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NILS ÅKE SJÖSTEDT

*The Ghost Sonata*

A distinguished scholar once stated that of all Strindberg's works *The Ghost Sonata* was the most difficult to understand. If you read some of the interpretations published during the last three decades you will be tempted to agree with him on account of the enormous disagreement among the interpreters. This disagreement is found both in the extrinsic and intrinsic approaches. The extrinsic approaches have perhaps not been as spectacular as the structural and internal ones but they have given results that seem more secure and for this reason the agreement among the scholars tends to be somewhat greater. We know quite a few things about Strindberg at the time when he wrote the play, about his philosophy and his opinions on life, about his reading and literary biases, and even about the aims of the play itself since they are partly explained in his letters and other writings. And in my opinion we are justified to use these results to underline some aspects in the interpretations. The methodological purists may shake their heads, but I think it necessary to combine the aspects, particularly if we want to respect the rules of the hermeneutics and look out for our own "Verstehens-horizont" ("horizon of comprehension") as interpreters and that of the other interpreters we might read. If the goal of the internal interpretation is to understand the work, to get hold of the meaning of the drama, then it cannot be irrelevant to ask what external research has to say about the author's intention.

In a dissertation, presented here in Zürich, Peter Szondi launched his "Theorie des modernen Dramas" (1954), and presented his idea of the crisis of the drama, of the point where modern contemporary drama, formed after the rules of the classical theatre, necessarily had to develop into modern epic drama, the dramatic form of Bertolt Brecht. And Peter Szondi found the very beginning of the modern epic theatre in some words in *The Ghost Sonata*. It is when Bengtsson, the valet, describes the "ghost supper" and says: "They drink tea, they don't speak or only the colonel speaks..." – and further when in the last few

moments of the play the young girl says about her parents that they do not speak, because they have nothing to say to each other. If classical drama is built on dialogue and on the collision of human wills, the situation described by Bengtsson and by the girl must be the end of classical drama, and the moment of the entrance of the epic narrator is near. And Szondi found this narrator – disguised! – in one of the *dramatis personae*: in the old man, Mr Hummel, who knows everything about everyone and at the beginning of the play tells the student all about the building and its inhabitants. Szondi found it rather curious that Strindberg himself did not fully understand the formal function of his innovation: he let Hummel die at the end of the second act. And that is why the third act is doomed to fail: its wandering conversation is “a painfully abortive ending to a unique play”.

Hanno Lunin follows up Szondi’s idea. In his opinion Hummel is a forerunner of the narrators in Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre. And this leads to far-reaching conclusions about the nature of the old man (I will return to this later). Others, like Eckhart Pilick, have violently opposed Szondi’s description of the formal basis of the play. And indeed there is much to be said against Hummel as the epic narrator: As long as Hummel takes part in the drama he is the most energetic character on the stage; you could rather call him the intriguer of the play, and the most crucial argument against Szondi’s theory is that it totally ignores the last part of the play. His interpretation is based on the interesting but in my opinion too speculative idea that he has of the dialectic development of modern drama, and perhaps one may find his attempt to support the theory by quoting from the play (the words of the valet and of the girl) very ingenious but it won’t do as an interpretation of the whole play.

Hanno Lunin agrees with Szondi in the view of Hummel as the narrator. A narrator is, of course, omniscient and Hummel’s omniscience distinguishes him from the other characters in the play. He must also be omnipotent; “there can be no doubt about his divinity”, says Lunin. But as we know – Hummel dies. So Lunin must think of him as the God of The Old Testament who is dethroned by the forgiving God of Christianity, and later even this will not do: so Lunin supposes him to be the king of some underworld, i.e. the Devil himself. Finally Hanno Lunin concludes that he is “gleichsam ein Partialnumen meta-physischer Gerichtsbarkeit”.

