DREAM REALITY:
AUGUST STRINDBERG'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE
DREAM FORM IN THE GHOST SONATA

by

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The following thesis is an examination into August Strindberg's mode of dramatic expression following his so-called "naturalistic" phase. This study will focus on Strindberg's means of expressing his subjective vision of the world around him as it is developed in one of his last plays, The Ghost Sonata (1907).

First, we will view the failure of naturalism as it applies to Strindberg's dramatic objectives; for naturalism as prescribed by Zola proved to be a too restrictive form of poetic expression, limiting the artist to the presentation of objectively verifiable external realism. Strindberg sought to explore the reality of the internal world, or life as it affects the very soul of the dramatist. This he accomplished through the creation of the dramatic dream form where visions and hallucinations merge with past and present objective events into a world of psychological reality. The form and techniques for creating such hallucinatory visions of reality are not new, but a fusion of these into a single dramatic work has been of seminal influence in 20th century drama.

Second, we will turn to Strindberg's creative process which bears a remarkable similarity to Freud's
explication of the nature of the "dream-work" in Traumdeutung. Furthermore, the dream form of The Ghost Sonata employs the various techniques that comprise the various stages of the dream-work. But these techniques are parallel to certain literary developments of which Strindberg was aware and consequently on which he molded his work. This becomes the basis for the third area of examination which covers the naturalistic, symbolistic and surrealistic techniques as they are applied to the structure of The Ghost Sonata.

The conclusion of this examination demonstrates Strindberg's perfect fusion of these previously established literary techniques into the dream-form. Even though none of the separate entities can be attributed to Strindberg's creative innovations; the use, adaption, expansion and fusion of these techniques into the dream-form serve admirably as a projection of the artist's personal vision of life into dramatic form.
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"Hallucinations, fantasies, dreams, are all very real to me. If I see my pillow assume various human forms, then those forms are there; and if someone tells me that they exist only (I) in my imagination, then I say, Only!! What my inner eye sees is more important to me."

(August Strindberg in letter to Torsten Hedlund, July, 1896)

"as far as The Ghost Sonata is concerned, don't ask me what it is about. Discrétion, s'il vous plaît! One enters a world of intimations where one expresses oneself in half-tones and with a soft pedal, since one is ashamed to be a human being."

(August Strindberg in letter to Emil Schering, April 7, 1907)
Chapter One: The Failure of Naturalism

In the 1880's Strindberg embraced the new literary movement—Naturalism—in revolt against the stagnation of the conservative European theater. In retrospect Strindberg in his *Open Letter to the Intimate Theater* tells of the structure imposed upon the playwrights:

When anyone in the 1860's and 1870's submitted a full length play to the Royal Theater, he had to observe the following requirements if he were to get it performed. The play should preferably have five acts, each act should be approximately twenty-four sheets long, or, in all, 5 x 24 = 120 folio pages. The division into scene was not appreciated and was considered a weakness. Every act should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The end of an act should be the place for applause, which was aroused by an oratorical figure, and, if the play was in blank verse, the last two lines should rhyme. Within the plays were "numbers" for the actor which were called "scenes"; the soliloquy or monologue was permitted and frequently was the high spot or climax; a longer emotional outburst or a speech of condemnation or an exposure was almost necessary; one could even relate something—a dream, an anecdote, an event.¹

Strindberg revolts against these strictures imposed by the Swedish, or for that matter, the entire European Boulevard theater establishment and becomes a so-called "naturalistic" writer. The label "naturalistic" is somewhat misleading for it suggests adherence to the French school of naturalism. Though Strindberg was an
admirer of Zola and his aims, he was not always able to follow the limitations of "photographic detail" and "scientific objectivity", hence his drama falls short of the requirements of naturalistic drama as set down by Zola. —witness the reservations Zola has about Strindberg's "naturalistic" attempts in The Father:

Pour être franc, des raccourcis d'analyse m'y gênent un peu. Vous savez peut-être que je ne suis pas pour l'abstraction. J'aime que les personnages aient un état civil complet, qu'on les coudoie, qu'ils trempent dans notre air. Et votre capitaine qui n'a même de nom, vos autres personnages qui sont presque des êtres de raison, ne me donnent pas de la vie la sensation complète que je demande. Mais il y a certainement là, entre vous et moi, une question de race. Telle qu'elle est, je le répète, votre pièce est une des rares œuvres dramatiques qui m'aient profondément remué.  

(letter 14 December, 1887)

Zola in the Preface to Thérèse Raquin in writing about the break with the established dramatic forms states: "Il ne doit plus y avoir d'école, plus de formule, plus de pontife d'aucune sorte." (25 July, 1873) However, it was not long before Zola had exchanged the formula of the "well-made play" for his new and equally strict creed of naturalism. Even though Strindberg was sympathetic toward Zola and his followers, he was not prepared to exchange one limiting form for another equally limiting form.
The influence of Zola's theoretical writings, especially *Le naturalisme au théâtre*, on Strindberg has been examined by B. G. Madsen in *Strindberg's Naturalistic Theatre*. In it Madsen studies the naturalistic principles established by Zola and their employment by Strindberg in the so-called "naturalistic" plays. Madsen lays down a useable definition of naturalism as being a "realistic literature with scientific pretensions." More specifically, according to Zola's definition of naturalism the dramatist must observe reality and depict life as it is through carefully documented means. Much like the scientist, the writer must abandon abstraction for realities and replace ready-made formula with vigorous analysis. In order to make the lives of the characters portrayed in drama scientifically valid the naturalist employs the results of physiological and psychological research. Hence in the portrayal of characters the author must point out how character is determined by the forces of heredity and environment. In addition to the psychological portrayal of character Zola called for the presentation of realistic decor, simplicity of structure, and grand conflicts. He also called for naturalness of staging, acting and diction. This became the basis for Zola's so-called "nouvelle formule" which Madsen has
so aptly demonstrated to rest on the principle of faire vrai, faire grand and faire simple.\(^6\)

Zola's determinism is based on the positivistic ideas set forth in Taine's *Introduction a l'histoire de la litterature anglaise* where the influencing factors in a literary work of art are race, milieu and moment.\(^7\) This concept of scientific determinism Zola sought to apply to the theater. The author's view of the nature of experience should be in accord with scientific principles so that the portrayal of characters and situations is not only accurate in external appearance—photographic realism—but also reflects and reveals a pattern of ideas—in this case a scientific theory or law—which controls its actions. In a sense naturalism in the theater was intended to be an almost clinical portrayal of man as he responds to predetermined forces as based on scientific principles and observations. Thus one of the chief aims of naturalism is the depiction of that which is, i.e., to observe and report the "scientific" truth.

Though naturalism as envisioned by Zola emphasized the portrayal of scientific and photographic truth, it stops short of the logical continuation of scientific inquiry into an even deeper exploration of the truth. Essentially the ever-widening study of truth would take
into account subjective as well as objective aspects of an inquiry. Such continued probing, as pointed out by Martin Esslin would include the very nature of our perceptions—whether objective or subjective—the very base upon which any study of reality is built. These considerations, though the logical consequence of a creed which promised truthfulness and accuracy of observation, were outside the scope of naturalism. After all, to profess a creed of objectivity and then to conclude by studying the subjective nature of an "objective" author would appear to be quite a contradiction, though in fact it is the logical consequence. In fact Zola himself has stated: "Il est certain qu'un œuvre ne sera jamais qu'un coin de la nature vu à travers un tempérament."

Thus revolt against the current naturalistic form of expression became Strindberg's struggle, for his temperament was unable to accommodate itself to the restrictions of naturalism. Yet this is not to say that he is a form-smasher set out to destroy the very foundations the naturalistic theater was built on. Strindberg merely attempted to revitalize drama by abandoning limitations after a whole generation of dramatists, experimenting with naturalism and realism on the stage, had steered the dramatic form into a mode limited to the grayness of small mimetic actions. The naturalistic
drama of the 1880's was anti-theatrical in that it focused more and more on the creation of the illusion of reality and on the adherence to scientific principles while restricting the free flow of fantasy and illusion which had for centuries been a mainstay of the theatrical tradition.

Pål Lagerkvist in an early essay, "Modern Theater: Points of View and Attack", attempts to come to grips with and explain the significance and impact of Strindberg on modern drama. He states:

And it is a fact that he has meant the renewal of the modern drama, and thereby also the gradual renewal of the theater. It is from him and through him that naturalism received the critical blow, even if, moreover, it is also Strindberg who gave naturalism its most intense dramatic works. If one wishes to understand the direction in which the modern theater is actually striving and the line of development it will probably follow, it is certainly wise to turn to him first of all.

