁴

In spite of Mrs. Alving's reproaches, however, she does give the hypocritical pastor the Orphanage affairs to handle — involving the large sum that attracts him so greatly.

In *Tiny Alice* the Cardinal, whom we have already seen to be a dissolute and hypocritical man, schemes to get his hands on an even greater sum of money, and the Lawyer schemes to help him.

LAWYER

My employer ... wants to give some of her money to the Church.

CARDINAL

(Enthusiastic, but guarded)

Does she!

LAWYER (Offhand)

Gradually... A hundred million now.

CARDINAL (No shown surprise)

And the rest gradually.

¹⁴) Ibsen, p. 543.

LAWYER

And the same amount each year for the next twenty — a hundred million a year. She is not ill; she has no intention of dying; she is quite young, youngish; there is no ... rush.

CARDINAL

Indeed not.

LAWYER

It is that she is ... overburdened with wealth.

CARDINAL

And it weighs on her soul.¹⁵

Ibsen's Mrs. Alving has also used her money to build the Orphanage because it also weighs on her soul:

MRS. ALVING. ... I didn't want my son to inherit anything whatsoever from his father.

MANDERS. I see, so you used Alving's money to - - -?

MRS. ALVING. Precisely. The money that has gone into the Orphanage amounts to the exact sum of the fortune, that once made people consider Lieutenant Alving a good match.

MANDERS. I understand you.

MRS. ALVING. I sold myself for that sum. I don't want Oswald to touch a penny of it. Everything he had will come from me — everything!¹⁶

A further likeness in each play is that each church figure shows himself to be entirely unscrupulous when it comes to sacrificing a human being to gain his desires.

In *Ghosts*, Mrs. Alving hints at a love affair between her and Manders, yet as we have witnessed in the scene above, Manders kept her sealed in her brutal marriage to maintain his precious reputation. In *Tiny Alice*, the Cardinal is perfectly willing to sacrifice his lay brother and secretary, Julian, to get his hands on Miss Alice's money:

¹⁵) Albee, pp. 14-15.

¹⁶) Ibsen, p. 546.

CARDINAL

(Evading JULIAN'S eyes)

We sign the papers today, Julian. It's all arranged, the grant is accomplished; through your marriage ... your service.

JULIAN (Puzzlement)

Father?

CARDINAL

(Barely keeping pleasure in his voice)

And isn't it wonderful: that you have... found yourself such great service and such ... exceeding happiness, too; that God's way has brought such gifts to his servant, and to his servant's servant as well... It is your wedding day, Julian!

JULIAN

Yes, it is! And a day of glory to God, that His Church has been blessed with great wealth, for the suffering of the world, conversion and the pronouncement of His Glory... That God has seen fit to let me be His instrument in this undertaking, that God...

CARDINAL

Julian. (Pause) As you have accepted what has happened ... removed, so far removed from ... any thought ... accept what ... will happen, may happen, with the same humility and...

JULIAN (Happily)

It is my service.

CARDINAL (Nods)

Accept what may come ... as God's will.

JULIAN

Don't ... don't frighten me. Bless me, Father.

CARDINAL (Embarrassed)

Julian, please...

JULIAN

(On his knees before the CARDINAL)

Bless me?...

CARDINAL

May the presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ be with you always...

JULIAN

... to ... to shield my eyes from too much light, that I may be always worthy...

CARDINAL

... to light your way for you in the darkness...

JULIAN

... darkness, Father?...

CARDINAL

... that you may be worthy of whatever sacrifice, unto death itself...

JULIAN

... in all this light!

CARDINAL

[It] is asked of you; that you may accept what you do not understand.¹⁷

And that is just what Julian suffers from the machinations of the Cardinal — sacrifice unto death from a gunshot wound in the stomach. For after the Lawyer has shot Julian, the Cardinal stands by without even calling a doctor even though Butler suggests calling one. In *Ghosts*, when Oswald is dying, there is talk about calling a doctor for him too. His mother says, "I must fetch a doctor, Oswald — let me go!" But Oswald prevents her, saying, "You're not going out — and no one is to come here!" and then locks the door.¹⁸

The shooting of Julian, of course, has given him what he has always wanted — martyrdom in the service of the Church. But as Julian lies dying, and the Lawyer hands the Cardinal the briefcase containing all of Alice's money Julian has helped to gain for the Cardinal and his Church by dying, the Lawyer puts it another way:

¹⁷) Albee, pp. 141-143.

¹⁸) Ibsen, p. 579.

