The Ghost Sonata Study Guide

The Ghost Sonata by August Strindberg

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

The Ghost Sonata Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....4

Author Biography....5

Plot Summary....7

Scene 1....12

Scene 2....16

Scene 3....18

Characters....20

Themes....25

Style....28

Historical Context....30

Critical Overview....32

Criticism....34

Critical Essay #1....35

Critical Essay #2....40

Critical Essay #3....59

Critical Essay #4....60

Critical Essay #5....67

Adaptations....72

Topics for Further Study....73

Compare and Contrast....74

What Do I Read Next?....76

Further Study....77

Bibliography....78

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information...79

Introduction

The Ghost Sonata is one of August Strindberg's "Chamber Plays," a series of short, simple dramas he wrote for his 161-seat Intimate Theatre, which opened its doors in Stockholm, Sweden in 1907. The plays were inspired by the chamber music of composers like Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven. Strindberg created *The Ghost Sonata* with Beethoven's *Geistertrio,* Opus 70, No. 1, in D Major in mind, and the play echoes the style of the music. It creates an atmosphere by repeating various themes, rather than developing a story through conventional portrayals of character and a linear plot. The themes of *The Ghost Sonata* mainly relate to secrets, illusions, and the disappointments and tragedies of life, and it is the revelation of these terrible details of the characters' past lives that form the action of the play.

The Ghost Sonata does not take place in the real world; or at least not in a world most people would recognize as reality. Strindberg originally subtitled his play "Kama-Loka," the name of a mystical dream world through which some mortals have to wander before reaching the kingdom of death in the afterlife. Accordingly, the characters in *The Ghost Sonata* speak, move and act as if they are part of a dream or a nightmare. One sees glimpses of the future, another embodies tragedies from the past. There are literal ghosts and vampires in the play, as well as a mysterious woman known as the Mummy.

The world Strindberg created in *The Ghost Sonata* was one he found in his own tortured imagination. On stage, his vision of an alternate reality was a forerunner to later twentieth century experiments in non-realistic dramatic literature, such as Expressionism, popular in Germany in the 1920s, and the Absurdist movement of the 1950s, made popular by writers like Samuel Beckett, Eugene lonesco, and Jean Genet. When the play was originally staged at the Intimate Theatre in 1908, its strange, avant-garde style and grim view of the world made it unpopular with critics. It wasn't until the famous director Max Reinhardt staged the play in Berlin in 1916, then toured it to Strindberg's native Sweden in 1917, that it won acclaim from audiences and reviewers. Reinhardt's production toured central Europe through the 1920s, and the play was produced by Eugene O'Neill's Province-town Players in New York in 1924 and at the Globe and Strand Theatres in London in 1926. In 1930 it was turned into an opera with music by Julius Weissmann and performed in Munich, and the British Broadcasting Corporation aired a television production of *The Ghost Sonata* in 1962. Reviewer Maurice Richardson noted that, even though the television production was probably seen by fewer than a million people, "it was probably a larger audience than the total number of people who had ever seen it before."

Author Biography

August Strindberg is now considered to be one of Sweden's finest dramatists and among the most important contributors to the modern theatre. His life and career at the turn of the twentieth century, however, was a twisting path of minor successes and major public humiliations, of deep psychological and spiritual turmoil, and of a love-hate relationship with women that scarred his mind and inspired him to some of his best writing. Strindberg was an author whose life was an open book. Everything he experienced and felt, from unhappy memories of his childhood to marital strife and battles with madness and despair found its way into his many novels, short stories, poems, essays and plays.

Strindberg was born in Stockholm on January 22, 1849. He was the son of a steamship agent whose family was once part of Sweden's wealthy aristocracy. His mother had been a waitress. His parents had three children all sons before they were married. They wed just before August was born, and had several more children, eight of whom survived. By his own admission, Strindberg felt the world was unjust toward him, that his birth into this once noble, now impoverished family was a mistake. In his autobiography *The Son of a Servant* (1886), he blames his father for marrying beneath him, reflects on the family's bankruptcy, his mother' s tuberculosis and death, and the sexual conflicts he felt when his father later married the family's housekeeper. These conflicts an attraction toward motherly figures that might provide him with the affection he craved, and a repulsion from strong, domineering, sexual women appear repeatedly in his later plays.

Although Strindberg studied at the Swedish University of Upsala on and off for several years, he constantly experienced financial troubles and was unable to complete a degree. Still, he managed to build a wide-ranging resume. As a young man in Stockholm he worked as a teacher, a journalist, and a librarian. He briefly studied chemistry in the hope of attending medical school, but upon failing his entrance examinations he decided to become an actor. After struggling in a minor part, someone advised Strindberg that he should train at the Dramatic Academy to improve his skills. Offended at the suggestion and frustrated by his lack of respect and success, Strindberg attempted suicide by swallowing an opium pill. Instead of dying, though, he awoke from the effects of the drug with vivid memories of his childhood, which he turned into his first three plays in 1869, The Freethinker, *A Nameday Gift,* and *Hermione.*

With this early work, Strindberg earned a little recognition as an artist, but no money to support himself. For a few years he worked at various jobs while continuing to write poetry and plays, then landed a position as an assistant librarian at the Royal Library of Stockholm. He spent eight years at the library, from 1874-1882, reading and writing constantly. During this time he met his first wife, Siri von Essen. She was married to Baron Wrangel, an older man, and already had a young daughter. Strindberg frequently visited the couple, and had begun to view them as parental figures, all the while falling in love with Siri. For her part, Siri was enchanted by romantic notions of the theatre and wanted to leave her dull family life and become an actress. She divorced the Baron and married Strindberg in 1877, a scandalous move that was widely publicized.

Strindberg's marriage to Siri lasted 15 years, during which time he produced a popular autobiographical novel, *The Red Room* (1879), and several historical works that drew sharp criticism for their attacks on Sweden's establishment, causing the author to leave his country and spend the next six years in self-imposed exile, living in France, Switzerland, Germany, and Denmark. In 1884 he published *Getting Married,* a collection of scandalous short stories that drew charges of blasphemy back in Sweden. Strindberg faced a trial and was acquitted, but remained bitter about his treatment at the hands of his fellow countrymen.

While his relationship with Siri was deteriorating, and his bouts with mental illness growing more severe, Strindberg produced some of his best-known plays. *The Father was staged* in Denmark and Sweden in 1887, followed by *Miss Julie* in 1888. Strindberg divorced Siri in 1892 and married Austrian journalist Frida Uhl in the following year. He was forty-four and she was twenty-one. She left him within three months and, though she returned and they had one child together, their relationship ended permanently in 1895.

For the next few years Strindberg lived in Paris, traveled in artistic circles, and dabbled in science, the occult, and alchemy. He actually tried to discover a chemical secret for producing gold and, in the process, injured himself severely and spent several months in the hospital. In 1900 Strindberg met and married the Norwegian actress, Harriet Bosse, who was 29 years younger than him. During the year they were together, he wrote *The Dance of Death* (1900) and *A Dream Play* (1901). For the next few years Strindberg wrote nothing and many of his plays were ignored by Swedish theatres. Abroad, however, his work was being discovered by well-known authors like Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, and George Bernard Shaw.

In 1907 Strindberg founded his own Intimate Theatre in Stockholm. He wrote his four "chamber plays" for the small, 161-seat performance venue, including *The Ghost Sonata* (1907). None met with particular success, and for the last three years of his life Strindberg wrote only short articles about religion and politics. He died of stomach cancer on May 14, 1912, at the age of 63.

Plot Summary

Scene One

The Ghost Sonata begins the morning after a terrible disaster. A house collapsed in Stockholm, Sweden, where the action of the play is set, and a poor student, named Arkenholz, witnessed the tragedy and spent all night tending to the wounded and dying. He appears the next morning, filthy and rumpled, at a public drinking fountain outside of an expensive city apartment house.

The Student meets a milkmaid at the fountain and tells her about his experience of the night before. The Milkmaid, it turns out, is actually an apparition, seen only by the Student. She is the first of several "ghosts" in the play. Still, she listens to him and even hands him a cup of water and helps him rinse his face with a cloth. Not far away, Jacob Hummel, an old man in a wheelchair, watches the scene and listens to the Student speak, apparently, to thin air. The Old Man has been reading about the accident, and the Student's heroics, in the newspaper, and recognizes the boy as the son of a man he once knew.

The Old Man approaches the Student and asks him questions about his life and family. The Student confesses that his father was, indeed, the merchant the Old Man remembers, though they each have a different story about the relationship the two men shared. The Student recalls his father as bankrupt and ruined, and remembers him blaming his misfortune on the Old Man. For his part, the Old Man insists it was the merchant himself who squandered his fortunes, then robbed him of his life savings. Confused about what to believe, the Student agrees to help the Old Man with "a few small services." In exchange, the Old Man will help the Student take advantage of his heroic actions and become well-known, wealthy, and happy.

The first task the Old Man assigns the Student is to attend an opera performance of "The Valkyrie" in order to meet the Colonel and the Girl, who is allegedly the Colonel's daughter. The Colonel and his daughter live in the beautiful house near the fountain the very building the Student has been passing by each day and jealously admiring. He has had dreams of living in such a home, with a wife, two children, and a generous income. The Old Man, amused by the Student's fantasies, tells him a little about the house and describes each of its inhabitants one by one as they appear.

There is a statue of a beautiful woman, seen through a window, that represents the Mummy who lives inside. Once a lovely, radiant young lady, the Mummy is now, according to the Old Man, a half-crazed recluse who lives in a closet and worships her own statue. Seated at the window of another room is the Fiancee, a white-haired old woman who was once engaged to the Old Man. Outside on the steps are the Lady in Black and the Caretaker's Wife. The Lady in Black is the daughter of the Caretaker's Wife and the Dead Man, a former government official whose ghost now haunts the house.

Because the Student is a "Sunday child," the Old Man explains, he is able to see things others cannot. This supernatural ability allowed him to see into the future the night before, and save the inhabitants of the house that collapsed. With his second sight, he also saw the apparition of the Milkmaid at the fountain, and is now able to see the ghost of the Dead Man walk out of the house and around the corner to see how many people have come to pay their respects. The Dead Man, the Old Man explains, was a "charitable scoundrel" who gave generously to the poor in order to increase his own stature. Now the poor are lined up around the house, mourning his passing.

The house the Student so desperately wants to enter is filled with this odd collection of characters and one other figure who attracts his attention more than anyone else: the Girl. The Old Man and the Student watch as she returns from a morning of horseback riding and enters the house. The Student is struck to the soul by her beauty, and more determined than ever to do whatever the Old Man wants in order to meet her and enter her house.

The Old Man's servant, Johansson, returns from an errand in time to wheel his master around the corner of the house to watch the beggars mourn the Dead Man. While the Old Man is entertaining himself in this macabre way, Johansson returns for a brief conversation with the Student, who tries to learn more about his new benefactor. Johansson compares the Old Man to the god Thor, riding in his wheelchair chariot, and says he has the power to build and destroy both homes and lives. It is no mere coincidence that the Old Man encountered the Student and has convinced him to do his bidding. The Student suspects the Old Man has some kind of sinister plan for the inhabitants of the mysterious beautiful house, and he is ready to walk away and leave it all behind him when the Girl suddenly drops a bracelet out of her window, once again drawing the Student's rapt attention.

His mind once again occupied with thoughts of the Girl, the Student decides to stay and do whatever the Old Man asks. As if on cue, the Old Man returns, standing up in his wheelchair, which is being pulled along by a group of beggars. He shouts to the residents of the nearby homes to clap their hands, cheer and celebrate the deeds of the Student, who risked his life to save the lives of others in the accident of the day before. The Old Man boasts that, like a Sunday child, he too has the gifts of prophecy and healing. Once, he claims, he brought a drowned person back to life.

Suddenly, the Milkmaid reappears. She is making motions like a drowning person and only the Student and the Old Man can see her. Mysteriously, the Old Man is horrified at her appearance. He collapses and shouts at Johansson to quickly take him away.

Scene Two

That evening, inside the house, Bengtsson and the other servants are setting up for the inhabitants' traditional "ghost supper." Johansson has joined them as a waiter. Bengtsson explains to Johansson that they all call the event the "ghost supper" because everyone who attends looks like a ghost. They have been meeting for tea and biscuits

in the same room, with the same people, sitting in silence or saying the same things for twenty years. No one ever says anything new, Bengtsson explains, for fear that their secrets will be discovered.

While revealing some of the mysteries of the house, Bengtsson introduces Johansson to the Colonel's wife, who they call the "Mummy." Once a beautiful young lady called Amelia, the Mummy has gone crazy and retreated to a closet, where she lives in the dark, hiding from the world. She cannot stand "cripples or sick people," including her own daughter, and cackles like a parrot when she speaks.

Johansson quickly realizes that this mansion, the "paradise" that the Student so desperately wanted to enter, is really a house of horrors, filled with dreadful secrets and frightening people. It is too late, though: the Colonel and the Girl met the Student at the opera, just as the Old Man planned, and they invited him home for dinner.

The Old Man (out of his wheelchair and hobbling along on crutches) arrives uninvited and demands to be let in to see the Colonel. Bengtsson runs off to fetch his master, and the Old Man sends Johansson away, leaving himself alone in the room with the statue of Amelia as a young lady. As he stands admiring the shapely marble form, he is startled to hear the parrot-like voice of the Mummy, the older Amelia, calling him from the closet.

Amelia emerges from her hiding place and explains, in a normal voice, that she lives there to avoid life, to avoid "seeing and being seen." Jacob, the Old Man, tells her he has come to see the Girl, Adele, who is actually their child from an affair they had years ago, and to take revenge on the Colonel who once stole his fiancee from him. Amelia warns Jacob that if he harms the Colonel, now the Girl's father, he will die in that very room, behind a black Japanese death screen that is standing near a couch.

The Old Man does not fear his own death, however, and explains that he must complete his revenge. He has in mind that he will help the Student become rich, and that the Student will marry the Girl, and all he needs to carry out his plan is an invitation to the ghost supper being held that evening.

The Mummy leaves to join her daughter, the Girl, in the "Hyacinth Room" next door as the Colonel arrives to speak with the Old Man. It is the moment the Old Man has been waiting for. He explains to the Colonel that he has gone around and bought up all of his promissory notes the debts the Colonel has accumulated in order to keep up his wealthy standard of living. Now, everything the Colonel owns belongs to the Old Man, and he plans to take control of the Colonel's house.

Taking away his belongings, however, is only the beginning. One at a time, the Old Man strips the Colonel of everything he holds dear. He tells him his noble family name has actually been extinct for a century that he is no longer a nobleman and shows him a document of proof. He reveals that he is not actually a Colonel, since the American Volunteer Force in which he once served was disbanded and all its titles abolished. The Old Man even points out that the one-time Colonel wears a wig and false teeth and was actually once a kitchen lackey.

The Old Man's revenge, however, is not complete. He orders the Colonel to allow the ghost dinner to go on as planned so he can tear apart the entire household. One-by-one the guests arrive the Student; Miss Beatrice von Holsteinkrona, the Old Man's former fiancee from upstairs; Baron Skanskorg, whom the Old Man recognizes as a jewel thief; and Amelia, the Mummy. When they are all seated in a circle, the Old Man reveals his plan: The Girl, his daughter, has been suffering from a mysterious illness, he explains. The sickness has actually been caused by the crimes in the air of the house, and once the crimes are exposed, and the criminals driven away, the Student and the Girl may marry and start a new life together in the house that he will give them. He tells them all their time will be up when the clock strikes.

Suddenly, the Mummy reaches up and stops the clock before it can chime. She has, symbolically, stopped time itself. Now it is she who takes control. She tells the Old Man that, in spite of their crimes, everyone in the house is good at heart, and better than him, because they regret their sins and have been long-suffering because of them. Jacob, on the other hand, denies his own crimes and pretends to be virtuous. Once, she says, he stole her heart with false promises, and they had a child together that he abandoned. Furthermore, she explains, he murdered the Consul, the Dead Man who was buried that day, by piling him with debt, and he lied to the Student about his father's debts in order to get him to do his bidding.

Bengtsson remembers the Old Man, too. Years ago the Jacob lived in Bengtsson's house like a vampire. He ate all of the nourishing food and left Bengtsson's family with watery broth, so that they nearly died of starvation. Later, he encountered the Old Man in Hamburg, where he had become a money-lender and was charged with the murder of a young girl, the Milkmaid. The Milkmaid had seen him commit a crime, and to prevent her from reporting it he had lured her out on thin ice, and she fell into the water and drowned.

Crushed by the weight of his crimes brought to light, the Old Man gives up. He hands over the Colonel's promissory notes. The Mummy now strokes Jacob like a parrot, and he cackles as she once did. She directs him to crawl into the closet where she has spent the last twenty years repenting her sins, and hang himself by the rope he has so often used to strangle the life out of others. The Old Man does as he is told, Bengtsson drags the death screen in front of the closet door, and the group of "ghosts" pray as the Old Man dies.

Scene Three

The final scene of the play takes place a few days after the funeral of the Old Man. The Student and the Girl are again in the Hyacinth Room, where the Girl spends all of her time when she is not outdoors. There are hyacinths of every size and color in pots and vases all around the room. Still, though the room looks beautiful and perfect, it is called the "room of ordeals" because it is really full of defects. It is cold and drafty, and she cannot light a fire because the chimney smokes. There is a fine writing desk that wobbles, and a pen-holder that is constantly covered in ink.

The Girl explains all of this to the Student, who is amazed by the imperfections of the house he once thought was paradise. Worse yet, she explains, are the servants who tend to the family. The Cook is from "the Hummel family of vampires." Like the Old Man when he lived with Bengtsson, the Cook boils all of the nourishment out of the family's food before serving it to them. She drinks the soup stock herself and feeds the family watery broth. She drinks the coffee and leaves the family only grounds, and drinks the wine and fills the bottles with water. She refuses to leave, and is nearly starving the family to death.

The family also keeps a housemaid who dirties the house more than she cleans it. Every day, the Girl must tend to the stove, wash the dishes, remake the beds, wipe the chimneys and tend to the candle wicks, because the maid does such poor work. According to the Girl, the broken house and vampire servants, who sap the family's strength and will to live, are the penalties they all pay for the sins they have committed.

The Student makes a desperate attempt to save the Girl from her poisonous environment. He asks her to become his wife, and tries to convince her that, together, they may yet find beauty and truth in the world. It is too late, though. The Student realizes that madness and suffering often lie behind beauty and the promise of life. As he laments what an awful, evil place the world is, the Girl collapses and begins to die.

Bengtsson brings the death screen from the other room and arranges it in front of the Girl while the Student welcomes the arrival of Death, who he calls the "Liberator," and hopes the Girl finds peace in an afterlife that is not flawed like the mortal world of "illusion, guilt, suffering and death." The lights fade, the room disappears, and an image of Arnold Bocklin' s painting "The Island of the Dead" appears, symbolically, in the distance.

Scene 1

Scene 1 Summary

The detailed description of the set that begins this scene establishes that the scene takes place in a wealthy neighborhood. The house is a new, two-story one. Many nice amenities are present in this home, including marble stairs with mahogany and brass railings leading to the front door. A marble statue is visible through the open windows. White sheets covering a few upstairs windows indicate that there has been a recent death in the house. The bells of several churches can be heard ringing in the distance.

A young woman wearing black stands in the open doorway of the house, and an older woman cleans the stairs, railings and sidewalks in front of the house. An old man sits in a wheelchair next to a kiosk, reading a newspaper. A milkmaid carrying a basket of milk bottles comes from around the corner and stops at the fountain for a drink, to wash her hands and straighten her hair. A student who looks as if he has not slept in days enters and approaches the fountain.

The student asks the milkmaid for a drink of water. He also explains that he has been helping take care of people at an accident scene in which a house has collapsed. She gives him a drink of water and helps him clean out his eyes that are inflamed from the smoke and dust at the accident scene.

The old man interrupts the student to ask him whom he was talking to, as there is no one at the fountain. Further, he asks the boy his name because he recognizes his speech pattern. They introduce themselves to each other and discover that the old man, named Hummel, was responsible for the boy's family's bankruptcy years before. Of course, the old man says, the boy's father stole money from him.

Hummel then asks the boy to do him a favor and push his chair around the kiosk so he can see what plays are at the theaters that night. He finds a play that he is interested in and sends the boy to see about tickets, in order for the boy to meet the colonel and the colonel's daughter. The boy calls and purchases the ticket as he is instructed by Hummel to do.