Briefly I will recapitulate some of Lagerkvist's observations which will serve as a base for the direction taken by the following detailed discussion of The Ghost Sonata. First of all, the theater is perhaps the most conservative of all the art forms, and places much emphasis on the preservation of tradition. It was not without a considerable amount of friction that the "naturalists" became accepted on the stage.
naturalistic school did much to implement change in the art of the theater, but that is not to say naturalism was suited for the theater. Lagerkvist argued, and correctly so, that naturalism though in harmony with external reality was not a natural ally of the theater: "for what is right and natural in the theater...is unnatural and artificial outside it."¹¹ The naturalists were masters in the studied art of illusion, in a drama where the fourth wall had been removed so as to give the illusion of "reality". However close the naturalists may have come to verisimilitude, a basic fact of drama remains, the fourth wall is not there and one is playing to an audience. Naturalism if pursued to the logical extreme would have denied the very essence of the theater—the playing to an audience. This is a distortion and corruption of drama for "naturalism on the stage means, in short, a denial that theater ought to be theater"¹² when by tradition the theater "was no structure designed for the exposition of a harsh and inhibited realistic story, but rather for the free play of the fantasy, for magnificent passion, sweet pleasure, for reckless romance, or classically heightened ideality—for a little of everything, not merely the even grayness of everyday life. Greater proportions and more splendid forms."¹³
The crux of Lagerkvist's essay, and a point to which he returns again and again, is that naturalism is anti-theatrical and restrictive, in short, wholly unsuited as a base upon which modern drama can be built and continue to flourish. On this point Lagerkvist has his own row to hoe for he advocates a revival of the "rich and diversified" theater which flourished in the Middle Ages. For Lagerkvist the naturalistic theater lacks the "richness of possibilities" since it is restricted to the "anxious art of illusion." Granted, Lagerkvist's outright condemnation of naturalism fails to account for such a genius as Ibsen who with the creation of his social plays (1870's and 1880's) achieved a height in naturalism which, though frequently imitated, has not been surpassed. But failing the creativeness of an Ibsen, naturalism, in a strict sense of the word, could go no further—to strike out in another direction became a necessity if the art of the theater was to remain a viable imaginative mode of expression. This was to be Strindberg's undertaking.

As early as 1889 Strindberg in an essay, "Om modernt drama och modern teater", has pointed out the difference between the great ("den stora") and the little ("men lilla konsten") naturalism. According to Strindberg, Zola,
and later Henri Becque’s *Les Corbeau* (1882) was hailed as another milestone in naturalism. But Strindberg is quick to note that Becque’s work is not a “slice of nature seen through a temperament” for the temperament is lacking. Naturalism has here degenerated to photography where even a "dust particle on the camera lens" is included to the exclusion of the larger picture of life. For Strindberg naturalism should be more than the presentation of minute and accurate details such as a speck of dust; it should be concerned with seeking out life's meaningful motifs and presenting them in dramatic form.

As a result Strindberg pushed further than anyone else the strick requirements of the naturalistic method, not only for the theatrical or aesthetic reasons, but more as a personal indulgence of projecting into drama his subjective inner view of life as it affected his personal being. Whereas naturalism became confined to a continuous developing of theme which employed the scientific method of observation and generally dealt in external social problems, Strindberg chose to express in drama his own inner vision, the way his imagination viewed the world, and to present this vision in concrete external form. It is a personal form of inner reality projected and made manifest through external depiction of action,
not only in terms of realistic dialogue, theme and character development, but in the creation of a pervasive mood transmitted to the audience with the aid of lyrics and symbolic representation. In short, with all the aids that make the theater alive and fantastic, Strindberg strove to present reality, though not reality as depicted by the "photographic" and "scientific" school of naturalists, but rather through the presentation of reality as it is seen and affects the very soul of the dramatist.

Before turning to The Ghost Sonata it is only fitting that one point out both the significance of some of Strindberg's earlier writings and related biographical facts in order that one may grasp an overall view of the direction taken by his literary endeavors. Even during Strindberg's so-called "naturalistic" period it is quite apparent that he goes beyond the accepted norm of naturalism by seeking an exaggerated effect, reducing action to its simplest terms and juxtaposing his effects in order to bring to the stage an inner vision of reality as perceived by him. Verisimilitude or "realism" is disregarded if the effect and mood produced by distortion, exaggeration or abstraction is in keeping with the inner vision, the super-subjective view of events Strindberg imagines as "real". Essentially a study of Strindberg,
whether it be of prose or poetry, novel or play, is a study in biography, or more accurately, psychology, for virtually every point one touches upon needs some sort of biographical footnote in order to understand the full ramifications of his work. Though many details in Strindberg's creations are recognizable as biographical, they are, nevertheless, distorted, heightened, compressed and abstracted to suit his particular view of those events. By integrating his subjective observations into drama, the current form of naturalism would not suffice to express this view of "psychological reality" and the creation of new modes of expression became necessary.

The direction Strindberg was to take in later years is apparent even in his so-called "naturalistic" plays for they do not completely meet the requirements of naturalism (note the above quoted letter from Zola). If The Father, for example, is "slice of life" realism, it certainly is a curious one needing many qualifications. Maurice Valency has suggested that if The Father is to be considered a drama of photographic realism it is not a photograph of external surfaces but rather "the photograph of the X-ray." Strindberg penetrates the life he sees around him and presents a startling inner view, baring the very soul of the individual. It is the
beginning of modern psychological drama where the life of the Captain is not so much an accurate portrayal of external experience but rather a manifestation of the life that lies beneath experience—a life which one is not readily made aware of unless it strikes resonant strings within our own being. The situation of the Captain does not depend on logical resemblance to external experience for the exaggerated effects defy verisimilitude, yet we can understand his predicament and empathize for in the Captain we see ourselves when given up to emotional excess.22

From our vantage point one can see the The Father moves toward depth psychology, a penetrating diagnosis of the protagonist's state of mind, providing a special sort of mimesis not of surface reality but a baring of psychic motives which underlie the action. Such an "X-ray" photograph of life can be disconcerting, to say the least, especially to an audience accustomed to the plodding conventional logic of naturalism. But Strindberg was not to be hamstrung by conventions. In a letter to his brother, Axel, he writes: "You will know that, as a poet, I blend fiction with reality, and all my misogyny is theoretical, for I couldn't live without the company of women...So you mustn't get depressed when you read The
Father, for it is a work of fiction." (February 25, 1887) And later in a letter to Axel Lundegard: "It seems to me as though I walk in my sleep—as though reality and imagination are one. I don't know if The Father is a work of the imagination, or if my life has been...Through much writing my life has become a shadowplay..." (November 12, 1887) The point here being, much of the material is biographical and Strindberg is conscious that he draws on this though it is interspersed with fiction—as such it does not have the desired objectivity of "naturalism" and it becomes a personal expression of events. The motives for the actions are partly found in real occurrences and partly as projection of Strindberg's tormented psyche. Both are combined in order to form a unified effect on the audience, to awaken the audience to various layers of reality. To accomplish this the author must base the drama on his own experiences, for he cannot know the workings of any other consciousness than his own. By using material directly or indirectly affecting the author personally he makes his audience aware of nature as seen through his own temperament—in this case the super-subjective poetic temperament, not dominated by Zola's "objective" stance.

Strindberg's temperament is difficult to come to
grips with, not because of a lack of sufficient autobiographical material or knowledge of the man, for virtually everything he wrote was of an autobiographical nature (there are some fifty-five volumes of collected works in the John Landquist edition); on the contrary the sheer amount of material makes it difficult to find convenient labels. Difficult as it may be to deal with Strindberg's rich temperament, the most striking aspect is, without qualification, his hypersensitivity. In one of his Chamber Plays his alter ego says, "I was born without a film over my eyes--and I therefore can see right through things." This hypersensitivity, or in Alrik Gustafson's words, "the incisive intensity of his vision", operates on all levels of Strindberg's experiences--and it is the intense responses to his experiences which he attempts to communicate to the outside world through his writings. However, the conventional forms of expression proved inadequate for his temperament's imaginative flight and visionary intensity.

The search for form, apparent in The Father, was to continue in the "naturalistic" endeavors of Miss Julie. In the "Author's Foreword" Strindberg, in an elaborate defense of his form of new drama, states:
Some countries, it is true, have attempted to create a new drama by using the old forms with up-to-date contents, but not only has there been insufficient time for these new ideas to be popularized, so that the audience can grasp them, but... as no new form has been devised for these new contents, the new wine has burst the old bottles.  

He continues by simply saying, "In this play I have not tried to do anything new for this cannot be done, but only to modernize the form to meet the demands which may, I think, be made on this art today." In modernizing the form, no small task in itself, he flatters himself on having gone beyond present forms by probing the character's motives and suggesting a multiplicity of motives as a possible clue to the character's motivations. He looks for a number of explanations instead of being satisfied with a simple motive; psychological, physiological, evolutionary and hereditary principles are probed. He probes deeper and creates somewhat "characterless" characters who are but "conglomerations of past and present stages of civilization, bits from books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, rags and tatters of fine clothing, patched together as in a human soul." The search for new forms of expression and the creation of "characterless" characters are of interest in that it points toward the grotesque fantasy of the post-inferno drama where Strindberg becomes more painfully aware of
the total misery of man. The move is away from specific case studies of man, which held so much interest for the naturalists, by a move toward the concentration on universal Man—man with a capital M. The inner "reality" of his hypersensitive soul sought to find expression for Man's universal suffering and pain which the secret life of Strindberg's psyche experienced. Strindberg's problem, as has been repeatedly suggested, was to find forms and techniques that could convey more adequately than did orthodox naturalism, or some other traditional dramatic technique, the varied and ambiguous texture of the soul's experiences. This was achieved in his post-Inferno works where the strange "dream-like" quality of man's existence is presented by partly utilizing naturalistic techniques, but more important Strindberg moves into the subterranean world of fantasy and symbols.
The Ghost Sonata, written in February and March of 1907, was not the first "dream-play" Strindberg had undertaken, but followed some years after A Dream Play (1901) and To Damascus (1898-1901). In his Reminder to the reader that prefaced A Dream Play he wrote what has now become a classic manifesto regarding the form of the "dream-play":

In this dream play, as in his former dream play To Damascus, the Author has sought to reproduce the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream. Anything can happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations.