It would seem that Lunin's conclusions concerning Hummel are rather odd. The origin is the false conception of Hummel as the epic narrator, inherited from Szondi, but the problem which Lunin tries to solve is more far-reaching, and it is actually the problem of a great many other interpreters. The problem concerns the form of reality that is presented in the play. One chapter in Lunin's book is entitled: "Gespenstigkeit als Wirklichkeitsebene". Some scholars describe the play as a "dream-play", using the term which Strindberg himself adopted for two of his other plays (*To Damascus* and *A Dream Play*); Hanno Lunin would rather describe the play as a "ghost-play". "The ghostly" has taken over the role played by the dream in *A Dream Play*. The reputable house that is so exactly and concretely described in the stage directions at the beginning of the play, is not really a house – it is like the growing castle at the end of *A Dream Play* and it is a symbol of "the building of the world", its inhabitants represent men and women, old people and young people, officers and civilians, proletarians and aristocrats, and this total complexity makes it into a sort of "Noah's ark", to which "die Spezies Mensch von jeder ihrer Arten ein Exemplar entsandt hat". And everyone in the house is living a sort of life that is only *seemingly* life. When Hummel takes away the disguise of the Colonel, he delivers the proof of the fact that his existence is unreal and only a sham existence. The fact that his wife in the cast is called the Mummy denies her real, human existence. And when people who have already passed away, like the Milkmaid and the Dead man, are brought to life on the stage, the dimension of reality becomes relative in another way: not only are living men dead, also dead men are alive! And what Hummel and the Student are confronted with is a sort of reality in which the real and the unreal are amalgamated – just what ordinary rational people would call "ghostly".

Pavel Fraenkl also holds the view that the characters in the play are ghosts. He has written a monograph on Strindberg's dramatic imagination in *The Ghost Sonata* (1966). The genuine element of the "dramatic imagination" is movement ("rörelsen", die Bewegung); Fraenkl counts the number of mutes on the stage, and when he has put these statistics into a diagram, he finds that the diagram shows a rhythmic pattern like a wave. And this wave-like rhythm, perceptible in the diagram but hardly from your seat in the theatre, indicates how Strindberg is using movement to dissolve the distinct characters of the naturalist

theatre, and thus the integrity of the personality is transformed into a new shadowy mode of existence. The mutes, forming groups of ghosts, both in the Stockholm street and in the bourgeois house, are exactly the same as the “unanimistic groups” depicted in Strindberg’s drama long before Jules Romains had his idea of “unanimism”. And since a ghost in Strindberg’s sense of the word is “the non-existent human existence”, Pavel Fraenkl can point out another pioneering idea of Strindberg’s: the life of a Strindbergian ghost is just the same as “the unauthentic mode of human existence” which Karl Jaspers has described! Pavel Fraenkl himself confesses that his analysis is “abstract” but I think it would be more appropriate to call it abstruse. It cannot be denied that there may be some sort of parallel between Karl Jaspers’ “unauthentic mode of existence” and Strindberg’s misanthropic view of men and women without real, true ways of living, but there is no connection between the wavelike rhythm of the number of mutes on the stage and the fact that most of the characters in the play are morally suspect.

But the crucial point both for Hanno Lunin and for Pavel Fraenkl is the role played by the “ghosts” in the play. Both of them regard most of the characters as ghosts and that is why according to Lunin reality is dissolved, and according to Fraenkl the personages are disintegrated into a kind of ghostly existence. But it is not true to say that the characters of the drama are ghosts in the normal sense of the word. There is only one ghost in the usual folk-lore sense of the word, and that is the Dead man coming down the staircase in the beginning of the play. The others are normal people with certain deviating traits – but not spooks or ghosts. But: Did not Strindberg himself name his play “Spöksonaten”, thereby indicating that the protagonists are spooks? This argument will not do. The Swedish word “spöke” has a synonym: the word “gengångare”, the same word that Ibsen used for his play about Mrs Alving and Oswald. And there is evidence that Strindberg used the word “spöke” in the same way: wrong doing done in the past, crimes that someone has committed, will return as some kind of consequence, as punishment or remorse. Especially the Swedish scholar Göran Lindström has shown that it is this symbolic use of the word that Strindberg had in mind, when he called his play “Spöksonaten”. He took the name from a piece of chamber music by Beethoven (the piano sonata no. 17 in d minor, op. 31 no. 21) which he used to call “Beet-

hovens Gespenstersonate", because of the tantalizing remorse it always evoked when he listened to it. And especially the Milkmaid, who when she first appears on the stage is a real person, visible to everyone except to Mr Hummel, and who when appearing next is a vision seen only by Mr Hummel; she in particular is a symbol of Hummel's remorse. And you will notice that when the "Ghost-supper" is discussed in the second act there is the same symbolic use of the word. Bengtsson, the valet, explains why the evening party is called the ghost supper: it is because the guests "look like spooks". They are people who *look like spooks*, they *are not* spooks, and the whole setting indicates that it is the crimes and the remorse that constitute the spectral atmosphere of the scene.