LAWYER

(Taking the briefcase to the CARDINAL)

There it is, all of it. All legal now, the total grant: two billion, kid, twenty years of grace for no work at all; no labor ... at least not yours. (Holds the briefcase out) There ... take it.

CARDINAL

We do not ... fetch and carry. And have not acquiesced... (Indicates briefcase) For this.

JULIAN (Weak again)

Father?

LAWYER

Not God's errand boy?

CARDINAL

God's; not yours.

LAWYER

Who are the Gods?

JULIAN (Pain)

God in heaven!

MISS ALICE

Poor Julian!

(Goes to him; they create something of a Pietà)
Rest back; lean on me.

LAWYER

(Withdrawing his offer of the briefcase)

Perhaps your **new** secretary can pick it up.

You will go on, won't you — red gown and amethyst, until the pelvic cancer comes, or the coronary blacks it out, all of it? The good with it, and the evil?

(Indicates JULIAN) Even this? In the final mercy?

(The CARDINAL looks straight ahead of him for a moment, hesitates, then walks out, looking neither left nor right)¹⁹

¹⁹) Albee, pp. 173-174.

Note that it is not the Cardinal who has pity — only Alice.²⁰

And now let us consider the leading lady of *Tiny Alice*, Alice, the only woman in her play, in connection with the two women in *Ghosts*. The one so like Alice in age, attractiveness, and love interest, of course, is Regina, and she therefore becomes the most obvious parallel. Alice falls in love with Julian and marries him. Regina is in love with Oswald, the young master of the house, and he wants to marry her. But Oswald has inherited a venereal disease from his father and is fatally ill from its ravages. And when Regina finds this out and the horrible invalidism it will entail, she will have nothing to do with him, even when she finds out that she is Captain Alving's daughter and that Oswald is her half-brother. Let us have a look at the scene:

MRS. ALVING. ...Your father was a broken, dissolute man long before you were born.

OSWALD. Ah!

MRS. ALVING. And I was tormented by the thought that Regina actually had the same rights in this house that you have.

OSWALD. Regina!

REGINA. I!

MRS. ALVING. Yes. Now perhaps you understand everything — both of you.

OSWALD. Regina!!

REGINA. So mother was — that sort of woman.

MRS. ALVING. Your mother had many fine qualities, Regina.

REGINA. But that didn't prevent her from —! Please allow me to leave at once...

OSWALD. Leave now? But you belong here.

²⁰) Could there be a hint of Rolf Hochhuth's recent highly controversial play *The Deputy* in this portrait of the Cardinal, as well as Ibsen's Parson Manders?

REGINA. *Merci*, Mr. Alving — I suppose I can call you Oswald now — though this wasn't the way I wanted it to happen.

MRS. ALVING. Regina, I haven't been honest with you—

REGINA. No! You certainly haven't, Mrs. Alving! If I'd known that Oswald was a sick man... Well! I can't waste my time out here in the country looking after invalids.

OSWALD. Not even your own brother, Regina?

REGINA. I should say not! I'm poor — all I have is my youth — I can't afford to waste it. I don't want to be left stranded...

MRS. ALVING. ... But don't throw yourself away, Regina.

REGINA. If I do — I do — that's all! If Oswald takes after his father, I take after my mother, I suppose. May I ask, Mrs. Alving, if Mr. Manders knows about all this?

MRS. ALVING. Mr. Manders knows everything.

REGINA. Then I'd better try and catch that boat. Mr. Manders is such a kind man, he's sure to help me. It seems to me I have a right to some of that money too — a better right than that filthy old carpenter.

MRS. ALVING. You're welcome to it, Regina.

REGINA. And I must say, Mrs. Alving, it seems to me I also had a right to a decent upbringing — one suited to a gentleman's daughter. Well, what do I care! Glances at the bottle of wine. Some day I may be drinking champagne with the best of them — who knows?

MRS. ALVING. If you should ever need a home, Regina, come to me.

REGINA. No thank you, Mrs. Alving! Mr. Manders'll look after me, I'm sure. And if the worst comes to the worst, I know of a place where I'd be quite at home.

MRS. ALVING. Where do you mean?

REGINA. In Captain Alving's Haven... [The Seaman's Haven, which is to be run by the filthy old carpenter, Engstrand.] ²¹

As we saw in the shooting scene from *Tiny Alice* above, Alice is the only one who shows Julian any pity. And she did marry him. But like the others in her play, and like Regina, too, she finally goes off and leaves Julian to die — in this case alone.