The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallise, scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all—that of the dreamer. For him there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples and no law. He neither condemns or acquits, but only relates, and since on the whole, there is more pain than pleasure in the dream, a tone of melancholy, and of compassion for all living things, runs through the swaying narrative. Sleep, the liberator, often appears as a torturer, but when the pain is at its worst, the sufferer awakes—and is thus reconciled with reality. For however agonising real life may be, at this moment, compared with the tormenting dream it is joy.28

The main theme—life as a dream—as expressed here
has grown increasingly since Strindberg's Inferno crisis\(^{29}\); the dream-reality of existence has become a living reality that is now transposed into drama. In *Legends* he asks:

Do you know what makes life endurable for me? Yes, that I in the meantime believe that life is only a half reality, a tortuous dream, inflicted on us as a punishment; and at the moment of death one is awakened to the real reality, that one becomes conscious all was only a dream; all the evil one has committed was only a dream.\(^{30}\)

Use of the dream motif is not only an attempt to provide a personal world view but also provides a subjective organic structure, a form enabling Strindberg to express life as he experienced it with greater immediacy.

*The Ghost Sonata*, however, differs from its two predecessors in that the playwright does not entirely abandon himself to an overindulgence in personal "memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations." There is, in fact, an overall unity and logic, the unity of the dream, holding Strindberg's purely personal responses to experience in check; if not totally subdued they are nevertheless transmuted into a communicable pattern of symbols, amplifying the mood and theme. The tone and theme of this play, to sum it up in a phrase, is one of pessimism and resignation in the
face of man's increasing suffering until released by
death.

What impressed one chiefly in The Ghost Sonata is
the rich mixture of naturalism and certain elements
pointing toward expressionism; the shift between the
"real" and "imagined" world, combining the "natural" and
the "unnatural" into a dramatic form revealing Strindberg's
profoundly pessimistic view of life. We, the audience,
are subjected to the most grotesque and bizarre scenes
depicting the miserable life of a suffering mankind. In
studying this dramatic work a basic question arises--
how does the dramatist create a form which will convey
his penetrating view of life, a view commensurate with
his vision of the depravity of the human condition and
the pervasive mood of total resignation to the abysmal
state of being. In The Ghost Sonata the pattern of the
psychical dream is transposed by Strindberg into an art-
form lending unity to the fantastic and somewhat in-
credible material presented through a mixture of
naturalistic reality, distortions, fantasy and symbols.
As a background to the dream-form let us first turn to
Freud.

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There is an uncanny similarity between Strindberg's dream presentation of life and Freud's psychoanalytic studies of dreams. Despite the similarities it is generally held, since there is no evidence to suggest otherwise, that Strindberg was unaware of Freud's work on dreams. Yet a look at Freud's work on dreams will throw light on Strindberg's creative process. In any examination of Strindberg's and Freud's use of dreams one must keep in mind, as pointed out by Robert W. Corrigan, that there is a distinction to be made between the dream as a psychical phenomenon and the dream as an art-form. Nevertheless a comparison is in order.

Freud, in *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, when studying the relationship between the dream-elements and the latent thoughts underlying them, has identified four stages of dream activities. The four stages or "achievements" ("Leistung")--condensation (Verdichtung), displacement (Verschiebung), plastic representation (plastische Wortdarstellung) and secondary elaboration (sekundäre Bearbeitung) constitute the basic material of latent dream-thoughts. In order to understand "dream-distortions" (Traumentstellung) Freud suggests it is necessary to penetrate from the substitute (manifest dream content) to the thought proper
(latent content) for which it stands. Understanding these four stages of dream activities will assist in the
probe of "dream-distortions".

Condensation is the process where certain latent elements are omitted; only fragments of latent dreams are
present in the manifest content; and certain latent elements sharing some common characteristic are combined
into a composite image. Freud in explaining this process of condensation states: "Eine solche Mischperson sieht
etwa aus wie A, ist aber gekleidet wie B, tut eine Ver-
richtung, wie man von C erinnert, und dabei ist noch ein
Wissen, dass es die Person D ist." In other words, a
whole myriad of elements and events are compressed into
a single composite fantasy picture. However unclear the
condensation process may appear in its manifest form,
the dream can be interpreted and related to particular
associations in waking life, for the formation of such
a composite figure is not a haphazard affair; it is a
purposely constructed image to represent an underlying
thought through a metaphorical process.

Displacement, the second achievement in the dream-
work, deals with the rearrangement or substitution of
significance within the dream. There are two forms of
displacement: first, a latent element may be replaced
by something other than itself, as long as it alludes
to the object; secondly, there may be a transfer of
accent, shifting the emphasis from an important to a
relatively unimportant element. Such substitution or dis-
placement of elements within the dream-work shifts the
whole center of the dream, thus giving the dream a
"foreign appearance". The effect of such transference
of significance or stress is to give the dream element
a distorted or surrealistic effect: i.e., an incon-
gruous image is produced by means of unnatural combinations.

The third achievement of the dream-work is the
process of plastic representation where the thoughts are
transformed into visual images. To represent words,
feelings, thoughts and sensory perceptions is difficult
due to the abstract nature of verbalizing these processes,
but in the dream-work this is achieved by regressing to
representation through "pictorial forms". These "memory-
pictures", then, are the transformation of latent elements,
as expressed in words, into such perceptual forms as visual
images. In other words, the thought process, or verbaliza-
tion process is distilled into symbolic representation.

The fourth and final aspect of the dream-work is known
as secondary elaboration. During this process the various
elements of the dream are combined into a fairly coherent
whole. Though various fragments are united into an
organic unit one is warned that the dream material is often arranged so as to lead to misunderstandings of its representation. Essentially this is to suggest that the form of the dream is a coherent whole in itself, though it may not correspond to external reality--yet the dream is not to be discounted inspite of the fact that external reality may be displaced, for dreams are an expression of the dreamer's inner reality. As such the dream is a self-contained coherent form whether or not the dream has discernible meaning beyond itself.

R. W. Corrigan states that "a dream is not a representation of something other than itself--it is a structure of relationships in which meaning is a function of form, and form is its own meaning." This may be true, but imagine how much more meaningful a dream is when it points to something beyond itself as is the case with Strindberg's "dream-play".

Bringing Freud's dream theory into play at this point is by no means an attempt to superimpose an artificial theoretical framework on this examination of The Ghost Sonata. Rather it serves a twofold purpose by shedding light on the similarities between the "dream-work" and the artist's creative process, and by pointing to the use of the dream as a literary motif. More
clarification on these two uses of the dream is in order. The "dream-work" functions much like Strindberg's creative process by which his perceptions and observations of daily life are transformed into dramatic art. This, as will be shown, becomes clearly evident in The Ghost Sonata where the models are taken from real life and transmuted into what appears to be a somewhat unusual fantasy representation of reality. Indeed, the "dream-work" like artistic creativity is essentially one of translation--a rendering of thoughts into another form or language. In regards to form, Freud states: "'Traum' kann man nichts anderes nennen als das Ergebnis der Traumarbeit, d.h. also die Form, in welche die latenten Gedanken durch die Traumarbeit überführt worden sind."38 Likewise, the term "dream-motif" is only applicable to the whole form of the dream structure, not the various artificial divisions employed by the analyst in breaking down the dream into its latent parts, but to the dreamer's concept of a dream. This becomes the world separate from waking life, a fantasy world which has an aura of unreality.

With this brief background of the dream as a psychical phenomenon let us now proceed to examine The Ghost Sonata; first the similarities between the "dream-
work" and Strindberg's creative processes, and second, the use of the dream as an art-form.