When Strindberg wrote the short preface ("Reminder") to *A Dream Play* he gave some hints as to a definition of his concept of a "dream-play". And there are a great number of scholars who have tried to characterize *The Ghost Sonata* as a "dream-play" in Strindberg's sense of the term. The dream-play character was clearly accentuated in Ingmar Bergman's second production of the play in 1954 (Malmö), in which he had the whole drama take place behind a thin transparent curtain with white clouds of veils passing by before the beginning of each act. – Egil Törnqvist tries to find parallels between happenings and characters, striving to demonstrate how some of the characters belong together and play each other's roles. And this feature – that the persons are doubled and play each other's roles – is connected by Egil Törnqvist with the words in the preface of *A Dream Play*, where Strindberg tells us that the persons in that play are "split and doubled". And looking for dream-like details in the play Egil Törnqvist finds that the Milk-maid, the Dead man, and the Colonel's wife, who looks like a mummy and speaks like a parrot are such dream-like details. – Birgitta Steene makes references to the dream, but she does not classify *The Ghost Sonata* among the "dream-plays": Strindberg has carried the technique of *A Dream Play* one step further – not "satisfied with projecting *les misères de la vie* by using the *structure* of a dream, Strindberg recreates in *The Ghost Sonata* the entire, absurd world of a dream,..." (112) She finds that Strindberg's style "employs dramatic metaphors in a surrealistic way", and that, I suppose, is something quite different.

All the interpretations based on Strindberg's Reminder in *A Dream Play* are severely criticized by John R. Northam in his analysis of 1966.



Northam reads the stage-directions and finds that it is not the capricious structure of a dream that the play aims at forming. On the contrary the play is clearly and logically constructed by a skilled craftsman in the field of drama. The realistic details are step by step given a distinct symbolic significance. This main thesis of Northam's seems hard to contradict. And part of the craftsmanship is also the use of literary allusions: even though there are no allusions to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* there is – as Egil Törnqvist has produced evidence of – a fairly close connection with Goethe's *Faust*. Certainly the play contains peculiarities that you cannot understand if you look upon it as a realistic drama: a dead man comes down the staircase, one of the protagonists sees a person that no one else can see (this phenomenon is as impossible to stage realistically here as it is in the Shakespearean tragedies), the scenery presents several strange details: the "hyacinth room" and its statue of Buddha, the closet and the "death-screen", and there is the abrupt change from insanity to normal behaviour in the character of the Mummy and so on. In this conflict of realism and fantastic details you will find the very problem of the characterization of the drama. And this problem cannot be solved by references to the "dream-play"-technique. Martin Lamm associated *The Ghost Sonata* with surrealism as did Birgitta Steene, but he could not find that "surrealism" gave a satisfactory answer. The reference to the absurd theatre which has been made by Gösta Kjellin may be better, but this alternative implies an anticipation of ideas in the same way as the surrealistic interpretation. If you want to find out the author's intention and listen to his own views, you will find an exact description that accounts for both the fantastic elements and the realism of the drama. In a letter of the 22nd of Oct. 1908 (to the Swedish actor and stage director Victor Castegren) he writes: "A fairy play or a play of the imagination set in our own time and with modern houses – that is what I intended." And to his friend Tor Aulin, the composer, he wrote of the technique of *The Ghost Sonata*: "To evoke the poetic atmosphere of modern every-day reality without going back to the Orient or the Middle-Ages of the fairy-tale drama." What Strindberg had in mind when he described *The Ghost Sonata* as "a fairy tale or fancy play" (ett sago- eller fantasistykke) is quite clear from the indication he gave to a German friend of his; he looked upon his plays as "Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier" and this is of course a reference to E. T. A. Hoffmann. From Hoffmann and his

volume of short stories which he called “Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier”, Strindberg adopted the technique of placing the unlikely happenings of the fairy tale in a milieu which in other respects was quite realistically depicted. And in 1906 he wrote to a friend about Hoffmann and another of his favourite writers, Edgar Allan Poe, that Poe spoilt his stories by using “natural explanations” while Hoffmann “took the supernatural things quite naturally and thereby saved the poetry (the atmosphere)”. This is an innovation of Strindberg’s. Hoffmann used the technique in fiction and Strindberg followed him for instance in *Black Banners*, but here he adopted the model for the stage. Strindberg may be said to have followed the same course in his own fairy-tale dramas. In *Lucky Per’s Journey* he combined fairy tale and realistic details in almost the same way, but what is new in *The Ghost Sonata* is a change of accent: *Lucky Per’s Journey* is a fairy tale with some realism, *The Ghost Sonata* is a realistic drama with details of a fantastic kind. And this innovation was to be fertile in the future: both surrealism and the absurd theatre used effects that were already to be found in *The Ghost Sonata*.

