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**Symbolism in the works of August Strindberg**

**Edward S. Franchuk**

**Submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Drama  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Glasgow**

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## Summary

In many ways, Strindberg's works are among the most paradoxical in modern literature. Violently misogynistic, they nevertheless reveal a man who worships Woman, cannot live without her, loathing her as Mistress but adoring her as Mother; almost brutal in the violence of their emotions, they are at the same time gentle in the irony of their humour; totally unorthodox in their theology, they are profoundly religious; even when most naturalistic (as in *Fröken Julie*: *Miss Julie*), they are highly symbolic. The leading practitioner of naturalistic drama is also the father of the theatre of the absurd.

However unlike his works might appear to one another, and whatever the seeming contradictions and inconsistencies among the various ideas espoused and championed by Strindberg at different points in his career, his themes remained the same: his own life, the struggle for dominance between the sexes, psychological domination through the power of suggestion, the problem of the existence of evil and suffering in the world, and the influence of the supernatural on human life and history. And whatever his literary genre -- drama, poetry, novel, short story, satire, history, autobiography, scientific or philological treatise, political, philosophical, or religious essay -- these themes are expressed and developed through a rich and evocative symbolism drawn not only from the tribal treasury of archetypal images, but supplemented, shaped, and refined by his own experience, imagination, and subconscious. An examination of his symbolism, then, will not only elucidate the works by making our interpretation of them surer, but should reveal a consistency and logical development in his writing not always apparent with other approaches.

Symbolism can be seen as a kind of shorthand: a way of enriching a text which, particularly in drama, poetry, and the short story, is often more or less severely constrained in terms of length: by drawing on universal or traditional symbols, the author can suggest levels of meaning, connections, and associations which extend his work beyond the limits imposed on it. In more extended literary genres, such as the novel, on the other hand, symbolism is often used only sparingly. Over the course of his career, an author also builds up a set of personal symbols, drawn from his experience, his reading, his interests, and, ultimately, his view of the world; his work cannot be fully understood without an awareness of these symbols. This study seeks to identify Strindberg's symbols, to search out their meanings, to relate them to each other, to the works in which they occur, and to the body of work as a whole, and to suggest, wherever possible, their sources.

The overwhelming tendency in Strindberg studies is to approach the works as biographical and/or psycholog-

ical documents. His habits of working from living models (a practice he called vivisection), of fictionalizing his own experiences, and of meticulously documenting his life and his intellectual and spiritual development make this inevitable. This study does not ignore the author's biography (impossible in such an autobiographical writer), but seeks to place the emphasis elsewhere, on the more exclusively literary concern of meaning (as opposed to reference).

Strindberg always considered himself primarily a dramatist, and indeed it is almost exclusively as such that the non-Swedish world knows him. It is, therefore, with Strindberg's plays that this study is primarily concerned. He was, however, a prolific writer, covering most genres, and much of his non-dramatic writing expands upon, explains, or provides the source for, the symbolism of the plays. With two or three minor exceptions (noted in the text), I have therefore looked at all of Strindberg's published works; those not mentioned have been omitted because they do not contribute in any significant way to an understanding of his symbolism.

Preference has been given to the Swedish texts in the twenty-two volumes which have appeared so far in the ongoing "National Edition" (*Samlade verk: Collected Works*); for works which have not yet appeared there, I have used, in the first instance Gunnar Brandell's *Skrifter* (*Writings*, the Swedish edition which Glasgow University Library possesses), and, for works that appear in neither of those editions, John Landquist's monumental *Samlade skrifter* (*Collected Writings*). Although I have often consulted various English translations, the translations of cited passages are my own, except where noted. Biblical quotations are cited from a variety of English translations, in an attempt to stay as close as possible to the Swedish wording cited by Strindberg; when it is a question of simply providing a reference, I have preferred to cite *The Jerusalem Bible*. In a few instances, where no English translation could be found which corresponded satisfactorily to Strindberg's version (whether through an anomaly of the Swedish translation he used -- presumably the *Karl XII Bible* -- or through his own deliberate or unconscious misquotation), I have translated the citation literally.

In quotations (and in their translations), underlined ellipses (...) are Strindberg's own; those not so distinguished (...) indicate an omission from the text. In a few instances, when scenes in the Swedish text are unnumbered, I have supplied numbers as an aid to locating cited passages in a translation.