The old man then directs the boy's attention to the house behind them. He tells the boy about the house's occupants. First, there's the colonel who has a marble statue of his wife in his bedroom. Next, Hummel tells about the dead man upstairs who was a consul. Hummel says that if the boy were a "Sunday child," he would see the consul walking around looking at his own funeral arrangements. The boy says he was born on a Sunday, and does in fact see things that other people do not see, such as the milkmaid whom the old man did not see. Next, a white-haired woman sits down in front of a window. Hummel claims that she was his fiancée sixty years earlier.

The superintendent's wife comes out of the house carrying spruce greens to spread on the sidewalk, which is a Swedish funeral custom. Hummel explains the complicated and confusing family relationships of the members of this household. The woman in black is the daughter of the superintendent's wife and the consul. She has a lover who is currently married to her half-sister, the consul's other daughter.

Hummel asks the boy to push his chair into the sunlight and complains about how cold he is. The boy takes his icy hand and the old man refuses to let go. The boy pulls his hand away after accusing the old man of draining all of his strength and freezing him to death.

The colonel's daughter crosses the stage, without noticing the men, and enters the house. She looks just like the marble statue upstairs, which Hummel says is a statue of her mother. The boy is instantly in love with her and grieving that he can never have her, when Hummel tells him that she is who he will be sitting by at the play and that he will be in her drawing room that evening afterwards.

The colonel's daughter re-appears at the hyacinth window to water the flowers. Then the colonel appears behind her to show her the paper with the article about the student's heroic deeds from the night before at the accident site.

Soon, the old woman closes the window that she has been sitting in front of, and the dead consul appears at the front door, wrapped in a burial sheet. The student can see him though the old man cannot. The dead man comes outside to inspect all of the traditional funeral customs in his honor.

The old man's servant, Johansson, returns. The servant reports to the old man that there will be an extra edition of the paper with a full report of the collapsed building and all of the information about the student who is now a hero. The old man and Johansson leave as Baron Skanskorg approaches the house to speak to the lady in black. Johannson returns without the old man to speak to the student. The student asks what kind of man Hummel is and the servant gives him very vague answers. He does say that the man knows everyone and everything, uses people, and destroys lives. The student also guesses that the one thing the old man is afraid of is the ghost of the milkmaid that he had seen earlier. While they are talking, the colonel's daughter drops her bracelet outside the window. The student returns it to her.

The old man returns standing in his wheelchair that is being pushed by beggars. He sends up a cheer for the student for being a hero, drawing the attention of everyone in the house. He claims to be able to heal the sick and see the future, though he cannot see the dead, and claims to have brought a drowned person back to life. The milkmaid re-appears, though she can be seen only by the student and the old man who shrivels in fear. Johansson and Hummel hurry offstage.

Scene 1 Analysis

The Ghost Sonata is the third in a series of four chamber plays written by August Strindberg around the turn of the twentieth century. They were called chamber plays because they followed a similar pattern to that found in chamber music that was popular at the time this play was written. *The Ghost Sonata* follows the structure of a musical sonata, which has three movements and relies, as all music does, on the development of theme and mood instead of plot and character. The first scene of the play is the equivalent of a brisk allegro, generally happy and upbeat.

In sharp contrast to the mood established in the first act are the main images of the play that contribute to the overall theme: death as a settling of accounts. The play is clearly written from the perspective of a character who is physically dying and who has already died a series of psychological deaths in his lifetime.

Death permeates the opening scene. There are sheets in the windows of the house, signaling an immediate physical death. The first character to enter from offstage is a ghost milkmaid. The old man, although he is sickly and approaching death himself, is unable to see her.

There is one character present who seems able to avoid death in any form: the student. The student is not only highly educated, but also he is considered to be a hero for rescuing people from a collapsing building, defying death for the first time in this play. Next, we find out that he was born on a Sunday and has the gift of second sight, or the ability to see things that others cannot see, such as the consul's ghost and the milkmaid's ghost. He can even communicate with the milkmaid, and she ultimately helps him get a drink of water and cleans his eyes. He not only avoids death, but he asks favors of it as well. Next, the old man grips the student's hand and will not let go, sucking the strength and life from him. This is one of the audience's first indications that the old man might not be just old, but perhaps sick as well. The student has the strength and the presence of mind to pull away before the old man succeeds in draining all of his strength from him.

The last person surrounded by the images of death is the colonel's daughter who enters towards the end of the scene. When she approaches the house, she is wearing riding gear that would suggest that she has been engaged in vigorous activity that day. She enters the house and changes clothes, and from this point in the play, she becomes smaller and weaker. Her room of choice is an office filled with hyacinths, fragrant beautiful flowers that seem to represent the cosmos, but ultimately require great care to survive. The young girl dangles her arm out of the window only to lose her bracelet. She is so fragile that she cannot even keep a bracelet on. The student has all but given up on her when he is given the opportunity to save her by retrieving the bracelet.

There are two minor themes in this play. The first one is that the world is a fraud, full of lies and deceit. The second is that to live is to be guilty. The old man and the student have different versions of a story regarding what happened to the previous wealth of the boy's family. He, of course, has been told that the old man is the cause of the family's

bankruptcy. The old man claims that the boy's father robbed him. The old man goes on to tell the boy of lies and deceits that have taken place in the beautiful house in front of them. He claims that he is the father of the colonel's daughter, that the consul stole his fiancée, and that the colonel's wife had left him for a time but has now returned and locked herself up as a mummy. All of these can be assumed to be rumors, or chalked up to human nature. Strindberg seems to be assessing them as the result of human nature.

Scene 2

Scene 2 Summary

The colonel's valet, Bengtsson, and Johansson, are in the round drawing room of the large house. Johansson is dressed as a waiter. The two men are talking about their masters. Johansson asks about the lady of the house. Bengtsson tells him that she is crazy and that she doesn't attend the dinners because her eyes are too sensitive to the light. He shows Johansson the lady of the house, who is sitting in a closet wrapped up like a mummy and talking like a parrot. The beautiful marble statue is the mummy when she was young.

The old man, Hummel, enters the room uninvited and tells Bengtsson to announce his arrival to the colonel. He also sends Johansson away, and inspects the statue. The mummy comes out of the closet and identifies herself to Hummel. He asks about their daughter, the daughter whom the colonel believes is his. She says that she told the colonel the truth once when they had an argument, but he didn't believe her. The old man vows to get revenge on the colonel for stealing his fiancée many years ago. They discuss the guest list for that night's dinner party, and then she exits to her daughter's room.

The colonel enters the room. Hummel informs the colonel that he has bought all of the colonel's promissory notes from the original creditors, so he is, technically, the owner of all of the colonel's belongings. Further, he produces proof that the colonel is not a nobleman as he claimed to be, and proof that he is not truly a colonel. As the discussion becomes heated, the guests begin arriving. The student enters the room, greets the colonel and Hummel and is shown into the hyacinth room where the ladies are already gathered. The old man's former fiancée' enters, as well as Baron Skanskor. The mummy is called back into the drawing room with the rest of the older generation.

The old man, Hummel, begins the conversation. He talks about the ways different languages developed for the purpose of keeping secrets. He talks about the crimes of deceit and trickery that have taken place in the house and how they are affecting his daughter who lives there. He says they are taking away her will to live, and she does not understand why. He says his visit that evening was to right the wrongs, settle old scores, and to bring into her life someone who has the warmth and light of a heroic deed such as the student's.

The mummy stops the old man, saying that although they have all made mistakes, they have repented, making them better people. She says that Hummel is more contemptible than the rest of them because he has come to pass judgment on them and to seek revenge. She calls the servant, Bengtsson, certain that he knows of Hummel's previous crimes before he came to their city.

Bengtsson tells them about the old man stealing from his kitchen, leaving scraps for the family in the house. He tells of Hummel later committing usury and killing a young girl (the milkmaid) because she was the only witness. While Bengtsson is speaking, the milkmaid has appeared though no one but Hummel can see her. The mummy then collects all of the notes and the dead consul's will from the old man and banishes him to the closet that she has been living in. She has the death screen moved to cover the door. In the hyacinth room, the young lady can be seen playing the harp as the student recites poetry to her.

Scene 2 Analysis

In this very bazaar scene, the student has managed to get invited into the house and the old man forces his way in as well. In musical terms, the second scene corresponds to the largo in a sonata. The tempo is much slower and heavier, and there are many long silences.

The minor themes of the work are fully developed in this scene, as the old man first discusses with the mummy their mutual deceits in not telling her husband about their daughter. She indicates that the reason she is a mummy is in payment for all of the wrong, deceitful lies she has been a party to. Her inner decay has become evident on the outside as well.

The dinner party in scene 2 is the climax of the story when all of the primary characters are present at once and confront old lies and deceptions. The old man is at his most powerful during the dinner party when he exposes all of the sins and guilt of each of the dinner guests. We later meet the cook, who is a member of the old man's family and, as he is eating away at the psyches of the household members, she is starving them physically. Again, an image of the inner world reflected in the outer world.

Ultimately, Hummel has all of his masks, deceptions, stripped away as well, when the dinner party finds out about his role in the death of the milkmaid whose only crime was being the only witness to his usury. Hummel is banished to the closet where the mummy, the half-dead, has been serving penance for twenty years. This is, in effect, his death sentence: the final accounting.

Scene 3

Scene 3 Summary

This scene opens in the hyacinth room with the young lady sitting at the harp and the student standing beside her. The colonel and the mummy can be seen sitting motionless and silent in the next room. The young lady asks the student to sing a song to her flowers.

The young man tells the girl that the hyacinths symbolize the earth with the stars above it. He asks the girl why her parents sit in the drawing room without talking to each other.

The girl tells him that her parents don't have anything to say to each other because they can't trick each other anymore anyway. She tells him about the cook, a Hummel that sucks all of the nutrition out of everything she cooks and won't leave, even if they try to fire her. They also have a maid that they have to clean up after and can't get rid of.

The student asks if she values honesty, and she replies, yes, within reason. The student tells her about attending Hummel's funeral. He met a friend of Hummel's who ended up being the lover of Hummel's son. Hummel had asked to borrow money from an admirer of his son and the priest that performed the funeral was arrested the next day for embezzlement. The student then proceeds to tell the young girl about his father getting locked up in an asylum for being too honest at a dinner party, revealing everyone's secrets. He then continues with his own honesty, criticizing the members of her household for their secrets and their indiscretions, and questioning why she won't agree to marry him.

During his speech, the young girl is withering away, collapsing. It is clear that she is dying. She calls to Bengtsson, and tells him to bring the death screen. Bengtsson places the screen around her as the student continues talking. He ends with the poem that he had been reciting to her in Scene 2, and she dies.

Scene 3 Analysis

Scene 3 is often criticized as unnecessary since the final accounting was accomplished in the previous scene, and all of the minor themes had been addressed as well. The problem with that premise is that the play is in the form of a sonata, which has three movements. So, to stay true to his chosen form, Strindberg had to write a third scene which stresses the play's principal theme one last time and brings the play to a close that restates all of the themes.

In this scene, the audience is presented again, with what can result from lies and deception. Although the younger generations, represented by the student and the colonel's daughter, have not been guilty of deception themselves, their future is affected by the guilt and lies around them. The girl has been raised in a house full of lies and

deception that have poisoned her and made her physically ill. The student, still a Christ-like figure in this scene, again overcomes death by telling her about all of the guilt and horror in the world and in her house. Though he offers to take her away from it and save her, she cannot accept his offer and instead grows weaker and weaker as he is speaking until she ultimately dies. He has grown stronger in overcoming death, but at the expense of even the one who he loves most.

Death is the final accounting, both for the colonel's daughter as she is released from the guilt and shame of living in that household of lies and secrets, and for the family as they lose the reminder of their lies. The student is free to return to his life, no longer entangled in the old man's web of deceit.

Characters

Adele

Although the Colonel believes Adele is his daughter, she is actually the child of the affair Amelia had with Jacob Hummel. Along with the Student, Adele is one of the few "innocent" people in the play, but she must suffer along with all of her guilty family. She has a mysterious illness which saps all of her strength. When she goes out, which is rarely, she likes to go horseback riding. When she is home, she spends her time tending her flowers in the Hyacinth Room. As Hummel finally reveals, Adele's sickness is caused by the lies and crimes of the people in the house that are polluting the air. If they were to confess all their sins and leave the house, she would be saved. It is too late, however. Despite Hummel's attempts to drive everyone from the house, and the Student's efforts at wooing her and trying to convince her there is beauty in the world, Adele collapses and dies at the end of the play.

Amelia

Amelia is the Colonel's wife. As a young lady, she was beautiful. Even at 35, she convinced the Colonel she was only 19, which is when he first married her. The Old Man tells the Student that Amelia once left the Colonel, that he beat her, and that she returned to marry him again. She went crazy and began to think she was a parrot. For twenty years she lived in a closet because her eyes could not stand the light, and her skin became pale and wrinkled, like a mummy's. During the ghost supper, when the Old Man is prepared to reveal everyone's secrets and run them out of the house, Amelia stops time by holding back the hands on the clock, and turns the tables on Hummel. Instead of allowing him to ruin them, she confronts him with all of his own crimes, and forces him to crawl into her closet where he hangs himself.

The Aristocrat

See Baron Skanskorg

Arkenholtz

Arkenholtz is a student and the son of a merchant. His father was ruined by Jacob Hummel while Arkenholtz was a very young boy. Initially, he is happy and idealistic, but by the end of the play he has learned some brutal lessons about life's lies, disappointments and tragedies. He possesses special powers because he is a "Sunday child." His supernatural birthright gives him glimpses into the future, and allows him to see ghosts where others see only empty air. This ability allowed him to save the inhabitants of an old house moments before it collapsed, and for his heroics Hummel claims he will make him a wealthy and famous man. Even more importantly, the Old

Man convinces the Student he will get him introduced to the beautiful Girl, Adele, who lives inside the rich house Arkenholtz has been admiring.

Arnkenholtz is confused by Hummel, youthfully naive, and smitten with the Girl, so he agrees to help the Old Man with his strange plans to get inside the house. He is in the Hyacinth Room with Adele when Hummel attempts to ruin the Colonel and his friends, so he does not hear about everyone's crimes, or see Hummel's undignified death. After the Old Man's funeral, Arkenholtz returns to the house and tries to save Adele from her suffering and convince her to be his wife. She has been exposed to the foul air of the sinful house for too long, though, and even as he attempts to play music and sing for her, anything to break the mysterious spell that grips her, she grows weaker, and dies before him. In the end, Arkenholtz finally recognizes that the world is not always what it seems; that guilt, suffering and death often lie behind the doors of beautiful homes, and that paradise may only exist in a life after death.

Bengtsson

The Colonel's butler, Bengtsson, has seen many ups and downs in his life. He has been both master and servant to the Old Man. Once, the Old Man lived in Bengtsson's house as a vampire who tried to starve Bengtsson's family to death. Years later, Bengtsson encountered the Old Man in Hamburg, where he was a villainous money-lender who murdered the Milkmaid in order to prevent her from reporting a crime he had committed. It is Bengtsson's testimony about the Old Man's crimes at the ghost dinner that finally defeats him, and saves the inhabitants of the house from being revealed and evicted.

The Caretaker's Wife

The Caretaker's Wife helps tend the house. She once had an affair with the Consul, the Dead Man who was buried on the day the play begins. Their child is the Dark Lady.

The Colonel

As a young man, the Colonel was actually a poor kitchen servant who stole Jacob Hummel's fiancee from him. Since then, he has falsely acquired his military title and noble family name, and has borrowed large amounts of money in order to maintain a wealthy lifestyle. He married Amelia, the Mummy, when she was 35, thinking she was really a young girl. He believes the Girl is his daughter, though she is actually the child of Jacob Hummel, who had an affair with his wife, Amelia. Though he has built his entire life on a series of carefully constructed lies, he willingly and honestly admits his mistakes as the Old Man reveals them one at a time during the ghost supper.

The Cook

The Cook is somehow related to Jacob Hummel, the Old Man. As the Girl explains to the Student, she "belongs to the Hummel family of vampires." The Cook is slowly starving the Girl and her family to death by feeding them only watery broth and meat boiled clean of all nourishment. Despite the family's protests, the Cook refuses to leave, and the family is powerless and cannot drive her out. She is, the Girl claims, part of the price they all must pay for their past sins.

The Dark Lady

See The Lady in Black

The Dead Man

Described by the Old Man as "a benevolent scoundrel whose only aim in life was to have a magnificent funeral," the Dead Man was a consul who loved the uniforms, ribbons, medals and ceremonies involved with his public life as a government official. He had an affair with the Caretaker's Wife, and their daughter is the Dark Lady.

The Fiancee

See Miss Beatrice von Holsteinkrona

The Girl

See Adele

Jacob Hummel

Jacob Hummel is 80 years old and wheelchair-bound, but he has been many things in his lifetime. His servant, Johansson, describes him as "a horse-thief in the human market," someone who "steals human beings in all sorts of different ways." His main motivation in the play is revenge: Years ago the man who now calls himself the Colonel apparently stole Hummel's fiancee from him. Later, Hummel had an affair with Amelia, the Colonel's wife, and they had a daughter, Adele. Now Hummel has returned to exact his full revenge. His plan is to lie to the Student and use him to get inside the Colonel's house. Once there, he will ruin the Colonel by revealing all of the lies he has built his life on his wealth, his noble name, his military title, and the girl he believes is his daughter. He also plans to reveal all of the crimes committed by the people in the house, and chase them all away. In the end, he hopes, Arkenholtz will marry Adele and they will live in the newly purified house together.

What Hummel does not count on, however, is his own criminal past coming back to haunt him. First Amelia stands and accuses him of lying to her, of lying to Arkenholtz, and of murdering the Dead Man by piling him with debts he could not repay. Then Bengtsson recognizes him as the man who once tried to starve his family to death, and later murdered the Milkmaid to prevent her from revealing a crime he had committed. Finally, in defeat, Hummel crawls into the Mummy's closet where he hangs himself.

Johansson

Johansson is an educated man, a bookseller who committed some kind of crime, and would have gone to jail if he had been discovered. But the Old Man knew about his indiscretion, and instead of turning him over to the law, he has made a servant out of him. Johansson serves the Old Man in exchange for food and the small amount of freedom he is allowed.

The Lady in Black

The Dark Lady is the daughter of the Dead Man and the Caretaker's Wife, and she is engaged to Baron Skanskorg.

The Milkmaid

The Milkmaid is a silent character in the play. She is the ghost of a young girl murdered in Hamburg by Jacob Hummel. She witnessed a crime Hummel committed, and to avoid being caught he lured her out onto some thin ice, and she fell through and drowned. She appears from time to time throughout the play to terrify Hummel's guilty conscience.

The Mummy

See Amelia

The Old Man

See Jacob Hummel

Baron Skanskorg

The Aristocrat, Baron Skanskorg, is the son-in-law of the Dead Man. He was once Amelia's lover, and he is now engaged to the Lady in Black, though he is still married to a wealthy baroness. His wife is divorcing him and presenting him with a stone mansion just to get rid of him. When he arrives at the ghost supper, the Old Man recognizes him as a jewel thief.

The Student

See Arkenholtz

Miss Beatrice von Holsteinkrona

The Fiancee is introduced by the Colonel as Miss Beatrice von Holsteinkrona, a reasonably wealthy, and very religious woman who lives in one of the apartments above the house. As a young woman, she was engaged to Jacob Hummel, the Old Man. The Colonel apparently seduced her away from Hummel, and the Old Man has spent the rest of his life seeking revenge.

Themes

Illusion vs. Reality

Strindberg liked to view himself as a continual seeker of truth, as an artist who could present the sin, suffering and degradation of the world on the stage and unmask all of the world's liars, hypocrites and criminals. Several of his plays attempted to reveal what he felt were the hidden secrets of his society its institutions and individuals. In a letter to his friend Emil Schering dating March 27, 1907, Strindberg wrote of *The Ghost Sonata,* "It is horrible, like life, when the veil falls from our eyes and we see things as they are. Secrets like these are to be found in every home. People are too proud to admit it; most of them boast of their imagined luck, and hide their misery."

The secrets of *The Ghost Sonata* are terrible indeed, and they are initially hidden behind an illusion of wealth, nobility and respect, inside the walls of a beautiful house. At the beginning of the play, the Student thinks the house is some kind of paradise. He tells the Old Man, "I often stop to look at it. I passed it yesterday when the sun was shining on the window panes, and I imagined all the beauty and luxury in there." He is willing to do anything to get inside, and to meet the lovely young girl who dwells in the house's Hyacinth Room. The Student also thinks he has found a generous benefactor in the Old Man.