What happens in *The Ghost Sonata* is that Mr Hummel tries to avenge an injury that he had suffered long ago. He will do it by unmasking his rival, the Colonel. And to me it is obvious that the main theme of the drama is this unmasking. Not only the Colonel is unmasked, most of the inhabitants of the fashionable house are unmasked, even Mr Hummel himself is unmasked, the Student relates that his father had once in a fit of frankness “undressed” all his guests, which led to him being sent to a madhouse. In the ghost supper in the second part of the play you will find the dramatically most effective scene relating to this theme. But what happens in the third part of the play is that the Student expands the unmasking to include life and reality in general. The social criticism terminates in an existential experience of emptiness and nothingness. And this conclusion is similar to what Strindberg himself stated when a few weeks after he had completed the play he sent it to his German translator: “It is ‘schauderhaft’ like life when your eyes are opened and you look at ‘das Ding an Sich’.” And he also indicated in the letter that it was his religious belief, the hope of something better in a world to come, that made it possible for him to endure – an idea that coincides with the religious thoughts that are the last words of the play.



And then to the fairy-tale ingredients! Some of the unrealistic elements interfere little with the realism of the play: that the Student is a so-called Sunday child with second sight is what Mr Hummel and the Student himself believe, and such ideas are not uncommon among some people. But that the Dead Man comes down the staircase and that Mr Hummel alone cannot see the Maid are phenomena that totally destroy the realism of the play.

The most subtle and ingenious attempt to indicate the peculiarities of *The Ghost Sonata* has been made by Eckart Pilick. He cannot agree with Szondi and Lunin that Mr Hummel is "the epic narrator", and he claims that the characteristic features of the play are not its *actions* but its *mood*. The dramatic actions take place in the realm of *the mood* and *the soul*. He expounds his interpretation especially in his analysis of the role of the Milk-maid. First she is a living woman, then she becomes a vision, and thereby reality becomes relative. The real and the unreal bear a relation to each other, and that engenders the mood in which the characters in the play have to live. Strindberg's chamber plays are an attempt to break the boundaries of reality. By "the mood" Pilick means "the mood understood as the relation of existence" ("die Stimmung als Verhalten der Existenz verstanden").

The interpretation of the fantastic elements that we find in Eckart Pilick's theory, is perhaps too speculative but it does not differ much from what Strindberg pointed out as the aim of the technique which he and Hoffmann used: "to save the mood, the poetry".

But if it is emphasized that Strindberg spoke of "fairy tales", you may of course be supported in your interpretation by the vast body of research into fairy tales and myths, from Vladimir Propp to ethnological psychologists using the theories of Freud and Jung which have attempted to explain man's interest in fairy tales and his need for them.

The most impressive investigation of the fairy tale and mythological aspects of *The Ghost Sonata* is that of Harry G. Carlson in his recent book *Strindberg och myterna (Strindberg and the Myths)*. He records every allusion to, every indication of a myth or a fairy tale in the play – and there are plenty of them: "Will you be the Good Samaritan" says the Student in the opening scene, and that of course is an allusion to the Bible. And a Biblical myth is also involved when someone remarks that the Student longs to enter the house as he longs for Paradise. Once in the play Mr Hummel is explicitly described as the Norse God Thor, the

Thunderer. But Harry Carlson also notes an allusion to another Norse God, namely Odin: Mr Hummel eventually hangs himself, and Odin hung for nine nights in Yggdrasil, the great ask tree! Carlson's book is crammed with allusions and associations of this kind and, in my opinion, some of them are questionable. But you cannot deny that Strindberg was very fond of using mythological and fairy-tale themes, and that he used them symbolically and with reference to fundamental things in his conception of life. The results of Harry Carlson's investigation of *The Ghost Sonata* are these: In his entire literary work Strindberg favours three kinds of myths – the myth of the Creation, the myth of the Virgin in the Tower and the myth of the Great Mother. All of them are used in *The Ghost Sonata*. And what is characteristic of that play is the conflict between two of them: between the heroic tale of the Virgin in the Tower and the archetype of the Great Mother, the manifestation of the Maya, the Weaver of the World in Buddhist philosophy. All the female characters – the Milk-maid, the Mummy, the Hyacinth Girl and the Cook – are manifestations of the Great Mother, the Terrible Mother and at the same time manifestations of something within Mr Hummel, in his soul. (Jung's archetypal interpretation is of course fundamental to this reading of the play.) And the sense of this myth and archetype is that neither Mr Hummel nor the Student reaches his goal, which is to regain his own self, his ego, by fighting the Terrible Mother. This interpretation is acceptable – but you must never forget that it owes all its authority to Jung's theories. The theory has no bearing on what is obviously the theme of the play – the unmasking of man, society and life of man on earth. In this respect the mythical symbols that Strindberg uses are simple and clear enough: he refers to the Indian myth of Buddha and to the Christian myths of Earth and Heaven and so on.

