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A PRODUCTION STUDY OF THE GHOST SONATA

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the requirements for the degree of
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

August Strindberg has been called ". . . one of Sweden's greatest authors, and the only Swedish author who occupies an important place in world literature."¹ Shaw claimed that Strindberg was ". . . the only genuine Shakespearean modern dramatist . . ." and he gave his Nobel prize money for better translations of Strindberg's work.² Strindberg's influence on twentieth century drama has been emphasized by Eugene O'Neill:

Strindberg was the precursor of all modernity in our present theatre . . . Strindberg still remains among the most modern of moderns, the greatest interpreter in the theatre of the characteristic spiritual conflicts which constitute the drama--the blood--of our lives today.³

Although Strindberg has had a great influence on modern expressionism and the modern theatre, his plays are rarely performed, especially in the United States.⁴ The explanation for this may be found in his unusual personality,

¹Alrik Gustafson, A History of Swedish Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 254.

²Eric Bentley, The Playwright as Thinker (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946), p. 196.

³Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd, Masters of Modern Drama (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 112.

⁴Ibid.

his willfulness, his unwillingness to go along with popular taste, his unconventional dramatic techniques, and his thematic use of autobiographical material.

Because of the unusual qualities of Strindberg and his plays and his influence on modern drama, The Ghost Sonata has been chosen for this production study.

I. THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this thesis was to design, from a director's viewpoint, an original production of the play, The Ghost Sonata that could be performed effectively and feasibly on a college campus. The thesis has been entitled "A Production Study of the The Ghost Sonata by August Strindberg."

The Ghost Sonata presented two major challenges to the director. The play is quite difficult to understand even after several readings. It is a religious fantasy involving abstruse thought, and it relies a great deal upon nonverbal effects, i.e., what is seen on the stage. One does not just read a play like this; rather one takes his time working it over and asking questions.⁵ For these reasons the director must be able to convey meaning clearly to the audience through the directing techniques used. The expressionistic style of the script presents another important challenge to

⁵Eric Bentley, The Play A Critical Anthology (New York: Prentice Hall, Incorporated, 1951), p. 588.

the director.

II. PROCEDURE

To begin the production study, a thorough examination of the life of Strindberg and the nature of expressionism was made to uncover the influences of each upon the play. After a thorough interpretation and analysis of the play, a production plan was developed. This plan was recorded in a prompt book which was filed with the Speech Department of Bowling Green State University. This prompt book contained a diagram of movement and composition, a floor plan, and a description of the stage business and the tempo. This thesis was then written to state the results of the study.

III. TRANSLATION USED

Strindberg is not only difficult to understand when translated into English, but his style of writing is almost impossible to translate into another language:

He writes an idiomatic Swedish which, in a sense, is not reproducible in another language. His sentences, whether in the dialogue of a drama, or in the story of a novel, are wrought with a nervous force which is untranslatable. His phrases seem to be innervated, warm-blooded entities, and support the theory that the sentence preceded the word in the evolution of speech. He is often ungrammatical; each sentence is a living whole which cannot be divided. Analyse him with syntax and dictionary and you will find "mistakes" and startling neology. The meaning will sometimes be obscure. But read him as you would listen to a piece of music with your ear to the harmonics, and you will find a consum-

mate artist in words.⁶

Three translations of The Ghost Sonata were available.⁷ The translation by Elizabeth Sprigge was chosen for several reasons. The language of the Björkman translation was outdated. In the Sprinchorn version the language was so modern that it bordered on slang. The Sprigge translation seemed to be a good median between the two extremes. To illustrate the above statements, segments of the dialogue have been taken from each translation. In Edwin Björkman's version the following dialogue is found:

Student. What a ludicrous adventure!

Hummel. Are you a sportsman?⁸

In Sprigge's translation the same dialogue was interpreted in the following manner:

Student. What an odd adventure!

Old Man. Are you a gambler?⁹

⁶L. Lind-Af-Hageby, August Strindberg The Spirit of Revolt (London: Stanley Paul and Company, 1913), pp. 329-30.

⁷August Strindberg, Plays by August Strindberg, trans. Edwin Björkman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), pp. 101-48.

August Strindberg, Six Plays of Strindberg, trans. Elizabeth Sprigge (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Incorporated, 1955), pp. 263-304.

August Strindberg, The Chamber Plays, trans. Evert Sprinchorn, Seabury Quinn, Jr., and Kenneth Peterson (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Incorporated, 1962), pp. 102-152.

⁸Björkman, p. 109.

⁹Sprigge, p. 273.

Sprinchorn's version varied even more:

The Student. I don't know what I'm getting into. It's crazy.

The Old Man. Aren't you a gambler?¹⁰

Very formal English was used by Björkman:

Hummel. Whom were you talking to awhile ago?¹¹

Student. Whom does that statue represent?¹²

Sprigge translated this same passage into a more conversational style:

Old Man. Who was it you were talking to just now?¹³

Student. Who is that marble statue of?¹⁴

The Sprinchorn version looses the beauty of Strindberg's meaning by using the everyday jargon:

The Old Man. Who was that you were talking to just now?¹⁵

The Student. Who is that marble statue in there?¹⁶

Another reason for choosing the Sprigge translation was that it is used in college courses and in the newer anthologies being published. Therefore, it is more familiar

¹⁰Sprinchorn, p. 111.

¹¹Björkman, p. 106.

¹²Ibid., p. 110.

¹³Sprigge, p. 271.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 274.

¹⁵Sprinchorn, p. 108.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 112.

with the college audience than the other translations. For these reasons Elizabeth Sprigge's translation seemed more adaptable to production in a college theatre.

IV. SOURCES

The main source of information came from the script of The Ghost Sonata by Elizabeth Sprigge. Critical discussions of Strindberg's style, literary worth, the play and its meaning were found mainly in Carl Dahlstrom's Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism, The Chamber Plays by August Strindberg, and The Playwright As Thinker by Eric Bentley. Much valuable material was found in biographies and in anthologies. The three most helpful were Elizabeth Sprigge's The Strange Life of August Strindberg, L. Lind-Af-Hageby's August Strindberg The Spirit of Revolt, and Eric Bentley's The Play A Critical Anthology. Play Direction by John Dietrich was used as the guide for the prompt book.

V. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter includes the introductory and background material. The second chapter discusses the meaning and interpretation of the play. The third chapter analyzes the structure and style of the play. The fourth and fifth chapters discuss the directing techniques, the acting style and the technical

aspects that were employed in the prompt book. The final chapter is a summary and conclusion of the problems derived from the production study of the play.

The chapter headings were divided in a manner designed to show the process the writer would take in directing the play. Reasons will be given for the production approach that was chosen.

The prompt book that will be included as part of the thesis study must be detailed enough to be used by anyone who would want to produce the play. It includes a record of movement, composition, business, and tempo.

VI. BIOGRAPHY OF STRINDBERG

In order to understand and appreciate Strindberg's works, one has to know about the life of this man. The greatest part of his works are autobiographical; and if he is not the main subject of his work, his own experiences and obsessions fill the pages.¹⁷ Strindberg said about his life and his writing:

. . . I live and I live the manifold lives of the people I describe, happy with those who are happy, evil with the evil one, good with the good; I creep out of my personality and speak with the mouths of children, of women, of old men: I am king and beggar, I have worldly power, I am the tyrant and the down-

¹⁷Elizabeth Sprigge, The Strange Life of August Strindberg (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. vii.

trodden, hater of the tyrant; I hold all opinions and profess all religions; I live in all times and have myself ceased to be. This is a state which brings indescribable happiness.¹⁸

Johan August Strindberg was the fourth child of Carl Oscar and Ulrika Eleanora Strindberg. His parents had been married only a few months before he was born on January 22, 1849, in Stockholm. His family was poverty stricken, and he had eight brothers and sisters to share this poverty. Since the family was so large, Strindberg had to compete for his mother's love and for the attention which she had no time to give him. His father also had no interest in him or time for him.¹⁹ Strindberg found no comfort in his family life:

Sacred Family! Thou art supposed to be the home of the virtues, where innocent children are tortured into their first falsehood, where wills are broken by tyranny, and self-respect killed by narrow egoism. Family! Thou art the home of all social evil, a charitable institution for comfortable women, an anchorage for house-fathers, and a hell for children.²⁰

In school he was considered an outcast because he was so poor.²¹ School for him was "a preparation for hell and

¹⁸August Strindberg, Alone, cited in Sprigge, The Strange Life of August Strindberg, p. vii.

¹⁹The Strange Life of August Strindberg, p. 2.

²⁰August Strindberg, The Son of a Servant, cited in J. Marchand, "Strindberg in America," The Bookman, XXXVIII (December, 1913), 436.

²¹The Strange Life of August Strindberg, p. 6.

not for life."²² Since life seemed so full of misery, it was not surprising that he developed into a paranoic and an extreme pessimist.

He attended the University of Uppsala. While there he became interested in medicine and in acting. He proved a failure at both. Strindberg seemed to lean toward literary creation when in school and had a short play produced by the Royal Theatre. He then wrote The Outlaw which won him a stipend from King Charles XV of Sweden. This helped him financially to remain at the University. However, he lost the stipend when Charles died. He tried his hand at a full-length romantic historical drama, Master Olaf, in 1872. It was a failure at this time although he revived it several years later.²³ From 1872 to 1880 he wrote for several newspapers and magazines.²⁴

In May of 1875 Strindberg fell in love with Siri von Essen, who at the time was the wife of Baron Carl Gustaf Wrangel. She divorced her husband to marry Strindberg in December, 1877, two months before the birth of their first

²²Frank Chandler, Modern Continental Playwrights (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), p. 21.