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The Ghost Sonata first appears to have been composed by one who is hallucinating, or by one who is experiencing an altered state of consciousness. It should be noted that in many ways the Student appears as an author surrogate—a hypersensitive "Sunday's Child" who suffers from an altered state of consciousness. His acute perceptiveness is exacerbated by a lack of sleep, bringing him into the border regions of hallucinations. This is similar to Strindberg's own experiences during his "Inferno Crisis" where he would go nights and days on end without sleep while over-stimulating his senses with excess alcoholic consumption. In this condition the raw nerve endings of his sensitive antennea were exposed to the "excess of impressions that force themselves on me." In a letter to Torsten Hedlund (July, 1896) Strindberg wrote, "Hallucinations, fantasies, dreams, are all very real to me. If I see my pillow assume various human forms, then those forms are there; and if someone tells me that they exist only (I) in my imagination then I say, Only!! What my inner eye sees
is more important to me." The landscape which the "inner eye" perceives begins to take on its own reality. Strindberg now offers a multiplicity of realisms to replace the single reality which had so dominated the naturalist's worldview. In Legends he writes:

For several years I have recorded all my dreams, and have become convinced that all men live a double life, for imaginations, fancies and dreams have their own form of reality. We are all spiritual somnambulists who in our dreams commit deeds which through changing states follow us during working hours...And the poet's fantasies, which limited souls so despise, are realities.

Note that he includes the world of fantasies, imaginations and dreams as being "real"—real in the sense that they exist for the person who perceives visions during dreaming hours and also that they correspond to life in waking reality. This, as pointed out by Gunnar Brandell, is wholly in the spirit of the symbolists and surrealists, this subjective anti-realistic world of the mystic.

What the "inner eye" sees becomes the basis for Strindberg's projections onto the written page. Let us proceed to explore the background to the creation of The Ghost Sonata.

As in the "dream-work" the element of distortion accounts for much that occurs in Strindberg's drama. It is simply not an arbitrary attempt on his part to distort "objective reality", but rather it is an attempt to
represent in drama a psychic experience—to represent and present a personal outlook on life. Thus distortion, as pointed out by Carl Dahlström, is a "psychological trick; the objective side of experience is cast away entirely...or is warped in order that the subjective side may gain." This has been the case with Strindberg's writings all along—Karin Smirnoff in referring to Strindberg's treatment of his first marriage with Siri von Essen in A Madman's Defense (1894) states: "There is scarcely an incident in it that doesn't have some foundation in fact—only everything is so horribly twisted and distorted." Despite the distortions one cannot discount Strindberg's distorted and subjective perceptions of the world around him since the multiplicity of sensory perceptions are selected, transposed and ordered into a meaningful experience. This is not simply translated into dramatic symbols and images which are meaningful to Strindberg alone, but also arranged into an art-form readily comprehensible to his audience.

The Ghost Sonata is no exception when it comes to utilizing distorted reality in dramatic form. As usual Strindberg builds his dramatic motifs on observed reality—the characters and situations employed are often those he has at one time or another come across in real life.
In *Ensam* (Alone), a sensitive autobiographical work written in 1903, he relates how his creative process works--on his daily walks he absorbs much that is later transposed into literature: "I take snapshot impressions and afterwards work out what I've seen." What he saw on one occasion he was to use some four years later:

And so one evening I walked by a beautiful corner apartment with large windows--I saw furniture from the 60s crossed with curtains from the 70s, portieres from the 80s and bric-a-brac from the 90s. In the window stood an alabaster urn, yellowed like ivory by the breathing and sighing of people, by wine fumes and tobacco smoke, an urn without use or purpose, which someone finally had turned into a repository for calling cards--a funeral urn made to adorn a grave and now containing the names of all the friends who had come and gone, of all the relatives living and dead, of engaged couples and married couples, of those christened and those buried. Many portraits hung on the walls, from all ages and epochs, heroes in armour, wise men in wigs, ecclesiastics in clerical collars. In one corner stood a game table in front of a divan, and four strange creatures sat around it playing cards. They said nothing; their lips didn't move. Three of them were as old as time, but the fourth was of middle age or thereabouts. He must have been the man of the house. In the center of the room sat a young woman, her back to those at the card table, her head bent over her crocheting. She was obviously working away at it but she took no interest in it--simply making the time pass, stitch by stitch, measuring out the seconds with her needle. Then she held her crochet work up and looked at it as if she were telling time on a clock. But she looked beyond her
crochet clock and into the future—and her glance sped out through the window, past the funeral urn, and the rays from her eyes met mine out there in the darkness, though she couldn't see me. I thought that I knew her, that she was speaking to me with her eyes, though of course she wasn't. Then one of the mummies at the table said something. The woman replied with a movement of her neck, without turning around. And then as if her thoughts had been interrupted, or as if she had momentarily given herself away, she dipped her head lower than before and let her second hand go ticking away. Never have I seen boredom, tedium, weariness with life so epitomized as in that room.

The face of the man at the card table changed expression continuously. He seemed to be uneasy, as if waiting for something, and the mummies shared his uneasiness. Every once in a while they would cast a glance at the clock on the wall, whose longer hand was approaching the hour. Probably they were waiting for someone, someone who would drive away their boredom, bring something new into that room, give them a shaking up, perhaps even turn their lives upside down. As if on tenderhooks with the fear that that might happen they were afraid to devote themselves to the game. They played their cards tentatively, as if they expected to be interrupted at any moment. But no pauses in their play, no expression, no gestures. They moved like mannequins.

What was meant to happen happened. "What luck!" I said to myself as the portiere moved and a maid in a white cap came in to announce someone. A spark of life flew from person to person in that room, and the young woman turned halfway around as she rose to her feet. At the same instant the clock on the wall struck the hour so loudly that I heard it out on the sidewalk, and I saw the minute hand jump to twelve.

At this moment Strindberg's observations were interrupted and he felt, "I had been thrown out into the street, out
of that room where I had been in spirit for a long two minutes, living a fragment of the lives of these people."

From this episode one sees both Strindberg's ability to project himself into certain situations, and more important, how he gathers material which fires his creative process. A simple comparison of the details in this short scene with details in *The Ghost Sonata* is sufficient to convince one of the real life observations now transposed into drama. Note that Strindberg places particular emphasis on the "boredom, tedium, weariness with life", the uneasy anticipation that something was about to occur, the clock, the "mummies", the appearance of the maid—all of which in a distorted form play a significant role in *The Ghost Sonata*.

Other elements in *The Ghost Sonata* are also drawn from experiences in real life. Jacob Hummel is based on a well-to-do businessman whom Strindberg, on his morning walks, occasionally saw handing alms to the needy. The Girl and the Student are probably based on his own daughter and her fiance to whom he seems to have been attracted. The Colonel and the Mummy are drawn from the same relatives as the couple in *The Dance of Death*, his sister Anna and his brother-in-law, Hugo Philip.
In 1900 the same brother-in-law placed a "von" before his name, just as the Colonel had done. The Japanese screen Strindberg saw in the Philip home; and the idea of the "death screen" was given to him by a niece, a hospital nurse who related how a screen is placed before the bed of a dying patient. Böcklin's "Island of the Dead" which appears at the end of The Ghost Sonata was one of Strindberg's favorite paintings. The difficulties encountered with servants who are more of a nuisance than an aid are no doubt a reflection of Strindberg's own domestic problems in mid-March, 1907.

In Blå Bokens Historia he writes:

My domestics left, the house was turned upside down; I exchanged six domestics in forty days, one worse than the other. At last I had to take care of myself; set the table, stoke the fire, and had to eat black swill which I ordered out—in short all the bitterness life offers I was forced to suffer without understanding the reason.

The episode where the Student's father proceeded to unmask the characters seated around
the dinner table is also told in Blå Boken: "I had a friend who during a party became clairvoyant; he seated himself on the middle of the table and proceeded to tell all he had seen during the evening; He stripped his friends—in the end he was carried off to the madhouse."58

The title "Spöksonaten" alluded to Beethoven's piano sonata Opus 31 Number 2 in D minor; it was one of Strindberg's favorite sonatas (he was a great admirer of Beethoven and belonged to a Beethoven society). He was especially fond of a few final bars in this piece which "awakened his pangs of conscience." When Leopold Littmansson was to translate Crimes and Crimes, where this sonata was used as a theme, Strindberg wrote: "Be so good as to indicate in paranthesis about Beethoven's D minor sonata. The finale and especially bars 96-107 should come on strong. These bars always act as a stimulant to my pangs of conscience."59 As a subtitle for The Ghost Sonata Strindberg thought of adding "Kama-Loka" in reference to the theosophist name for the realm of the dead. In a letter to Schering he wrote: "during the writing I have suffered as if in Kama-Loka (Scheol)" and that he had "created The Ghost Sonata with the feeling that it was his last sonata."60
Strindberg’s correspondence to Schering is of further interest since it is a rich source of material revealing the type of play he had intended to create. At one point Strindberg writes: The Ghost Sonata "is Schauderhaft like life, when the veil falls from our eyes and we see Das Ding an Sich." What is this "thing in itself" which Strindberg sees, and more important, how does he present this "thing in itself". Again we return to the question of form, which cannot be answered fully until one attempts to deal with the creative process, the very source of Strindberg’s dramatic vision.