What he doesn't know, however, are the past indiscretions of the people in the house, and the terrible crimes committed by the Old Man, who is now intent only on revenge. The Colonel, it is revealed, actually has no claim to a noble family or to any military titles, and all of his apparent wealth is really a pile of tremendous debts he has amassed over the years. The Colonel's wife, Amelia, was once young and beautiful, and she had an affair with the Old Man when he was a youth called Jacob Hummel. Their child was Adele, the Girl who lives in the Hyacinth Room, and thinks her father is the Colonel. The weight of Amelia's sins overcame her, and she has spent the last twenty years living in a closet, becoming pale and wrinkled like a mummy. Everyone else in the house has a similar dark past to hide. The Dead Man, the Aristocrat, the Fiancee and even the Caretaker's Wife all have built illusions to hide the dreadful reality of their lives.

It is the Old Man who tries to strip all of the illusions away and disclose the truths everyone has tried to hide, though he himself is the guiltiest of all. He seduced Amelia then abandoned her. He murdered the Dead Man by burdening him with debts he could not repay. He lied to the Student about his father in order to get him to do his bidding. Worst of all, he once committed a crime and murdered the only witness, an innocent Milkmaid, to prevent her from reporting him. The Student is slow to learn all of these things, and slower still to apply them to the way he views the world. But by the end of the play his optimism and idealism have turned to cynicism, like the Old Man. He understands reality better, and refers to the world as a place of "illusion, guilt, suffering and death," and now hopes only for a better place in the afterlife.

BOOKRAGS

Betrayal

Several of the characters in *The Ghost Sonata* betray one another in some form. Years ago, the Colonel seduced Jacob Hummel's fiancee away from him. In retribution, Hummel later had an affair with the Colonel's wife, Amelia, that produced a daughter the Colonel believes is his. Then he betrayed Amelia, and left her behind to live with her sin. Even the minor characters of the play live on a merry-go-round of betrayal. The Caretaker's Wife had an affair with the Dead Man that produced a daughter, the Lady in Black. Now the Lady in Black is engaged to Baron Skanskorg, an aristocrat who must first divorce his current wife before marrying his new love.

Coming of Age

One of the most significant changes in the play occurs with the Student, who begins as a heroic, optimistic, idealistic youth, and ends as cynical and disappointed as any of the actual sinners and criminals in the play. The dreams he has of finding paradise in a beautiful house, with a lovely wife, a generous income, and happy children, are dashed when he discovers that the real world is often filled with unexplainable rejection and disappointment, and he watches the girl he loves die in front of him. Still, like any responsible adult, he must formulate a new way of looking at the world and move on with his life. Mature now, he understands the world can be evil, and looks forward to a happier life after death.

Human Condition

One of the most important recognitions in the play is that no one is perfect all people are flawed in some way or another. Part of being alive and being human is making mistakes sometimes very big ones then finding ways to learn from them and recover. Amelia, the Mummy, for example, made a large mistake when she fell for Jacob Hummel, had an affair with him and produced a daughter. She has felt guilty about her mistake ever since, and has locked herself away from the world in a closet where she dwells on her sins and becomes less and less human with each passing day. Jacob's appearance in the house, however, sets her free from her prison. After twenty years she realizes she has paid enough for her mistake, which was really quite human, and now has the strength to turn the tables and accuse Jacob for the crimes he has committed.

Another, even more painful, aspect of the human condition revealed by *The Ghost Sonata* is the terrible suffering human beings must face in life. The play begins the night after a random disaster. A house collapsed, killing and seriously injuring many people. Though the Student, with his second sight, was able to save some of the inhabitants and tend to the wounds of others, he could not prevent Death from claiming the lives of a few. Everyone else in the play suffers eventually. Bengtsson, Johansson and the other servants suffer with their menial positions. The Colonel suffers all the lies he has told to create the illusion of a happy, prosperous life. The Milkmaid is a silent, suffering ghost who died innocent, and before her time. Hummel, the Old Man, ultimately must answer

for his various crimes, and suffer a humiliating death in front of those he would have destroyed. Most tragic of all, the Girl suffers because of the sinners and criminals around her. They have fouled the air she breathes with their corruption and, in spite of the Student's efforts to save her, she dies.

Style

Sonata

The form of *The Ghost Sonata* is modeled after a particular type of chamber music called a "sonata." The sonata traces its roots to the fifteenth century, when it was used to describe a variety of selections of purely instrumental music for individual instruments, trios or ensembles. Its most recognizable form, however, began to take shape in the mid-eighteenth century. During the Enlightenment era, sonatas started to take the form of three- or four-part compositions, often for solo pianists or violinists.

The classic sonata consists of independent movements that vary in key, mood and tempo. Typically the first section of a sonata is exposition. The *exposition* establishes one musical theme in a principal key center, called the tonic, then produces another theme in a secondary key center, called the dominant. The two themes intermingle and bridge into the second section, known as the *development* portion of the sonata. During the development stage, the themes presented in the exposition are played in new ways, with new combinations and variations that may include minor keys not found in the exposition. Finally, in the recapitulation section, the themes are again played in their original order, but only in the tonic key.

Like the classic sonata musical form, Strind-berg's *The Ghost Sonata* is divided into three distinct sections. In the first scene, the exposition stage of the sonata, he presents the beautiful house and all of the people in it as they *seem* to be, and he introduces his two major themes: the Student's youthful idealism and love and longing for perfection, and the Old Man's cynicism, hatred, and longing for revenge. In the second scene, the development phase, Strindberg moves inside the house, and these themes interweave as all of the masks and lies are stripped away from the people and the house is seen for what it really is: an abode for less-than-perfect people, sinners who have spent years paying for their crimes. In the third and final scene, the recapitulation, both of the themes presented in the exposition are proven faulty and destructive. The Student by himself, forming the tonic key, plays both through both themes and finally arrives at a sort of coda to the composition. A new, hopeful theme emerges: the faint hope for the final salvation of mankind in an afterlife free of the miseries and disappointments of the mortal world.

Expressionism

Strindberg is considered to be one of the most important influences on an avant-garde artistic movement called *expressionism* that became very popular in Germany in the 1920s. While writers of realism at the turn of the century tried to produce plots that mirrored real life events and characters who seemed to talk, move and act like real people, expressionist writers, like expressionist painters, tried to portray life as they saw it, altered by strong inner emotions, and modified and distorted by the artist's vision of

reality. As a result, expressionist plays are often disjointed, nightmarish scenes that bear little resemblance to the real world.

Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* contains many elements also found in later twentieth century ex-pressionistic dramas. For example, his characters are types, rather than individual people. They are known by labels, like "The Student" or "The Old Man," rather than by names, and sometimes they do not even have distinct personalities. The play is filled with symbolic imagery, like that often associated with dreams. The pendulum clock, the Mummy, the "vampires," the Old Man's wheelchair, and the house itself, where the characters have their "ghost supper," are all symbols representing abstract ideas like time, fear, guilt, shame, power and corruption.

Like a dream, the play does not follow a straight line of cause-and-effect actions. Time is ambiguous, and can even be stopped like the hands of a clock, and the characters act in strange, unpredictable ways. Perhaps most important of all, *The Ghost Sonata* projects the feelings and attitudes of its author through the words and actions of his characters. As a style, expressionism is meant to convey the inner workings of the artist's mind. Strindberg's own tortured psyche is on display throughout the play. He was, by his own admission, compulsively neat, and he required an orderly, clean environment. Little wonder, then, that the Girl in *The Ghost Sonata* is so dismayed by a housekeeper who dirties more than she cleans. Reportedly, Strindberg also feared cooks, and often suspected them of poisoning his food, which may explain the appearance of vampire-like kitchen servants in his play. And, given the dark, dismal entries he left behind in his journals and letters, there is little doubt he spoke through the Student at the end of the play when he mourned "this world of illusion, guilt, suffering and death, this world of endless change, disappointment, and pain. The lesson Arkenholtz learns that the world can be a cold, cruel place is one Strindberg seemed to live, and desperately wanted to express in *The Ghost Sonata.*

BOOKRAGS

Historical Context

Dream Plays and Psychoanalysis

Strindberg began his successful literary career in the 1880s writing the kind of realistic dramas that were made popular by playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov. *The Father* (1887) and *Miss Julie* (1888) are both considered to be masterpieces of realism, depicting natural characters in mundane, ordinary surroundings. By the turn of the century, however, Strindberg was reshaping reality on the stage to correspond to his own tortured, nightmarish vision of life. In "dream plays" like *To Damascus,* a trilogy produced between 1898-1901, The Dream Play (1902), and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907), time and location are often vague and unpredictable. The characters are personality types rather than individuals, and they are mainly alienated, lost human beings struggling with the sins of the flesh while seeking some kind of spiritual fulfillment.

Strindberg's accomplishments in these plays prefigure such major avant-garde literary movements as expressionism and the Theatre of the Absurd, and were generated, at least in part, by his own terrible relationships, bouts with mental illness, and spiritual crises. At the same time, however, a widespread interest in the human mind was developing in Europe, owed partly to the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905), Freud tried to describe the structure of the mind, analyze how it functioned, provide reasons for human behavior and suggest ways of dealing with mental illness. In his work, Freud emphasized the importance of the unconscious mind, a place where dreams may be interpreted as the key to understanding suppressed desires. At its root, Freud's psychoanalytical theories are a prescription for seeing past the illusions to the realities beneath the surface the single most common theme in Strindberg's "dream plays."

Women's Rights

August Strindberg was married and divorced three times in a society that did not favor the rights of women, and held the vows of marriage sacred. Each time he was probably mismatched with his mate. Strindberg claimed to cherish domesticity and a "traditional" family life, but each woman he wed was outgoing and career-minded. He met Siri von Essen, his first wife, when she was married to a nobleman, Baron Wrangel. He viewed them as mother and father figures, but nevertheless fell in love with Siri and lured her away. In a highly publicized and scandalous move, she divorced the Baron, and married Strindberg in 1877. They spent fifteen years together, battling each other over his increasingly eccentric personality, while she tried to become a successful actress.

They divorced in 1891, and Strindberg married FridaUhl, and Austrian journalist, in 1893. She was twenty-three years his junior. In the year that they were married, they actually only spent a few months together just long enough to have one daughter

together. After a stretch of a few years during which Strindberg scorned the company of women, he married for the last time in 1901. His relationship with Harriet Bosse, a famous Norwegian actress 29 years younger than him, lasted only a little longer than his time with Frida. They were married for three years, though they separated frequently, and they had one child together before divorcing in 1904.

Sweden, like most of the countries of the western world, did not allow women to vote in the nineteenth century. In fact, it was not until 1919 the year before American women were first allowed to cast ballots that women in Sweden were granted suffrage. During Strindberg's lifetime, the rights of women were restricted, and often given to them legally and socially through the marriage contract with their husbands. In many countries, women could not legally borrow money or even own property without their husbands' permission. While the industrial age had brought many women out of the home and into the workplace, the jobs available to them were mainly unskilled, menial tasks that required long hours for little pay. Other than house-cleaning or repetitive, sometimes dangerous factory work, women might become teachers or clerical assistants, but not much else. The women Strindberg married a journalist and two actresses may have been considered adventurous, even improper, for their time.

Divorce was available (and Strindberg relied upon it frequently), but only if both parties agreed, and if there was a strong, just cause, such as infidelity, criminal activity, physical incapacity or insanity. In any event, divorcees were stigmatized by society, and relatively few couples opted to separate. More often, unhappy couples remained together in misery, true to their vows, but false to their hearts.

Realism

The Realism movement in the theatre that shaped Strindberg's early writing owes a great debt to Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright who produced works like *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), and *Hedda Gabler* (1890). Like his fellow realists George Bernard Shaw, Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky, Ibsen sought to portray characters, actions and the environment in a realistic way on the stage. Unlike the open, emblematic staging of Shakespeare's plays during the Renaissance, or the painted, two-dimensional "realism" of the German Romantic theatre of the late eighteenth century, realist writers of the late-nineteenth century paid great attention to detail in an effort to reproduce the actual world for audiences. Playwrights and designers took great pains to describe and build complicated, three-dimensional rooms, complete with walls, doors, furniture, working lights, and even ceilings. Characters in realistic plays are affected by both heredity and environment, and respond in natural ways to psychological and physical conflict. Additionally, the themes employed by realist writers are common, everyday problems with significance to many people. Ibsen wrote about marital problems, disease, poverty, inter-class conflict and many other issues faced by his audiences in the 1880s and 1890s. Just after the turn of the century, facing competition from the novel new form of entertainment called "movies," the theatre began to turn away from Realism and toward more experimental styles such as Symbolism and Expressionism.

Critical Overview

The Ghost Sonata was first produced at Strindberg's Intimate Theatre in Stockholm on January 21,1908. The play followed *The Storm* and *The Pelikan* as Opus No. 3 of Strindberg's "chamber plays," which he wrote specifically for his tiny theatre. Like these two previous productions, however, *The Ghost Sonata* was attacked and ridiculed by critics who did not, or would not, understand the symbolic dream worlds Strindberg was attempting to portray on the stage.

After the failure of *The Ghost Sonata*, Strindberg wrote no more great plays. In 1908-09 he produced a few historical dramas of little note, then spent his last few years writing only essays about religion and politics. The real accomplishment of *The Ghost Sonata* was not widely understood, and the playwright himself was not universally appreciated until after his death in 1912.

Max Reinhardt's production of the play in Berlin in 1916 was the first to meet with popular and critical success. Reinhardt toured the show to the Lorensberg Theatre in Gothenburg, Sweden, then on to the Royal Opera House in Stockholm, where Strindberg's play finally received the acclaim from his countrymen he had so desperately sought. Afterward, Reinhardt's production traveled to Munich, Vienna, and Frankfurt, and he mounted other productions in cities across Europe into the 1920s.

Other famous directors have approached the play, including Olaf Molander, a lifelong devotee of Strindberg's, who mounted The Ghost Sonata at the Royal Theatre of Stockholm in 1942, and Ingmar Bergman, who produced the play twice, once in Stockholm in 1941 and once in Paris in 1962 for the Theatres des Nations festival. The play was first produced in England at the Oxford Playhouse in 1926, and appeared in America for the first time at Eugene O'Neill's Provincetown Playhouse in New York in 1924. The Provincetown production fared miserably. Attendance was low, critics complained, and the show closed after only 24 performances.

Over the years, *The Ghost Sonata* and a few of Strindberg's other "dream plays" have appeared occasionally on the stages of universities and community theatres in Europe and the United States. By themselves, they have never achieved tremendous popularity, but as forerunners to some of the great artistic movements of the twentieth century, and as models for some of the great modern dramatists to follow, they are now viewed as monumental turning points in the history of dramatic literature. Antonin Artaud, the famous French director and playwright, credited Strindberg's work as an important precursor to his own "Theatre of Cruelty." Randolph Goodman, in the introduction to his English version of the play in *Drama on Stage*, *writes*, "His [Strindberg's] influence is clearly discernible in the work of Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O'Neill, and Sean O'Casey, to name but a few of the masters. In more recent times such cynical social commentators as Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, Pinter, and Genet have raised a superstructure of raucous laughter, of cabaret and farce, on the somber foundations laid down by August Strindberg."

No less a critic than the great British historian Allardyce Nicoll proclaimed in *World Drama*, "Three things in especial Strindberg did. First, in the supreme concentration of the dramas of his middle period, he showed how much even the closely packed realistic plays of Ibsen lacked of essential dramatic economy. Secondly, he came as near as any man towards creating a modern social tragedy. And, thirdly, in his latest works he achieved what might have seemed impossible producing theatrical compositions that in effect are wholly subjective. In the long range of his writings his hands touch now the early romantics, now the realists and naturalists, now the expressionists, now the surrealists, and now the existentialists. There is no author whose range is wider or more provocative. In him the entire history of the stage from 1800 to the present day is epitomized."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5

Critical Essay #1

Lane A. Glenn is a Ph.D. specializing in theatre history and literature. In this essay he discusses the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg on August Strindberg's life and work, and analyzes The Ghost Sonata in light of Swedenborg's notions of life, death and the afterlife.

August Strindberg spent much of his life on a quest for psychological and spiritual fulfillment. Contemporary accounts written by friends, family and colleagues, as well as the playwright's own journals and letters, describe Strindberg as a man who was eccentric, almost always unhappy, and constantly battling mental illness.

Over the course of his lifetime, his madness took many forms. As a boy, he resented his mother for her lower class background, yet still fought for her attention among seven brothers and sisters. She died when he was only thirteen, and his father married their housekeeper. For the rest of his life Strindberg experienced a strong attraction toward women he thought of as pure, motherly figures, and a repulsion from women he damned as promiscuous sinners. As often as not, he felt both feelings toward the same woman, seriously complicating his relationships and contributing to his three failed marriages.

Besides his sexual conflicts, Strindberg also suffered from a severe obsessive-compulsive disorder, frequent bouts of paranoia, hypochondria, delusions, and hallucinations. There were times in his life when he would write for days on end, producing volumes of prose or dramatic text; and there were other, less fertile periods when he would sit, stare into space, and ponder for hours, oblivious to anyone around him. During his darkest hours, while living alone in Paris from 1894-96, he claimed that severe electric shocks were passing through his body, and that hostile "Powers" were pursuing him, bent on his destruction. He turned to pseudo-science, and worked feverishly with chemical experiments designed to produce gold. Recognizing how close he was to the edge of sanity in the summer of 1896, he wrote to Anders Eliasson, a doctor who had been treating him, "I do not especially fear the madhouse, for it would be interesting to see these people whom I believe to be possessed by demons and not sick or senile. And I would regard it as a new education for a new life."

Arguably, what ultimately saved Strindberg from a complete nervous breakdown that summer was his discovery of a new spiritual faith. As a boy, Strindberg detested religion, and vehemently denied the existence of God. As an adult, however, and after experiencing some of the disappointments and tragedies of life, the troubled artist found himself searching for solace in the spiritual realm. In his quest for faith in some kind of higher power, Strindberg turned to Buddhism, occultism, existentialism, mysticism, and Theosophy, before discovering his own unique form of religion, based largely on the doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), the eighteenth century Swedish scientist, philosopher, and theologian. From the summer of 1896 forward, Strindberg's life and work, including the 1907 Ghost Sonata, were indelibly marked by the playwright's newfound religious beliefs

In Swedenborg, Strindberg found the balance he was seeking between traditional Western Christianity, Eastern mysticism, and the waking supernatural realm of the occult that he had been exploring, and living, for many years. Strindberg identified with and understood such works as Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia,* which emphasized a supernatural vision of the afterlife existing parallel to the mortal world, and acknowledged the unavoidable presence of sin, terror and suffering among all people. In Swedenborg's, and Strindberg's, view, the mortal world was a place for humans to work off their debt of Original Sin, pay the penance of guilt, mental anguish and physical pain, then pass into the afterlife, where their souls would be treated accordingly.

Goran Stockenstrom summarizes the central tenet of Swedenborg's teachings in "The Journey from the Isle of Life to the Isle of Death: Reconciliation in *The Ghost Sonata.*" Stockenstrom writes:

After death men are transported to the spiritual world or the lower earth. After their arrival the appearance of the newly fledged spirits remains unaltered and they can still conceal their thoughts and feelings as they could in life. Therefore many believe that they continue to reside in earthly existence. When after a while the external condition is unveiled by the internal one, the human spirits can no longer hide their thoughts. As feature after feature is stripped away, all hypocrisy dissolves, and the exterior is transformed into a mirror-image of the interior condition. The ultimate objective of this differentiation of spirits is to unmask the person's true self, so that there emerges a complete correspondence between the outer appearance and the inner reality. It is not a question of a judgment in the usual sense, for to Swedenborg God is absolute love. Rather than submitting to judgment, the evil and the good spirits unite with their equals by their own free will in order to be finally dispatched to one of the different societies in heaven or hell.

The place where this unmasking occurs is a sort of purgatory for souls on the way to heaven or hell. The Theosophists of the nineteenth century, who also drew upon the works of Swedenborg, called this place "Kama-Loka," a phrase Strindberg used as the original subtitle for *The Ghost Sonata*. In the play, as in Swedenborg's purgatory, Kama-Loka, masks, lies and illusions are slowly stripped away, baring the naked souls of the people underneath. Life begins with promise and ends, as often as not, in humiliation, degradation and, eventually, release.