LAWYER

...(To MISS ALICE, immediately) Are you ready to go?

MISS ALICE

(Looking up; sad irony)

Am I ready to go on with it, do you mean? To move to the city now before the train trip south? The private car? The house on the ocean, the... same mysteries, the evasions, the perfect plotting? The removed residence, the Rolls twice weekly into the shopping strip... all of it?

LAWYER

Yes. All of it.

MISS ALICE

(Looks to JULIAN, considers a moment)

Are you warm now?

JULIAN

Yes... and cold.

MISS ALICE

(Looks up to the LAWYER, smiles faintly)

No.

LAWYER

Then get up and come along...

MISS ALICE (To JULIAN)

I **must** go away from you now; it is not that I wish to. (To BUTLER) Butler, I have left my wig, it is upstairs...

²¹) Ibsen, pp. 574-575.

JULIAN

ALL HURTS!!

MISS ALICE (Coming to him)

Oh, my poor Julian...

JULIAN

LEAVE ME!

(MISS ALICE considers a moment, turns, leaves) ²²

But if Alice shows striking parallels to Regina in character, age, good looks, situation, actions, and lovers, she also shows two striking differences.

Alice is enormously rich and the mistress of her castle-like house. Regina is miserably poor and only the servant in the mansion where she lives. And even though she turns out to be Captain Alving's daughter, she does not choose to stay there.

Yet these differences become significant when we examine Mrs. Alving, the other woman character in *Ghosts*. For it is precisely these differences between Regina and Alice that Mrs. Alving supplies to Alice.

Mrs. Alving is rich, too, and in her own right. As we have seen she wants to build the Orphanage so that she can get rid of all the money her husband left her and live on her own income. Moreover, like Alice, she is mistress of a house, which if it is not a castle, certainly is a stately old Norwegian mansion.

Alice's mansion-castle makes every effort to be European, too, and not American, even if it was carried stone by stone, as one character says, to somewhere else.

But where is that somewhere else? We are never told, and it doesn't sound like America. It must be some fairy tale place in Europe, nebulously, (purposefully?) unclear.

Finding important facets of Mrs. Alving in Alice brings us to another strange thing. As has been pointed out, when we first see Alice she is disguised as an old lady, tottering on canes and wearing a

²²⁾ Albee, pp. 177-184, *passim*.

wig. Then suddenly she takes off her wig, abandons her mask and becomes young, beautiful Alice for the rest of the play.

This not only puzzles us, but Julian too.

MISS ALICE

(She unfastens and removes her wig, unties and takes off her mask, becomes herself, as JULIAN watches, open-mouthed) There. Is that better? And you needn't yell at me any more; if anything, my hearing is too good.

JULIAN (Slightly put out)

I... I don't understand.

MISS ALICE

Are you annoyed?

JULIAN

I suspect I will be... might be... after the surprise leaves me.

MISS ALICE (Smiling)

Don't be; it's only a little game...

For we are involved in weighty matters... the transfer of millions, the rocking of empires... As you can see — you **can**, I trust — I am **not** a hundred and thirteen years old, but I **do** have my crotchets, even now... ²³

So, Miss Alice explains, she has her crotchets and likes disguises. But at the end of the play, how does she or anybody else explain the fact that when she abandons the dying Julian to go off with the Lawyer, the Cardinal and the others, she tells Butler to go up and bring down her wig, then forgets the wig and leaves it on the phrenological head, whereupon the dying Julian in his hallucinations tends to worship it as a mother image? Is this symbolism? If so, of what?

I think there is another explanation. Alice is the fusion of two characters from Ibsen. The youth, beauty, and seductiveness of Miss Alice are, as we have seen, facets supplied by Regina. But the wig, the

²³) *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

mask, and the rest of the disguise of old age are the remnants of Mrs. Alving, along with her big old house. So too is the wig on the phrenological head, which the dying Julian worships as a mother image, a situation which parallels the fact that Oswald has his real mother with him as he is dying.²⁴

Explain the wig and the disguise as you will. There is no other explanation that seems to fit so well.

But if Miss Alice has been made of the fusion of Ibsen's Regina and Mrs. Alving, Butler the butler is a character that has been fashioned out of one facet of Regina. They are both servants in great houses, running around the stage, doing their servant chores. But they are both awarded special privileges as the plots of both plays unfold. Regina is first asked by Oswald to marry him, then she turns out to be the illegitimate daughter of Captain Alving and a former maid-servant and thereby is elevated to being Oswald's blood-kin and more or less his equal.