²³The Strange Life of August Strindberg, pp. 19-52.

²⁴Brita M. E. Mortensen and Brian W. Downs, Strindberg: An Introduction to His Life and Work (Cambridge University Press, 1949), p. 25.

child. Siri was an actress who enjoyed the life of the social world while Strindberg preferred a quiet life devoted to reading and his writing.²⁵

During the years from 1874 to 1882, Strindberg worked at the Royal Library. In this position he was able to obtain a wide background for his future literary endeavors.²⁶

Strindberg's first outstanding success was his novel, The Red Room, written in 1879. In 1881 he tried his luck again with Master Olaf, and it proved a success. He published a collection of modern short stories on matrimony in 1884 under the title of Married. This book revealed his attitude toward women and their emancipation.²⁷

After fourteen years of marriage during which time three children were born, Strindberg obtained a divorce from Siri in 1891 under highly unpleasant circumstances. He accused his wife of having lovers of both sexes and of wanting to have him committed to a mental institution. He began to deteriorate mentally in the years following his works against women.²⁸

In 1893 he married an Austrian journalist Frida Uhl.

²⁵Strindberg: An Introduction to His Life and Work, pp. 26-29.

²⁶Ibid., p. 29.

²⁷The Strange Life of August Strindberg, pp. 86-100.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 110-13.

However, his clouded mental state was not conducive to marital happiness; and this second marriage soon ended. He began to engage in fantastic chemical experiments, became a Swedenborgian mystic (one who follows the doctrines set up by Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish philosopher and religious writer), and had unusual psychic reactions that led him to enter a private sanatorium where he quickly recovered. During this period, however, he wrote twelve historical plays which showed he had not completely lost his mental prowess. Later several of his plays became subjective and elusive. These plays included To Damascus, The Dream Play, The Great Highway, and The Ghost Sonata which were the forerunners of expressionistic drama.

Strindberg married a third time in 1901 to Harriet Bosse, an actress; but this marriage lasted only a short time.²⁹ In 1907 he published his Chamber Plays, The Pelican, The Storm, After the Fire, and The Ghost Sonata. These plays were intended for a theatre built exclusively for the staging of these and others of Strindberg's plays; this theatre was called the Intimate Theatre.³⁰

August Strindberg, the man who never seemed to find happiness in this life, passed to a possible peace on May

²⁹The Strange Life of August Strindberg, pp. 197-206.

³⁰Mortensen, p. 139.

14, 1912. His last words were said as he pressed the Bible to his heart, "Here is to be found the only true expression."³¹

Strindberg's collected works included fifty to sixty volumes.³² In these volumes he produced plays, novels, short stories, autobiographies, poems, historical and scientific studies, literary and philosophical essays. At one time his historical work The Swedish People was read more than any other book except the Bible among the Swedish people.³³

Strindberg has aptly summarized his life in his autobiography, The Inferno:

Such then is my life; a sign, an example to serve for the betterment of others; a proverb to set forth the nothingness of fame and of celebrity; a proverb to show the younger generation how they should not live; yes! I am a proverb, I who regarded myself as a prophet, and am revealed as a braggart.³⁴

VII. HISTORY OF THE PLAY

The Ghost Sonata was written in 1907 as part of a collection of Kammarspel or Chamber Plays. These plays were

³¹Archibald Henderson, European Dramatists (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1926), p. 72.

³²Edwin Bjorkman, Voices of To-Morrow (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1913), p. 42.

³³Albert Shaw, "The Strindberg Celebration," The American Review of Reviews, XLV (February, 1912), 159.

³⁴August Strindberg, The Inferno, trans. Claud Field (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), pp. 228-9.

performed at a small theatre called the Intima Teatern (Intimate Theatre) in which only Strindberg's plays were performed. The original title of The Ghost Sonata was Kama-Loka which means ghost supper. This term refers to the appearance of the guests in scene two. They gather daily for this meal to munch silently on their biscuits and to sit in silence. Each guest is afraid he will reveal some secret from his past.³⁵ The Theosophists, a religious sect with which Strindberg was associated at one time during his life, gave the name of Kama-Loka to a kind of limbo or purgatory through which people had to wander before they reached the peaceful realm of the dead.³⁶

This play was not successful at the Intimate Theatre in Stockholm. Max Reinhardt was the first to direct it successfully in Germany in 1917. Then the Swedish director Olaf Molander gave a successful production of it. In the 1920's Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Players staged it in New York.³⁷ Several productions have been given throughout Europe and the United States since 1945.³⁸

³⁵Martin Lamm, Modern Drama (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 149.

³⁶The Chamber Plays, p. 225.

³⁷Gustafson, p. 273.

³⁸A list of the productions of The Ghost Sonata is found in the Appendix on page 72.

When the play was produced at the Provincetown Playhouse, Stark Young gave a good account of the effect produced upon the audience:

[The play] was like the flux and confusion and urgent logic of dreams. The play . . . is uneven and disordered, but it slips from one strange inner certainty to another, and abounds in recognitions and revelations whose point arises quite as much from the moment in which they come as from their words. . . . you are constantly aware of Strindberg's essential realism, which is often the more penetrating by reason of its being so unexpected, and intangible. It holds an audiences' attention by a kind of subconscious sequence of life in it and by a strange, mad veracity that, for all the disorder and poor taste and violence and mental disease, has its own unity and force.³⁹

To amplify Mr. Young's observation, the phrase, "one strange inner certainty to another," refers to the bond of sin and evil that ties all of the characters, young, old or spectral together. One is constantly aware of the main theme even though the events seem disordered.

The phrase, "abounds in recognition and revelations whose point arises quite as much from the moment in which they come as from their words," means that the viewer realizes what is happening by seeing the action that takes place rather than from what is said. Much is implied in the dialogue, and the essential meanings are revealed mainly through the action of the characters.

"Strindberg's essential realism," results from the

³⁹Stark Young, "The Spook Sonata," The New Republic, XXXVII (January 23, 1924), 231-32.

basis in reality which Strindberg has given to his conceptions. The characters and plot are drawn from real human experience. The characters reflect real life, but this life is seen in an unreal way.

The "subconscious sequence of life," refers to the dream experiences that the audience has. The play should remind them of the disordered sequence of their own dreams.

CHAPTER II

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

To interpret a play one must discover its meaning in terms of the main theme and the minor themes which permeate the script. Additional interpretation of the theme is found in the major and minor character symbols and in the visual symbols incorporated by the author. The mood of the play is another important aspect to consider in interpreting a play. After determining the above factors of interpretation, the director is better able to apply the technique of stage directing in the process of producing the play.

I. SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

The play begins early on a Sunday morning. One hears church bells ringing and sees the façade of a house. Through its windows are seen two rooms, known as the Round Room and the Hyacinth Room. The Lady in Black stands motionless in the Hyacinth Room; and her mother, the Caretaker's Wife, is outside sweeping the doorstep. The Old Man is reading a newspaper while seated in a wheel chair near the advertisement column outside the house. The Milkmaid enters upon the scene and goes to the water fountain in front of the house to freshen herself. The Student enters and is exhausted from having saved people from a terrible fire during

the night. The Milkmaid is an apparition seen only by the Student. He asks her to give him a drink and to bathe his eyes. She does so and then quickly disappears.

The Old Man has been watching the Student and proceeds to talk to him. He finds that he knew the Student's father from years past. The Old Man supposedly ruined the father financially. Hummel, the Old Man, offers the Student a job. In this job the Student will render a few small favors for Hummel. A date is then made for the Student to go to the opera and to sit with the Colonel and his daughter, who is actually the Old Man's daughter by the Colonel's wife. In the continuing discussion between the Student and Hummel, one learns that the Colonel, his wife the Mummy, their daughter the Girl, the Fiancée, the Caretaker's Wife, and the Lady in Black inhabit the house that is seen onstage. All of their lives are interwoven in a web of sin and sordidness in which the Old Man plays the spider. The Mummy used to be young and beautiful; but now she hides herself in a cupboard worshipping her own statue, which is displayed in the Round Room. The Fiancée was engaged sixty years ago to the Old Man. The Caretaker's Wife and the Dead Man, who has just passed away, are the parents of the Lady in Black. The Lady in Black has a suitor who is the Aristocrat, Baron Skansborg. He is getting a divorce from his present wife, who is the daughter of the Dead Man.

The Girl enters the scene, and the Student is overwhelmed by her beauty. This pleases the Old Man greatly, for his goal is for them to meet and marry. The Old Man hopes he can save the Girl, who is his daughter by the Mummy, from the perverted household in which she lives.

The Dead Man enters from the side of the house. The Dead Man is an apparition seen only by the Student. The Old Man has said that the Student is a Sunday child, who can see what others cannot.

Johansson enters to give his master, the Old Man, a message. He then pushes the Old Man around the corner of the house to the back door, so that he can visit with the beggars. Johansson returns, and discusses with the Student the motives of the Old Man. Johansson states that the Old Man wants power over people and will stop at nothing to get it. Hummel is afraid of nothing except the Milkmaid. He fears her because she is connected to some terrible episode of his past life. Hummel returns from the back of the house followed by the beggars. The Milkmaid appears, and the Old Man is horror stricken. He exits quickly.

Scene Two begins inside the Round Room where Bengtsson, the Colonel's servant, and Johansson are discussing the ghost supper that is about to take place that evening. The ghost supper is a habitual gathering of the members of the household at which tea and biscuits are served. The

people say the same things or say nothing at all, for fear that their past might be revealed. Bengtsson opens the door of the cupboard to find the Mummy looking as her name implies; she is also babbling like a parrot.