The promise of life in *The Ghost Sonata* is found, of course, in the Student, Arkenholtz. Young, heroic and idealistic at the beginning of the play, Arkenholtz has not yet seen enough of the world to know that what he wants paradise on earth is unattainable, that it doesn't exist. There is little doubt that the author saw a great deal of himself in his character. Milton Mays notes in "Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata:* Parodied Fairy Tale on Original Sin," "Like Strindberg, the Student is an innocent trying to believe in an unfallen world in the face of the horrors of real existence."

Arkenholtz has rescued people from a collapsed building, catches glimpses of the future with the second sight granted him as a "Sunday child," and has just discovered a mysterious benefactor who is prepared to introduce him to the life he has dreamed of

living in an elegant city apartment house. "Think of living up there in the top flat," he has said to his companion, "with a beautiful young wife, two pretty little children and an income of twenty thousand crowns a year."

A bourgeois lifestyle, however, does not begin to pay for Original Sin, and the Student, along with all of the other characters in the play, must begin the process of transformation from sinner to penitent to saved soul. Jacob Hummel, the Old Man, is prepared to force them all along that journey. In the first scene of the play, outside the house, Hummel seems omniscient and all-powerful. He gulls the Student into doing his bidding, knows everything there is to know about the strange inhabitants of the house, and orders his servant, Johansson, about like a slave, because he holds his freedom in his hands.

The building up of opportunity and power in the first scene, though, merely sets the stage for the ritual of soul cleansing that is to follow. Like the mortal souls that enter Kama-Loka, everyone in the house must be stripped of masks, illusions and artifice. Their true natures must be laid bare, so their souls can be separated into the good and the evil.

Initially, the Old Man presides over the unmasking. Once he has worked his way into the house, on the premise of attending the evening's "ghost supper," Hummel sets about taking his revenge on its inhabitants by revealing all of their secrets. The telling of truths begins when he encounters the Mummy, Amelia, who was once his lover. She was young and beautiful, until she lied about her age, married the Colonel, and had an affair and a daughter with Hummel. Since that time, twenty years ago, she has lived in shame and isolation in a closet of the house, where she avoids the light of the sun and the light of public scrutiny, and her skin turns white and wrinkled like a mummy's.

Together, Hummel and Amelia discuss the crimes and secrets of the rest of the household. Baron Skanskorg is divorcing his wife in order to marry his lover, the Dark Lady. This mysterious Dark Lady is the daughter of the Caretaker's Wife, who had an affair with the Dead Man, who was in turn another of Amelia's lovers. Hummel's former Fiancee will be attending the ghost supper. She was seduced away from him by the Colonel, Amelia's husband. It is, as Hummel jokes, "A select gathering." Adulterers, thieves and, as it later turns out, murderers, are on the guest list of the ghost supper. "Crime and secrets and guilt bind us together," Amelia mourns, "We have broken our bonds and gone our own ways, times without number, but we are always drawn together again."

The secrets kept for so long by the weird inhabitants of the house are not uncommon ones, or so the playwright would have his audience believe. Although the world his characters inhabit is clearly not the world most people recognize as real, it is meant to be a parallel world where people like us, yet not like us, live the way we do, and suffer the way we suffer. As Strindberg famously wrote about *The Ghost Sonata* in a letter to Emil Schering in 1907, "It is horrible like life, when the veil falls from our eyes and we see things as they are. It has shape and content; the wisdom that comes with age, as our knowledge increases and we learn to understand. This is how 'The Weaver' weaves

men's destinies; secrets like these are to be found in every home. People are too proud to admit it; most of them boast of their imagined luck, and hide their misery."

Hummel, the would-be "Weaver," saves his deadliest ammunition for the Colonel, who he has been plotting against ever since the younger man stole his fiancee years before. Hummel now owns all the Colonel's debt, and reveals that the wealth he has surrounded himself with is all borrowed goods. His family name, too, is borrowed. While the Colonel truly believed himself to be a nobleman, Hummel provides him with a document that strips him of his titles. Furthermore, the Old Man presses, he is not even a Colonel, since the army he once served in disbanded and abolished all its titles. The relentless Hummel pins the broken Colonel in a chair and warns him that if he removed his wig, his false teeth and his moustache, he find underneath all the lies a miserable lackey who once served in a kitchen.

Hummel's intention is to methodically strip the masks away from all the guests at the ghost supper, "to pull up the weeds, to expose the crimes, to settle all accounts, so that those young people [Arkenholtz and Adele] might start afresh in this home, which is my gift to them." What the Old Man does not count on, however, is that he, too, is mortal, and like all mortal souls to Swedenborg and Strindberg's way of thinking, he must face his own reckoning.

Amalia abruptly breaks out of the trance that has held her for twenty years and turns the tables on the group's accuser. "We have erred and we have sinned, we like all the rest," she rails at Hummel, "We are not what we seem, because at bottom we are better than ourselves, since we detest our sins. But when you, Jacob Hummel, with your false name, choose to sit in judgment over us, you prove yourself worse than us miserable sinners." In the Swedenborgian realm, Amelia is warning, they have suffered for their sins, but now their souls are prepared for a rewarding afterlife. Hummel's, on the other hand, will continue to suffer after the sorting of his sins.

The list of Hummel's crimes runs long. He stole Amelia's heart with false promises, murdered the Dead Man by burying him in debt he could not repay, and conned the Student by lying to him about his father. Worse yet, he once lived as a sort of vampire in Bengtson's home, nearly starving his family to death, before moving on to Hamburg where he committed crimes and murdered an innocent Milkmaid who might have exposed him. In the end, Hummel is reduced to the gibbering parrot Amelia once was, and crawls into her closet to hang himself.

Despite the seeming justice of Hummel's end, and the suggestion that the sinners of the house have suffered enough, and order will now be restored, the still-innocent young people in the play who were viewed as the hope for tomorrow do not fare any better than their guilty parents. The Girl, Adele, has lived too long in the polluted air of the house, and now suffers like a vicarious sinner in her Hyacinth Room where everything seems perfect, but is really damaged and dying. For his part, Arkenholtz tries to save her. He woos her, even proffers marriage, but she is not to be moved. He tries to play her music, but even the harp will not sound in her room where nothing is what it seems.

Finally, she droops, and dies at his feet. The Student prays for her, wishing for her the best fate that anyone can achieve while passing from this world of misery into the afterlife of the unknown. "The Liberator is coming," Arkenholtz announces, "Welcome, pale and gentle one. Sleep, you lovely, innocent, doomed creature, suffering for no fault of your own. Sleep without dreaming, and when you wake again, may you be greeted by a sun that does not burn, in a home without dust, by friends without stain, by a love without flaw."

This world, the Student now recognizes, is a world of "illusion, guilt, suffering and death." It is a world of "endless change, disappointment, and pain," and only a merciful god in the afterlife can offer any balm to soothe the suffering souls of all of mankind.

Some critics have found fault with Strindberg' s variation on a fundamental Christian principle that is reflected in the Student's new outlook. As Stephan C. Bandy explains in "Strindberg's Biblical Sources for *The Ghost Sonata,*" "Instead of looking to Christ for release from his unhappy existence, the Student in fact redefines Christian salvation in his own terms. At the center he places not an abstract God, but the Self. And thus it appears that Strindberg has presented us with nothing less than a modern-dress, thoroughly up-dated parable of redemption but a redemption stripped of its Christian idealism and optimism."

Nevertheless, as bleak and hopeless as the play may make the world seem, there is intended to be a note of optimism in its characters' suffering. Despite the trials and tribulations of life in the mortal realm, Swedenborg suggested, and Strindberg believed, that the hereafter could be different. For Strindberg, writing *The Ghost Sonata* and his other "chamber plays" that addressed the sin, guilt and terror of life was a form of therapy. He alleviated some of his own anxiety and misery by expressing his feelings, and promoting his religious beliefs, in his art. "What has saved my soul from darkness during this work has been my religion," he wrote to Schering, "the hope of a better life to come; the firm conviction that we live in a world of madness and delusion from which we must fight our way free."

Source: Lane A. Glenn, for Drama for Students, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Berry presents how Strindberg uses the dialogue and staging of The Ghost Sonata to develop his concept of reality as a "single and unified fabric consisting of a homogeneous blend of matter and mind."

August Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* is the most produced of his Chamber Plays. Its complexity and depth allow a great many directorial approaches and absorb countless interpretations. Perhaps this is one reason for its popularity: expressionism, symbolism, and realism can all be found in the work and can each, when used as a major production style, produce valid, powerful results. From the realistic interpretation given the play by Olof Molander, to the divergent expressionistic approaches taken by Max Reinhardt and Ingmar Bergman, *The Ghost Sonata* has been proven to be a remarkable play capable of communicating its complex ideas through many voices.

Part of the play's success in this regard may be a result of the form of the work itself a form that combines realism and symbolism to create a tension between the material and the immaterial concerns of the drama. Such a tension enabled Strindberg to make a difficult theme not only dynamic but also dramatic and allowed him to complete a theatrical experiment in which he had been engaged for years. As Evert Sprinchorn has pointed out, Strindberg, through his scientific experiments beginning in 1891, searched for the great coherent principle in nature and so attempted to "combine the realms of inorganic and organic matter in one grand synthesis in which the universe would display a kind of order without having any Ideological end." Further, Strindberg expanded his pursuits to include not only matter but also mind. In his own terms, his intention was to eliminate "the frontier separating matter from what was called mind." In his later works, including The Ghost Sonata, one finds a further attempt to eliminate not only the frontiers separating matter from mind but those separating matter, mind, and spirit.

Consequently, Strindberg strove in his scenic experiments to expand even the concept of reality until it was seen to be a single and unified fabric consisting of a homogeneous blend of matter and mind, material and spirit, subjective and objective modes of perception. All phenomena would thus be seen to exist concurrently and coproductively. As with Freud, the map of reality is enlarged. But for Strindberg, it has become all-inclusive, leaving nothing outside its boundaries.

The Ghost Sonata represents a major step in Strindberg's theatrical experiments in staging this broadened reality. In it, realism plays a large role in the staging, but it is a realism that is inclusive rather than exclusive of spiritual and metaphysical concerns. The first scene establishes the context of the play visually as well as verbally. The audience is induced to view the drama from a broadened perspective a perspective that Strindberg may have regarded as being a primary state of awareness before abstractions are enforced.

Indications for this perspective are immediate. Note, for example, Strindberg's changes within the layout of the set. From the opening moments of the play, one is not looking

out upon a street or an exterior environment from inside a drawing room, as was customary, but is looking in upon the interior action from an exterior advantage. The view is from "the other side," both literally and figuratively, and quickly establishes an important context: one enters the house the small interior world of humanity from the far side of life; and one's interpretations of the subsequent action will be partially determined from this bias.

Thus, the standard or the norm by which one will view the scene will be that of the world of the Milkmaid that outer realm that interpenetrates the inner. This does not mean, however, that this play is simply a dream play. It is a dream play and much more. For the world of the Milkmaid is complex and multidimensional. She exists in several realms that operate simultaneously. The Student can see her at the fountain although Hummel cannot. This is possible because she is of the spirit world, visible only to the Sunday child. Neither can Hummel see the dead Consul. Yet, moments later when Hummel boasts of having saved a drowning girl in Hamburg, the Milkmaid appears to him. She is now of the world of dreams of the drama of mind and it is Hummel's conscience that "sees" her.

Had Strindberg chosen to present the Milkmaid in verbal discourse alone, or had he not been careful to have her enter the scene, fully visible to the audience, before the Student, and to have her use the physical fountain because she feels the heat of the day, her role in the opening scene and the perspective that she represents may have been reduced to that of a psychological aberration a sign of strain on the mind of the Student. Moreover, had the Milkmaid been visible only to the Student and not to Hummel (who we know is not a Sunday child), her citizenship in multiple worlds would not have been depicted. The audience sees her in several connections, and her reality is therefore a more complete one. Hers is that wide realm in which all partial "realities" (material, spiritual, and psychological) are merely modes of one whole reality.

The play takes on a semidreamlike quality, to be sure, for there are a number of private dreams staged; and, more importantly, one is not used to viewing the world in the way that Strindberg shows it. One is more inclined to believe in the "reality" of Hamlet's murdered father stalking the parapets than in that of a drowned milkmaid wandering the streets of Stockholm. The one reality is theatrical, but the other Strindberg's oversteps its theatrical bounds. Strindberg does not ask, as does Shakespeare, that one willingly suspend one's disbelief, he asks that one actually *change* one's beliefs to accord with his own. That is, Strindberg seems to require that his audience accept his personal vision (minus a modicum of artistic exaggeration, of course) as a true depiction of the way things are. How is one to make this change? The Milkmaid herself is not ready to accept the reality of this interpenetration of realms. She is not so much frightened at seeing the Student as at being seen and spoken to by him. He is special. He has an expanded vision almost like that of the audience, who will now view the whole of the real world at once rather than piecemeal. The action of the first scene not only establishes the relationships between characters and the exposition of antecedent action needed for the audience to better understand the play but also determines the way in which the play will be viewed. It eases the otherwise unwilling audience into the proper frame of reference.

When this context is established, the audience finds itself peering into a new house, probing into the lives of living people, descending into the material depths. Appropriately, the guide for this stage of the journey is Hummel, for he is alive, rooted firmly to the material mode, and complexly related to the other people in this living inferno. He leads the Student and the audience through an examination of the house and the people within it.

This house is one of many houses talked about in the play; but because of its similarity to the others, it comes to represent society at large. We know that one house has collapsed the house of the elder Arkenholz is in shambles and we realize that this one may someday end in the same way. Societies come and go, as do families and nations, and this new house in a new style is no exception. For the moment, however, it seems to resist decay. It appears so perfect and so inviting. The student remarks with an unabashed ardor:

I have already looked at it very carefully.... I went by here yesterday, when the sun was glittering on the panes and dreaming of all the beauty and luxury there must be in that house, I said to my friend, "Imagine having an apartment there, four flights up, and a beautiful wife, and two pretty kids, and twenty thousand crowns in dividends every year."

The Student has looked at the house. He says he has looked very carefully. But he has not looked into it. He has seen only the outside of the house and the few objects visible to him through an open window objects of luxury and elegance that are also visible to the audience at the opening of the curtain: "*When the curtains are drawn and the windows opened in the round room, one can see a white marble statue of a young woman surrounded by palms and bathed in sunlight. On the windowsill farthest to the left are pots of hyacinths blue, white, pink.*" The house itself is finely decorated: "Through the door can be seen the hall and the staircase with marble steps and balustrade of mahogany and brass. On the sidewalk on both sides of the entryway are tubs with small laurels." If appearances mean anything, this is a place to be desired. It is a scene of material perfection, both beautiful and opulent, into which everyone dreams of entering the beggars at the back door, the Student, and Hummel.

To this vision are added the peeling bells and distant organ tones of a Sunday morning. Ships' bells in the harbor signify the beginning and end of different journeys. The atmosphere early on is reminiscent of that at the close of Goethe's Faust. For salvation is in the air, and the best that life has to offer stands bathed in sunlight on a glorious morning. If appearances mean anything, the Student has stumbled into an earthly paradise. But unlike Faust's kidnapping from the mouth of hell, any salvation that will be open to Strindberg's seeker after knowledge lies on the far side of hell. He must first descend into its depths, experience pain, love, confusion, and anguish; his eyes and his mind will be opened until he can no longer bear to see or to know. When his knowledge and his vision crush him, and his love crumbles away, he will have discovered both the reason and the need for faith. Like the outside of this modern new house, the Student will find the promise of this particular Sunday morning a mere fagade behind which something rots.

As the ships' bells toll, the Student's journey into the house of Man begins. He has gone through one passage and approaches another. As he grows to physical and spiritual maturity, he leaves the vanished child behind and presses on through *The Valkyrie into* the round room and the room of ordeals. Hummel has come full circle to the end of his own journey. Life and death meet in the person of the Milkmaid; and the theme is reiterated in the scene. Even in this radiant place where every detail breathes success, ''*Hanging on the railing of the balcony on the second story are a blue silk bedspread and two white bed pillows. The windows to the left are covered with white sheets signifying a death in the house."* As spruce twigs are scattered on the ground, one journey through this life is accomplished, and another begins.

Overtly symbolic of this rhythm of comings and goings, life and decay, is the statue of the Colonel's wife. "Was she so wonderful?" inquires the Student. Then, in a non sequitur that belies his own love of beauty for beauty's sake, he adds, "Did he love her so much?" Hummel replies: "Suppose I were to tell you that she left him, that he beat her, that she came back again and married him again, and that she is sitting in there right now like a mummy, worshiping her own statue. You would think I was crazy." In the idealistic Student's eyes, something is crazy. For how could ugliness reside in beauty? How could the truly beautiful decay? He does not understand, as yet, the rhythms of life.

In the first scene of *The Ghost Sonata,* matter and mind, life and death are depicted as a confluence of realms interdependent on each other. The action in one sphere defines the action in another; and causes and effects are so interwoven that no amount of analysis could ever unravel them into their separate strands. This complexity of causation and relationship has grown from its initial articulation in the preface to *Miss Julie* to include every conceivable kind of determinism. After Hummel tries to give the Student an idea of the interconnections among the persons in the house, he adds, "Complicated, don't you think?" To which the Student can only respond, "It's damned complicated!" Indeed it is, to borrow Hummel's words, inside and outside. The complicated outside of *The Ghost Sonata* the context is established.

Unlike the first scene, the second presents space and the objects within it in the convention of the bourgeois drama. The atmosphere of this interior scene will be darker and more terrible than that of the exterior scene; but, perhaps with the exception of the death screen, the scenery will not be. The darker mood will be established through action, characterization, and language rather than through the visual symbolism of Strindberg's scenography.

The scene is the round room, a conventional drawing room whose furnishings are indices of a particular time and place. The place is an upper-class set of apartments in Strindberg's own Stockholm. The milieu, as many have pointed out, is highly specific; and if the universal can be found in the particular, the universal might be found here. For Strindberg has brought along the baggage and the trappings of naturalism. He does not, however, treat the properties and the setting as mere decoration. The objects in the round room will not function simply as indices of time and place, class and taste, nor will they be, for the most part, overtly symbolic. The objects will play the role of objects in the material world. As characters in the drama, they will represent that material world in

the same way that human characters represent humanity. Furthermore, these objects will function as that material stuff through which the human characters must battle.

In terms of the set, the round room is pierced with several doors that lead into other rooms with other doors. There is always a way into or out of a room in this labyrinthine drama of passage and passages. Life is lived in a series of interconnected spaces. In this connection, the role of the Mummy's closet takes on a special function. There is a door, a passage, which leads into a closed room. The purpose of this room is for storage; it was never intended to be a place to live. Much like the psychological niche into which the Mummy has retreated, the closet is a cul-de-sac. It is part of the round room and is not. The parrot-character is in this world and is not. Thus the Mummy lives on the fringe of life and passes now this way, now that, through the papered door now taking refuge in oblivion, now returning of necessity to eat or to drink in the great round.

Resuming my discussion of the physical objects within the scenic space, the realistically individuated properties of the rich interior constitute a repetition of "things" to which the inhabitants of the house are inextricably wed. Ironically, these inhabitants are both masters and prisoners of their own possessions. In the context of the multiple dimensions established in the first scene, this statement is both sociological and ontological. Sociologically, these bourgeois characters are tied to the objects that support them in their station. The humans are thus defined by their property to such an extent that they would cease to be what they are if their material worth were at all diminished.

For example, in verbal discourse, the Colonel is stripped by Hummel of his stations as a noble and as a military man. These have been the credentials upon which the Colonel has been able to extend his credit, accumulate the hallmarks of his apparent wealth, and move up in the world. Without them, he would have been nothing; and to lose them destroys even his ability to rebuild. He has lost his possessions to Hummel and, by extortion, his ability to recover from the loss.