The sources of Strindberg’s drama are, as shown above, experiences in his own life, distorted and rearranged to suit his artistic purpose, nonetheless they are a personal account of reality. Again he writes to Schering and cautions him of the personal nature of the play: "I now ask you to read my new drama as merely a mosaic of personal and foreign occurrences; but please do not read it as autobiographical or as memories. What does not correspond to reality is poeticized and not falsification of fact." This form of "mosaic" which Strindberg speaks of he has amplified on other occasions; in Ensam he writes:

For I live in my work, looking ahead, sometimes looking behind me, at my memories, which
I can treat like a child's building blocks. I can make all sorts of things with them, and the same memory can serve in all sorts of ways in a single dream structure of the imagination, turning up different colored sides. And since the number of arrangements is myriad, I get a sense of infinity as I play this game.63

Strindberg is a master builder who has an infinite variety of ways in which to create a structure. With his building blocks (memories based on experience) he is able to build all sorts of fantasy structures by merely arranging and rearranging the blocks in the manner his creative imagination directs.

The haphazardness implied in any creative method employing such a kaleidoscopic view of personal experiences needs to find a form appropriate to the vision. As suggested above, Strindberg, in order that he may transpose experiences into art, employs distortion, but it is a unique form of distortion which is closely linked with the realm of dreams.
Chapter Three: The Search for New Techniques

As previously suggested, The Ghost Sonata is written in the form of a "dream play", a form, though similar in numerous aspects to the psychical dream, differs by virtue of being transposed into an art-form. While the psychical dream often appears to the dreamer as a haphazard conglomeration of images without any discernible cohesive pattern fusing the dream into a whole, the dramatist creating an art-form based on the structure of the psychical dream must control the direction of the artistic form so as to make it communicable to his audience. The random chance images projected in the psychical dream often demand the services of a trained psychoanalyst to probe and expose underlying layers of consciousness giving rise to the dream. If the dramatist attempts to imitate the dream-form without endeavoring to channel it into a form with a readily comprehensible overall theme and tone, he runs the risk of not being able to communicate except to the initiated few. Rather, the dramatist while employing the techniques, contents and form of the psychical dream must manipulate them by orchestrating them into a comprehensible whole, so as to give rise to a unified effect without the aid of the literary psychoanalyst or critic.
Strindberg in *The Ghost Sonata* largely achieves this unified effect without a great deal of probing on the reader's part into the dark recesses of biographical footnotes. Though it cannot be denied that a knowledge of Strindberg's domestic problems, neurosis, idiosyncrasies and literary forerunners adds to the understanding of how his creative mind functions, a lack of such information does not significantly detract from the overall merit of his dramatic accomplishments. Indeed, *The Ghost Sonata* can stand entirely on its own as a self-contained dramatic work of art. Be that as it may, this study has undertaken to explore the direction of Strindberg's mode of dramatic expression by focusing on the form and techniques he employed in creating *The Ghost Sonata*. Through hindsight the literary historian and critic can readily look back to Strindberg and proclaim that he is the literary precursor to Expressionism, in fact the father to much of our 20th century dramatic heritage. But rarely is it emphasized sufficiently that Strindberg despite his powerful imagination did not write his dramatic works in a literary vacuum void of outside influences. He was a voracious reader who was abreast of all current literary movements and developments on the Continent. There are, as shall be seen, numerous references in his
letters, journals and books to those writers to whom he owed a literary debt. An examination of The Ghost Sonata will reveal that while his creative imagination functions much like the "dream work", the various techniques employed to express his dramatic vision are an adaptation and expansion of various contemporary literary trends on the Continent.

Using the dream as an art-form necessitates finding or creating literary techniques commensurate with Strindberg's bizarre and fantastic dramatic "dream" vision of life. Essentially Strindberg draws on established literary techniques used in naturalism and symbolism to serve as a basis for his new art-form. While it is not possible within the limits of this examination to give definitive treatment to the origins of naturalistic and symbolistic representation or to examine them as independent literary movements, a study of a number of key traits of symbolism and naturalism will demonstrate and clarify the literary traditions Strindberg worked with. Once aware of the literary traditions Strindberg utilized in creating The Ghost Sonata it will be possible to ascertain where he departed from established forms and broke new ground. It should also be noted that some prominent literary figures influenced Strindberg's
dramatic techniques and ultimately the form.

Strindberg's experiments with new modes of expression were largely influenced by the writings of Villiers, Baudelaire, Huysmans, Maeterlinck and Swedenborg. There is a common bond loosely defined as symbolism joining these writers. Martin Lamm states that Strindberg was not a stranger to French symbolism: "he had read Baudelaire and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam with admiration, assimilated from Huysmans' later works the demands of the symbolists, and included Maeterlinck and Pélandan among his household gods." Lamm continues by saying that after the Inferno Crisis Strindberg's writings smack strongly of symbolism but also "emphasized his desire to serve as a bridge between occultism and naturalism, to become 'the Zola of occultism'." But as Lamm observes, Strindberg often preferred to think of himself as a "neo-naturalist" by which he apparently meant that Strindberg "wanted to retain naturalism's conquest of reality without yielding to its overestimation of science." Yet the conclusion drawn by Lamm is that Strindberg cannot be encompassed within either naturalism or symbolism and not by a fusion of these two schools. At this point I tend to disagree with Lamm for there is sufficient evidence, especially in The Ghost
Sonata (also evident in the other Chamber Plays), to suggest that Strindberg achieved the ultimate goal of developing a literary mode of expression commensurate with his personal vision of life through employment and expansion of naturalistic and symbolistic techniques. Lamm is correct in concluding that some of Strindberg's work can in certain ways be considered "expressionistic" and "surrealistic." But what do these literary techniques represent in terms of Strindberg's work if not in the final analysis a fusion between naturalistic and symbolistic techniques?

To begin let us turn to Symbolism and examine: 1.) the aims of symbolic representation, and 2.) the prominent symbolistic literary influences on Strindberg.

Edmund Wilson in his classic study of Symbolism, Axel's Castle, states that:

It was the tendency of Symbolism—that second swing of the pendulum away from a mechanistic view of nature and from a social conception of man—to make poetry even more a matter of the sensations and emotions of the individual than had been the case with Romanticism: Symbolism, indeed, sometimes had the result of making poetry so much a private concern of the poet's that it turned out to be incommunicable to the reader.

In order to communicate the unique emotions experienced by the artist he resorts to the use of a complex and
highly private type of symbolization to express the feelings and sensations that the world around imposes on him. This is unlike the conventional use of symbols in that symbols are now often chosen arbitrarily by the artist to suggest his personal ideas and concepts of experience, they are no longer strictly fixed, as in allegory, to represent an already established idea. In summing up the doctrine of Symbolism Wilson states:

Every feeling or sensation we have, every moment of consciousness, is different from every other; and it is, in consequence, impossible to render our sensations as we actually experience them through the conventional and universal language of ordinary literature. Each poet has his unique personality and feelings. Such a language must make use of symbols; what is so special, so fleeting and so vague cannot be conveyed by direct statement or description, but only by a succession of words, of images, which will serve to suggest it to the reader.  

Consequently there is a mystery about their writings that needs to be decoded in order to understand their personal language. For Symbolism, again in Wilson's words, is "an attempt by carefully studied means—a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors—to communicate unique personal feelings..."

Here those symbols lacking any apparent logical relation are unified into a pattern, a "medley of metaphors" expressing the artist's personal emotional response in
in a communicable form. In short, Symbolism is an attempt to "meet a need for a new language"—a language which will provide a means of expression commensurable to their "new conception of reality." 

As aspect of Symbolism's attempt to "meet a need for a new language" is the creation of surrealistic techniques to deal with our new perceptions of reality. Distortion and deviation from the "natural" would become the hallmark of surrealistic techniques. Basically the use of these techniques was a reaction against the imitation of nature in art and literature, i.e., it is a new form of anti-naturalism seeking to explore the irrational and distorted elements in life through surrealist means. Thus, symbolic representation takes on a new reality striving to present "das Ding an Sich" by freeing objects from their natural framework and allowing the "distorted" object to represent the poet's vision of "reality". As we shall later see, Strindberg presents life through the means of "deformed reality" where the logic of the natural order is distorted thereby leaving us with a view of reality which is visionary and fantastic. This is again in Martin Lamm's words, a kind of "super-realism" that defies most observable reality.

Part and parcel of the 19th century literary world
of symbolism are the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Symbolism was influenced by Swedenborg's mysticism, especially his platonic concepts of "correspondences" where every physical aspect of this world corresponds to a spiritual quality. In other words, the actual appearance of things on this earth is a reflection and revelation of the spiritual world. The communication between this world and the spiritual is carried out through symbols where man's earthly perceptions of objects reveal an underlying spiritual significance. In *Heaven and Hell* Swedenborg states:

> The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, and not merely the natural world in general but also every particular of it; and as a consequence everything in the natural world that springs from the spiritual world is called correspondence.\(^79\)

The problem with Swedenborg's correspondences is that his conception of symbol is somewhat archaic, harkening back to old-fashioned allegory. For him the "head" signifies intelligence and wisdom\(^80\); "bread" is affection for all good\(^81\); and the "sun" signifies love.\(^82\) This pattern of symbolism signifying a correspondence between the worldly and Divine did not greatly interest Swedenborg's latter day literary followers; but the general concept of correspondences, as a means of expressing the invisible
in visible terms, remained. The symbolists, as pointed out by Anna Balakian, were among those who discovered the poetic possibilities of Swedenborg's correspondences. By rejecting the symbol as being a literal correspondence between the Divine and the natural world, they were able to avoid allegory and begin to probe the areas of the mind not dominated by the traditional concepts of the Divine and Spiritual world, and to proceed to explore those facets of the mind's creations which were very real to them.