The Old Man, who has invited himself to the ghost supper, waits in the Round Room for the others to arrive. The Mummy comes out of her cupboard and speaks to Hummel. While they are talking, one learns that the Colonel took the Fiancee from the Old Man. Therefore, Hummel had to take revenge by winning the Colonel's wife which resulted in the birth of the Girl. Also one discovers that the Baron was the Mummy's lover and that the Colonel had seduced the Fiancee. The Mummy points out that they are all bound together by "crimes and secrets and guilt."

The Colonel comes into the Round Room, and the Old Man proceeds to carry out his mission for being there. The Colonel has unpaid promissory notes which the Old Man holds over him. Hummel reveals information that discredits the Colonel's titles as a nobleman and as a colonel. He is found to be nothing but a lackey. The Old Man continues to expose the crimes and secrets of the past lives of the other guests. He wishes to rid the house of all evil in order that the Student and his daughter might escape it to start a new life. The Mummy stops him, however, by asserting that he cannot undo the past and wipe it out by bribes and

threats. The only way to do this is through suffering and repentance. She accuses him of being the cause of the sin and crimes. Therefore, he has no right to condemn others. Bengtsson exposes him as having formerly been a servant in Bengtsson's kitchen. He also states that the Old Man had lured a young girl out on the ice to drown her because she had witnessed a crime he had committed. The Mummy then transforms him to her former state, as a mummy-like figure, who speaks like a parrot. She leads him to the cupboard where he hangs himself. The scene ends with the Student reciting a poem to the Girl in the Hyacinth Room.

Scene Three continues in the Hyacinth Room which is symbolic of heaven and eternity. The Student and the Girl discuss the meaning of the hyacinth and the Buddha. The Girl tells how the cook sucks all the nourishment from the food which is causing her, the Girl, to die gradually. The Girl has to do all the work, cleaning and so on because the housemaid never thoroughly finishes anything. Adele, the Girl, labors constantly; but she grows very tired of living. There seems to be no hope for her in life. The Student tells how his father was caught in such a web as this household, and he decided to break loose. The father told his friends what he thought, and he was taken to a madhouse where he died. The Student asks for answers to the questions, ". . . Where is beauty to be found? . . . Where are honor and faith? . . .

Where is anything that fulfills its promise?"¹ The Girl is dying, and the death screen is brought in to be placed in front of her. The Student closes the play by stating, "The Liberator is coming . . .",² and this liberator is death. Death seems to be the only hope, for it leads to an after-life where the Student's questions may be answered.

II. DISCUSSION OF THE THEME

Central theme. The main idea of The Ghost Sonata is a ". . . merciless exposure of life's most shameful secrets."³ People's lives are bound together by crime, secrets, and guilt from the past which will be exposed eventually.

The past of all the characters' lives is linked through unusual and entangled relationships. The Old Man is the spider in this web, for he seems to be the main link in all of these character relationships. The Old Man points out this theme quite explicitly in Scene I. He is talking to the Student about the past lives of the members of the house which is before them. The Student does not realize the notorious past which Hummel has had. The Old Man comments quite casually, "My whole life's like a book of fairy stories, sir.

¹The Ghost Sonata, p. 303.

²Ibid.

³Six Plays of Strindberg, p. 265.

And although the stories are different, they are held together by one thread, and the main theme constantly recurs."⁴ At another time in the same scene, Hummel tells the Student, "Our fates are entwined through your father--and other things."⁵

When Bengtsson is discussing the ghost supper with Johansson in Scene II, he states the theme indirectly when he says there are ". . . always the same people saying the same things or saying nothing at all for fear of being found out."⁶ Each is afraid of revealing his past.

In Scene II the Mummy, the past lover of the Old Man, is found hiding in a cupboard. She does this to forget her guilt from the past. In the same scene, the Old Man invites himself to the ghost supper in order to expose the past life of the Colonel. However, the Mummy enters the room to turn the tables on Hummel. With Bengtsson's aid she completely reveals Hummel's past. Again the central theme is found recurring in the Mummy's lines: "Crime and secrets and guilt bind us together. We have broken our bonds and gone our own ways, times without number, but we are always drawn together

⁴The Ghost Sonata, p. 274.

⁵Ibid., p. 277.

⁶Ibid., p. 284.

again."⁷

The Student repeats the central idea in the final lines of the play: "You poor little child, child of this world of illusion, guilt, suffering and death, this world of endless change, disappointment, and pain."⁸

The guilt and crime of the Old Man's past recurs in the form of the ghosts of the Dead Man and the Milkmaid. Hummel, it will be recalled, had killed the Milkmaid because she had caught him in the act of committing some crime. He figuratively strangles the Dead Man by using his power as a creditor over a debtor.

As stated previously, Strindberg's works are autobiographical. While he was a reporter, he was supposed to have found that ". . . even the closest families appeared to be held together by fear, deceit and greed--by every human emotion, but most seldom love."⁹ Perhaps this observation was the inspiration for the theme of The Ghost Sonata.

Servants and vampires. The servants in the play are referred to as vampires. Bengtsson describes the Old Man, when he was a servant in Bengtsson's household, as ". . . like a vampire, sucking the marrow out of the house, so that

⁷The Ghost Sonata, p. 289.

⁸Ibid., p. 304.

⁹Masters of Modern Drama, p. 112.

we became like skeletons."¹⁰ Another time the Girl describes the cook as belonging ". . . to the Hummel family of vampires. She is eating us."¹¹ In March 1907 Strindberg had trouble with his servants, quarters, and food. This may have influenced the repeated theme of servants taking nourishment out of their masters' food. This theme is found in almost all his plays in which there is a relationship between masters and servants.¹²

Vampirism seems to be with Hummel still in his role of creditor. He drains the people of their money and causes them to be poor or to kill themselves as in the case of the Student's father and in the case of the Dead Man. Hummel as a vampire is seen again when he clasps the Student's hand in Scene I, and the Student is unable to free himself from the deathlike grip. The Girl is a vampire in that she is a leech on the Student because he has no strength and has no soul. She is related to the Cook and to Hummel. They are all parasites who consume without producing. Only the Girl's death saves the strength and life of the Student from being de-

¹⁰The Ghost Sonata, p. 294.

¹¹Ibid., p. 298.

¹²Carl Enoch William Leonard Dahlstrom, Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1930), p. 200.

stroyed by her.¹³

Strindberg seems to be obsessed with vampires for in The Confessions of a Fool he describes his wife ". . . as a beautiful vampire sucking his heart's blood."¹⁴ Again the life of Strindberg creeps into his writing. Also in his play The Stronger the silent Miss Y is a vampire whose ". . . soul bored . . . like a worm into an apple, and ate and ate and burrowed and burrowed, till nothing was left but the skin and a little black mold."¹⁵

Religion. Reference to two religions are found in The Ghost Sonata. The most evident of these is Buddhism because a Buddha is part of the decor of the Hyacinth Room and is the object of many references in Scene III. Religion or an afterlife seems to be the only hope left for the Student and the Girl, who are surrounded by the sin, the greed, and the guilt of the Hummel household. The Student appeals to Buddha:

You wise and gentle Buddha, sitting there waiting for a Heaven to sprout from the earth, grant us patience in our ordeal and purity of will, so that this hope may not be confounded.¹⁶

¹³The Chamber Plays, p. xxii.

¹⁴Chandler, p. 22.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁶The Ghost Sonata, p. 304.

The second religion to which the Student appeals is Christianity. In Scene III he says, "Savior of the world, save us! We perish."¹⁷ The Christian symbols in the poetry, the heavenly music, and the use of Bocklin's painting, The Island of the Dead, at the end of the play serve as a kind of deus ex machina effect.¹⁸ Another reference to Christianity is made in the last lines when the Student asks, "the Lord of Heaven,"¹⁹ to bless the Girl on her journey to eternity.

The themes found in The Ghost Sonata reflect the life of Strindberg as seen in the following description by L. Lind-Af-Hageby in his biography of Strindberg:

He took upon himself the role of destroyer; he mocked men's religion and men's morality; he ridiculed propriety and poured bitter scorn on the social order.

He passed on, making enemies, breaking idols, desecrating temples. He sowed reality and reaped hatred. . . . He dissected the human heart, laid bare its meanness, its uncleanness; made men and women turn on each other with sudden understanding and loathing, and walked away smiling at the evil he had wrought.²⁰

From this description it is evident that the autobiographical elements of Strindberg are found interwoven in The Ghost

¹⁷The Ghost Sonata, p. 303.

¹⁸The Play A Critical Anthology, p. 624.

¹⁹The Ghost Sonata, p. 304.

²⁰Lind-Af-Hageby, pp. 9-10.

Sonata. The qualities of Strindberg's writing are seen particularly in the Old Man.

III. DISCUSSION OF SYMBOLS

Major character symbols. Hummel represents a man of power and a man of this world.²¹ He is the spider which has entangled the lives of all those around him into his web of sin and crime.

The Student is not a man of this world, for he is Sunday's child who can see what others cannot.²² He can see the Milkmaid and the Dead Man who are only specters from the past. He seems to represent hope because of his optimism and naïveté. He believes in some kind of eternal life.

The Mummy has unusual powers in that she can stop time, wipe out the past, and undo what has been done. Her character implies that the soul has only one way to escape from its hell and that is through retribution.²³ She is a savior and revealer of the truth. The Mummy could be a sort of *deus ex machina* for the second scene. She also stands for eternity which can stop time.