Butler turns out to be not only a butler, but a co-partner in the plot the Lawyer, the Cardinal, and Alice perpetrate against Julian. And in each play the socially superior characters indicate their wish to accept their servant as their social equal by having him or her sit down and drink wine with them. Champagne, in both cases.

Ghosts:

REGINA comes in with the champagne.

REGINA. Excuse me for being so long, Mrs. Alving. I had to go down to the cellar.

Puts the bottle on the table.

OSWALD. Fetch another glass.

REGINA. (Looks at him surprised.) Mrs. Alving has a glass, sir.

²⁴) This same use of a hallucinatory character in *Tiny Alice*, the wig on the phrenological head Julian imagines to be his mother which has seemingly been fashioned from a real mother, Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts*, resembles a feature in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* In the latter play the love-hate couple, George and Martha, quarrel over imaginary children, while in Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*, the love-hate couple quarrel over real children. See Taylor, pp. 62-63.

OSWALD. Yes, but fetch one for yourself, Regina.
(She glances at MRS. ALVING.)

Well?

REGINA. Do you wish me to, Mrs. Alving?

MRS. ALVING. Fetch the glass, Regina.

She [Regina] goes into the dining-room.

OSWALD, looking after her. Have you noticed how wonderfully she walks, mother — so strong, so sure.

MRS. ALVING. This can't be allowed to happen, Oswald.

OSWALD. But it's all settled — you must see that — there's no use forbidding it.

REGINA. Comes in with a glass in her hand.) Sit down, Regina.

MRS. ALVING. Sit down.

REGINA sits on a chair by the dining-room door, with the empty glass in her hand.²⁵

And now for a similar passage in *Tiny Alice*, where the characters are also drinking champagne:

BUTLER

(Starts passing the tray of glasses)
Miss Alice.

MISS ALICE (Strained)

Thank you.

BUTLER

(Starts toward JULIAN, changes his mind, goes to the CARDINAL)
Your Eminence?

CARDINAL

Ahhh.

²⁵) Ibsen, pp.. 565-566.

BUTLER

(Starts toward JULIAN again, changes his mind goes to the LAWYER)
Sweetheart?

BUTLER

(Finally goes to JULIAN, holds the tray at arm's length; speaks, not unkindly)
Our Brother Julian.

JULIAN (Shy friendliness)

Thank you, Butler.

LAWYER

And now...

BUTLER

(Moving back to the table with the tray)
Hold on; I haven't got mine yet. It's over here.

JULIAN

Yes! Butler must drink with us. (To MISS ALICE) Don't you think so?

MISS ALICE (Curiously weary)

Why not? He's family.

LAWYER ...

Yes; what a large family you have.²⁶

Add to that more wine drinking, such as the elaborate toasting of Julian's and Alice's wedding, following this scene in *Tiny Alice*, and Oswald's frequent drinking in *Ghosts*. For in both plays the characters mention wine often and drink wine on stage twice, once being champagne in both plays. Add to that all the talk of wine cellars in both plays — Regina's mention of having come up from the wine cellar in the Ibsen scene just quoted and a long passage about Julian's tour of the wine cellar in *Tiny Alice*.²⁷

²⁶) Albee, pp. 153-154.

²⁷) See Act II, Sc. 1, pp. 78-83.

And remember all these drinking allusions in both plays are to wines, not to the hard liquor more commonly used by Americans. All of which seems to add up to more than mere coincidence.

Now we come to the male leads in each play — Oswald and Julian. We have already learned so much about each we can tend to summarize. Both are young, handsome and much more appealing to the ladies they love than the other men suing for their hands. Both young men are intellectuals, with the spiritual or artistic side more highly developed than the practical or material. Oswald has tried to pursue painting, but is still a novice. Julian has pursued Catholicism, but he is still a novitiate. Both are seeking truth, meaning in life. But both so far have met only frustration.

Both young men find the women they love in great houses. But there is a question in each case whether the young men will leave or stay in the great houses.

Both young men look to their beloveds for help and salvation, but both are deserted by their beloveds. Both go down to tragic defeat and frenzied deaths, the innocent victims of evil and treachery initiated by others.

Before they die, both young men are terribly afraid. Also, both are attended by a mother figure — Alving by his own mother and Julian by his hallucinatory mother — the wig Alice left on the phrenological head on the library table.

Both men's deaths are attended by the mention and use of lights, blotted out by darkness. Oswald calls for the sun, but he has a stroke, and darkness overwhelms him. Julian sees lights both in the library and in the scale model of the castle on stage, but he dies in encroaching patterns of darkness.