Strindberg had studied the teachings of Swedenborg during the later part of his Inferno Crisis (1896-1897) and in *En Blå Bok* (1907), dedicated to Swedenborg, he writes: "Poetry's essence consists of finding correspondences on different levels (Swedenborg's correspondences)." He, like the Symbolists, was not only inspired by Swedenborg's mysticism, but was especially drawn toward his concept of "correspondences." Though Strindberg's movement toward the position of a religious visionary began prior to his acquaintance with the 18th century religious mystic, his vision was reinforced by Swedenborg. But Strindberg's interpretation of Swedenborg took a sinister turn when Swedenborg's view of Hell became for Strindberg a description of life on earth, where man
was damned to suffer the curse of being born. Swedenborg's theory of "correspondences" is in a distressingly distorted manner adapted in *The Ghost Sonata*, for the world presented here is a world of intimations unmasking a disconcerting sham reality of existence.

Strindberg was also a great admirer of Maurice Maeterlinck and shared in his mystical world by departing from reality to probe the individual's experience in a disintegrating world order. In *Open Letters to the Intimate Theater* in reference to Maeterlinck he writes: "His Inferno world is in the spirit of Swedenborg, but there is light in the darkness, beauty in the suffering, and sympathy with everything that lives. But it is a world of despair, diaster, heaviness." The evocation of mood and atmosphere, rather than the presentation of realistically concrete events through symbols was central for Maeterlinck. He, like the Symbolist, attempts to reveal the mystery of inner life and the spiritual harmony between visible and invisible reality. Realistic theater neglected man's soul and his unknown destiny in the universe by simply presenting such externals as habits, passions, milieu etc., while Maeterlinck felt the need to portray the spirit's conflict with its mysterious fate. He portrays this struggle in symbolic terms much as
Baudelaire and Mallarmé had done in poetry, but now in dramatic form.

Naturalism, as discussed earlier (pp. 2-7), could not effectively deal with the subterranean feelings of sensitive human beings for life is too complex—partaking of both the visible and invisible worlds. Reality in The Ghost Sonata can be viewed in the same light as one sees dreams. There is a certain dream-like quality about this drama making it both fantastic and actual, as if there is a mysterious and terrifying reality behind it. Like the dream, the world Strindberg portrays is partly concrete and partly abstract. While using the dream as a basis for an art-form, he utilizes certain symbolistic techniques to paint the abstract and fantastic while retaining naturalistic techniques to root his vision in concrete reality. The whole effect of The Ghost Sonata is similar to Freud's explication of "dream-distortions" where fragments of actual occurrences in reality are combined and compressed into a composite fantasy picture. Let us now proceed to examine these techniques as employed in The Ghost Sonata.
Chapter Four: Inside the Metaphorical House of Dreams

The Ghost Sonata opens with a balanced naturalistic set: a solid upper-class house in the center consisting basically of the Hyacinth Room and the Round Room, a drinking fountain to the right; and an advertisement column to the left. However all is not as solid as the external appearances would suggest, the inhabitants of the house are to be stripped of all their deceptive masks. On the first floor resides a Colonel with a respected name—but his title is false; he is not the father to his daughter; remove his mustache, wig and false teeth and undo his metal stays and he becomes a former servant. The beautiful woman he married has been transformed into a Mummy, only a statue reflecting her former beauty reveals how she once looked. The Girl, the daughter to the Mummy, who prefers to remain among the flowers in the "Hyacinth Room", is suffering from a terminal disease. Hummel, the old man, former lover of the Mummy and father to the Girl, is now a cripple pushed around the streets in a wheelchair (his "war chariot") creating "havoc with human destinies" (p. 281). He forces himself into the Colonel's house, joins the "ghost supper" (p. 284) and proceeds to strip the members of the household of their deceptive masks and reveals the "real" beings.
for they are not what they appear to be: the Baron, a former jewel thief, was once the Mummy's lover and is now the lover of the caretaker's daughter; Bengtsson, now Hummel's servant, was once Hummel's master. Hummel, who is also not what he appears to be, is himself unmasked by the Mummy:

We are miserable human beings, that we know. We have erred and we have sinned, we like all the rest. We are not what we seem, because at the 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. For you are not the one you appear to be. (p. 293)

She then catalogues the crimes he is guilty of and summons Bengtsson to give the final blow. It appears that Hummel murdered an innocent young girl for having witnessed a crime he had committed, and the vision of the Milkmaid as this event is recalled is sufficient to cause Hummel to hang himself.

Strindberg, however, does not conclude the play in Scene II with the revelations of the deceitful and miserable lives led by the individuals gathered at the "ghost supper" which culminated with Hummel's death. Far from it, the roots of evil begun in a previous generation are not terminated with the exposure of the household's inhabitants for what they are; far worse, it has infected
the younger generation. Though the Old Man would like to do one good deed before his death, he is unable to see this wish fulfilled. It was his hope that through a union between the innocent Student and the Girl the corruption hidden behind the respectable facade of the house would be prevented from tarnishing her beauty. Despite Hummel's attempt to do good, the "fearfully complicated" (p. 277) relations lurking behind the respectable facade are so morally corrupt that in the end even the idealistic Student cannot save the Girl—she has been sapped of all her energy and vitality by the morally corrupt relations within the house. The Girl dies while the Student ends the play on a note of quiet resignation, accepting our worldly fate, miserable though it be, by sublimating his despair into a belief that there is a life beyond death in a spiritual world.

On closer analysis it will become clear that Strindberg in The Ghost Sonata is, above all else, presenting a vision of life as seen and told by a "truth teller" possessing a double vision of daily life. In effect Strindberg is here presenting a spiritual voyage through the House of Life—a voyage undertaken by the innocent "Sunday's Child" (p. 281), the Student Arkenholtz, who has been blessed and is consequently damned by the gift
-50-
of "second sight" (p. 276).

The central motif in The Ghost Sonata ultimately leading to the Student's vision of reality is the use of man's faculty of visual perception. The eye, the instrument of visual perception, and the process of seeing is mentioned nearly one hundred times. This great emphasis on perception is the underlying motif on which the entire play is built. Of the five senses sight is no doubt the most important in determining the reality of the world around us. It is probably also the most deceptive of the senses as a result of the numerous optical illusions the eyes, in conjunction with our mental faculties, can play. Society is, after all, visually-oriented and if one cannot rely on visual perceptions as a stable and accurate foundation to base our conception of reality on, what then can we trust?

The Student is faced with a perceptual problem, for he perceives (by our traditional conception of reality) both the "real" and "unreal" aspects of life. The problem of what is "real" and "unreal" tends to become rather confusing. What first appears ideal becomes a reality which in turn appears "unreal" but is in fact "real"--i.e., the Student gains entrance to the Colonel's house which on first sight appears ideal but on closer
scrunity becomes somewhat unreal, yet in the final analysis it is neither ideal or unreal but reality or life as it actually is. The double vision or "second sight" (p. 276), this sight behind real sight, granted the Student is his ability to "see what others can't" (p. 275). He relates an episode to Hummel about his vision:

Yesterday, for instance...I was drawn to that obscure street where later on the house collapsed. I went there and stopped in front of that building which I had never seen before. Then I noticed a crack in the wall...I heard the floor boards snapping...I dashed over and picked up a child that was passing under the wall... The next moment the house collapsed. I was saved, but in my arms, which I thought held the child, was nothing at all. (pp. 275-6)

The Student has the ability to see life ideally--he has a vision of innocence, symbolically made manifest in the guise of the Milkmaid. On the other hand, after having been exposed to Hummel and his extended household the Student perceives the corrupt and base nature of existence. It is his ability to see life both ideally and as it is in fact that drives home Strindberg's vision of life on this earth as a hell which man must endure until released by death.

It is important to note that the Student is a student of philology (p. 273), but the language which he
is presently learning in the Colonel's house is the language of Life—he finds the key unlocking the door which reveals the nightmarish anguish of existence. Language plays a key role in the masking and unmasking of Life's realities. Hummel tells the "select gathering" (p. 288):

Silence cannot hide anything—but words can. I read the other day that differences of language originated among savages for the purpose of keeping one tribe's secrets hidden from another. Every language therefore is a code, and he who finds the key can understand every language in the world. But this does not prevent secrets from being exposed without a key...(p. 292)

For years language has been the vehicle for covering-up the real identities of those gathered for the "ghost supper". But suddenly the tongue is loosened and with a torrent of words the entire company is unmasked, first by Hummel and then by the Mummy. This unmasking of the guests is similar to the story the Student tells about his father:

He made an enormous speech in which he stripped the whole company naked, one after the other, and told them of all their treachery. Then, tired out, he sat down on the table and told them all to go to hell. (p. 302)

These revelations by Hummel, the Mummy and the Student's
father tell us something about the deceptive nature of human beings but it is not the key revealing life. It is only the Student with his gift of "second sight" who has the "key". Thus language appears not to be the most important key, rather it is the visual perceptions which are most important in apprehending what life is.