Thus it can be seen how the major characters carry out

²¹The Play A Critical Anthology, p. 625.

²²Ibid.

²³Six Plays of Strindberg, p. 265.

the meaning and theme of the play. They represent ideas above and beyond the simple aspects of a character.

Minor character symbols. A few of the supporting characters contribute to developing the theme through their symbolic meaning. The Dead Man and the Milkmaid, as apparitions, are symbols of the sinister past of the Old Man.

The Cook is a symbol of greed within the Hummel household in that she takes all the nourishment from the food for herself and leaves the family to starve to death. She is one of the ordeals of life's suffering.

Visual symbols. Certain visual aspects of the setting represent more than just their physical make-up. The Buddha in the Hyacinth Room stands for eternity or for the hope of a life without sin, greed, and guilt. The clock which is stopped by the Mummy in Scene II represents time or the heartbeat of life. The statue in the Round Room is a representation of the youth of the Mummy. The Japanese screen is used as a death screen; its purpose is to hide the dead from this world. The hyacinth and the Hyacinth Room represent heaven or eternal life. The whole atmosphere of this room is one of life and happiness. The Liberator referred to at the end of Scene III symbolizes death which comes to take the Girl to a better life. The Round Room stands for death or hell, for most of the sinister happenings take place in this room.

The visual symbols also contribute to expanding the theme of the play.

IV. THE MOOD OF THE PLAY

The mood of The Ghost Sonata changes from time to time, but these changes take place within a dream-like world. Characters appear and disappear like spirits, and the events succeed one another as events do in dreams rather than in a strictly logical progression.

Four different moods and worlds seem to be shown. The first world is outside the façade of the house where life is found to be normal, happy, and pleasant. The Student has saved people's lives in a fire, the Old Man wants to help the Student by giving him a job and arranging a meeting with a beautiful girl, and the Old Man seems to be reforming in his ways by giving instead of taking.

A second world or mood interrupts the first when spirits in the forms of the Milkmaid and the Dead Man enter. Upon their appearances, the mood of happiness is changed for a short time to a mood of fear, mystery, and confusion. These visions suddenly disturb the previously established atmosphere.

In Scene II the third mood or world is found within the Round Room. This room represents death and hell, which conveys a dark and depressing mood. The sins and secrets

of all the characters are revealed; the ghosts of their pasts return to expose the truth. Each character goes through a kind of hell when his past is brought out in the open. The Old Man hangs himself in this room for the crimes he committed and for the crimes he caused others to commit.

The Fourth mood or world is found in the final scene of the play which takes place in the Hyacinth Room. In this room one finds beauty in the hyacinths which are sitting throughout the room, youth in the Student and the Girl, and hope in the Buddha which is to be seen at the back of the room. Eternity and heaven are represented in this room, and the mood is a combination of happiness and sadness because life and death are found there. The Girl dies, but it is hoped she will find happiness in the world to come.

The over-all mood of the play seems to be one of hopelessness and despair with rays of possible happiness which never actually materialize within the play.

V. SUMMARY

The Ghost Sonata displays the lives of thirteen characters whose lives are interwoven as if in the web of a spider. The spider is the Old Man who tries to ruin the lives of the other characters by enclosing them in his web of lies, sin, and greed. The Old Man dies, and all are freed to face the world and their pasts. The only hope seems to lie in the

two young people, the Student and the Girl; but even they have to find happiness in another life after death.

The central theme of people's lives being bound together by crime, secrets, and guilt is complemented by the minor themes involving servants and vampires, and religion.

The major character symbols include Hummel (the spider), the Student (a man of another world), and the Mummy (a revealer of the truth). These are combined with the minor character symbols of the Dead Man, the Milkmaid, and the Cook to represent the theme of the bond of sin and greed.

Visual symbols which enhance the theme are the Buddha, the clock, the statue, the Japanese screen, the Hyacinth Room, and the Round Room.

The mood of despair and despondency predominates throughout the play, but the possibility of hope and joy is suggested in the closing moments of the play.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE AND STYLE

In order to determine the structure and style of a play, the director must divide it into parts in order to see how these parts are inter-related. When this is discovered, it will be easier to understand the work of art as a whole. This chapter will consider the elements of the structure of the play according to Freytag's divisions as found in Play Direction by John E. Dietrich. The Ghost Sonata uses the dramatic style of expressionism, and its characteristics will be specifically pointed out in the following discussion.

I. EXPRESSIONISM AND THE GHOST SONATA

As previously stated, the expressionistic style of the script is one of the major concerns of the director in producing the play. The Ghost Sonata is generally classified as expressionistic in style although the actual term expressionism was not used until approximately 1910 when it came into use with reference to the literature and art of Germany.¹ This was three years after the composition of The Ghost Sonata. Strindberg, however, has been credited

¹Dahlstrom, p. 10.

with being the forerunner of expressionism because of this play and others written with similar techniques.² "It was from Strindberg that expressionism most fully stemmed."³

Expressionism is difficult to explain concretely; it is "a form that cannot be formulated."⁴ However, it will be useful to define the term expressionism as it applies to this play. Expressionism is conveying life through the eyes of the playwright or his main character(s) by means of inner emotions and feeling. It is a way of directly expressing a subjective reality. Observed reality is not seen in an expressionistic drama. Instead one's inner experiences are projected by use of distortion, pantomime, monologues, stream-of-consciousness dialogue, typification of characters, specters, dream elements, and autobiographical materials.⁵ All of these characteristics of expressionism may or may not be used in this style of drama, but each is used in The Ghost Sonata.

A further definition of expressionism is that of Kasimir Edschmid. His concept of the term is useful in further

²John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Dover Publications, 1940), p. 395.

³Alan Reynolds Thompson, The Anatomy of Drama (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1946), p. 349.

⁴Dahlstrom, p. 60.

⁵Ibid., p. 80.

describing Strindberg's style in The Ghost Sonata:

The artist fastens upon reality not by seeing, but by observing; not by depicting, but by experiencing; not by reproducing, but by fashioning; not by taking but by seeking--a selective act. He sees the human element in the harlot, the divine in the factory; all individual elements are fashioned by him into that whole which constitutes the world. . . . In expressionism, the human being is the most exalted and the most miserable. He becomes human. . . . man no longer is represented as an individual, classified according to his role in an artificial society. The hand of the artist goes behind all classifications, goes behind the mere individual, and shows us mankind.⁶

II. USE OF STYLE

The preceding discussion established the fact that The Ghost Sonata was written in the expressionistic style of drama. However, it should be pointed out that because Strindberg was a forerunner of expressionism, not all aspects of expressionism are exemplified in this play. For example, a social and political framework, telegraphic style dialogue, and the theme of modern mechanization, which are often considered characteristic of expressionistic drama, are missing in this play. The characteristics previously listed include major aspects of expressionism which are applicable to this play.

Expressionism has been defined in part I of this chapter as conveying life through the eyes of the playwright

⁶Dahlstrom, pp. 28-29.

or his main character or characters. In The Ghost Sonata Strindberg's inner emotions and feelings are predominant, for the play is distinctly autobiographical in nature. Including autobiographical material is one of the characteristics of expressionistic drama. For example, while Strindberg was writing the Chamber Plays, he had trouble getting someone to cook properly for him. This somewhat petty domestic problem provided a good symbol in The Ghost Sonata.⁷ The Cook is used as a symbol of a vampire.

Another trait of expressionism is the use of distortion. Strindberg uses apparitions in the forms of a Milkmaid and a Dead Man to represent the sinful past of the Old Man. Hummel's conscience is shown in the distorted form of specters. The Mummy is another distortion used in trying to convey the essence of reality. To show the extent of her desire to hide from the past, Strindberg exaggerates the effect it has on her by making her a recluse and a death-like figure. The ghost supper is made bizarre in that all of the characters are described as sitting around and munching on biscuits like "rats in an attic." There is silence except for the munching, and the characters are expressionless.

Pantomime is another important expressionistic technique which Strindberg employed in this play. The Dead Man,

⁷The Chamber Plays, p. 227.

the Milkmaid, the Caretaker's Wife, the Fiancée, and the Beggars do not have dialogue; their characters are interpreted strictly through pantomime. Also the characters being discussed by the Student and Hummel in Scene I would be pantomiming while this discussion transpires.

The use of the monologue is frequently found in expressionistic drama. In The Ghost Sonata the Student has speeches at the end of Scene II and Scene III which are monologues. Also the long speech given by the Old Man in Scene II, when he exposes the hidden secrets of the guests, could be classified as a monologue.

Strindberg gives few specific names to his characters. In the list of characters the Mummy, the Old Man, the Student, the Girl, the Cook, the Caretaker's Wife, the Lady in Black, and the Milkmaid are found. Typification of characters is another aspect of expressionism.

Specters are often included as a part of the expressionistic style. There are two specters in The Ghost Sonata, the Milkmaid and the Dead Man. The Milkmaid appears and disappears like a spirit; she is seen only by the Old Man and the Student. The Dead Man appears to be seen only by the Student.

Strindberg employs the dream-element which is characteristic of expressionism. Events seem to succeed one another in the disorderly fashion of a dream. The specters

enter and disappear suddenly as characters do in a dream.

All of the elements mentioned above are used by Strindberg to project subjective realities in a manner characteristic of expressionism.

III. DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

In order to analyze the structural qualities of The Ghost Sonata, the following elements have been considered: Exposition, Complication, Climax, Resolution, and Conclusion.⁸ The Ghost Sonata does not fit this system perfectly, but deviations from it will be explained.

