

# [Ibsens ghosts vs. aristotles poetics](https://assignbuster.com/ibsens-ghosts-vs-aristotles-poetics/)

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Ibsen's Ghosts, although a relatively modern drama, maintains many classical   
elements of tragedy as defined by Aristotle and championed by the ancient Greek   
playwrights and poets. One element of displayed prominently in this case is   
character. Aristotle believed that there were four main elements to a good tragic hero:   
1) the character must be good, 2) decorum, 3) the character must be true to life, and   
4) constancy within the characters demeanor and actions. The tragic hero in Ibsen's   
Ghosts, Mrs. Alving, fits into these criterion, yet Ibsen also strays from Aristotle's   
conventions.   
" The character will be good if the purpose is good." (pg. 27), according to   
Poetics. Ibsen attempts to create a good character in Mrs. Alving. Although she   
makes many mistakes and her judgments lead to the ultimate tragedy her intentions   
are good. " Yes, I was swayed by duty and consideration for others; that was why I   
lied to my son day in and day out." (Ghosts; pg. 29) She loves and wants to protect   
her son and to do so she feels she must shelter him from the truths of his father. " I   
want my boy to be happy, that is all I want. Mrs. Alving's goal is to purge herself and   
her loved one's from the past and the guilt which she feels for hiding the sins of her   
husband and therefore her family name. " I had been taught about duty, and the sort of   
thing that I believed in so long here. Everything seemed to turn upon duty-- my duty,   
or his duty-- and I am afraid I made your poor father's home unbearable for him   
Oswald." (ghosts pd. 53)   
Ibsen takes on a very modernistic' attitude in his creation of Mrs. Alving. The   
fact that she is female, intelligent and not at all portrayed as inferior to men, makes   
her character and role as a tragic hero unique and impressive. She is insightful and   
open to questioning the conventional thinking; " by praising as right and just what my   
whole soul revolted against, as it would against something abominable. That was   
what led me examine your teachings critically. I only wanted to unravel one point in   
them; but as soon as I had got unraveled, the whole fabric came to pieces. And then I   
realized that it was only machine-made." (Ghosts; pg. 31) He not only allows a   
woman to be the heroin, but he exposes emotions and situations which were not   
nessesarily acceptable at his time. Aristotle felt that " even a woman may be   
good,.... though a woman may be said to be an inferior being." Here it is seen that   
although Aristotle acknowledges that a dramatist could use a female as a tragic hero,   
he advises against it. He certainly would not have approved of the strong and   
complex character Ibsen invented in Mrs. Alving. Ibsen's apparent separation from   
the traditional idea of tradgedy seems to highlight the already controversial themes.

Aristotle believed that the second element to a satisfactory character is propriety. He   
defines propriety as " a type of manly valor; but valor in a woman, or unscrupulous   
cleverness, is inappropriate." Although somewhat unconventional, Ibsen gives Mrs.

Alving admirable behavior and being. " I had always before me the fear that it was   
impossible that the truth should not come out and be believed. That is why the   
Orphanage is to exist, to silence all the rumors and clear away all doubt... " I had   
another very good reason. I did not wish Oswald, my own son, to inherit a penny that   
belonged to his father." (Ghosts; Pg. 24) This meaning that Mrs. Alving was a   
courteous respectable part of her society, and despite her problems, she remained   
composed and her motives once again, were appropriate in her time and society.   
Mrs. Alving is a character created by Ibsen, but he created her in a way that made the   
audience believe that she was real. Her personality was true to traits of humanity and   
her emotions touched those of the audience. Mrs. Alving is a riske'"   
character as part of Ghosts, which was riske' in its examination of society.   
The final element that Aristotle outlined as a necessity to a good character is   
consistency within the personality of the character. Mrs. Alving's actions and feelings   
are " by rule either of necessity or probability." (Poetics; pg. 28) Poetics outlines the   
elements which Aristotle felt were necessary to a tragic drama; these included plot,   
character, time, and feeling, namely inspiration of pity and/or fear in the observers.