As this rite of initiation into the depravity of the human race unfolds, the Student comes to the realization that his vision of ideal beauty--the "paradise" represented by the seemingly unattainable goal of entering into the Colonel's house--is shattered. In scene 1 the Student, in reference to the house, states:

Yes, I've been looking at it a lot. I passed it yesterday when the sun was shining on the windowpanes, and I imagined all the beauty and elegance there must be inside. I said to my companion: "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." (p. 274)

Later on, in scene 3 after having entered the house he sees this "paradise" for the hell it is. Note the shattered dream in the final scene, when in speaking of the house he has entered, he says:

And yet I thought it was paradise itself that first time I saw you coming in here. There I stood that Sunday morning, gazing in. I saw a Colonel who was no Colonel.
I had a benefactor who was a thief and had to hang himself. I saw a mummy who was not a mummy and an old maid—what of the maidenhood, by the way? (p. 302)

His ideal conception of life is unalterably smashed and cannot be regained through conventional reality. "Where is beauty to be found?" is the Student's rhetorical question, "In nature, and in my own mind, when it is in its Sunday clothes. Where are honor and faith? In fairy tales and children's fancies. Where is anything that fulfills its promise? In my imagination." (p. 303)

Here one witnesses a shift in the Student's vision of "paradise" from a visual reality rooted in earthly reality to an ideal conception of paradise conjured up in the mind's eye. Reality as it has been exposed in visual terms during the Student's voyage through the House of Life does not live up to the ideal he envisioned when he first passed the house (see above quote).

The disgusting reality of life depicted in visible terms by Strindberg is perceived by the Student for the sham it is, this tissue of lies and deceit tying humanity together cannot be escaped except through the imagination. The Student does not assert his individual will but prefers to drop out of the common life, as represented by the Colonel's household, and insulate himself from this world in order that he might cultivate
the ideal dream vision of life. He finds reality a nightmare once he has entered this metaphorical House of Life by finding solace in the world of the imagination—only there can life be filled with serene idyllic beauty, for when the objective world is momentarily forsaken for the subjective one can retreat to experience beauty.

It is also through the Student's incisive perceptive faculties that we spectators of his metaphorical dream journey through the House of Life are made aware of the dream nature of the play. The Student tells the dying Girl, "Sleep without dreaming, and when you wake...may you be greeted by a sun that does not burn, in a home without flaw." (p. 304) Here all indications are that life has been a dream, a horrible nightmare, which sleep (death) will deliver us from. Yet there is a frightful reality behind the dream for the Student's dream corresponds to reality as experienced by us earthly creatures. Whereas Swedenborg's correspondences reveal the spiritual world, the Student's (Strindberg's) vision reveals the "real" world, not the spiritual world to come, but the actual. This candid glimpse of humanity is only made possible by Strindberg's adherence to the dream-form as a basis for the dramatic form. This point cannot be over-emphasized for the logic of the dream-form
becomes apparent when seen in the light of Freud's study of "dream-work". It is the strange, one is tempted to call it "absurd", mixture of the quite ordinary realities of everyday life with the fantastic, somewhat unreal elements that makes The Ghost Sonata a dramatic powerhouse. But strangeness alone does not make a great play, rather it is Strindberg's ability to portray the reality that lies beneath surface reality through cleverly controlled means. What makes the whole play plausible and consequently comprehensible is the role played by the Student. Above I suggested that the Student has a perceptual problem, a problem which cannot be readily accepted on rational grounds, but in the dream idiom all is possible, including the Student's double vision.

The central position of the Student gives the play a unified form for he is the dreamer who observes all the strange adventures in the Colonel's house. It is important to note that despite the absence of the Student's active participation in scene 2, he is nevertheless present to observe the unmasking of the entire household. On this point Strindberg's stage directions are explicit: "He shows the Student into the Hyacinth Room, where he remains visible, talking shyly to the Girl"
(p. 291, underlining mine). The Student may be "spared" (p. 292) temporarily from active participation in a flushing out of the truth, but he is a witness to it.

Again, the unity of the entire play is brought about by the use of the dream idiom which in turn lends clarity and logic to the dramatic form. The entire play is composed of dream play images--images whose full significance is not apprehended until the conclusion of the play when one discovers that the Student has been dreaming about Life. He has been dreaming about the Truth, the truth that lies beneath life's deceptive facade. What he has seen in the Colonel's house is a symbolic representation, correspondence if you will, of what life is. If we now return to the play it is possible to see more clearly that the form follows the psychical dream much like Freud's concept of the dream-work.

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To return to the play is to discover that the dream-form can be broken into three basic categories: the naturalistic, symbolistic and surrealistic techniques. Each of these literary techniques mirrors reality dif-
ferently according to the type of mirror used—the naturalistic mirror has the least distortion but is also the flattest in that it reflects relatively little depth; the symbolistic and surrealistic mirrors are clouded and wavy, reflecting the visible while pointing to the invisible world on the other side of the mirror.

As noted earlier, on first appearance The Ghost Sonata appears deceptively naturalistic. The meticulously precise stage directions describing the modern turn-of-the-century house with its balcony, flagstaff, blinds, marble statue, Round Room, Hyacinth Room, flowers, window-mirror, drinking fountain, advertisement column, etc. (p. 269), plus the descriptions of the Old Man, Milkmaid, Student, the sounds of the church bells, steamship bells and organ music (pp. 269-270) are reminiscent of naturalistic staging. Though this illusion is soon shattered when we discover that the Milkmaid is a symbolic phantom figure (p. 276), the play still proliferates in the use of naturalistic techniques. Though these techniques are somewhat displaced in this "fairy story" (p. 274) their presence, notwithstanding, cannot be ignored. On one level Strindberg employs naturalistic techniques by including many details based on observed reality (see above, pp. 31-32) which are here synthesized
into *The Ghost Sonata*.

In many ways the play develops along naturalistic lines in that the depiction of race, milieu and moment are a representation of life along the lines of scientific determinism. Though this may be a somewhat oblique approach to this play, on close inspection it is possible to see the basis for such a statement. There is an element of naturalistic tragedy introduced by Strindberg since the "fearfully complicated" (p. 277) interrelations of the household's inhabitants suggest that their fate has been preordained through a combination of heredity, environment and history. The Student and the Girl cannot escape their fate for "crimes, secrets and guilt" (p. 289) bind humanity together into a single suffering lot. But these naturalistic overtones are generally obscured by the dense forest of symbols introduced by Strindberg. Here again Strindberg does not remain true to the canons of naturalism, but forces the naturalistic elements to take on ramifications beyond their naturalistic meanings.

The symbolic aspects are clearly apprehended when one views *The Ghost Sonata* as a spiritual voyage through life. As pointed out by J. R. Northam, from the beginning of the play Strindberg has created, despite the natural-
istic stage setting, an atmosphere that is both religious and gives the impression of a sea-voyage. In the introductory stage directions the explicit instructions include the sounds of church bells (p. 269), steamship bells and organ music (p. 270). The full significance of these sounds becomes apparent at the conclusion of the play when Böcklin's picture, *The Isle of the Dead*, is projected at a distance and the sound of soft sweet and melancholy music is heard (p. 304). Here the Student's talk of death as a journey and the appearance of Böcklin's picture picks up the sounds first heard in the opening scene. There is here, in Edmund Wilson's words, "a medley of metaphors" at work conveying an image of a spiritual voyage through life.

During the course of this journey the Student has been initiated into the nightmarish reality of life which falls far short of any ideal conception of reality he had entertained prior to entering "paradise"--this earthly and corrupt house. Johansson, the Old Man's servant, says, "what a horrible house! And the Student was longing to get in, as if it were paradise." (p. 286) The Student finds it necessary to transcend disorder--and the entire household is in a great state of disorder--in order to attain, in a mystical sense, the ideal harmony. The Student's voyage is a journey to paradise,
a journey that aspires to harmony and order. But this journey is beset by disorder, where the unreality of the nightmare materialized as the real thing.

As suggested earlier, one is confronted with "deformed reality", a kind of "super-realism" that defies the logic of conventional reality. The result of Strindberg's visionary flight is much the same as in Freud's "dream-work" (see above pp. 21-24) where surreal, fantastic and bizarre effects, here approaching a nightmarish state, reflect the realities of daily existence. The surrealistic elements in The Ghost Sonata have much in common with the function of "displacement" in the dream-work. The two forms of displacement Freud wrote of are: the substitution of one latent element for another; and a shift of emphasis from an important element to a relatively unimportant one. Such displacement of elements may shift the entire center of the dream, giving it a distorted or even surrealistic effect. The most notable surrealistic effect in The Ghost Sonata is the appearance of the Cook with the Japanese bottle of soya (p. 300). This seemingly minor appearance takes on far greater importance than would normally be supposed (note Strindberg's letter to Schering, April 7, 1907--see above p. 32). Here Strindberg's hypersensitivity registers the small and seemingly unimportant details with the greatest
clarity and then builds them up all out of fair proportions. Note that the natural order of the household is all topsy-turvy—the insubordinate domestics are more of a hinderance than a help, giving orders is to no avail for the entire household, servants and all, is full of defects (pp. 299-301). Thus the Cook's intrusion is only in keeping with other incongruous images produced by unnatural combinations such as the Mummy who prattles like a parrot and sits in a closet, a Milkmaid who is a phantom and a dead man who walks (p. 279).

