



## **The Mold of Writing**

Style and Structure in Strindberg's Chamber Plays

av

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### **Akademisk avhandling**

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## Abstract

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The thesis examines the five plays published by August Strindberg under the label of Chamber Plays: *Stormy Weather*, *The Burned Lot*, *The Ghost Sonata*, *The Pelican* (all 1907), and *The Black Glove* (1909). It takes its point of departure in a particular aspect of Strindberg's way of writing as he actually describes it himself: during the act of deliberate composing, a productive fever tends to emerge bringing an element of chance to the work. The thesis defines the effect produced by this "fever" as the tension generated between, on the one hand, *structure* or *form*, and, on the other hand, *style* or *writing*. These concepts are associated with a tradition, primarily in French literary theory, which pays attention to what is described as a friction between the general linguistic aspect of literature (genres, recurring and recognizable patterns) and the individual aspect (the peculiar and idiosyncratic style of an author embodied in his material habitus). Thus the ambiguity found in the thesis' title: the "mold" alludes partly to the stereotypes or matrices of language, partly to the "fungi" that, according to Strindberg, could be considered an adequate image for writing; the poetic work, says Strindberg, grows like mold from the author's brain.

Theoretical questions, primarily of a formal and interpretational nature, are continuously discussed since one of the main points is that the Strindbergian way of writing restricts what kind of interpretation may be given his works. The eventual contrast between form and interpretation is, furthermore, related to a general theme developed throughout the Chamber Plays concerning the meaning of life.

It is stressed that the five plays show distinct formal and thematic differences; thus, a separate chapter is dedicated to each of them. The chapter on *Stormy Weather* examines the structural use of focus and the hierarchy of character-functions related to the centering on a protagonist. *The Burned Lot* is discussed from the concept of a ruin to describe how a multitude of conflicting forms come together to produce a fragmentary result. *The Ghost Sonata* is described in terms of simulation: while Strindberg alludes to certain dramatic patterns, he also distorts them whereby new effects are created. The chapter on *The Pelican* explores the temporal flow of the play and how it relates to writing. The thesis ends with a discussion of *The Black Glove* and its relation to the preceding Chamber Plays and also to the Strindbergian oeuvre. The concept of weed is used to distinguish a recurring element in Strindberg's work as well as in his worldview.

Throughout the thesis, the discussion is consistently related to previous studies and commentaries on the plays.

**Keywords:** August Strindberg, chamber play, literary form, writing, focus, ruin as form, simulation, speed, weed as form