Yet Hummel does not stop at this. He continues. "Take off that wig of yours and have a look at yourself in the mirror. And while you're at it, take out those false teeth and shave off that moustache and let Bengtsson unlace your metal corset." Much of what appears to be the Colonel is a fabrication, in a literal sense, laid upon the animal. His appearance is supported by objects that have become a part of his character. The Colonel and the other members of his household are indeed trapped in a deteriorating social structure, as Maria Bergom-Larsson has suggested; but they are also trapped in the world of things, of physical objects and a physical being, from which they cannot escape. Societies change, a person's dreams may be altered, but the human condition as Strindberg so often depicts it, is rigid. For the round room is also *Kama-Loka*, the realm of desires, the world of flesh and material need. In this more ontological context of the scene, the human characters are bound to the physical matrix of the great round of life; and they cannot be freed from that bondage without physical death. Strindberg plunges his characters into the agony of an existence they can in no way alter. As Harry Carlson puts it: "The pain in this world of lies and illusions is not simply a result of social injustice, it is existential. Social evils must be remedied, but the great round of life

creates and devours in a rhythm that is not governed by human concepts of order and justice." Ethics, it would seem, are a manufactured sociological expedient that have no permanent place in the natural world.

There is, however, a great difference between total capitulation to the material mode of reality and the recognition of that mode as *Maya* a veil over a deeper and more complete reality. Hummel has capitulated. He has given himself over not only to satisfying survival concerns but to taking into himself every good thing that crosses his path. Perhaps no character in the play is so deeply rooted in the physical as is Hummel. One of his first acts in the round room after banishing the servants is to roam about that room fingering objects. In one respect, he is taking inventory after having purchased all the Colonel's debts. His action thus sets up the next scene in which he strips the Colonel. In another respect, however, he is making love to the house, touching it, petting it stimulated by the sight of the statue of the woman who had come to represent for him all of this wealth. He took her when he could not take it. Now he has returned to take it. Hummel becomes, for the audience, the incarnation of lust and greed that he threatened to become in Johansson's introduction of his character to the Student in the first scene:

All day long he rides around in his chariot like the great god Thor.... He keeps his eye on houses, tears them down, opens up streets, builds up city squares. But he also breaks into houses, sneaks in through the windows, ravages human lives, kills his enemies, and forgives nothing and nobody. ... Can you imagine that that little cripple was once a Don Juan?

If the world were simply material, Hummel and his ilk would not be in the wrong. Survival of the fittest would be the only ethic.

There is, however, something more to life, and the Mummy points this out when she turns on Hummel in the climax of the supper sequence: "We are poor miserable creatures, we know that. We have erred, we have transgressed, we, like all the rest. We are not what we seem to be. At bottom we are better than ourselves, since we abhor and detest our misdeeds." Hummel has been, like everyone else, in the "wrong." But the Mummy does not come to this conclusion simply because she is on the losing end of a material battle. Rather, she has discovered the value of human cohesion after having come to recognize the realm of desires for what it is. That realm is *Maya;* and *Maya* in *The Ghost Sonata* is the clutter of the physical mode the illusion created by both pretense and the "reality" of physical objects. It is the shroud that hides the individual soul from its true, nonmaterial nature.

The round room up to this point has stood as a symbol for the great round of life the cycle in which all living things feed on one another. We see now, however, that the round room has a secondary symbolic meaning tied to late T'ang Buddhist philosophy that of the Round Enlightenment and its consequent defilements of the real. On the path to Round (perfect) Enlightenment, all Maya must be removed to escape the realm of *Kama-Loka;* and the participants in the ghost supper are doing much more than waiting upon all-conquering death to liberate them. They are engaged in sloughing off their

bondage to the material mode and to the illusions that they have constructed through a lifetime of ignorance and misunderstanding.

In the Mummy's phrase "at bottom we are better than ourselves," the human existence is split. The Mummy is voicing a concern of the soul, the eternal portion of the human. The recognition of the physical aspect as *Maya* is made from this more spiritual perspective; and once *Kama-Loka* is revealed for what it is in truth, the individual soul, in Strindberg's syncretistic blending of Buddhism and Christianity, can move to make reparations with its fellow souls. Reconciliation is sought with both human beings and God. Although complete reconciliation waits upon death, preparations must be made.

When Hummel points to the clock, which he uses to signify finite human nature when he points to linear time, which winds down and brings all things to a close, the Mummy ripostes by offering a different perspective: "But I can stop time in its course. I can wipe out the past, and undo what is done. Not with bribes, not with threats but through suffering and repentance." She cannot stop material time, this woman who wears its ensign more than any other character in the play; but she speaks from a vantage point of timelessness, from a knowledge that the physical life is just one ordeal to be passed through. She stops time in the sense that she knows that it too is *Maya.* This life will end for her, and therein lies hope. The first stage in the movement toward perfect enlightenment is accomplished in the banishing of lust and greed made manifest in the destruction of Hummel. This act is the initial step in the deconstruction of all *Maya*.

Although the human characters in this scene are more than physical and possess eternal souls, the realm of *Kama-Loka* is no illusion. As one has seen in the first scene, the existence of one mode of reality does not negate the existence of all others. The realistic properties in the round room play the role of a very tangible *Maya*. For it is the people and their language (their verbal discourse) and not their material environment that is half in and half out of this world. It is verbal discourse that makes the environment appear to be illusory: for it is through that discourse that the soul voices its aphysical nature. To pit the world of objects against the world of the soul, the scenographic discourse is borne out realistically in the tradition of the illusionistic theater. In this way, the major conflict in the scene is recognized as being not between Hummel and all others, nor between the characters and a fictive life, but between the human soul and the necessity of living in a material body in a material world. The harsh character of this material world advances through the realistic staging.

Scene 3 is played in the hyacinth room, and one discovers quickly that the ordeals borne in this place are extensions of those so graphically depicted in the last scene. The theme is repeated, although the point of attack is much earlier closer to the moment when innocence comes face to face with decay. Yet, even though the theme is reiterated, the third scene is not merely a repetition of the second. The second scene has served, in combination with the first, to prepare the audience for the difficult concepts and discourse of the final movement of the sonata. Leitmotivs have surfaced and resurfaced to foreshadow what will become the dominant strain of the third scene.

The scenographic depiction of the realm of desires is also reiterated when the language of the two human characters parades before the mind's eye a series of psychological scenes in which the material mode seems to act in direct opposition to the human will. That will is the will of innocence to create the best of all possible worlds, and Strindberg shows that such a world cannot exist in the corrosive presence of realistic detail. Although there is little to unmask in either the Student or the Young Lady, an unmasking does in fact take place. It is the unmasking of the scene, which not only serves to reveal the true nature of the hyacinth room but also operates as the dramatic event by which the Student and the Young Lady are led to the transcendence of a world of *Maya.*

The scene is initially "transported" by the presence of objects symbolic of transcendence. Strindberg's stage directions treat these objects simply:

A room decorated in a bizarre style, predominantly oriental. A profusion of hyacinths in all colors fills the room. On the porcelain tile stove sits a large Buddha with a bulb of a shallot (allium ascalonicum) in its lap. The stem of the shallot rises from the bulb and bursts into a spherical cluster of white, starlike flowers. . .. The Student and The Young Lady (Adele) are near a table, she seated at her harp, he standing beside her.

A room in a bizarre oriental style breathes a mysticism that is reinforced by the Buddha with his shallot. The hyacinths splash the stage with color. A harp echoes the final tones of an unheard song. The scene is at once transported in time, place, and mood from the grimness of the preceding scene.

Yet that grisly scene lingers: ' *'In the rear to the right, a door leads to the round room. The Colonel and The Mummy can be seen in there sitting motionless and silent. A part of the death screen is also visible."* This is a haunting reminder that one has not left the earth, that one has not been transported to Shangri-La, and that, as yet, love has not been able to conquer all. Paradise, or at least a small touch of heaven-on-earth, is juxtaposed to the hell-on-earth of the previous scene. To the rear at the left, like an umbilical life-support for the human beings in this other-worldly plenum, is the door to the kitchen. Strindberg has left no doubt about the context in which this third scene will be played.

As the action begins, the Student tries to leave things as they appear to be. He and the Young Lady, like Dante and Beatrice before them, stand atop purgatory in an earthly paradise looking into heaven. To heighten the reality of their situation into this dreamworld, the Student constructs some symbolism. "Is this the flower of your soul?" he asks. The flower in question is the hyacinth; and by linking it to the Young Lady's soul, he develops a resonance between it and the transcendent nature of her spirit. The mood darkens momentarily as the Student recognizes another resonance. The flower was created, according to legend, in the commingling of blood and earth in the death of Hyacinthus, whose brains were dashed out by a discus hurled by his lover Apollo and blown awry by the jealous Zephyr. This unspoken legend foreshadows the Young Lady's death in the final moments of the play, but the Student has another reason for avoiding it. He is still determined to put the best face on their situation. He hastily drops the

subject and proceeds to create another myth a symbolic meaning for the flower and a symbol of hope for himself and his companion.

First you have to interpret it. The bulb is the earth.... Here the stalk shoots up, straight as the axis of the world, and here at its upper end are gathered together the six-pointed star flowers.... It's an image of the whole cosmos. That's why Buddha sits there with the bulb of the earth in his lap, watching it constantly to see it shoot up and burst forth and be transformed into a heaven.

The Student has settled on the dominant metaphor of the Buddhist "emptiness" philosophy *K'ung-hua,* "the flower in the air as the symbol of an empty mirage of a flower *(hua*) grounded on empty space (*k'ung*)." The Student, however, transposes empty Nirvana to a heaven something more approachable by the Christian Young Lady and her Christian audience. This world, symbolized by the flower, may someday become a heaven. The young couple is excited about this prospect as if in the creation of such a myth they could make the idea it represents become a reality.

As they re-create the world in the light of their own hopes, the young couple surround themselves with a tentative Eden. They are insulated form an oppressive reality by symbols, flowers, music. They console each other with the notion that earth can indeed be made into a heaven. After this act of creation, the Student proclaims, "We have given birth to something together. We are wedded."

As with the original tenants of Eden, knowledge will be this couple's undoing. The Young Lady's reply, "No, not yet," picks at the thread that begins the unraveling of this make-believe universe. To be truly wedded (as well as to be truly enlightened), time, testing, and patience are required. The testing has begun. From this point on, the scene of beauty will be stripped away in a protracted analysis of the environment. A tension is created between symbolism and reality that is, between the object as it is used symbolically and the same object in its material function. In this way, the objects in the scene end by working as all objects do: to subdue, to constrain, to poison the ideal with the real. Clearly, the fabrication of a symbolic transcendence within a material existence cannot hold for long. For the imposition of symbolic nature upon an object interrupts only briefly its material function, and the materials used to signify spirituality soon decay into those functions.

In this room of ordeals, as the Young Lady calls it, examples of this fact abound. The Young Lady takes the Student on a verbal tour of the room and of her trials and tribulations within it. She speaks of the furniture, the stove, the windows, the laundry, and so on, through a chorus of things and chores that keep her battling to "keep the dirt of life at a distance." An example of the imperfections within the room is the writing desk, which, even though it is verbally presented in only a matter of seconds, encapsulates the nature of all the household objects and symbolizes the plight of the Young Lady herself. "Do you see that writing table?" she asks the Student. He replies, "What an extraordinarily handsome piece!" The Young Lady continues: "But it wobbles. Every day I lay a piece of cork under that foot, but the housemaid takes it away when she sweeps, and I have to cut a new piece. The penholder is covered with ink every

morning, and so is the inkstand, and I have to clean them up after her, as regularly as the sun goes up." Her tale of woe is not merely an indication of the untidiness of a maid who ought to be dismissed; it is a parable about the problem of living. Although the writing table is a beautiful piece of furniture, it is also an artifact with a utilitarian function. Its defect, its one short leg, does nothing as yet to impair its beauty but does impair its function. The table wobbles. Therefore, its functional aspect must be ministered to regularly. But its use as a writing table impairs its beauty, for because it is used, its top gets messy and must be constantly cleaned.

Like everything else in the room, the writing table has a functional aspect (a material aspect) that works against its symbolic or aesthetic aspect. Moreover, the functional aspect of each object is imperfect. It is difficult to write on the table. It is nearly impossible to keep a fire going in the stove. It is impossible to marry and have children with the Young Lady.

The symbol enlarges metaphorically: the Young Lady is beauty or the keeper or repository of it. She also has a functional self. Beauty, here equated with purity and innocence, coexists with utility in a combative relationship within the same person. On the ontological level, the functions of the human woman in her daily life compel constant ministering to keep beauty alive. Sociologically, the household and the Young Lady's way of life can be maintained only at great cost. She has been buoyed up upon a sea of people who have labored to support her in her pristine state. But as the sociological structure breaks down, and as the Hummel family of vampires eats away at the foundations, the Young Lady gets ever closer to the filth that is the basis of all material life. In the first scene, the Student claims he had marveled at an apartment that was four flights up. One no longer wonders why that apartment is now on the ground floor.

The worldly paradise tentatively established by the young couple crumbles back into purgatory and the inferno. The Student rages at a world of appearances that kills the individual (the idealistic individual) with its insidious realities. He ends by stripping away even those insulatory secrets that the Young Lady had asked him to let her keep:

It was a Sunday morning, and I stood looking into these rooms. I saw a colonel who wasn't a colonel. I had a magnanimous benefactor who turned out to be a bandit and had to hang himself. I saw a mummy who wasn't one, and a maiden who speaking of which, where can one find virginity? Where is beauty to be found? In nature, and in my mind when it's all dressed up in its Sunday clothes. Where do honor and faith exist? In fairy tales and plays for children. Where can you find anything that fulfills its promise? Only in one's imagination!

Indeed, the illusions of reality are a construct of the Round Enlightenment mind. But as the Maya gives way to understanding and emptiness, *Kama-Loka* falls away. Likewise, as the Young Lady comes under the blows of the Student's revelations as she is confronted with the truth against which she no longer has any defense, her hold on life is loosened. Her sickness "at the very core of life" kills her psychologically because she cannot bear the oppression of living while knowing that her life is borne upon pretense. It physically kills her because, without the hope that the pretense had given her, she is

no longer strong enough to keep tying that knot that binds her body and her soul together. She is freed spiritually as her mind and body pass into oblivion. To borrow words used by Yeats in another connection, "the ceremony of innocence is drowned" drowned first in the wash of a decaying civilization and a decaying body and then drowned in the knowledge of its own impermanence. The Young Lady's soul escapes her body and leaves the room of ordeals behind.

In the final sequence of *The Ghost Sonata,* the material mode of reality is passed through. But the clarity of the vision of the life beyond is obscured. How is this vision of the purely immaterial to be expressed in a physical theater without using cliched images of the afterlife? And if the Buddhist motif is still used, how would one depict "emptiness"? Strindberg knows not to portray too much. His initial intent was to deny the eye any concrete image on which to focus. The lessons of the third scene would teach this much. Therefore, the senses are transported to another level. All visual signs blur, when the walls of the house fall away, into pure light a radiantly white incandescence. Likewise, speech and all other auditory signs pass into music. The movement of the senses is thus from an object plane to an ephemeral plane. This would have been the more powerful ending to the play.

Strindberg could not, however, use the magnesium light that he wanted, so he called for his set to dissipate into a two-dimensional vision a painted backdrop of *Bocklin's Isle of the Dead* seen as a continued mode of reality. One sees the Young Lady moving across a Stygian stretch of water into another portion of her life in which the earthly *Kama-Loka* is finished.

Once it is clear that the material mode is to be traversed that is, lived through rather than capitulated to (as in the case of Hummel) or avoided (as in the case of the Mummy in her closet) or poetically dressed in its Sunday best then the *Maya* falls away and nonrealistic staging takes over. To get to this point, however, the realistic depiction of the material scene provides a theatrical vehicle for the character of the human soul whose vehicle is the language of the dialogue. Since conflict can exist only between characters that are truly opposed, Strindberg has, in *The Ghost Sonata,* brought both characters face to face. He has pitted humanity's spiritual nature against its physical nature.

Source: Jon M. Berry, "Discourse and Scenography in *The Ghost Sonata*,'' *in Strindberg's Dramaturgy*, edited by Goran Stockenstrom, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 316-29.Gerald Parker

In the following essay, Parker discusses Strindberg's use of the play's visual components in a way comparable to his polyphonic or symphonic arrangement of the oral components.

The divergence of critical response to Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* is adequately represented by Eric Bentley and Maurice Valency. Bentley writes: "For all the heterodoxy of style and the fantasy of the action, the play is simple in structure and straightforward in its symbolism. The three compact scenes constitute a statement, a

counterstatement, and a conclusion." Valency, on the other hand, states that "Unquestionably the play has many faults. Its underlying narrative is fantastically complex. The relation of its three movements is neither close nor entirely apparent." The play, Valency concludes, is "a momentary glimpse of the world through the eyes of madness." Although it has frequently proved a temptation to locate, in Strindberg's art and vision, more of the apoplectic than the apocalyptic, to overemphasize, or indeed to take refuge in psychoanalysis rather than criticism, the extraordinary sense of form which is apparent in much of Strindberg' s art would seem to argue that Bentley' s sensitivity to the overall clarity of design in *The Ghost Sonata* is valid.

From his earliest plays on, Strindberg was subject to a deeply felt to urge objectify the interior life so as to give it shape. Like others of his epoch, he endured the abrupt disappearance of the gods and the resultant sense of dispossession. However, as Wallace Stevens observed, "There was always in every man the increasingly human self, which instead of remaining the observer, the non-participant, the delinquent, became constantly more and more all there was or so it seemed; and whether it was so or merely seemed so still left it for him to resolve life and the world in his own terms." For Strindberg, as perhaps for most others suddenly in exile, a complete resolution of the self and the world was never possible. Nonetheless, Strindberg attempted to meet the challenge "to resolve life and the world in his own terms." Something of this attempt is evidenced in the various prefaces, letters and essays from the Preface to Miss Julie, through "The New Arts, or the Role of Chance in Artistic Creation" *to Open Letters to the Intimate Theatre;* together, these works reveal in Strindberg a mind seriously determined to forge a new and a vital aesthetic of the theatre, an aesthetic responsive to an ever-changing vision of the self and the world. The "heterodoxy of style" in some of the late plays is to be seen as the direct expression of this ever-changing vision a vision characterized by a moral and intellectual turbulence well beyond the sense of a relatively calm and logical response which might inform the more conventional sequential dramatic structure implied by Valency. On the the other hand, although Bentley's sensitivity to the controlling shape of *The Ghost Sonata* is surer than Valency's, there is little evidence to support the rigidity of his formula: statement, counterstatement and conclusion. The structure of the play is, as Bentley suggests, "simple" and "straightforward" but for important reasons other than those his analysis proposes.

By the time of the writing of *The Ghost Sonata,* Strindberg was clearly beyond the realist conventions which informed such achievements as *The Father, Miss Juli*e and *The Bond* although he continued his intense concern with the problems of guilt and the class-sex struggle with which those and other plays dealt. By as early as the writing of Master 0/o/(1872-6), Strindberg was experimenting with his concept of polyphonic composition, which he considered "a symphony, in which all the voices were interwoven (major and minor characters were treated equally), and in which no one accompanied the soloist." This concept of polyphonic composition was, early in Strindberg's dramatic career, expanded to embrace the functioning of the non-verbal "aesthetics of the theatre" in production. There is no lack of evidence to indicate the great care which Strindberg gave to the crucial substantive functions of the mise en scene. As Strindberg's vision reached beyond the more narrow restrictions of realism, elements in

the mise en scene were orchestrated in strikingly new ways, and given additional vitality and dramatic purpose.