Exposition. John Dietrich defines exposition as "the beginning, the introduction. It is that part of the play in which the initial situation is described . . . The characters are introduced . . . the theme is introduced."⁹ The exposition in this play differs from the above definition in that it is dispersed throughout the play rather than being concentrated near the beginning of the script. The relationship of all the characters is not completely revealed until the end of Scene II. For example, the Milkmaid is one of the first characters to appear upon the stage, but her significance is not fully explained until the end of

⁸John E. Dietrich, Play Direction (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1953), pp. 32-34.

⁹Ibid., p. 32.

Scene II. It is then learned that she is a ghost from Hummel's past. He has drowned her because she has witnessed a crime he has committed.

At times the situations and characters are understood only in retrospect. Hummel remarks to the Student in Scene I, "My whole life's like a book of fairy stories . . . the stories are different, they are held together by one thread, and the main theme constantly recurs."¹⁰ The viewer will not realize the meaning of this statement until Scene II when the Mummy says, "Crime and secrets and guilt bind us together. We have broken our bonds . . . times without number, but we are always drawn together again."¹¹ Only then does one look back to Hummel's statement and realize that he was implying the same idea.

According to Dietrich, exposition "must catch the interest of the audience."¹² In The Ghost Sonata, however, it is the lack of exposition at the beginning that brings about the same result. One is intrigued to find out what connection there is between a certain character or line with the remainder of the play.

The inciting action which upsets the initial balance

¹⁰The Ghost Sonata, p. 274.

¹¹Ibid., p. 289.

¹²Dietrich, p. 32.

of the action of a play¹³ is the introduction of the Old Man's servant, Johansson, at the end of Scene I. Johansson begins to give the audience insight into the real character of the Old Man. Johansson reveals the true motive for Hummel's actions in the previous part of the scene.

Complication. The complication is the "bringing together of the protagonistic and antagonistic forces."¹⁴ This "middle or heart of the drama"¹⁵ is found in Scene II when Hummel, the protagonist, strips the characters at the ghost supper of all pride, prestige, and honor. He is intent upon destroying them all as he had destroyed others in the past. However, the antagonist, who is the Mummy, interferes. She in turn strips Hummel of his false façade of power and godliness. Hummel is discovered to be as sinful and lowly as the others he has accused.

Climax. Dietrich points out that the climax is the "high tide of the drama"¹⁶ and that it "usually appears near the end of the second act."¹⁷ In The Ghost Sonata a climax

¹³Dietrich, p. 32.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

does come at the end of Scene II when Hummel enters the closet of the Mummy and hangs himself. However, a climax just as important appears at the end of Scene III. Hummel and his power as destroyer are not actually dead. In Scene III it is seen that Hummel's influence lives on in his daughter, the Girl. Until she dies, his power will continue to destroy. After her death at the end of the scene, the Student has some hope of escaping from the evil and sin of the world of Hummels. At the same time this second climax serves as a conclusion; as such it will be treated further in the fifth part of this discussion.

Resolution. This term is defined by Dietrich as "the inevitable unwinding of the conflict."¹⁸ In The Ghost Sonata the resolution is not exactly an unwinding of the conflict; it is rather a continuation of the conflict by the protagonist, Hummel. His evil influence stills lives on in the Girl, and his influence has to be purged in order for the play to have a conclusion that will provide some kind of an equilibrium. Scene III presents a further cycle of action in which the entire course of the previous action is repeated in a more concentrated form. This further action echoes all that went before it with the Student and

¹⁸Dietrich, p. 33.

Girl now becoming the central characters or pivotal characters.

Conclusion. "It [the conclusion] is the section in the play that logically and finally answers all the questions of the audience."¹⁹ Again this play seems to depart from Dietrich's system of structural analysis, for answers are not given. There is an indication that a life after death provides an escape from the dirt of life. However, even the Student does not know if this is the answer, for he asks, "Where is beauty to be found . . . Where are honor and faith? . . . Where is anything that fulfills its promise?"²⁰ He appeals to Christ, to death, and to Buddha to give him the answers. Strindberg does not hand out the answers to his audience, for he wants them to search and to discover the meaning for themselves.

Since Strindberg uses the dream element in his play, the structure seems to follow a sequence of events found in a dream. Therefore, it does not fit very neatly into a conventional classification of the component parts of a drama.

Another reason for the variation in the structure of this play is that it is meant to be treated as a sonata, a piece of music. The Ghost Sonata was named after Beethoven's

¹⁹Dietrich, p. 34.

²⁰The Ghost Sonata, p. 303.

"Ghost Sonata in D Minor" and his "Ghost Trio."²¹ The three scenes could be regarded as three movements of a sonata.²²

Strindberg's unique structure is summarized in his description of a theatre which should be free from conventional ties:

May we then secure a theatre where we may be horrible over the horrible, laugh over the laughable, play with the playful; where we can see anything and not be offended, when we see what lies concealed behind theological and esthetic veils, even if the old conventional laws must be broken; may we secure a free theatre, where we shall have freedom for all things save to have no talent and to be a hypocrite or a fool.²³

IV. SUMMARY

The director must analyze the structure and style of a play in order to better understand the play.

The Ghost Sonata is classified as an expressionistic drama. Expressionism is a style of writing in which the playwright conveys life through his or his characters' emotions and feelings. It is a way of expressing a subjective reality directly. There are certain elements that are characteristic of expressionistic drama. These include the use of: distortion, pantomime, monologues, stream-of-conscious-

²¹The Chamber Plays, p. 225.

²²The Play A Critical Anthology, p. 626.

²³August Strindberg, The One-Act Play, cited in Henderson, p. 2.

ness dialogue, typification of characters, specters, dream elements, and autobiographical materials. All of these elements are included in The Ghost Sonata.

The elements considered in analyzing the structure of this play were: exposition, complication, climax, resolution, and conclusion. It was discovered that the exposition was dispersed throughout the play rather than concentrated near the beginning of the play. The complication of the play takes place when Hummel reveals the past lives of all the guests at the ghost supper and is stopped by the Mummy. The Ghost Sonata has more than one climax. Climactic moments are found at the end of Scene II and at the end of Scene III. Each climax is equally important. The resolution is the unwinding of the conflict. However, in this play the conflict does not unwind in Scene II but continues on into Scene III. Hummel's influence and power lives on in the Girl, even though he dies. A kind of resolution occurs when the Girl dies at the end of Scene III. The conclusion does not give definite answers to all the questions in the play; it seems to leave the answers to be determined by the audience.

The Ghost Sonata has an atypical structure, for it is written in the form of a dream. The events follow the apparently disorganized sequence of a dream. Another reason

the play varies from the usual structure is that it is written as a sonata. It should be treated as a piece of music.

Strindberg believed in a theatre that was free from conventional laws; this belief is shown in his play, The Ghost Sonata.

CHAPTER IV

DIRECTING TECHNIQUES AND ACTING STYLE

Strindberg has been called a "stumbling-block to producers."¹ To direct one of Strindberg's plays is a difficult undertaking. Eric Bentley aptly explains the reasons for the problems involved in directing Strindberg's plays:

Strindberg is difficult. He is difficult in that he is great, and he is difficult in that he is not supremely great but in part a victim of a confused and confusing age. This means that a director has to approach him with a respect that is due to genius, has to be loyal to him, modestly subject to his will, and yet at the same time has to deal with his faults thus assuming undeniably, an attitude of superiority.²

In realizing the difficulty in producing The Ghost Sonata, much care has been taken to employ directing techniques which would convey meaning clearly to the audience.

A combination of expressionistic and realistic elements would be employed in directing The Ghost Sonata. Expressionism would be used to convey the mystic and heavily symbolic portions of the play, while realism would be used to enhance the development of the theme. Drawing attention to the theme is the most important aim in a Chamber Play according to Strindberg.³ The lack of production emphasis on

¹In Search of Theatre, p. 138.

²Ibid., pp. 139-40.

³The Chamber Plays, p. ix.

the expressionistic style is intended to keep the audience from becoming engrossed in the unusual production style, rather than becoming engrossed in the theme. The actors, for the most part, would be directed toward using realistic techniques, except when conveying the impression of a dream-like world.

I. COMPOSITION

According to Dietrich, composition in the staging of a play is ". . . the artistic and meaningful arrangement of characters on a stage."⁴ This arrangement of characters must clearly convey to the audience the meaning of the play and the emotions of the characters.

To exemplify such an arrangement, in Scene II the regularly scheduled ghost supper takes place with the Colonel, the Fiancée, the Aristocrat, the Mummy, and the Old Man participating. They are found seated around the dinner table in silence except for the munching of their biscuits. The characters are eating their meal in a slow, mechanical manner. They each stare into space as the Old Man begins to tear them apart by exposing the sins of their past lives. Each is seated in a position so that he does not directly face another person. The silent, macabre atmosphere with little movement presents

⁴Dietrich, p. 92.

an eery, death-like feeling. By being placed in such an arrangement, the effect of the habitual, automatic, lifeless atmosphere would be created.

Another example in which composition plays an important part is found in the beginning of Scene III. The Student and the Girl are in the Hyacinth Room discussing the hyacinth and the Buddha. The Student refers to the Mummy and the Colonel, who are sitting in the Round Room completely immobile and silent. The Colonel and the Mummy are sitting in chairs opposite each other and are staring at each other, but each fails to see anything. The Girl explains their silence by saying that "they have nothing to say to each other . . . neither believes what the other says."⁵ Their veil of illusion or sins of the past has been revealed in Scene II, and now neither one can say anything that will fool the other. Therefore, they remain silent. This arrangement of characters helps to point out the preceding action and the characters' reactions.