But we still don't come to the end of the parallels in each play when we have finished making a comparison of the two sets of characters. For there is a fire central to both plots, each coming into the second act of the play.

In *Ghosts* it is the Orphanage which burns, and Oswald, chatting with the others in the garden sitting-room is the first to look out of the window and notice it.

OSWALD. What's happening? What's that glare in the sky?

REGINA. It's the Orphanage — the Orphanage is on fire, Mrs. Alving!

MRS. ALVING. On fire?

MANDERS. ...Impossible! I've just come from there.

OSWALD. Give me my hat! — ... God! Father's Orphanage!

He runs out into the garden.

MRS. ALVING. ... The whole place is in flames!

MANDERS. How horrible! It's a judgment, Mrs. Alving — a judgment on this house...²⁸

At the beginning of Act III of *Ghosts*, we learn that the Orphanage has been burned to the ground and all of the characters on stage are agitated. But Oswald is the most disturbed.

OSWALD. Everything will be burnt. Father's memory will be wiped out. I shall soon be burnt up too.

REGINA (looks at him in amazement.)

MRS. ALVING. Oswald!... Your poor boy! You stayed down there too long. [At the fire.]

OSWALD. You're probably right.

MRS. ALVING. Your face is all wet, Oswald, let me dry it for you.

(Wipes his face with her handkerchief...)

You'd better get some sleep.

OSWALD. No! God, no! I don't want to sleep! I never sleep — I only pretend to... I'll sleep soon enough!...

REGINA. Is Mr. Alving ill?

OSWALD. ... Close the doors!... I want all the doors closed!... I'm afraid!...²⁹

²⁸) Ibsen, pp. 567-568.

²⁹) *Ibid.*, p. 572.

In *Tiny Alice* it is the chapel of the castle-like house which burns. But this fire is presented on stage in a most unusual way — inside the scale model of the big house, which sits in the library. Albee has described this setting as follows:

(The library of a mansion — a castle. Pillared walls, floor-to-ceiling leather-bound books... A huge reading table to stage left — practical. A phrenological head on it. To stage right, jutting out of the wings, a huge doll's house model of the building of which the present room is a part. It is as tall as a man, and a good deal of it must be visible from all parts of the audience. An alternative — and perhaps more practical — would be for the arched doorway to be either left or right, with bookshelves to both sides of the set, coming toward the center, and to have the entire doll's house in the rear wall, in which case it could be smaller — say, twelve feet long and proportionately high. At any rate, it is essential...) ³⁰

As we read this description we are caught up at once by an Ibsenism here — and not from *Ghosts*. “A huge *doll's-house* model of the building of which the present room is a part.” And then again: “to have the entire *doll's house* in the rear wall.”

Scale models of buildings are by no means unusual. They abound in architects' offices and in museums. But we *call* them scale models, or replicas, or facsimiles. We don't call them *doll's houses*. We only use the term *doll's houses* in connection with those houses little girls play dolls with.

And where might Albee have gotten this unusual term for the scale model he uses twice in one paragraph? Why not Ibsen's *A Doll's House*?

When we come to examine the actual fire scene in *Tiny Alice*, we learn that, as in *Ghosts*, it is the young man who is in love with the young girl in the play who first notices the fire — Julian. And like Oswald, who comes back from the fire in *Ghosts* shivering, his face

³⁰) Albee, p. 23.

dripping sweat, and talking about being frightened, Julian responds to the fire in his play with the same reactions. Let us now examine the Albee scene:

JULIAN

PLEASE!

BUTLER

What is it, for heaven's sake?

JULIAN (Pointing to the model)

The model is ... on fire; it's on fire!

BUTLER

Where!

LAWYER

Good Christ!

MISS ALICE

Quick!

(The LAWYER and BUTLER rush to the model) ...

BUTLER

((Peering into various windows with great agitation)

It's ... it's the ... where the hell is it!...

It's the chapel! The chapel's burning!

MISS ALICE

Hurry!

BUTLER

Come on! Let's get to it! (Begins to run out of the room) Are you coming? Julian!

JULIAN

But I ... but ... yes, of course.

(JULIAN and BUTLER run out)

MISS ALICE

(To the LAWYER as he hangs back)

We're burning down! Hurry!..³¹

Then later when Julian comes back :

³¹) *Ibid.*, pp. 89-91.

JULIAN

I don't understand anything. The chapel was in flames.

MISS ALICE

Yes.