The most significant indication of this new vitality is the increased substantive role of the visual components of the *mise en scene in To Damascus* (1898-1904). The complex episodic form of this trilogy looks back to the sequential tableaux arrangement of medieval drama, to the literature of quest and pilgrimage generally (*Piers Plowman, Pilgrim's Progress*) to Romantic drama (*Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, Goethe's Faust, Ibsen's Peer Gyni*) and, perhaps more significantly, to *Biichner' s Woyzeck* which itself was influenced by the genre painting techniques of the *Sturm* and *Drang* movement. More importantly, the form of To *Damascus* looks forward to the basic principles of montage in the modern film (for instance in the work of Eisenstein, and in the juxtaposition of subjective and objective vision in Bergman's *Wild Strawberries and Persona*) as well as to the episodic structure of the plays of Brecht. Elements in *To Damascus* also appear to foreshadow the techniques of radical visual and auditory juxtaposition in such plays as Artaud's *Jet of Blood,* and Ghelderode's *The Chronicles of Hell.*

Strindberg was not unaware of the technical problems in the staging of *To Damascus.* Shortly before the composition of the first two parts of this play he had become interested in the drama of Josephin Peladan. What seems to have impressed him most was the carefully controlled visual simplicity of the outdoor productions of Peladan's tragedies in France. Similar techniques were employed by Emil Grandison in his production of *To Damascus*. Referring to Grandison's production, Strindberg notes the effective simplicity of the set which employed backgrounds not dissimilar to modern projected scenery. Such arrangement permitted uncluttered visual representation which would not interfere with language and gesture, which would unobtrusively (as in medieval stage practice) contribute symbolic visual reinforcement to the complex drama of a spiritual journey. Strindberg, in his relations with his designers Grandison, Karl Ludvig Grabow and August Falck, insisted upon the primacy of the spoken word over the "machinery" of visual display, and yet his varied notes on the production problems of To Damascus and *A Dream Play* give clear evidence of a desire to orchestrate an effective and meaningful balance of sight and sound. He did not sanction the more radical implications of, say, Gordon Craig's manifestoes in *The Mask* which championed an almost autonomous aesthetic of the theatre, an aesthetic foreseen by Hegel when he wrote, of developments in the arts of the theatre: that which in the first instance had merely the force of an assistant and accompaniment, becomes an object on its own account, and receives the appearance in its own domain of an essentially independent beauty. Declamation passes into song, action into the mimic of the dance, and scenery in its splendor and pictorial fascination itself puts forward a claim to artistic perfection.... [Thus can develop a theatrical art which] liberates itself from the exclusive precedency of articulate poetry, and accepts as an independent end what was previously, to a more or less extent, a mere accompaniment or instrument, and elaborates the same on its own account.

Strindberg insisted that the visual components of the *mise* en scene exist to serve the dramatic dialogue with "the force of an assistant and accompaniment;" nonetheless, the

BOOKRAGS

visual dimensions of To *Damascus* challenged the resources of his small theatre, and led ultimately to the encouragement of a new theatre aesthetic wherein the visual could contribute more substantively.

The grotesque banquet scene at the beginning of To *Damascus*, Part One, Act Three, illustrates the brilliance of Strindberg's control and use of the visual. In this scene, there is a striking sense of bizarre incongruity between the assembled luminaries and the poor, an incongruity immediately registered in the visual details of opulence and ostentation on one hand and of squalor on the other. In the course of the scene, the candelabras, flowers, splendid platters of peacock, pheasant, lobster and melons are replaced by plain earthenware mugs; the ceremoniously attired dignitaries give place to grotesque ragged figures, "figures of the night, and disagreeable looking women." Finally, after this visually managed transformation is completed, the scene dissolves first into complete darkness, then into a "conglomeration of scenery, representing landscapes, palaces, and interiors" from which there at last emerges a prison cell, illuminated by a solitary sun beam casting a white spot on a wall on which hangs a large crucifix. This gradual transition from bright colour to semi-darkness, from irradiated material magnificence to isolated austerity, from a scene containing about thirty people to the solitary presence of the Stranger and the semi-lit crucifix is a single movement, a complete pattern the rhythm of which unmistakably contributes to our immediate apprehension of the radical cadence of the Stranger's consciousness.

This cadence can perhaps best be described in terms of Schopenhauer's doctrine concerning the various stages in the objectification of the Will. In Thomas Mann's words, this Will

as the opposite pole of passive satisfaction, is naturally a fundamental unhappiness, it is unrest, a striving for something it is want, craving, avidity, demand, suffering; and a world of will can be nothing else but a world of suffering. The will objectivating itself in all existing things, quite literally wreaks on the physical its metaphysical craving; satisfies that craving in the most frightful way in the world and through the world which it has brought forth, and which, born of greed and compulsion, turns out to be a thing to shudder at. In other words, will becoming world according to the principium individuationis, and being dispersed into a multiplicity of parts, forgets its original unity and although in all its divisions it remains essentially one, it becomes will a million times divided against itself. Thus it strives against itself, seeking its own well-being in each of the millions of its manifestations, its place in the sun at the expense of another.

As Mann goes on to say, "Plato's 'ideas' have in Schopenhauer become incurably gluttonous." This "gluttonous" struggle of will and passion is most evident in Strindberg's handling of the Stranger's "pilgrimage" through the phenomenal world. In this banquet scene the bizarre juxtapositions of rich and poor, plenty and paucity, colour and darkness, underscore the turbulence and blindness of the Will's objectification, present us with the illusive "veil of Maya:" a world of appearances, a "thing to shudder at."

The scenic arrangement here is carefully contrived to augment the motifs of struggle and phenomenal complexity which the dialogue exhibits. In the theatre, the visual

presentation reveals directly the controlling rhythm of the Stranger's consciousness: the physical details of the mise en scene are orchestrated with a degree of expressive fluidity permitting Strindberg's drama of the soul a more concrete realization than could be acquired through dialogue alone. It was in this way that new and meaningful vitality was given to the visual in production.II

"I propose, then, a theatre in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theatre as by a whirlwind of higher forces." Thus does Antonin Artaud proclaim for the theatre a radical function. The true vitality of the theatre, Artaud claims, "consists of everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as is the language of words."

It is most evidently in this direction that the plays from *To Damascus* on are tending, despite Strindberg's insistence upon the primacy of language. Indeed, the language itself is frequently, as Artaud advocated, "like a dissociative force exerted upon physical appearances." That is, the language throughout many scenes in Strindberg's later plays (including the banquet scene just discussed) loses in the verbal complexities of speech its efficacy as a means of rational discourse but gains new expressiveness as mere sound, as "intonation." Artaud advocated the "concrete value of intonation in the theatre... this faculty words have of creating a music in their own right according to the way they are pronounced, independently of their concrete meaning and even going counter to this meaning of creating beneath language a subterranean current of impressions, correspondences, and analogies...." In this way, language becomes itself as "physically " expressive as are the visual components of the mise en scene. For instance, in the banquet scene, speech is employed in such a way as to reinforce the transition from bright opulence to dark austerity. Rather than operating primarily as the sign or symbol of the psychology beneath (*as, say, in the drama of Ibsen, or in Miss Julie*) language is established as a spectacle in itself designed to act "physically" upon the spectator much as do the visual juxtapositions. The speeches delivered by the Professor, The Stranger, the Father and the Beggar come to occupy what Artaud termed theatrical "space," to function within the complex visual context as mere sound. The spectator clearly apprehends that the theatrical event is not being played out on the conventional level of discourse or "discussion," that the speeches do not in themselves function as rational vehicles of dramatic action, as would be the case in Ibsen or Shaw. As the visual pattern gains a momentum culminating in a conglomeration of images, so does the language rapidly dissolve into a *melange* of voices, until both the visual and the auditory are silenced and stilled by a darkness which serves as a release from the multiplicity of divided and warring parts in a world born of the principium *individuationis.*

The Ghost Sonata is a much simpler, less theatrically ambitious work than *To Damascus;* however, the controlling rhythm and form of this work owes much to the sense of a revitalized mise en scene that we find in many parts of the earlier play. Both the visual aspects and the language of *Ghost Sonata* are orchestrated in such a fashion as to make theatrically lucid the underlying motifs and to establish on the sensory level alone an experience of extraordinary range and effectiveness. That is to say, the mise

en scene operates meaningfully with "the force of an assistant and accompaniment," helping to embody the rhythm of thought and feeling which the main action manifests; and the mise en scene, as a totality, possesses a certain sensual quality which, as sub-textual, autonomously elicits a response not unlike that demanded by music and painting.

For this reason, although Strindberg has carefully fused in this play "vision" and form, the structure of Ghost Sonata possesses a certain duality. On the one hand, there is the straightforward pattern of spiritual action: the Student's entrance into a house wherein he discovers first of all as an observer (in Scenes One and Two) and secondly as an active participant (in Scene Three through his relationship with the Girl) the "curse" which "lies over the whole of creation, over life itself." This action is cadential, tending, as Susanne Langer puts it in her analysis of the tragic rhythm, "to an absolute close." This "close" is the death of the Girl, and the Student's acquiescence to what is unmistakably a Schopenhauerian awareness of the hellishness of life. Again, in Thomas Mann's words, "every expression of the will to live has always something of the infernal about it, being itself a metaphysical stupidity, a frightful error, the sin." The action of the play is, then, on this primary level of "idea" entirely spiritual, and, as in the case of To Damascus, the controlling pattern is that of a quest. In Schopenhauer's terms, the first two scenes embody the principium individuationis with all its turmoil and divisions: here we are made to share the observing Student's apprehension of hell on earth. In the last scene, the Student fails to "save" the Girl, fails to effect through action in the phenomenal world any sort of redemption. However, in the last moments of the play, a kind of "elevation" is manifested, not through action, but in "being." Schopenhauer describes the "Nirvana" of his vision thus: "What lends to everything tragic, in whatever form it may appear, its peculiar impetus to elevation, is the dawning realization that the world, that life cannot grant any true satisfaction, and hence they do not deserve our attachment: in this consists the tragic spirit: hence it leads to resignation."

Such fearful resignation is the emotion informing the Student's concluding prayer to the Liberator death (considered as a sleep) and to the "wise and gentle Buddha," as well as his total awareness of "this world of illusion, guilt, suffering and death, this world of endless change, disappointment, and pain." If Schopenhauer's philosophy is of some assistance to the illumination of such spiritual action, likewise is the Oriental concept of the tension between the qualities of Samsara and Nirvana, a concept with which Strindberg was likely familiar, indeed, which is hinted at through the presence of the seated Buddha. Nirvana is a state reached "when a man becomes annihilated from his attributes" and thus "attains to perfect subsistence." Samsara, on the other hand, is the wheel of birth and death, the realm of "eternal succession and coincidence of evolution and involution." The Student acquires through observation in Scene Two a growing awareness of the overpowering force of this realm, and, as expressed in the *Vimala-kirti Sutra*, rather than initially shrinking from experience, he "plunges himself into the ever rushing current of Samsara and sacrifices himself to save his fellow creatures from being eternally drowned in it." His efforts, however, are futile, and his defeat is registered in a despair from which the concluding resignation springs.

Although this primary pattern of action is distinctly spiritual, the play, particularly in the first two scenes, and mainly through the appearance of the Cook in the third, is as fully expressive of the tensions of the material-social world as are the earlier realist plays by Strindberg. The spiritual action is lucidly portrayed through the gradual disappearance of the social context so evident in the opening scenes, especially in the complicated exposition by Hummel. As in Ibsen's late plays, the spiritual quest is firmly located in the familiar context of class and family strife, economics, and sex. And, as in such plays as *The Master Builder and When We Dead Awaken,* this context is gradually transcended largely because it represents the scene of personal choice and action which prove ineffectual as redemptive sources in the light of the appealing "metaphysical stupidity" of any expression of the will to live, that is, the will to choose and act. To a considerable extent, the three scenes depict this transcendence of the phenomenal world of action and choice by way of the gradual elimination of characters until only the Student and the Girl remain in a softly lit room visited occasionally by the vampire-like Cook.

Valency remarks that the "underlying narrative is fantastically complex. The relation of its three parts is neither close nor entirely apparent." There is certainly no denying the truth of this first assertion if we centre upon the bizarre complications of Hummel, the Colonel, the Colonel's wife ("White and shrivelled into a Mummy") and the Girl in the Hyacinth Room. These complications are related by Hummel to the Student in Scene One, and are revealed further in the ghostly gathering of Scene Two. Hummel admits the "fairy-tale" quality of his narration to the Student, admits the near impossibility of disentangling the threads of earlier action and the current relationships among the characters. "My whole life's like a book of fairy stories, " he says; "And although the stories are different, they are held together by one thread, and the main theme constantly occurs." This main theme is the stultifying stagnation of lives buttressed by lies, deceit, crime, sin and sorrow lives fettered in every direction by subjugation to the soul-destroying forces resulting from the principium individuationis and the world it has brought forth, "born of greed and compulsion ... a thing to shudder at." The "underlying narrative" is complex in the telling, but perfectly lucid as the embodiment of this main theme. Like the Student, we are under no obligation to deliberately sort through the complications and arrive at a clear pattern of temporal action: we are meant, surely, to share his confusion, his admission to Hummel "I don't understand any of this." In the theatre, the exposition by Hummel in the first scene and the more public admissions of crime and guilt in the second have a cumulative sensory effect; the complications become too involved for immediate rational comprehension and become, theatrically at one level, "mere sound." We are reminded of this use of language in the banquet scene of *To Damascus*, and, perhaps, of a similar use of language and complicated exposition in the plays of Ionesco.

Despite this grotesquely abstruse temporal level of action, the more important spiritual pattern of action is never lost sight of. This spiritual pattern is made evident through the gradual transcendence of the social context, and through the arrangement of the visual elements in the total *mise en scene.* Evidence of the movement from the familiar to the strange, from the temporal to the spiritual, is provided by the visual pattern which tends from the opening out-door, sun-lit scene with the fagade of a house, a street complete with drinking fountain, bench and advertisement column, to the Round Room of Scene

BOOKRAGS

Two with familiar (though oddly juxtaposed as in surrealist art) interior objects (a stove, pendulum clock, candelabra, cupboard) and the almost claustrophobic impression of enclosure, to, finally, the Hyacinth Room with its general "exotic and oriental" effect, its clusters of varicoloured hyacinths, and the dominating presence of a large seated Buddha.

In the course of this visual movement, the highly detailed and more overtly social context of the opening gives place to interior settings: first of all to the almost surreal Round Room, which, in a sense, functions like the single room setting of such plays as *Miss Julie or Ibsen'*s Ghosts (that is, as a room which seems symbolically to portray the environmental dimensions and entrapment of modern man), and secondly, to another, but stranger interior which is far more "cosmic" in its symbolic implications. The sun-lit effects of Scene One, with shadows giving emphasis to the angular shapes produced by the house fagade and the various street details (not to mention the array of objects seen within the house) give place to, first of all the darkly grim second scene, and then to the more subtly orchestrated harmony of coloured flowers and the striking effect of the Buddha from whose lap "rises the stem of a shallot (*Allium ascalonicum*), bearing its globular cluster of white, starlike flowers."

If the first scene is reminiscent of the visual effects of such a realist painting as Degas' Cotton Market in New Orleans, the final scene is reminiscent of Gaugin's Where do we come from? Where are we? Where are we going? (1897) a picture, incidentally, which seems to reflect something of the spiritual quest dimension of Ghost Sonata. In each of these scenes we never completely lose sight of the others. Scene One portrays vague interior details which become visually clearer in each of the following. In Scene Two, hints of the Hyacinth Room appear off to one side, where we see the Girl reading. In Scene Three, the door to the Round Room is lelt open, and we see the seated Colonel and Mummy, "inactive and silent," and have a slight glimpse of the death-screen used for Hummel. Thus the transitions are not, visually, totally abrupt. Finally, all these visual presentations, which correspond so well to the general pattern of action described earlier, are made to dissolve into a single effect, which in a carefully devised production might pick up certain forms and colours already impressed upon our eyes. As the Student's last prayer is concluded, Bocklin's *Isle of the Dead* appears, the small solitary figures, gloomy shadows, isolated gold-lit temples of this painting displacing the varied impressions of both familiar and strange which the three scenes visually manifested.

In addition to such an overall visual pattern is the pattern of sound which likewise reinforces, "with the force of an assistant and accompaniment " the main action of the play. Apart from the wide range of voices (as sounds or intonations) throughout the play, this pattern is composed of the sound of bells, an organ, a clock, street noises, a harp, the loud pounding on a table. Like the visual details, these sounds are orchestrated to reflect the movement from the "familiar" to the strange and spiritual. In the course of the play, the bells, organ and general street noises of Scene One give place to the more discordant sounds of Scene Two (produced mainly by the voices) and, finally, to the more lyrical sounds of Scene Three, which is framed by the harp-accompanied song, "I saw the sun." The final sound is that of "music, soft, sweet, and melancholy" as the Bocklin picture slowly pervades the entire visual plane. Undoubtedly, Artaud is right in

his production plans for this play in suggesting a considerable magnification of sound effects. For instance, to reinforce the steamship bells which are heard at the beginning (an image which, incidentally, is echoed in the small boat carrying passengers in Bocklin's painting) Artaud suggests that "A constant noise of water will be heard, loud at times, to the point of obsession." Artaud also suggests that the return of Hummel with the Beggars, in Scene One, should take place "in a great din. The old man will begin his invocations from very far off, and the beggars will answer him in several stages. At each call the crutches will be heard knocking rhythmically, sometimes on the ground, sometimes against the walls, in a very distinct cadence. Their vocal calls, and the beat of their crutches will be punctuated towards the end by a bizarre sound, as of a monstrous tongue violently knocking against a hole in the teeth."

The play affords many such instances when exaggerated sounds could be employed effectively. The close of Scene One is, perhaps, the most striking instance of an unnerving violence in the play. The relative calm of the opening dialogue in this scene rises rapidly into a crescendo of voices and excitement. The ghostly figures in the house rise and gesture, announcing their real presence, as Hummel stands in his wheel chair, drawn and followed by the beggars, screaming "Hail the noble youth!" Such a crescendo is repeated twice more in the play. In Scene Two, the silence of the group is suddenly broken by Hummel as he begins to function more formidably as the exposer of lies and crimes. His speech is punctuated with silences of varying length, until he rises again as in Scene One to a crescendo augmented by the magnified sound of the clock ("ticking like a deathwatch beetle in the wall"), and by the horrendous striking of the table with one of his crutches. This crescendo is broken by the Mummy who stops the clock and in a normal voice proceeds to expose Hummel himself. The scene then subsides in intensity as Hummel gradually loses his forceful manner, and becomes, himself, a grotesque parrot. In Scene Three, after a most lyrical beginning, the disturbing sounds of Scene Two are echoed first of all by the Cook's presence and the Student's violent reaction to her, and secondly, the crescendo is apparent in the course of the Student's relation of the events of the earlier scene to the Girl.

Generally speaking, these deliberately spaced crescendo rhythms together with the various auditory juxtapositions (particularly of the lyrical and the dissonant) contribute to a total sound pattern of wide range and expressiveness; in addition, the overall pattern of sound functions as does the visual in the manner of an assistant and accompaniment to the main spiritual action. The auditory and the visual together constitute "beneath language," as Artaud advocated, "a subterranean current of impressions, correspondences, and analogies." As components of the *mise en scene*, they assist the main action, and they possess a certain sub-textual quality which elicits a response not unlike that demanded by music and painting. In no other single play by Strindberg is there such clear evidence of an advanced aesthetic to a considerable degree expressive of Ionesco's assertion that "The theatre is visual as much as it is auditory. It is not a series of images, like the cinema, but a construction, a moving architecture of scenic images."

Critical Essay #3

For me, a play does not consist in the description of the development of a story that would be writing a novel or a film. A play is a structure that consists of a series of states of consciousness or situations, which become intensified, grow more and more dense, then get entangled, either to be disentangled again or to end in unbearable inextricability.... All my plays have their origin in two fundamental states of consciousness: now the one, now the other is predominant, and sometimes they are combined. These basic states of consciousness are an awareness of evanescence and of solidity, of emptiness and of too much presence, of the unreal transparency of the world and its opacity, of light and of thick darkness.

An account of a play's structure in such terms will first of all indicate the theatrical functioning of such auditory and visual components of the *mise en scen*e as have been discussed; and secondly, will give clearer definition to that movement and rhythm of a play which operates in the theatre somewhat independently of the principle narrative thread or action. Frequently in Strindberg's plays, certainly in such a work as The Inferno, we can appreciate a sense of form based upon such a rhythm of "states of consciousness" as Ionesco describes. In *The Ghost Sonata*, the close of Scene One, the exposing of Hummel in Scene Two, and the Student's narration to the Girl in Scene Three are three significant instances of "states of consciousness" which "become intensified, grow more and more dense, then get entangled, either to be disentangled again or to end in unbearable inextricability." The exposition by Hummel in Scene One surely induces in the Student and in the audience a sense of "unbearable inextricability" not unlike the "expository" passages in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* or the accumulation of questions in The Lesson (where the Student responds physically to words which have become like solid objects enclosing her). The close of Scene One also possesses something of the gradual rhythm of intensification and relaxation of tension that we find in *The Chairs.* On this level, the form of The Ghost Sonata is a continuous modulation of sound and silence, of intensification and relaxation, of a sense of evanescence and "too much presence." Such a modulation is theatrically orchestrated through tension and release which is related to, yet also independent of the more lucid and "straightforward" spiritual action of the play.