The Old Man is confined to a wheel chair in Scene I; and in blocking, this minimizes the different positions in which he can be placed. It is important, however, that he be in strategic places where he can hear and see all that goes on in the other characters' lives. In the beginning

⁵The Ghost Sonata, p. 297.

of the scene he just happens to be outside the house reading his newspaper. He is close enough to the water fountain to overhear the Student talking to the Milkmaid. Later in the scene the Caretaker's Wife and the Lady in Black are talking; only Hummel is close enough to hear what is being said. In the end of Scene I, Johansson says figuratively that the Old Man "breaks into houses . . . sneaks through windows."⁶ Hummel always knows all that happens, and his position on stage must be conducive to acquiring such information.

In Scene III the Girl would remain in one place on the stage; she would be sitting or reclining on the couch in the Hyacinth Room. This would be done to show her illness, her waning strength, and her inability to cope with the life of the Hummel household.

II. MOVEMENT

Movement may be defined as the changing of a character or characters on stage into different positions necessary to imparting the meaning of the play.⁷ In The Ghost Sonata three of the characters have an ethereal or ghostly quality, and their movement must portray this quality. The Dead Man enters only once, and he would walk in a very stiff

⁶The Ghost Sonata, p. 281.

⁷Dietrich, p. 119.

and military manner. This quality of movement would be used to represent his past office as Consul and his spectral quality.

The Milkmaid would move as lightly and gracefully as possible. She should seem to appear weightless and should make no noise. This movement must give the effect that she is a spirit and that she appears and disappears as a spirit does.

The Mummy is also "of another world" in that she has been enclosed in a cupboard in the Round Room for twenty years.⁸ Her movement must depict a mummy-like quality. She would display a stiff body and little facial expression. She retains this quality until she begins speaking in her natural voice. At the end of Scene II she figuratively transforms Hummel into her former state as a Mummy who makes sounds resembling a parrot. The Mummy becomes like a magician by putting Hummel in a trance. She makes the appropriate hand and arm movements and draws Hummel to the closet.

The movement of the other characters does not vary to any great extent. The Fiancee moves in a trance-like state

⁸There is some apparent discrepancy in the length of time the Mummy has sat in the closet. Bengtsson says it has been forty years on page 285, and the Mummy says it has been twenty years on page 295. However, the Mummy should know better than Bengtsson how long she has been there. Bengtsson may be referring to the length of time the Mummy has been a member of the family and not to the time spent in the closet. See The Chamber Plays, p. 227.

on and off stage, for she is not aware of anything outside of her own small world. The Student's movement would be definite and brisk to show his confidence and superiority in that he is a Sunday child.

III. STAGE BUSINESS

"Stage business may be defined as all visual activity not involving movement from one place to another."⁹ Stage business may be classified into types called storytelling business, essential to the advancement of plot or conflict; character business, to differentiate one character from another; business for emphasis; and arbitrary business, to fill in gaps in the action.¹⁰

Business may involve pantomime to a great extent. The Milkmaid's character business involves having her hands outstretched to illustrate the condition that she is in the act of drowning. Her entire character is portrayed through business and pantomime, for she never speaks. Also the entire character of the Dead Man, the Fiancée, the Caretaker's Wife, and the Beggars is developed through pantomime. None of these characters have spoken lines.

The Caretaker's Wife distributes fir branches in front

⁹Dietrich, p. 143.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 144-45.

of the house in Scene I. This action is used as storytelling business in order that the Old Man can explain her part in the plot of the play.

Facial expression plays an important part in the stage business of Hummel. He must not obviously appear to be listening to the different conversations on stage, and yet the audience must know that he is not missing a word of what is being said. In Scene I he is supposedly reading a newspaper, but the audience must see that he is listening to the Student and the Milkmaid. Later in the same scene, he listens to the Lady in Black and the Caretaker's Wife in the same manner.

IV. TEMPO

The use of tempo on stage should direct attention, convey emotion, intensify conflict, and provide variety.¹¹ Since the play was named The Ghost Sonata after Beethoven's "Ghost Sonata in D Minor" and his "Ghost Trio," it is appropriate that the play be directed as a piece of music.¹² A sonata is defined as being:

Literally 'Sound-piece.' An instrumental composition in three or four movements, each with a unity of its own, but related to form a whole. The movements

¹¹Dietrich, pp. 175-76.

¹²The Chamber Plays, p. 225.

are contrasted in theme, tempo and mood. . . .¹³

With this definition in mind, it can be seen how the scenes of The Ghost Sonata resemble a sonata with contrasting tempo, theme, and mood. The first scene would be classified as a brisk allegro. The youthful buoyancy of the Student and the grasping eagerness of the Old Man is seen as they make their plans to enter the elegant house. The second scene provides a sharp contrast with a slow tempo often found in a largo. The long silences of the ghost supper emphasize this tempo. The final scene is a quiet andante in which the principal theme is emphasized. The play is brought to a close by a coda that restates all the themes.¹⁴

According to the definition of sonata, each movement must be unified within itself and yet be integrated into a larger whole. The director must keep this requirement in mind in staging this production.

V. CHARACTERIZATION

The autobiographical nature of Strindberg's works is revealed in the characters of The Ghost Sonata. He explained the development of his characters in a speech at a farewell banquet when he left the University of Uppsala:

¹³Lee Olean Smith, "Century" Musical Dictionary (New York: Century Music Publishing Company, 1935), p. 51.

¹⁴The Chamber Plays, p. xx.

A personality does not develop from itself, but out of each soul it comes in contact with it sucks a drop, just as the bee gathers its honey from a million flowers, giving it forth eventually as its own.¹⁵

In another place he tells how his characters are pieced together from people he has known in his own life:

. . . I have drawn my characters vacillating, broken, mixtures of old and new My souls (characters) are conglomerations of past and present stages of culture, scraps of books and newspapers, fragments of men and women, torn shreds of Sunday attire that are now rags, such as go to make up a soul. And I have thrown in some history of origins in letting the weaker steal and repeat the words of the stronger, in letting souls borrow ideas, or so-called suggestions from one another.¹⁶

In The Ghost Sonata a "fragment of men" is found in the character, Hummel. Hummel's character was modeled from a Stockholm merchant, Isaac Hirsch, whose pretentious philanthropy irritated Strindberg. The name Hummel may have been suggested by an American criminal lawyer, Abraham Henry Hummel, who was convicted on charges of conspiracy in 1905. There was also a Hummel of some significance in Beethoven's life.¹⁷

By understanding Strindberg's method of developing characters, the actor can better interpret his role. A completely stylized, non-realistic approach to acting is often used in expressionistic dramas. This proposed production

¹⁵Henderson, p. 21.

¹⁶Lind-Af-Hageby, pp. 216-17.

¹⁷The Chamber Plays, pp. 225-26.

would not adapt such an approach. Such an emphasis might detract from the theme and philosophy of the play. Only a few characters would deviate from the realistic style of acting in order to show their spectral or distorted qualities.

The Milkmaid would enter and exit with the light, quick steps of a dancer. All of her movement must be graceful in order to show her resemblance to a spirit. Her make-up would also enhance her ghostly quality by being very light and pale.

The movement of the Dead Man would be stylized by a stiff, rigid walk while his eyes would be staring straight ahead. Since he is not of this world, his acting cannot be conventional but should convey his ethereal quality.

The acting style of the Mummy is also exaggerated and distorted. These characteristics would be emphasized by her movement and facial expression. A stiff posture and an expressionless face would help to give the effect of a mummy. The character of the Mummy also has to imitate the sound of a parrot speaking during part of the play.

Most of the characters in The Ghost Sonata lack a three-dimensional development.¹⁸ The characters are more like universal symbols or emotions than fully developed personalities. This makes it more difficult for the actor to thoroughly understand and interpret his role. The actor

¹⁸Lind-Af-Hageby, p. 316.

must realize the lack of character development and work to thoroughly incorporate the aspects of the character that are shown.

The stream-of-consciousness monologues of the Old Man in Scene II and of the Student in Scene III would require a deviation from the conventional style of acting. The thoughts of the characters do not follow an organized pattern as do most lines in a play. The character speaks as his ideas happen to enter his mind. The actors of these two roles would have to suggest a trance-like state in order to convey the effect that they are alone with their thoughts. The use of silence and pauses would add effectively to these monologues. The pauses would show that the character is reflecting upon what he has said, that his mind has wandered to another subject or that he is thinking of what he would say next.

A combination of realistic and expressionistic techniques of acting would be applied in The Ghost Sonata. Whichever style is employed, the purpose would be to aid in interpreting the meaning more clearly. Stylized movement in acting would be employed when dream elements or distorted elements are predominant in the script. A realistic acting style is used in all other segments of the action.

VI. REHEARSAL

The requirements of the individual producing organiza-

tion may determine the rehearsal schedules of its plays. However, five weeks should be the minimum time given to rehearse and perform The Ghost Sonata. It is longer and more difficult than the typical one-act play. The first week would include reading and interpreting the play with discussions with the cast about Strindberg and expressionism. The second and third weeks would be spent blocking the play and in learning the lines. Adding the technical elements and polishing the play would occur during the fourth week. During the final week there would be dress rehearsals and performances.

VII. SUMMARY

The directing techniques and acting style of The Ghost Sonata will employ a combination of expressionistic and realistic elements in order to better emphasize the meaning and philosophy of the play.