JULIAN

... and yet... I saw the fire here in the model... and yet... the real chapel was in flames. We put it out. And now the fire here is out as well.

MISS ALICE

(Preceded by a brief, hysterical laugh)

... yes.

JULIAN

(Underneath the wonder, some fear)

I don't understand.

MISS ALICE

(She is shivering a little)

It's very hard. Is the chapel saved?

JULIAN

(His attention on the model)

... Oh, yes... partially, mostly. The... the boards, floorboards, around the altar were...gave way, were burned through. The altar...sank, some, angled down into the burned-through floor. Marble.

MISS ALICE (Almost a whisper)

But the fire is out... You're shivering, Julian.

JULIAN

No, Miss Alice, it is **you**... you are shivering...

MISS ALICE

Are you frightened, Julian?

JULIAN

Why, no, I...I am shivering, am I not?

MISS ALICE

Yes.

JULIAN

But I am not... yes, I suppose I am... frightened.³²

Can the two fires and the similar reactions of the leading men to those fires be pure coincidence? It seems unlikely.

One other parallel between *Ghosts* and *Tiny Alice* should be noted. The first scene of *Tiny Alice* takes place in the Cardinal's garden described by Albee in this fashion :

(The CARDINAL'S garden. What is needed...? Ivy climbing a partial wall of huge stones? An iron gate? Certainly two chairs — one, the larger, obviously for His Eminence; the other, smaller...³³

Similarly the only setting for the whole of *Ghosts* is described as :

: A spacious garden-room, with one door to the left, and two doors to the right. In the middle of the room a round table, with chairs about it. On the table lie books, periodicals, and newspapers. In the right-hand wall of the conservatory is a door leading down into the garden...³⁴

One setting for *Ghosts* — a spacious garden-room in a mansion. Three settings in *Tiny Alice* — the Cardinal's garden, the library, and briefly, Miss Alice's "upstairs sitting room of the castle." The first two could have been Ibsen's "spacious garden-room in a mansion" split in two, and the third simply another room in the mansion itself.

We could go on with more Ibsenisms in *Tiny Alice*. We could point out that if the "doll's house model" seems to have been suggested by *A Doll's House*, Butler's extensive business of covering the library furniture with, as Albee says, "what looks to be a pile of gray sheets," preparatory to everyone's leaving the house (except for Julian in the last scene of the play) is interesting. It could have been suggested by a scene in *Hedda Gabler* where Berta, the maid, divests the furniture of chintz covers in preparation for the homecoming of George Tesman and Hedda. Also Julian's being shot by a gun in the last act of *Tiny Alice*

³²) *Ibid.*, pp. 93-96, *passim*.

³³) *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁴) Ibsen, p. 523.

sounds like an echo of the pistol shot of Hedda taking her life in the last act of her play.

But why go on? Five characters in a three-act play called *Tiny Alice* show in character, actions and plot so many parallels to the five characters in a three-act play called *Ghosts* that the resemblances are striking.

To be sure, the themes of the two plays are not exactly the same. In *Ghosts* the theme seems to be that a marriage is bad if the sins of the father are visited upon the son and should have been terminated before there was a son for this to happen to. In *Tiny Alice* there is so much controversy over what the theme is, the issue is clouded. But the theme may be said to concern the combined worship of God and Eros and the hallucinatory aspects of both.

But certainly the parallels between the two plays far outweigh the differences. Both leading men are unusually sensitive in a spiritual sort of way; both are deserted by the ones they love; and both suffer tragic deaths through no fault of their own. Above all, both are haunted not only by the ghosts of their past, but also by the tragedies of their present.

Some of the parallels between Ibsen and Albee we have pointed out in this discussion could, of course, have been accidental. But the coincidences multiply to such a great extent, that one cannot escape the opposite conclusion. Ibsen and his *Ghosts* must have influenced Albee in writing *Tiny Alice*.³⁵

³⁵) It is tempting to study the parallels between Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* (which follows *Ghosts* in the Eric Bentley text) and *Tiny Alice*. For example :

1. **Ghost Sonata** : an old woman shrivelled into a mummy, thinks she's a parrot talking to birds.
2. **Tiny Alice** : the Cardinal talks to his birds.
1. **Ghost Sonata** : a Young Student, the main character, loses his beloved and has religious visions blent with love in a lengthy scene at the end.
2. **Tiny Alice** : Julian has religious visions blent with love in a lengthy scene at the end.

But we are not going to discuss similarities here. We plan to point all this out in another article.

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