Source: Gerald Parker, "The Spectator Seized By the Theatre: Strindberg's The Ghost Sonata," in Modern Drama, 1971, Vol. 14, pp. 373-86.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Bandy argues that "the play is anchored to a strong underlying structure," which "consists of a series of tightly interlocking allusions to incidents recorded in the Bible."

Readers and audiences generally agree that August Strindberg' s The Ghost Sonata is a highly provocative play. It is assuredly one of his most popular. Yet, even the most thoughtful critics are hard pressed to explain exactly what this play is about, or to make much coherent sense of the action onstage. As fairly typical of present-day thinking, we may take this comment from an anthology widely-used in introductory literature classes:

The play is not, as far as reader or spectator can discover, based on any rational system of thought. It asserts, or, rather, it shows it does not prove. On the other hand, that Strindberg has not philosophized his vision renders it immune to rational criticism.

But before we capitulate altogether to the irrational (encouraged as we are by current theatrical fashions), we might do well to examine *The Ghost Sonata* from a fresh point of view. That point of view is, as my title suggests, Biblical; and the results of the examination may alter our ideas about the presumed absurdity of The Ghost Sonata.

It is true that most efforts to devise a "meaning " for *The Ghost Sonata* have been as perhaps such endeavors ought to be vague and disappointing. We well know that when we reduce the play to an obvious homily on greed, or age, we have no more a paraphrase of The Ghost Sonata than of King Lear. Yet we persist in our habitual search for order, attempting to unite character and action into a significant whole, despite the fact that such a design does not readily appear in this play. We are naturally reluctant to accept the intricate web of human relationships which is such a conspicuous feature of The Ghost Sonata, as, finally, of no particular importance or relevance. Our expectations as an audience are properly outraged by such prodigal expense of character and dramatic situation, to no purpose.

We need not despair, however. There is a good deal more order in *The Ghost Sonata* than we may at first observe, for the play is anchored to a strong underlying structure. And that structure consists of a series of tightly interlocking allusions to incidents recorded in the Bible. Nothing is more probable than this, of course. Strindberg was, in his peculiar way, constantly preoccupied with all manner of religious literature and doctrine. His eclectic tastes in reading included not only the Bible, but also writings of theologians of every stripe pre-eminent among whom was Emanuel Swedenborg. And from this rich background, Strindberg no doubt drew the materials which he has assembled to produce The Ghost Sonata. The clues are, to my mind, explicit and unmistakeable. And if they do not clarify all the dark sayings in the play (for that would demand a great deal more of them than is necessary to prove their presence), they do at least bring its main actions into a common focus, to offer us a coherent philosophical outlook.

As the play begins, we observe the Student asking the evanescent Milkmaid to give him a drink of water from the well. He then begs her to bathe his eyes with his handkerchief. When she does not respond to his request, the Student unwillingly reveals that he has just returned from an attempt to rescue persons trapped in a burning house. Consequently, his own hands are soiled from contact with wounds and corpses. At length, after he has drunk, the Student pleads: "Vill du vara den barmhartiga samaritanskan?" To understand the Student's question, at this crucial early point in the play, as implying no more than "Will you be my Good Samaritan?" as English translations customarily render it may be seriously misleading. For those particular words recall only the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan, on the road to Jericho, whose great act of mercy was his rescue of the man who had been set upon by thieves (Luke X:30-37).

Yet there is another possible Biblical allusion embedded in this question, one which is of much greater ultimate pertinence to the play than the parable could be. Because of the absence of specifically feminine inflections in English, our term "Good Samaritan" neutralizes an ambiguity inherent in the Swedish "samaritanskan." That is, the Milkmaid cannot, strictly speaking, be a Samaritan at all she is rather a Samaritan-ess. My purpose in raising this point is not simply to provide an exercise in comparative philology, but to lead to a further suggestion. We must remember that the Samaritan of the parable is by no means the only member of his tribe to figure prominently in the life and teachings of Christ. There remains yet another Samaritan and this one is a woman whom Christ himself met at Jacob's well. Several details of that meeting, the telling of which takes up the greater portion of a chapter in the Gospel According to St. John, are reflected to a striking degree in the opening lines of *The Ghost Sonata.*

In this Biblical story, we recall, Jesus has passed through Samaria while traveling from Judea to Galilee. In the city of Sichar, he pauses by the well. The narrative continues in this manner (I quote from the King James version):

There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou has nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (*John IV:7-14).*

Jesus remained with the Samaritans for two days afterwards, during which time he converted many: "And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the

woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world"(IV:41-42).

This, then, is our first Biblical allusion. Simply on the face of it, the opening scene of *The Ghost Sonata* in both its action and its setting has a far stronger affinity with this meeting at the Biblical Jacob's well, than with events which took place on the road to Jericho. But now let us look more closely at this well, which the Samaritan woman has identified as the gift of the father of Israel. It is surely no accident that both the Jewish patriarch, and the evil Hummel of *The Ghost Sonata,* bear the same name: Jacob. Hummel is, of course, the patriarch of the "Hummel family of vampires," and it follows that the well from which the Student drank is as much "Jacob's well" as that from which Christ drank.

With this parallel in mind, we might search for further similarities between Jacob Hummel and his Biblical prototype:

1) The patriarch's first wife was named Lia. Hummel's first wife was Amalia.

2) The homely and "tender-eyed" Lia (Genesis XXIX: 17) was put away by Jacob in favor of her sister Rachel. Hummel's abandoned natural-wife Amalia, now a grotesque mummy, is shut up in the closet because "her eyes can't stand the light."

3) Jacob was tricked into marrying Lia, whom he did not love, because it was necessary that she be wed before her younger sister. Hummel accuses Amalia of having falsified her birthdate, and accuses the Colonel of having stolen his true fiancee.

4) Jacob and Lia are parents of a single daughter (though of many sons), Dina, who is later ravished. Hummel and Amalia are parents of Adele, who expires in the final scene.

5) Jacob first unfairly gained from Esau his birthright, and then, by disguising himself as his brother, stole his paternal blessing. The Mummy says that Hummel's "whole life has been falsified, including his family tree."

6) In stealing Esau's paternal blessing, Jacob was to become master of all: "Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" (*Genesis XXVH:29).*

Hummel, despite his wickedness, exerts incredible power over all others in the play, by keeping them in his debt.

7) Though Esau hates his brother for his deeds, he is told by Isaac that he must serve Jacob until "it shall come to pass when thou shall have the dominion, that thou shall break his yoke off thy neck" (Genesis XXVIL40). Hummel is finally exposed by Ihe servanl Benglsson, whose words precipilale his collapse: "Yes, I know him and he knows me. Life has ils ups and downs, as we all know, and I have been in his service, and once he was in mine. To be exacl, he was a sponger in my kilchen for Iwo whole years."

8) Jacob was made lame by his weslling wilh Ihe angel of God, who "touched Ihe hollow of Jacob's Ihigh in Ihe sinew lhal shrank" (*Genesis XXXIL32)*. Hummel loo is a cripple, who says of his condition, "... some say it's my own fault olhers blame my parenls personally I blame il all on lifeilself...."

I have no doubl lhal we could discover olher ways in which Ihe history of Ihe Jewish patriarch is reflected in Ihe activities of Ihe Hummel family, for Ihe lives of bolh Jacobs were exlraordinarily eventful. I am nol especially troubled by Ihe facl lhal we find no ladders leading to heaven, or pillows of stone, in *The Ghost Sonata.* Nor lhal, on Ihe olher hand, Ihere are no milkmaids, or parrols, or mummies (so far as I can tell) in Genesis. Il is templing, bul unnecessary, to seek oul a Biblical analogue for every detail of *The Ghost Sonata. For example*, could nol Ihe facl lhal Jacob stayed al home and "sod pottage" Ihe pollage for which Esau gave up his birlh-righl have some conneclion wilh Hummel's beginnings in Benglsson's kilchen, as well as wilh lhal alter ego of Hummel, Ihe Cook? Bul Slrindberg certainly did nol intend to write simply a paraphrase of Ihe Biblical story. Moreover, we musl make due allowance for Ihe possibility of private symbols, such as would nol readily translate into Biblical terms. (I suspecl lhal Ihe Milkmaid, for example, is one of Ihese.) And indeed, Ihe recurring motif of Buddha and hyacinlhs, in particular, should caution us againsl becoming overly-rigid in Ihe application of Ihe formula.

Of all Ihe parallels belween Ihe Iwo Jacobs, perhaps Ihe mosl arresting aside from Ihe duplication of names is Ihe lameness of bolh men. Il is interesting to observe Ihe opinion of Swedenborg in Ihis mailer. As I have suggested, Ihe writings of Ihis Swedish Iheologian were seldom far from the mind of Slrindberg, and citations from Swedenborg appear frequenlly in Ihe works of Ihe latter. Il is nol ifficull to imagine (Ihough il is, of course, unprovable) lhal Slrindberg may have, al some lime in his life, pondered Swedenborg's explanation of Ihe "internal sense" of Jacob's injury:

... as this happened to Jacob, it is signified that this nature passed from him to his posterity, and thus was hereditary. That the nerve of that which was displaced signifies falsity, may be seen above; here falsity from hereditary evil.

A few paragraphs later, Swedenborg more fully describes Ihe nalure of "hereditary evil":

Hereditary evil derives its origin from every one's parents and parents' parents, or from grandparents and ancestors successively.... But what hereditary evil is, few know: it is believed to be doing evil; but it is willing and thence thinking evil.... That hereditary evil could not be eradicated from the posterity of Jacob by regeneration because they would not admit it, is likewise manifest from the historicals of the Word.

There remains a final aspecl of Ihese interconnecting allusions which we have nol yel explored fully, Ihough il may be Ihe mosl imporlanl, so far as Ihe "message" of The Ghost Sonata is concerned: Ihe Sludenl as a symbol of Chrisl. We galher lhal Hummel, who says he has "an infinitely long life behind me ...," has been expecting Ihe Sludenl, and knows all aboul him and his heroism in Ihe burning house, wilhoul having to be told. Il was likewise Jacob Ihe palriarch who firsl prophesied Ihe coming of Ihe Messiah: "The

sceptre shall nol be taken away from Judah, nor a lawgiver from belween his feel, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall Ihe galhering of Ihe people be" (Genesis XUX:10).

After he had slruggled wilh Ihe angel, Jacob's name was changed to "Israel," for his sons were to found Ihe tribes of lhal nation. Appropriately, Ihen, Jacob Hummel says to Ihe Sludenl: "Our destinies are tangled logelher Ihrough your falher and olher tilings," for Chrisl was of Ihe house of David and literally descended from Jacob. In jusl Ihose words does Ihe prophel Isaiah predicl Ihe coming of Ihe Messiah: "And I will bring forth a seed oul of Jacob, and oul of Judah an inheritor of my mountains ..." (Isaiah LXV:9). And much of Ihe prophetic writing of Isaiah speaks of Ihe coming of Chrisl as Ihe salvation of Israel: "... Ihy Saviour and Ihy Redeemer, Ihe Mighly One of Jacob" (LX: 16).

The identification of "Chrisl-figures" in ostensibly secular lileralure has, of course, long been a favorite scholarly pastime, and the attendant danger of permitting one's zeal to overbalance one's judgment is notorious. But the early resemblance in *The Ghost Sonata* of the Student to Christ is confirmed, I think, by another mention of Christ this time explicit and fully developed at the very conclusion of the play. Here, the Student ponders that similarity:

There are poisons that seal the eyes and poisons that open them. I must have been born with the latter kind in my veins, because I cannot see what is ugly as beautiful and I cannot call what is evil good. I cannot. They say that Christ harrowed hell. What they really meant was that he descended to earth, to this penal colony, to this madhouse and morgue of a world. And the inmates crucified Him when He tried to free them. But the robber they let free.

These words forcibly remind us, once more, of the life of Christ, again in close conjunction with the life of the Student. And, if one cares to press the analogy with the sonata-form (for there is much evidence that Strindberg intended us to do so: the three-part structure of the play, or the final coda, in which the Student restates all of the events of the play), he may see a certain aptness in this return to the initial theme of the first scene. In this closing meditation of the Student, we are pointedly reminded that Christ's purpose in entering hell (ironically realized in his rejection as the Messiah come to earth) is to harrow that region and to liberate the souls of men imprisoned there. It is logical to consider these final words of the Student in the light of what has gone before: we may view the collapse of the house of Jacob Hummel (that is, the "Hummel family of vampires") as, in effect, apocalyptic. Just as the Student attempts to save the life of the daughter, so is Christ to redeem mankind in the last days.

But if this parallel is intended, there is something badly amiss in the Student's *imitatio Christi:* the daughter, instead of embracing her savior, droops and dies. Similarly, the Messiah was rejected by the house of Jacob, or Israel. Moreover, we recall that Christ is traditionally described by the prophets as the "Bridgegroom" who comes to wed the lovely "daughter of Zion" (Isaiah LXII), a figure of speech which would appropriately describe the course of the Student's powerful, but unconsummated, longing for Hummel's daughter. Indeed, the Student's present inability to rescue anyone at all from the Colonel's house was forecast (perhaps "prefigured" is the better word) by his earlier

experience in the burning house. As the Student tells Hummel: "The next moment the house collapsed. ... I escaped but in my arms where I thought I had the child there wasn't anything...." Is not this to be precisely the fate of the Colonel's house? We mark the words of Johansson, Hummel's servant, as he explains to the Student that his master's method is one of "Eavesdropping on the poor. . . . Planting a word here and there, chipping away at one stone at a time until the whole house falls metaphorically speaking."

Metaphors within metaphors, we might rather say. But, call it what we will the Colonel's house, the burning house, the house of Jacob Hummel, or the house of Jacob-who-is-Israel the symbolic burden of this edifice is clear: the house which is collapsing is, in its largest sense, all of unredeemed mankind, bound together as a family by their common guilt and parasitism. One might detect in this formulation a doctrine of correspondences altogether Swedenborgian.

Thus do the actions of the Student, onstage and off, continually rehearse the long-awaited coming of Christ but always in a manner oddly distorted and inverted. The significance of this tangle of events and allusions may be summarized by words of the Student: "It's remarkable how the same story can be told in two exactly opposite ways." Remarkable indeed! In the eyes of the believer, the betrayal of Christ may represent a triumph of God's mercy and a promise of hope to all mankind but not so for the Student. He is a "Sunday child," as we are often told, and is able to see what others cannot see: that the tragic sacrifice of Christ is in no way beautiful or noble.

Unquestionably, Strindberg has written much autobiography into *The Ghost Sonata* (the almost ludicrous vampirism of the Cook is commonly recognized as an echo of his own difficulties with domestics at the time). And to this extent, his technique accords with what we have come to regard as a characteristic practice of "Expressionism ": a systematic interpretation of all experience through the subjective filter of the Ego. But we are not wise to ascribe such practices to Strindberg without considerable hesitation. We often tend to pigeonhole Strindberg as a precursor of this movement; but Expressionism, as an aesthetic philosophy, was unknown to him, and it came to full flower long after his time. The great danger of this classification is, of course, that it encourages one to cultivate certain critical attitudes toward Strindberg's work, perhaps to the neglect of other, equally valid, view-points. Hence, if we can label Strindberg a , we then have no difficulty at all in believing The Ghost Sonata incapable of analysis. But, with due regard for these pitfalls, we would not go too far to suggest that in *The Ghost Sonata* Strindberg has turned inside-out the traditional meaning on the passion of Christ: he transforms it into an eternal image of the Student's bitter disillusionment. Instead of looking to Christ for release from his unhappy existence, the Student in fact redefines Christian salvation in his own terms. At the center he places not an abstract God, but the Self.

And thus it appears that Strindberg has presented us with nothing less than a modern-dress, thoroughly up-dated parable of redemption but a redemption stripped of its Christian idealism and optimism. Though we recognize the fundamental similarity to Christ at Jacob's well when the play begins, we are soon aware of a profound departure

from the model. Christ converted the Samaritans, but the Student saves no one. Yet we should not be startled by his failure: the Student has already warned us that the same story can be told in two exactly opposite ways. The "living water" which Christ offered to the Samaritans flows from a source which, so far as the universe of this drama is concerned, has run quite dry. The Student cannot reconcile himself to the fact that, although Christ revealed himself as the Messiah whom Jacob had foreseen, he was nonetheless sacrificed. The Student' s eyes are now opened to the truth when he strikes the golden harp with the invocation "Sursum Corda," the strings do not sound.

In a final irony, the Student, far from preserving any of the self-destructive and doomed "Hummel family of vampires," is perhaps himself converted by them. He is, after all, of their seed; and their fleshly sins weigh on his soul as well. So does the Mummy accuse Hummel: "You have stolen the student, and shackled him with an imaginary debt of his father's, who never owed you a penny...." In the same way, the Student later comes to realize, was the Messiah destroyed by those whom he meant to save.

Even though the question is somewhat outside the boundaries of this study, we might now ask what purpose is served by those several conspicuous references to Buddha throughout *The Ghost Sonata*. They seem, at first glance, singularly out-of-place in a play so largely taken up with intramural debate over Judeo-Christian theology. But it may be that Buddha and the legend of the hyacinths are to provide a resolution of that debate. Strindberg seems to balance the values of an exhausted Western tradition, against the more inward-looking values of Eastern philosophy. It is no matter that Strindberg fails to offer a very definite idea of Buddhism, as it appears in the play. Rather, the mention of Buddha seems to serve in *The Ghost Sonata chiefly* as the antithesis of the deadly self-seeking which possesses the intimates of Jacob Hummel. It would be rash to infer that Strindberg is recommending mass conversion to Buddhism; yet he does seem to hold out the hope, not unusual among Western thinkers, that there is a solace to be found among the religions of the East, of a sort which is no longer possible in Western culture. It is clear that in the world inhabited by Jacob Hummel, the mystifications of Christianity are merely a cruel deception. The Student therefore concludes that the only possible liberator from the hell of life is death whose features strangely resemble those of the "pale Galilean": "Befriaren kommer! Valkommen, du bleka, milda!"

Source: Stephen C. Bandy, "Strindberg's Biblical Sources for *The Ghost Sonata,"* in Scandinavian Studies, August, 1968, Vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 200-09.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, Mays contends "that The Ghost Sonata takes as its main structural mode the fairy tale, that it is in fact a parodied fairy tale of sorts, and that this form is the means of saying something about Original Sin."

Despite a good deal of interest in Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata,* critics, as Evert Sprinchorn puts it, "seem reluctant to declare that the play possesses any great coherence." There has been, in fact, a marked willingness to take the dodge that "dreams needn't make sense": doubly specious, since plays are not dreams, however "dreamlike," and even dreams have, if not a logic, a psychologic. The many readers who find *The Ghost Sonata* one of the most exciting pieces in modern drama however much avoided by pusillanimous directors are surely correct. The play, that is to say, for all its admitted redundancies and even symbolic nonsequiturs, must have a thematic and symbolic coherence. The thesis here advanced which by no means explains everything is that *The Ghost Sonata* takes as its main structural mode the fairy tale, that it is in fact a parodied fairy tale of sorts, and that this form is the means of saying something about Original Sin.

Strindberg's was a basically religious consciousness, and a fascination with the concept of Original Sin would seem a natural corollary of his known obsessive fascination with guilt, especially marked in the chamber plays. *The Burned House,* which immediately precedes our play in the group, and is closely associated with it in the writing, turns on a question of the guilty past, and is full of allusions to the Garden, the Tree of Knowledge, and the loss of an (equivocal) childhood innocence. *The Ghost Sonata,* with that hallucinatory clarity peculiar to the surrealistic work, focuses on the universality and inescapability of guilt, bearing down on "innocent" and "sinful" alike in a debacle which seems fully as terrible as the pagan retribution rejected by the play and this despite the concluding unction of the Student's words on patience and hope, accompanied by "a white light," Bocklin, and "soft, sweet, melancholy" music.

Early in Scene I when the Old Man begins to open out the insanely complicated relationships binding the inmates of the Colonel's house, the Student says, "It's like a fairy story." Hummel, in replying, "My whole life's like a book of fairy stories... held together by one thread, and the main theme constantly recurs," seems to corroborate their genre and hints that his story and our play is about something specific. Seen in broad relief, *The Ghost Sonata* contains all the elements of the fairy story, and it is this which gives it a kind of structural cohesiveness not found in the other chamber plays, which seem to spill their symbols into a void. We have a poor but heroic youth, and one, moreover, especially blessed or singled out by destiny (a "Sunday child" with the gift of second sight). Our Student is enraptured of a beautiful and highborn maiden, who lives in a "castle" imagined by the Student to enclose all his life's desires. He thinks his suit is hopeless, but a "fairy godfather" with an aura of immense and mysterious powers appears and promises him an entree to "doors and hearts." In Scene II we discover, as we might have expected, that there are "ogres" in the castle who have the maid in thrall; but the fairy godfather is prepared to do them battle. In the third scene we would further

expect the fairy princess and hero to be united and "live happily ever after." Just how true and false to the facts of the play this outline is should be apparent; yet in the play's relation to this submerged paradigm, I am suggesting, lies much of its meaning.