In fact much in the play is seen in a rather unnatural light where naturalistic and realistic elements are pushed beyond their natural limits. Hence a surrealist effect is achieved where the object is freed from its natural framework. It is precisely Strindberg's ability to force the naturalistic and realistic elements to extreme usage which lends a surrealistic atmosphere to the play as indicated by the above described proceedings.

The Ghost Sonata, much like the dream, defies nature's forms and perspectives, yet it reflects an underlying reality which is related to the distorted reality made manifest in the course of the Student's "journey". These so-called "dream distortions" are the result of the "dream-work's" four stages of dream activity; con-
densation, displacement, plastic representation and secondary elaboration (see above pp. 21-23). The mystery of the dream state as explored and explained by Freud turns the illogical, fantastic, bizarre, grotesque and absurd aspects of dreams into a communicable pattern of images which on closer analysis reflect the dreamer's daily reality. Likewise Strindberg's creation of the Student's dream vision is a reflection of an inner reality that corresponds in many ways to external reality. The sources for the Student's dream are based on observed reality (see above pp. 29-33), but they are definitely distorted in the "dream-work" process, giving off the appearance of being both natural and unnatural. To present his vision of reality Strindberg employs in the dream-form naturalistic, symbolistic and surrealistic techniques, and they are, as explained by Freud, intrinsic to the dream-work (see above pp. 21-25).

Thus it was Strindberg's incisive vision of life that led to the creation of a new dramatic form by using the dream-form and naturalistic, symbolistic and surrealistic techniques. The result of this mixture of form and technique is the reintroduction of fantasy in the theater. We now have what Pär Lagerkvist (see above pp. 8-10) called a "gradual renewal of the theater."
A "little of everything" is employed in *The Ghost Sonata* but employed in such a manner as to form a cohesive unity of expression leading to "greater proportions and more splendid forms."^92
Strindberg's genius lies not simply in his adoption of symbolistic and surrealistic techniques, but in his poetic fusing of the introspective dream visions with naturalistic techniques. Strindberg did not choose the alternatives of Symbolism and Naturalism, but rather he merged the two to provide us with a vision of life more complex, more complete and more mysterious than previously expressed in dramatic form. It is precisely this ability to join the symbolist's cult of the self, this realization of an inner vision, with the naturalist's ability to present life objectively, that is made manifest in *The Ghost Sonata*. Strindberg turns the inner experience into an expressible form by employing both the techniques of symbolism and naturalism to lend interpretation to his vision of man's state of being. Hence in *The Ghost Sonata* we have the objectification of an inner experience molded into a communicable pattern and form.

The dreams and hallucinations his hypersensitive soul experiences are the basis for Strindberg's art--in *Alone* he tells of how he often translates experiences, this "excess of impressions that force themselves on me" into poetry. But note that there is always the process
of selectivity working, in other words, the experiences he translates become the "edited reality" of both objective and subjective observances.

In summary, a brief restatement of the problem discussed in this examination is in order. First one is dealing with the nature of Strindberg's mode of dramatic expression--techniques, content and form--in The Ghost Sonata. We began by examining the failures of naturalism and proceeded to explore the direction of Strindberg's literary creativity; naturalism proved to be too limiting, and in expressing his vision Strindberg proceeded to press the limits of "reality" into the world of dreams, visions, hallucinations and unreality. To express in dramatic form the "incisive intensity of his vision" Strindberg turns to the world of dreams. On the one hand his creative faculties create a vision of events and incidents in life in a manner similar to the "dream-work" functions in the psychical dream. On the other hand he transforms the dream into an art-form where the dream now becomes a literary motif which is used to express a personal worldview of reality. In order to communicate his view, Strindberg fuses symbolistic and surrealist techniques with naturalistic techniques. Though he is not the originator
of any one of these techniques of expression he was highly successful in fusing and expanding the use of them into an expressive format which in retrospect has become a basis for much of 20th century dramatic art. In *The Ghost Sonata* we examined and found the form and content, while marked with what we now know as the Strindbergian quality, to be influenced by both Symbolism and Naturalism. To conclude, it is safe to say that with the current material available, Strindberg had at least one eye focused on realistic representation (his naturalistic impulses) while the other eye explored the subjective dimensions of the human experience (his symbolic impulses), for he, clearer than any forebears or for that matter many followers, was able to present his subjective worldview with clarity through manipulation of literary techniques. Therefore revolt and renewal mark Strindberg's dramatic creations—revolt in that he found the current naturalistic mode of expression too limiting, and renewal in his return to the creative fantasy of imaginative presentation of life on the stage by blending the subjective world with the objectivity of the naturalist. The result, as seen in *The Ghost Sonata*, is a perfectly controlled excursion into the dream world of reality.
Footnotes


7 Ibid., p. 17.


9 Ibid., p. 18.


11 Ibid., p. 606.

12 Ibid., p. 612.

13 Ibid., p. 607.

14 Ibid., p. 614.

15 Ibid., p. 614.

16 Ibid., p. 615.

18 Ibid., p. 35.
19 Ibid., p. 36.
20 Ibid., p. 41.
22 Ibid., p. 267.
24 Gustafson, p. 255.
26 Ibid., p. 62.
27 Ibid., p. 65.
28 Elizabeth Sprigg trans., p. 193.
29 For more information on this phase of Strindberg's life, see Gunnar Brandell, *Strindbergs Infernokris* (Stockholm: Bonniers Förlag, 1950).
31 The numerous similarities between Strindberg's dramatic works and the German Expressionist school of writers has been pointed out in Carl Dahlström's pioneering study, *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism* (New York: Benjamin Blom Inc., 1968).
33 This material first appeared in *Die Traumdeutung über den Traum* (1900), but for our purposes is condensed into a more clearly apprehended form in *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, (1917).

35 Ibid., p. 175.

36 Ibid., p. 185.

37 Corrigen, p. XVI.

38 Freud, p. 186.

39 There are too many parallels between the Student's incisive vision and Strindberg's to doubt that the Student is anything but an author surrogate.


44 Brandell, p. 506.

45 Dahlström, p. 15.


47 August Strindberg, Inferno, Alone and Other Writings, p. 385.

48 Ibid., pp. 385-386.

49 Ibid., p. 386.

50 Martin Lamm, Strindbergs Dramer, Del II (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1926), p. 396.


53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 216.


59 Martin Lamm, p. 58.

60 Ibid., p. 308.


62 Ibid., p. 204.


66 Ibid., p. 537.

67 Ibid., pp. 387-388.

68 Ibid., p. 388.

69 Ibid.

Ibid., p. 21.

Ibid., pp. 21-22.

Ibid., p. 295.

Ibid., p. 297.

Surrealism was not an established literary movement when Strindberg wrote *The Ghost Sonata* (1907), but the methods of surrealist techniques have discernable roots reaching back to Baudelaire, see Anna Balakian, *The Literary Origins of Surrealism*.


Ibid.


Ibid., p. 56.

Ibid., p. 64.

Ibid., p. 70.


Ibid., see pp. 403-404. Here he writes about Swedenborg's theory of correspondences where every earthly creation corresponds to the spiritual world.

Harriet Bosse states that: "Strindberg was so fascinated by Maeterlinck that he amused himself by translating a chapter from *Le Trésor des Humbles*, dedicating the manuscript to me." *Letters of Strindberg to Harriet Bosse*, Arvid Paulson trans. (New York: Glosset & Dunlap, 1959), p. 48.
87 Strindberg, *Open Letters to the Intimate Theater*, p. 300.

88 August Strindberg, *The Ghost Sonata*, Elizabeth Sprigge trans. in *Six Plays of Strindberg*. All future references give only the page to this edition.

89 Martin Lamm in *August Strindberg* states that Strindberg has a "compulsion for revealing the truth, as in the bizarre and moving scene in *The Ghost Sonata* in which the Student, intoxicated by love, is seized by an irresistible craving to tell the Young Lady everything he is thinking about her, although he knows it will cost her life. Vainly, she tries to stop him: 'It's in asylums that people say everything they think.' But he goes on, relentlessly: 'I must, otherwise I'll die!' He was born with a poison that prevents him from closing his eyes to life, 'for I cannot see what is ugly as beautiful nor call evil good. I cannot!'", p. 531.


91 Freud, p. 174.

92 Lagerkvist, p. 607.

Bibliography


Lamm, Martin, Strindbergs Dramer. Del. II. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1926.