The first of Strindberg's favourite myths – that of the Creation – plays an important part in Harry Carlson's analysis. There is indeed very little in the text of the drama that explicitly deals with the creation. But Strindberg once wrote a whole short drama about the creation, first placed in the epilogue which he wrote for *Master Olof* in 1877 and afterwards published at the beginning of the French version of the *Inferno*. In it appear God and his brother Lucifer. God is an old man who feels bored and that is why he resolves to create the world. Lucifer is young and handsome, like Prometheus, Apollo and Christ. But the

creator is not the highest God – above him there is The Eternal One. And this indicates that the creator is the demiurge of gnosticism. In *The Ghost Sonata* – according to Carlson’s reading – the relation between Mr Hummel and the Student is just the same as the relation between God, the demiurge and the son of his fair brother Lucifer. Hummel is Jahveh, the old punishing God of The Old Testament and the Student is Christ, the only begotten Son. Prof. Carlson stresses the parallelism between the Student and Eleonora in *Easter* and Agnes, the daughter of Indra in *A Dream Play*; he is “Christ in man”, the incarnate God, the gnostic messenger. And the point is that the form of myth that the Student represents, emphasizes the pessimism and the hopelessness of the drama: the only thing left is resignation (in contrast to *Easter* and *A Dream Play* where there is still hope). However interesting this may seem, I cannot find anything in the text that indicates that Mr Hummel and the Student are gods and not human beings. The mythological hints are so vague that the whole hypothesis seems more fantastic than all the fantastic things that the spectator is confronted with in the play. The aim of the hypothesis is to explain the necessity and the *raison d’être* of the final part of the play – the scene in the hyacinth room. This scene is a reproduction of primal rhythms, a microcosm of life’s ruthless cycle of the birth, maturation and death of love. The Student comes to the house as a liberator, but he is both *kāma deva* and *māra*, the Hindu god of love who is also the god that kills. If you can hear these echoes of the Hindu myth in the music of *The Ghost Sonata*, perhaps the poetic value of the play and your poetic appreciation of it will increase. And perhaps this is exactly what Strindberg had in mind: you can “save the poetry (the mood)” by taking the supernatural quite naturally. Strindberg’s technique of depicting everyday life and unreal, mythical elements in the same simple naturalistic way invites you to look for mythical elements in the realistic web of the play. But it is wiser to stress the realistic character and the symbolism that emerges from the realistic setting and avoid plunging into the marsh of myths. Naturally, there are Christian, Buddhist and Swedenborgian ideas in the play. The Student speaks of Buddha and he recites the medieval, Catholic *Sólarljóð* as a summary of the message of the play. And the drama deals with the relation between man and the metaphysical, religious forces. In this interplay of man and god, of earthly existence and eternity, the folk tales and the mythical details appear as concrete elucidations and as spectacular, symbolic elements.

In the interpretation of the play we have to consider the “Verstehenshorizont” – both our own and that of earlier interpreters that may influence our own interpretation.