For the fairy tale, after all, is a projection of the return-to-Paradise wish. Whatever his ill fortune (symbolic of the fallen world), the hero's desert is always good (he is naturally good, an erect Adam), and the powers that be, somehow always recognizing this, return him and his Eve, the princess (who has suffered her trials as well), to Paradise, shutting the golden doors of "they lived happily ever after" firmly before our inquisitive eyes. In The Ghost Sonata Strindberg uses parody and distortion of the fairy tale to make it say the opposite thing: that guilt is contagious, innocence non-existent, or, if in some sense real (the girl), it is "sick" and "doomed," "suffering for no fault" of its own. In Adam's fall, sinned we all. Nor is there any Paradise to be regained in the last act. The Student says of the girl's house: "I thought it was paradise itself that first time I saw you coming in here." But the flowers in the "paradise" are poisonous; it is in fact a place of ordeals, where no dreams come true. In sum, despite the vague appeal of the Student (who seems in these last moments of the play to have stepped out of the character of hero and into the function of raisonneur) to a "Liberator" who will waken the innocent girl to "a sun that does not burn, in a home without dust, by friends without stain, by a love without a flaw" despite this perhaps rather sentimental gesture, the force of the play is compacted into a metaphor for Original Sin: it is expressive of the agony of "this world of illusion, guilt, suffering, and death .. . endless change, disappointment, and pain."

Strindberg's meaning in the play is put both abstractly and concretely: both in discursive "talk," such as we have rather too much of in the Student's last speeches, and in the most vivid symbols, such as the vampire cook a disturbing contribution of paranoia to art. The Student says that "The curse lies over the whole of creation, over life itself'; but this allusion to the fallen world is only effective because we have seen the "haunted" old house, in which the very air is tainted, "charged with crime," so that its inmates, guilty and innocent alike, are withering away.

It has been said that "the fairy tale's miracles occur on the material plane; on the spiritual plane (affections; characters; justice; love) law abides." *The Ghost Sonata* is a fairy tale parodied and distorted. We have not witnessed this play for long before getting a disturbing sense that nothing is quite right, that even a "spiritual logic" is being tampered with. Is the Old Man, Hummel, a benefactor, or a self-serving user of other people, after power or what? That is, is he good fairy or wicked witch? There are abundant hints to shake our confidence in Hummel, the most startling of which is the first sounding of the vampire-motif when Hummel takes the Student's hand in his icy hand, and the Student struggles to free himself, saying, "You are taking all my strength. You are freezing me." Variations on this theme occur throughout the play, of course: "vampirism" is a multiplex symbol for vicarious gratification ("enjoy life so that I can watch, at least from a distance"), for enslaving others by a knowledge of their guilty secrets (Johansson, the Colonel), or by a sense of obligation (the Student) or by usury. Hummel is a "bloodsucker " both metaphorically, on the surreal level of "sucking the marrow out of the house," and economically (the debts of the Consul and the Colonel).

There is, if anything, a redundancy of suggestion of evil identity for the Student's ostensible benefactor: he is a pagan god in a chariot, a wizard, an "old devil." Hummel's Mephistophelean character is underlined by his saying to the Student, "Serve me and you shall have power."

STUDENT. Is it a bargain? Am I to sell my soul?

And when the Student, after hearing something disturbing about Hummel from Johansson, his servant, decides to escape from him, the girl drops her bracelet out of the window, the Student returns it, and there is no more talk of escape. The girl serves Hummel's purpose in a sense as Gretchen does Mephisto' s. (And both women are destroyed, though I am not suggesting the parallel be taken any further.)

The question of the essential nature of Hummel remains a difficult one. He is clearly the most dynamic character in the play, the one who seems to make everything happen. With the Student as the "arm to do [his] will" Hummel will enter the Colonel's house and "expose the crimes" there so that the girl (his daughter by the Colonel's wife), withering away in the evil atmosphere, can live again in health with the Student. All is for the young couple; Hummel's cleansing revenge is to involve the "ghosts" only. But by Scene II we are as suspicious of Hummel's intention as is the Mummy. In any case, realistic criteria of character consistency and continuity of action are mostly irrelevant in this play. If we are unsure what Hummel's "real" purpose with regard to the "innocents" is, we are no more sure how his defeat by the Mummy has influenced the outcome of the play in Scene III. Are the Mummy, the Colonel, and the others versus the Old Man two groups of equally evil figures who mutually destroy each other? This would seem to leave the field clear for the blossoming of young love, the ghost house purged. But before we can understand more fully why this is not the case, the Student must be considered.

The role of the Student in *The Ghost* Sonata also has its curious features. Does the play's conclusion leave him saved or damned? A survivor the only one or a victim? Or is he, by the conclusion of the play, not a protagonist at all, but dramatist's *raisonneur,* as suggested above? It seems to me that in his final speeches he does assume the function of authorial surrogate, but that there is a certain fitness to this: like Strindberg, the Student is an innocent trying to believe in an unfallen world in the face of the horrors of real existence. He is an Adam-figure, a "Sunday child," who, when he first saw the house of his beloved on Sunday morning the "first day of creation" thought it was paradise. But he is a fairy tale hero ejected from his fairy tale world and a cruelly parodied hero at that. His dream of bliss is all bourgeois: '" Think of living up there in the top flat, with a beautiful young wife, two pretty little children and an income of twenty thousand crowns a year.'" The conclusion of Scene I is also parodistic, and splendid theater: Hummel, standing in his wheel chair which is drawn in by the beggars, cries: "Hail the noble youth who, at the risk of his own life, saved so many in yesterday's accident. Three cheers for Arkenholtz!" This scene is followed by a nice tableau of the beggars baring their heads, the girl waving her hankerchief, the old woman rising at her window, and the maid hoisting the flag. Strains of a bizarre slapstick are found throughout the play; the audience should laugh, but not over-confidently.

The girl and the Student fairy tale hero and princess do not figure in Scene II, where the ogres or witches fight. At least one consequence of Hummel's defeat follows the fairy tale pattern: Johansson, his servant, is "freed from slavery" by his death, as the victims of the enchanter or wicked witch always are. Alone with his beloved in the Hyacinth Room in Scene III, the Student's expectations are clearly for speedy achievement of his heart's desire. "We are wedded," he says; but his Eve must disillusion him. This place is not what it seems; it is no paradise, and no fairy-tale "ever-after," but is "bewitched" "bedeviled" we might more literally call the post-lapsarian world. Hummel "old Adam" as well as "old Nick"? may be dead (literally by his own hand, as Adam was in effect), but his influence lives on after him. "This room is called the room of ordeals," says the girl; "It looks beautiful, but it is full of defects." We are placed on earth to work out our salvation; and earth's beauties are no end in themselves, but illusory, mutable ("defective"). The metaphor for this in The Ghost Sonata is domestic if insane. The Student's "paradise" was domestic; his fate is the domestic demented; instead of "they lived happily ever after," we see the fairy princess at the kitchen sink, in effect. It is not the real world, but the domestic-surreal, this house with servants who unclean, cooks who un-feed; but the surreal can be taken as measure of the recoil of the tender soul (Strindberg, the Student) from real life. As the Student says in closing, only in the imagination is there anything which fulfills its promise. The Student, rather like his creator, is Adam who refuses to accept his ejection, symbolically as well as psychologically the child who refuses to grow up. ("Where are honor and faith? In fairy-tales and children's fancies.") "I asked you to become my wife in a home full of poetry and song and music. Then the Cook came ..." says the Student. "What have we to do with the kitchen?" he asks the girl, who replies, "realistically," "We must eat." The Student reflects Strindberg's neurotic fastidiousness, well known, toward the "lower functions"; and eating, by the mechanism known to psychologists as "displacement," can represent the sexual function, also profoundly disturbing to Strindberg: "It is always in the kitchen quarters that the seed-leaves of the children are nipped, if it has not already happened in the bedroom." The Student wants to live in a garden with his bride, but this garden is "poison": "You have poisoned me and I have given the poison back to you," says the Student. But perhaps the "sickness" is in fact the "Student's": It is the recoil of a pathological romanticism upon itself which sees the earth as "this madhouse, this prison, this charnel house." Strindberg, like his surrogate, the Student, desires the fairy-tale princess in a "home full of poetry and song and music" a home with no "kitchen quarters," only conservatory. That this whole fairy-tale gone crazy is a projection of the Student's we may take as admitted in his saying that he is a man born with one of those "poisons that open the eyes" or does it "destroy the sight"? "for I cannot see what is ugly as beautiful, nor call evil good."

As the girl enumerates all the tasks which weigh her down, the Student cries out again and again for "Music!" music to drown out the sounds of real life. But it is no more possible to do so than it is for Strindberg to ring in "soft, sweet, and melancholy " music at the end of his play in order to effect a resolution. The emotion we depart with is fear trembling on the brink of hysteria, the image that of the grinning vampire cook. No vague promises of a "Liberator," a waking to a "sun that does not burn, in a home without dust, by friends without stain, by a love without a flaw" can salve over the fact, of which The Ghost Sonata is the gripping symbol, that "a curse lies over the whole of

creation, over life itself." Out of his own conflict between paradise and the fallen world, fairy-tale and reality, Strindberg has made stunning drama.

Source: Milton A. Mays, "Strindberg's Ghost Sonata: Parodied Fairy Tale on Original Sin," in Modern Drama, 1967, Vol. 10, pp. 189-194.

Adaptations

A television version of T*he Ghost Sonata,* translated by Michael Myer and directed by Stuart Burge, was aired by the British Broadcasting Corporation on March 16, 1962. Afterward, the same production was broadcast in the United States and Australia.

In 1930 the play was turned into an opera, with music by Julius Weissmann, and performed in Munich. The operatic Ghost Sonata appeared in Duisburg and Dortmund in 1956.

Topics for Further Study

In literature, a symbol is something that represents something else, and is often used to communicate deeper levels of meaning. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous novel The Scarlet Letter, for example, the red letter "A" worn by Hester Prynne is a symbol not only of her supposed crime (adultery), but also of her neighbors' bigotry and her own courageous pride. Strindberg incorporates many symbols into The Ghost Sonata in order to communicate deeper levels of meaning to his audiences. Consider the importance of the Old Man's wheelchair, the Girl's hyacinth flowers, and the pendulum clock as symbols in the play. What might each one represent? How are they viewed by different characters? How do they affect your understanding of the plot of the play? What are some of the play's other important symbols and how are they used?

The form of *The Ghost Sonata* is modeled after a particular type of chamber music. A "sonata" is a three- or four-part composition that consists of independent movements that vary in key, mood and tempo. Typically the first section of a sonata is exposition, in which a theme is introduced, followed by a section that develops the theme, and ending in a recapitulation of the theme. Listen to one of Mozart's many piano or violin sonatas, Haydn's sonata number 19 in D-major, or Beethoven's D-minor piano sonata and determine ways in which Strindberg's play is constructed like this chamber music form. Consider the number of scenes and the flow of action in *The Ghost Sonata*, as well as the play's themes and the way they are woven into the plot and "recapitulated" near the end.

A "motif' is a theme or an idea that occurs again and again in a work of art. In The Ghost Sonata, death seems to be a dominant motif. What are the many ways that death is discussed, or that images of death appear in the play? What message or messages regarding death do you suppose the playwright is trying to communicate to his audience?

Several characters in *The Ghost Sonata* are referred to simply by descriptive titles instead of proper names. Why do you suppose Strindberg chose to call some of the most important characters in the play "The Student," "The Old Man," "The Milkmaid," "The Colonel," and "The Girl," instead of giving them individual names? How does this affect the way you view the characters? Would you prefer that they be called by proper names? Why/why not?

The Ghost Sonata has often been compared to absurdist plays of the mid-twentieth century. Read a play by the famous absurdist author Samuel Beckett, such as Waiting for *Godot* (1952) or *Endgame* (1958). How are the characters in each play alike? How does each play view serious subjects like human relationships and death? Can you find examples of humor appearing in unlikely places in both plays? What effect does this have?

Compare and Contrast

1907: Gustav V becomes King of Sweden. During his 43-year rule the Social Democratic Party created many progressive reforms, including extension of voting rights, the introduction of an eight-hour workday, public child welfare, and state-subsidized housing.

Today: A new Swedish Constitution in 1975 dissolved all of the powers of the king. Sweden is now governed by a Prime Minister and a Parliament, and, like many industrial nations, is in the process of deregulating the economy, privatizing formerly government-owned industries and businesses, and cutting government spending on welfare programs.

1907 Many countries around the world, including the United States, do not allow women to vote, or to serve in public office.

Today: In 1994, Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson led a Social Democratic Party government in which half of his cabinet, and 41 percent of the entire parliament, were women, the highest percentage of women lawmakers in any government in the world.

1907 Marriage in most western cultures is viewed as a religious vow and a civil contract, and separations, or divorces, are hard to obtain. In Great Britain and the United States, for example, a separation decree could only be granted if one spouse could prove that the other had somehow caused injury, through such means as adultery, habitual drunkenness, impotence, committing a felony, abandonment, or severely abusive behavior. Men and women who divorced were often viewed as immoral, and treated as outcasts. Out of almost one million marriages conducted annually in the United States, fewer than 100,000 (less than 10%) end in divorce.

Today: "No-fault" divorce laws in many states have made divorces much easier to obtain. "Irreconcilable differences" is a common, simple, and acceptable reason cited as the reason many spouses separate. Each year, 2.5 million people marry in the United States, and nearly half of those marriages are expected to end in divorce.

1907 The early years of flight: On December 17, 1903, Orville Wright first flew a heavier-than-air craft under its own power for 12 seconds at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. A year later, he and his brother, Wilbur, had constructed an "airplane" that could stay airborne, turn and bank.

Today: The wartime uses for airplanes helped speed the development of the transportation technology. By the 1950s, more people were crossing the Atlantic Ocean in airplanes than on ships. In the 1970s, Britain and France developed the Concorde, a jet plane that allows travelers to fly faster than the speed of sound, and reach the United States from Europe in only a few hours. In 1995, airlines worldwide flew an estimated 1.26 billion passengers.

1907 Although "penny arcades" had been showing short motion pictures to individual viewers since Thomas Edison demonstrated his "kinetoscope" in 1894, it wasn' t until photographer George Eastman and inventor Thomas Armat combined flexible film with a projector that mass audiences could sit in one room and watch "movies " together. The first movie theatre opened in 1905, and by 1909 there were 8,000, each seating about 100 people, offering short film attractions. D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) proved that the new medium could compete with the style of realism popular in the live theatre, and soon the film industry surpassed the theatre as the world's favorite form of entertainment.

Today: Multimillion-dollar blockbuster films may now be purchased or rented, taken home, and viewed on a television with the help of a videocassette recorder (VCR) or digital video disc (DVD) player. Many films are made and released directly to the new tape or disc format, or aired on one of many cable television stations. The television is the late-twentieth century's private kinestoscope, and fewer than 10% of the population attends live theatrical events.

What Do I Read Next?

In a career spanning forty years, August Strindberg wrote 60 plays. Many were never very popular, and are no longer performed, even in the author's native Sweden, but some have become classics of modern dramatic literature. Try reading *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1889), a short one-act play called *The Stronger* (1889), or his "dramatic lyrical-fantasy in fourteen scenes," written partly in prose and partly in verse called A Dream Play (1901).

The Ghost Sonata is often considered an early form of twentieth century experimental drama like Expressionism or Absurdism. Consider reading T*he Emperor Jone*s (1920), an expression-istic drama by American playwright Eugene O'Neill, or Samuell Beckett's 1952 absurdist play Waiting for Godot.

Like a handful of other great European writers during the last decades of the nineteenth century, Strindberg was profoundly affected by the movement toward Realism in drama. His Miss Julie (1889), for example, is a realistic drama, interwoven with symbolic imagery. Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House (1880) and Russian writer Anton Chekhov's The *Three Sisters* (1901) are two other examples of turn-of-the-century European Realism.

A dominant theme of The Ghost Sonata becomes the disappointment and pain the world causes, and the search for relief in the afterlife, an idea familiar to Existentialist thinkers and writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To learn more about Existentialism and its effects on literature, try a critical history like Walter Kaufmann' s Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre (1988) or go right to the source with Soren Kierkegaard's The Concept of Dread (1844) or Fear and Trembling (1846).

There is a Gothic horror quality to the characters and plot of The Ghost Sonata that resembles the work of the American short story author Edgar Allan Poe. Check out Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) and "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), two horror tales with creepy characters and unsettling stories.

Like many prolific and successful playwrights, Strindberg occasionally shared his insights on his craft in essays he wrote about the theatre and the art of playwriting. One such essay, "On Modern Drama and Modern Theatre" (1889), appears in Playwrights on Playwriting (1960), a compilation of essays by such notable dramatists as Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill, Bertolt Brecht, and Arthur Miller.

Further Study

Meyer, Michael. Strindberg, Seeker and Warburg, 1985.

A thorough biography of playwright August Strindberg, including a complete history of his childhood, his several marriages, his 1884 trial for blasphemy in Stockholm, his investigations into the occult, and his immense body of writing, including plays, novels, stories and essays. Also contains several pages of photographs and illustrations from Strindberg's life and the production of his plays.

Meyer, Michael, ed. File on Strindberg, Methuen, 1986.

A collection of excerpted comments and criticism about Strindberg's plays, taken largely from theatre reviews, letters from Strindberg's friends and associates, and writings by the author himself. Also includes a chronology of Strindberg's work and a bibliography of other research sources.

Nicoll, Allardyce. *World Drama: From Aeschylus to Anouilh, Harcourt, Brace and Company, rev. ed., 1976.*

In a book that describes trends in dramatic literature from the Ancient Greeks to the twentieth century, Nicoll places August Strindberg alongside Ibsen and his other Scandinavian contemporaries in an essay titled "Strindberg and the Play of the Subconscious."

Strindberg, August. The Son of a Servant, translated by Claud Field, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913.

Strindberg's autobiography, in which he details his unhappy childhood as one of eight surviving children born to a bankrupt father who was once part of an aristocratic family and a mother who was once a waitress.

Tornqvist, Egil. Strindbergian Drama: Themes and Structure, Humanities Press, 1982.

Tornqvist notes that several authors and critics have assembled biographies of August Strindberg, and attempted critical discussions of the ideas found in his plays and where he fits into late nineteenth century theatre history, but that little has been written about the actual structure of his plays, and how his formal style is different from that of his contemporaries. Strindbergian Drama examines ten of Strindberg's plays, from The Father to A Dream Play and The Ghost Sonata, and considers the importance of imagery, plot, language and borrowed forms to their creation.

Bibliography

Bandy, Stephen C. "Strindberg's Biblical Sources for Ghost Sonata," in Scandinavian Studies, August, 1968, Vol. 40, no. 3, p. 208.

Goodman, Randolph. Introduction to Drama on Stage [his English language version of The Ghost Sonata], Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978, pp. 428-437.

Hampton, *Wilborn. A review of The Ghost Sonata, in the New York Times, May 9, 1995.*

Lide, Barbara. A review of The Ghost Sonata, in Theatre Journal, March, 1992, p. 109-111.

Nicoll, Allardyce. World Drama: From Aeschylus to Anouilh, Harcourt, Brace and Company, rev. ed., 1976, p. 563.

Richardson, Maurice. A review of the BBC television production of The Ghost Sonata, in the London Observer, March 18,

1962, reprinted in Drama on Stage, edited by Randolph Goodman, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978, pp. 439-441.

Sinclair, Clive. A review of The Ghost Sonata, in the Times Literary Supplement, June 12, 1992, p. 18.

Strindberg, August. Letter to Edvard Brandes, c. June 12, 1885, excerpted in File on Strindberg, edited by Michael Meyer, Methuen, 1986, p. 51.

Strindberg, August. Letter to Anders Eliasson, July 11,1896, excerpted in Strindberg, by Michael Meyer, Seeker and Warburg, 1985, p. 341.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Drama for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any

form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

BOOKRAGS

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535