In blocking the play, the principles of composition, movement, stage business, and tempo were considered. The composition or arrangement of characters on stage was designed to give the audience a clear understanding of the meaning of the play and to portray the emotions of the characters.

The movement in the play is basically conventional except for the stylized movement of the spectral characters. The Milkmaid, the Dead Man, and the Mummy portray the dream

element of a world of distorted and spectral characters by their movement on the stage.

Much pantomime is used in the stage business of the play. Pantomime is particularly prominent in the characters who appear on stage but never speak. These characters are the Milkmaid, the Dead Man, the Fiancée, the Caretaker's Wife, and the Beggars. Also characters may be pantomiming in one room while the characters in another room or outside the house are speaking.

The tempo of the play is similar to that of a sonata with three contrasting movements. The first scene is a brisk allegro; the second scene provides a contrast with the slow tempo of a largo; the third scene is a quiet andante with a coda that closes the play by restating all the themes.

Even though each of the principles of play direction has been considered separately, they are only parts of what must become a unified whole in production.

In analyzing the characters of the play, it is helpful to know that Strindberg has combined characteristics of many of the people who have passed through his life to develop his characters. His characters are not three-dimensional. They seem to represent universal symbols and emotions rather than fully developed personalities. The actor must take the facets of character that are there and develop them in the best way possible to bring out the theme and

meaning of the play.

Five weeks would be needed to rehearse and perform The Ghost Sonata. This proposed rehearsal schedule varies from the typical one-act play because The Ghost Sonata is longer and more difficult than the typical one-act play.

CHAPTER V

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS NECESSARY FOR PRODUCTION

Usually a university has a technical director who is in charge of the technical elements of production. However, the director should know what technical aspects are needed and should work with the technical director on them. For the purposes of this project, complete details with regard to the exact design and coloring of the set, the specific music used, etc., will not be considered. A general, practical approach to the technical elements of production will be discussed from the stage director's point of view.

The technical requirements for The Ghost Sonata would include: stage setting, stage properties, lighting, sound, costumes, make-up, and special effects.

It is assumed that the stage facilities and budget would be ample enough for a full-scale production. The facilities for the production would not need to be elaborate, but they should be generous enough for an imaginative use of the technical elements called for by the script and the director.

I. STAGE SETTING

The setting of a play should be practical and functional. Its purpose is to aid or to enhance the play being

presented and not to detract from it by being a center of attention in itself.

The design of a stage setting for The Ghost Sonata would require a combination of expressionistic and realistic elements. A few aspects of expressionism would be used in the setting to convey to the audience the impression that the play is not entirely realistic; it has elements of distortion, and it occurs within a dream world. A multiple set would be used to eliminate any scene changes and interruptions in transferring from scene to scene. Scene I takes place in front of the facade of a house. The two rooms of the house would be exposed except in Scene I when a window in front of each room would be flown from above to establish the location of the front wall of the house. The expressionistic element would be found in the windows which would be made with distorted angles. In Scene II the window of the Round Room on stage right would be raised to reveal the action that is taking place within. The walls of the room would be semi-circular in shape in keeping with the name of the room. In Scene III the window of the Hyacinth Room would be raised to indicate that the location of the action of the play has been shifted. The walls of the Hyacinth Room would be formed as

a regular box set with raked¹ side walls. An alley at the side of the house on stage right with a wall or fence leading to the back of the house would be needed. A drinking fountain in front of the house on stage left is required in Scene I, but this fountain may be removed at the end of the scene. Lights would be used to indicate the transitions from scene to scene.

The use of a multiple set would provide for a smooth-flowing production without any unnecessary interruption. This is essential to Strindberg's Chamber Plays. He wrote the play to be performed within approximately ninety minutes and to be given without an intermission. He did not want the action to be stopped or the rhythm to be interrupted. He felt the audience should not reflect until the curtain went down.²

II. STAGE PROPERTIES

Few of the properties needed in The Ghost Sonata present any particular problem. The water fountain in Scene I may be removed when the scene is finished, and the flown windows would be raised for Scene II and for Scene III. The re-

¹To rake the side walls means to slant the walls toward the center at the rear for the purpose of aiding sight lines. See Willard J. Friederich and John H. Fraser, Scenery Design for The Amateur Stage (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), p. 249.

²The Chamber Plays, pp. xii, xiii.

moval of these set properties should not detract from the action of the play. Any hand properties needed would be brought on and taken off by the individual actor using them.

III. STAGE LIGHTING

Lighting would play an important part in the production. It would be used to emphasize the areas in which the action is taking place upon the multiple set by illuminating a particular area while subordinate areas are left in darkness. Lighting is essential to designating the mood and atmosphere of the play. Scene I takes place out-of-doors on a bright, cheerful Sunday morning. Lights of a bright tint would be needed for this atmosphere. The second scene is inside the Round Room which represents death. Therefore, the lights would be dimmer to portray an atmosphere of gloom and evil. The Hyacinth Room, in which Scene III takes place, has a heavenly atmosphere and the lights would be brighter and softer.

Since spectral characters appear unexpectedly in the first and second scenes, lights would add greatly to giving a ghostly, unreal quality to the characters. A special spotlight can be used to emphasize their pale, ethereal qualities.

The climaxes at the end of Scene II and at the end of Scene III would be enhanced by lighting. A red glow provided by the appropriate lights would be used as the Old Man enters

the closet to hang himself; this effect would be used in order to indicate that he is entering into hell where he is to be punished. At the end of Scene III, the lights would become brighter and brighter as the Girl dies and supposedly enters into a happier life beyond the grave.

IV. SOUND

The use of sound effects at different intervals during the play would help to maintain the atmosphere and mood of the production. It would not be necessary to have continuous background music, for most of the language and action of the play can stand by themselves. Eery and somber music, such as "The Storm Scene" from the King Lear Suite by Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky, would be used when the Dead Man enters to emphasize the distorted expressionistic element he represents. Music such as A Poem in Cycles and Bells by Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky, would be used during Scene III to denote the heavenly, unearthly qualities of the scene. The striking of the clock in Scene II must be added in order to motivate the reactions of the Mummy and Hummel. Emphasis through music would be useful when the Mummy is revealed in Scene II.

The distorted, exaggerated, expressionistic elements of the play can be better emphasized with music to show their nonreal characteristics.

V. COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP

The costumes and make-up must add to the character's type and yet be in keeping with the style of the production. For the most part, the costumes would be of the early 1900's except for those of the characters who are not of the realistic world. The Dead Man would be in his Consul's uniform with plumes and ribbons. The Mummy would be in a white nightgown or robe to give her the quality her name implies. The Milkmaid's costume would be that of a typical milkmaid, but her make-up and the use of lights would help to convey her spectral qualities. The Fiancée would wear a long out-of-date dress for she is rather eccentric and lives in a world of her own. To convey the expressionistic element of distortion, the Beggars would be made up in an almost grotesque fashion. The Lady in Black would be dressed in black to indicate the dark, mysterious quality of her life.

VI. SPECIAL EFFECTS

Only one major special effect is required for this production. At the end of Scene III as the Student is reciting the poem, special harp music would begin playing while a picture of Böcklin's Isle of the Dead would be lowered from above. Lights would be focused upon it. The effect would emphasize the passing of the Girl from life to death.

VII. SUMMARY

Even though a university director usually works with a technical director in producing a play, it is necessary that the director be aware of the technical problems involved in the production. In producing The Ghost Sonata a combination of realistic and expressionistic elements would be used to aid in a clearer interpretation of the play.

The setting of the play would be a multiple set with three playing areas for the three scenes. These areas would consist of the area in front of a house and of the two rooms inside the house. The set would be designed in this manner to eliminate scene changes and interruptions between scenes. This technique would aid in creating a smooth-flowing production without breaking the thought pattern of the audience as Strindberg had planned in writing his Chamber Plays.

A water fountain and the flown windows in front of each room would be the only set properties to be changed. Hand properties would be taken care of by the particular actors using them.

Lighting is pertinent to the mood and atmosphere of the play. It would be important in indicating the areas of the stage which are being used as the scenes change. It would play an important part in conveying the dream element when the nonreal characters appear on stage. A red glow at the end of Scene II would help to produce the effect of hell.

A soft, bright light at the end of Scene III would help to convey the atmosphere of heaven.

Sound would be used to emphasize the distorted and exaggerated elements of the play. Background music would also help to build the climaxes at the end of Scene II and at the end of Scene III.

The costumes of the characters would be essentially those of the early 1900's. The make-up would be realistic. The exceptions to the above would be with the characters of the spiritual world. They would be distinguished in part by their costumes but mainly by their ghostly, pale make-up.

One major special effect would be used. At the close of Scene III a picture of Böcklin's Isle of the Dead would be lowered while the Student is reciting his poem and his last lines. Harp music would be played and lights would be focused on the picture.

In dealing with all the technical elements of the play, it must be remembered that the elements are used to enhance the language and theme of the play. The design of the stage setting and the other technical elements should not overshadow the play itself.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I. SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis has been to design, from a director's viewpoint, an original production of the play, The Ghost Sonata by August Strindberg that could be performed on a college campus. Two major challenges were presented to the director in that the script was difficult to understand, and it was expressionistic in style. The Elizabeth Sprigge translation was chosen for the purpose of this study.

In studying the life of Strindberg, it was found that his works were quite extensively autobiographical in nature. His plays have been performed rarely in the United States and therefore, presented a definite challenge to the director.