Among modern theatre people there are those who claim that the first interpreter of a play is the author – when he writes the stage directions. (The dialogue is according to this view the real drama, and the stage directions are the author’s interpretation of the drama.) The criterion that I have referred to in the discussion of the different interpretations has been, as you may have observed, Strindberg’s own “Verstehenshorizont” as it is manifested both in the stage directions and in some declarations by Strindberg in letters. When Olof Molander staged the play in the forties he had access to Martin Lamm’s investigations of the biographical and local background of the play. Thus this interpretation stressed the genuine Stockholm milieu of the play: the house and the street were copies of the house and the street where Strindberg lived and which had been models for the description of the setting in the opening stage directions. And in many respects Olof Molander’s staging followed Strindberg’s intentions: “real life” and “quite natural elements of the folk-tale”. This line was followed so consistently that the stage direction which at the end of the play has the room disappear to be replaced by Böcklin’s picture *Toteninsel*, seemed impossible to Molander and was hence cut out. – One year after the first night at Strindberg’s theatre Strindberg projected a new staging of the play. At that time he had been caught by the idea of what he called the “Drapery stage” (*Draperibanan*), and perhaps influenced by Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig he developed a new style of staging opposed to the naturalist theatre. Here he was prepared to do without the concrete, realistic stage directions in *The Ghost Sonata* and use only the drapes as scenery. He wrote to August Falk, his co-director: “It would raise the play to its true level, which is not the material level.” According to Strindberg’s view of life, influenced by Swedenborg and by theosophical ideas, man has to free himself from the material plane, and when Strindberg once had in mind to name *The Ghost Sonata* “Kama-Loka: A Buddhist drama”, he was in fact stressing this point. Kama-Loka was the theosophical name of the first place that the soul passed through after death where man was to be purged from earthly sin and shame and desire. This process begins with death and this is what the unmasking in *The Ghost Sonata* aims at. Strindberg’s Kama

Loka version was never performed on the stage of his theatre. But in the wave of the expressionist theatre the stressing of the fantastic elements of *The Ghost Sonata* had its first great chance in Max Reinhardt's famous production. As I mentioned a few minutes ago, Pavel Fraenkl's reading has its background in the existentialist movement when he identifies the ghost world of the drama with the "unauthentic mode of existence" that is an element in Jaspers' existentialism. The unmasking of the respectable bourgeois house of course lends itself to an interpretation in Marxist terms. And the new wave of interest in Oriental mythology and in Jungian myth interpretation offers opportunities for stressing aspects of the drama that had never occurred to stage directors or scholars before.

All these readings are not of equal value. I think it is possible to contest a good many of the arguments put forward for the various interpretations and of course every interpreter has a "Verstehenshorizont" of his own. But you cannot deny that every new "Verstehenshorizont" makes it possible to stress new elements in the drama and that these *are* – or *ought to be* – of importance for every new interpretation.

The reading which I myself should prefer would start from what I regard as Strindberg's own intention and "Verstehenshorizont", but I think it is also necessary to consider readings of later interpreters with new "horizons". It is really not at all surprising that a literary work of distinction should lend itself to new interpretations and new "Verstehenshorizonte". *The Ghost Sonata* is a realistic drama in an ordinary contemporary environment with unusual and fantastic features, which are effective precisely through contrasting with the realism of the play. The main theme is the unmasking of men and society, which finally turns into the unmasking of human existence and its earthly conditions. The background is a religious belief in which Christian elements are combined with elements borrowed from Buddhism, from Schopenhauer and from Swedenborg. The human beings presented in the drama are real people but in the process of being unmasked they come to live near the border-line of another existence, postulated by the religious belief expressed at the end of the play. By stressing different elements in this dramatic structure the outcome may be Max Reinhardt's expressionistic nightmare or Strindberg's theosophical Kama-Loka or Pavel Fraenkl's and Karl Jaspers' unauthentic human exist-



ence. And as an explanation of the effect of the drama you may resort to C.G. Jung or J. Campbell and their myth theories. Perhaps the most interesting background for the drama and its peculiarities is that category of "the fantastic" which Roger Caillois in France and Lars Gustafsson in Sweden have introduced as a key to important and fascinating spheres of art and literature.

Finally I think we should bear in mind that according to some structuralists the plot has features that are typical of the period as well as of the author. The hero who attempts to unveil falsehood and treachery in society and in the family is a rather common theme in naturalist literature, for instance in France and Norway, and the normal ending is that our sympathy remains with the truth-teller, even though he himself perishes. The plot in Strindberg's works sometimes agrees with that of the period, as in the episode of Gert the Bookprinter in the first version of *Master Olof*. But in the verse edition of *Master Olof* and in *The Red Room* the plot is reversed: the unmasking teller of the truth is defeated and has to reconsider matters. And in *The Ghost Sonata*? Martin Lamm found it gratifying that the unmasker is himself unmasked – which is true as far as Mr Hummel is concerned. In this respect the play fulfils the reconsidering theme of the verse edition of *Master Olof* and of *The Red Room*. But in *The Ghost Sonata* the duty of telling the truth gets the better of it in the plot which centres around the Student: in the name of religion you have to carry the unveiling and unmasking through to the bitter end.

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