Erik van Ooijen (b. 1980) has published articles on topics related to narratology and the theory of drama. The Mold of Writing is his doctoral thesis.

A century ago, August Strindberg wrote his five so-called Chamber Plays: Stormy Weather, The Burned Lot, The Ghost Sonata, The Pelican and The Black Glove. Still these plays bustle with a peculiar kind of literary life. While they have not grown old – the plays are still being republished, performed, read and analyzed – they could nevertheless be said to have grown mold. For the work of the literary writer, says Strindberg, “grows profusely in his head like grapes or mold”. Whereas the author certainly may have had a thoroughly prepared design in mind when he started to write a particular work, many strange things can happen during the actual act of execution: the pen runs forth on the sheet of paper, producing squiggles and taking the work in new and unexpected directions. Thus Strindberg seldom amends his writing, and when he is asked for the meaning of a particularly difficult passage he may simply answer like Pilate: “What I have written I have written!”

In The Mold of Writing, Erik van Ooijen examines the strange play between intentional design and contingent whim so typical of Strindberg and the Chamber Plays. What effects are generated when an author working on an artistic whole at the same time throws in ideas, motifs, and passages apparently at random? And how does such an inclusion of whims and passing fancies affect the possibility of interpretation? These are some of the problems discussed during an exploration that moves through the pyramids and labyrinths, ruins and rhizomes, weeds and couch grasses of Strindberg’s Chamber Plays.