The central theme involved the idea that people's lives are bound together by crime, secrets, and guilt from the past which will eventually be exposed. Minor themes included servants and vampires and religion.

The major character symbols were Hummel (the spider), the Student (a man of another world), and the Mummy (a revealer of truth). Minor character symbols found in the Dead Man, the Milkmaid, and the Cook contributed to the theme of the bond of sin and guilt. The visual symbols of the Buddha, the clock, the statue, the Japanese screen, the Hyacinth

Room and the Round Room further enhanced the communication of the central theme. Despair was the predominant mood of the play with rays of joy and hope found in the final moments of the play.

The Ghost Sonata has been classified as an expressionistic drama. Expressionism has been defined as a style of writing in which the playwright conveys life through his or his characters' emotions and feelings. Certain elements characteristic of expressionism were considered in analyzing the play: distortion, pantomime, monologues, stream-of-consciousness dialogue, typification of characters, specters, dream elements, and autobiographical materials.

In analyzing the structure of the play, the elements of dramatic structure were used: exposition, complication, climax, resolution and conclusion. It was found that this play varied to a great extent in structure from the typical play. The main reasons for the variations were that the play was written in the form of a dream, and it was written as a sonata or a piece of music. Strindberg believed in unconventionality in the theatre.

Expressionistic and realistic elements were combined in the directing techniques and acting style to better emphasize the meaning and philosophy of the play. Composition was designed to give the audience a clear meaning of the play and to portray the emotions of the characters. The movement

was basically conventional except for the stylized movement of the spectral or distorted characters such as the Dead Man, the Milkmaid, and the Mummy. Stage business involved a great deal of pantomime for several characters had no spoken lines. Also pantomiming took place in one area of the stage while other characters spoke in another area. The tempo of the play was influenced by the rhythmic structure of the sonata with the three contrasting movements of a brisk allegro, a slow largo, and a quiet andante.

Strindberg's characters were drawn from many of the people who passed through his life. His characters in The Ghost Sonata lacked three-dimensional qualities and seemed, instead, to represent symbols and emotions.

It was decided that five weeks would be necessary for the rehearsals and performances of the play due to the fact that it was longer and more difficult than the usual one-act play.

The director should be aware of the technical problems involved in a production even though he may work with a technical director. A multiple setting was designed for the staging of the play. This type of stage setting helped to eliminate scene changes and interruptions between scenes. This was in keeping with Strindberg's idea of having a smooth-flowing production in order that the audience would not have time to reflect until the end of the play. Few

stage properties caused any special difficulty in this play. Lighting contributed to the mood and atmosphere of the play. Lighting was also pertinent in indicating the areas upon the stage in which the action took place. Sound was used mainly to emphasize the distorted and dream elements of the play. The costume and make-up were essentially realistic except for the characters who were spectral, distorted, or eccentric such as the Dead Man, the Milkmaid, the Mummy, the Fiancée, and the Beggars. One special effect, which was a picture of Böcklin's Isle of the Dead which was lowered from above at the end of the play.

In dealing with all the separate elements in analyzing a play, it must be remembered that these elements should ultimately be combined to make a unified, integrated work of art.

II. CONCLUSION

After a thorough study of The Ghost Sonata, it was decided that it would be feasible and effective to produce this play on a college campus. With the combination of realistic and expressionistic techniques, the meaning could be conveyed clearly to the audience. The setting would present no technical difficulties to most colleges. The fact that Strindberg's plays are infrequently produced in the United States would give college students a new and educa-

tional experience in participating in the play or in viewing it. Also the use of the expressionistic style provides a further educational experience for the designer, director, actor and viewer.

Strindberg's technique of a continuous production without intermissions would be new and different for the audience and actors. Both could become more involved in the play without a break in the rhythm or thought patterns.

Because of the new educational experiences The Ghost Sonata would provide, it would be worthy of production on a college campus.

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APPENDIX

PRODUCTIONS OF THE GHOST SONATA

FROM 1945 to 1962

Denmark--Kongelige (Copenhagen) 1948

France--Théâtre de la Gaîté-Montparnasse (Paris) 1949

Helvetia--Schauspielhaus (Zürich) 1952

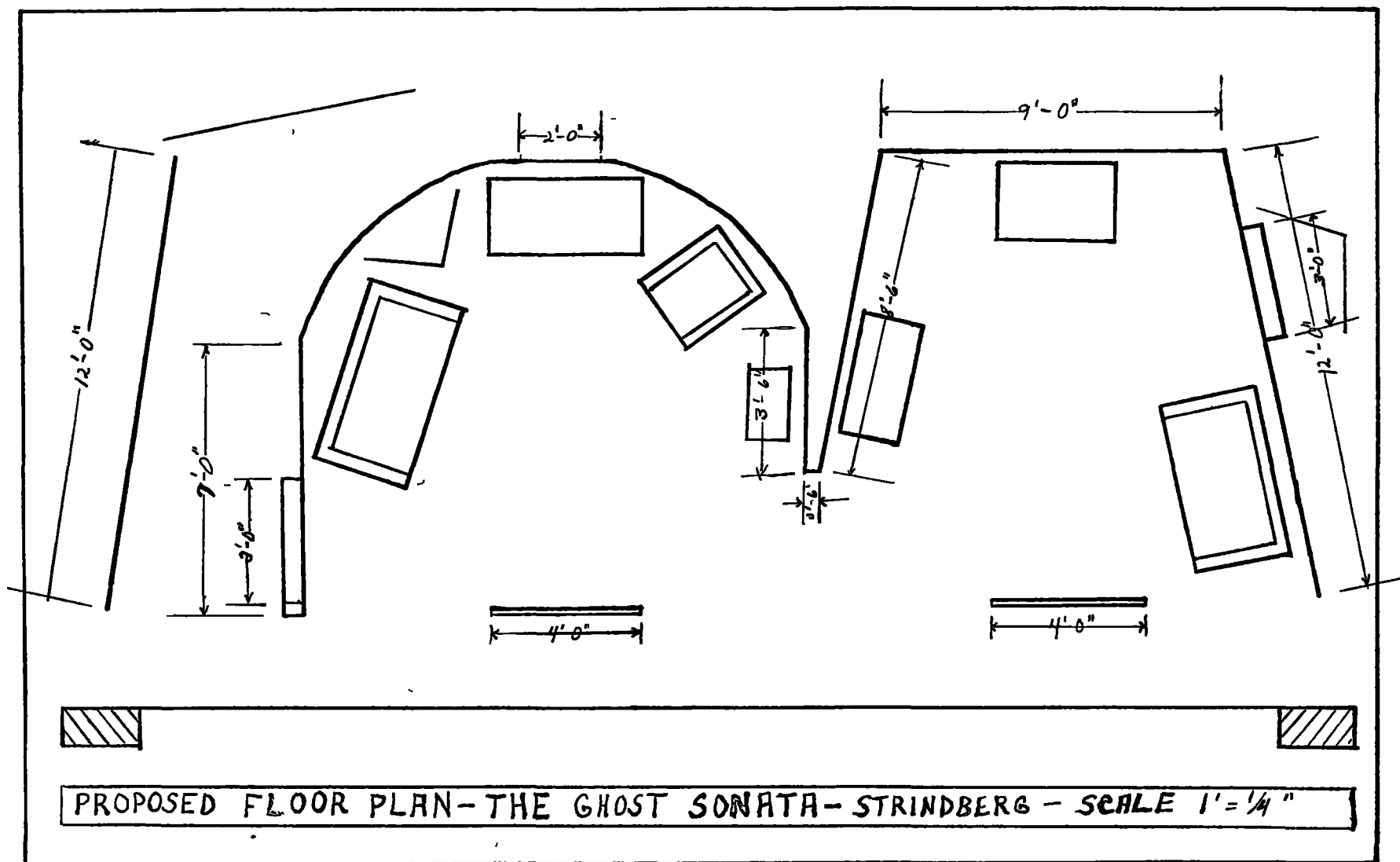
Norge--De Norske Teatret (Oslo) 1953

Suomi--Kansanteatteri (Helsinki) 1948
Tampere 1951

Sverige--Stadsteater (Göteborg) 1956
Stadsteater (Malmö) 1954

United States--Yale University 1950
Pasadena Playhouse 1951

Westdeutschland--Kammerspiele (Köln) 1955
Städtische Bühnen (Dortmund) 1955
Städtische Bühnen (Frankfurt) 1956
Schauspielhaus (Bochum) 1961-1962



An Abstract of
A PRODUCTION STUDY OF THE GHOST SONATA
BY AUGUST STRINDBERG

Nancy Stoops

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Faculty Adviser: Charles R. Boughton

The purpose of the thesis was to design, from a director's viewpoint, an original production of the play, The Ghost Sonata, that could be performed effectively and feasibly on a college campus.

The production study included a thorough examination of the life of the playwright, August Strindberg, and the nature of expressionism in order to reveal the influence of each upon the play. In interpreting the play, the theme, symbols, and mood were established. The dramatic structure of the play was analyzed in terms of exposition, complication, climax, resolution, and conclusion.

After the interpretation and analysis of the play, a production plan was developed. The plan was recorded in a prompt book which was filed with the Speech Department of Bowling Green State University. The prompt book contained a diagram of movement and composition, a floor plan, and a description of the stage business and tempo.

The study established that the play could be produced effectively on a college campus. Using a combination of expressionistic and realistic techniques would help to convey the difficult meaning of the play clearly. The fact that the play was an expressionistic drama and had many unusual elements, would provide a new, educational experience to all

who would be concerned with viewing or participating in the production.