## Chapter 1

## Fritänkaren

Strindberg's first literary work was also his first play: *En namnsdagsgåva*<sup>1</sup> (A Name-Day Present) (1869). Unfortunately, it has not been preserved; the earliest work extant, also a play, dates from the same year. In 1869 Strindberg interrupted his university studies in Uppsala and made his first unsuccessful attempt to become an actor. His audition piece for acceptance as a student at Kungliga teatern (the Royal Theatre, Stockholm) was the rôle of Härved Boson in Frans Hedberg's *Bröllopet på Ulvåsa* (The Wedding at Ulvåsa). Although he did not gain admission (he suffered all of his life from shyness and was never at ease speaking in public), the experience (he appeared on the stage thirty evenings, in eight different small parts) gave him exposure to the practical considerations of the theatre, and awoke in him a consuming interest: he always considered himself a dramatist and his other works to be of less significance than those he produced for the theatre.

*Fritänkaren* was written under a pseudonym: its full title is *Fritänkaren: dramatiskt utkast av Härved*

<sup>1</sup> What little is known about this play is summarized in Ollén, 7-9.



Ulf<sup>2</sup> (*The Freethinker: A Dramatic Sketch* by Härved Ulf). The name is obviously drawn from his audition rôle;<sup>3</sup> perhaps an acknowledgement of debt to the theatre. In subsequent works the name Härved disappeared, but a variation on Ulf appears in the short story "Odlad frukt" ("Cultivated Fruit", 1882) in *Svenska öden och äventyr* (*Swedish Destinies and Adventures*), where the young hero (who has many similarities to the author) is named Sten Ulvfot.

*Fritänkaren* is really more a theological dialogue than a play (it has never been performed): the young author is obviously much more interested in ideas than he is in realistic dialogue, dramatic action, or characterization. Nevertheless, many characteristics of Strindberg's subsequent work, including his greatest plays, are discernible here: the hero has a consuming, if unorthodox, interest in spiritual matters; he finds himself unable to accept the values of his society; he suffers rejection from those he loves; and he becomes a voluntary exile who nevertheless retains a strong feeling of affection for his homeland. This is the pattern of the great pilgrimage plays; it is also the pattern of the author's life.

<sup>2</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 5-59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ulf* is an older spelling of the first syllable of the place name in Hedberg's title, *ulv* (= wolf).

The hero is a young man named Karl Larsson. He is not an atheist, as Strindberg is at pains to point out, but is rather a follower of the American Unitarian preacher, Theodore Parker (1810-60), whose teachings<sup>4</sup> included rejection of the divinity of Christ, the Church, and scripture, in favour of a personal intuition of God. Karl's single-minded dedication to searching for the truth, and his refusal to compromise or behave hypocritically bring about all of his losses in the play: the ruptures with his family and his sweetheart, the loss of his job, and, eventually, his inability to remain a part of his society. Through it all he never wavers: these are sacrifices which must be made for the attainment of truth.

In the first scene, Karl is contrasted to his atheistic fellow students, in the second to his hypocritical parents (who bear a certain resemblance to the Magistrate and his wife in *Advent*, 1898) and brother, and in the third he must face rejection by parents, sweetheart, and society as a whole. Besides the general pilgrimage pattern of the play, there are several less important symbols which continue in Strindberg's work. Karl's brother Otto, for instance, first appears dressed as a hunter, having just shot two small birds.

<sup>4</sup> Parker's teachings are contained in his *On the Transient and Permanent in Christianity* (1841), presumably the book (in translation) which accompanies Karl everywhere: he refers to it only as Parker.

Perhaps the most fully realized character in the play, Otto is a soldier, a good-natured, fun-loving young man who ignores the teachings of religion while continuing to pay lip-service to the church. That he should first appear as a hunter is appropriate, for in Strindberg's works and elsewhere hunting is often a symbol of the vain pursuit of earthly pleasures. Similarly, Agda's concern and love for the birds which Otto hunts indicates, as with Eleanora in *Påsk* (Easter, 1900), the innocence of her nature. When Karl realizes that he is going to have to abandon his hopes of marrying Agda if he is to remain true to his convictions, he regards her as a lamb which must be sacrificed: "Stackars mitt lamm, som skall offras åt girigheten och fåfängan!"<sup>5</sup> The sacrificial lamb is often paired with the scapegoat, as in *Folkungasagan* (*The Saga of the Folkungs*, 1899); in this play, the latter symbol is applied only to Christ. Karl rejects the divinity of Christ principally because he rejects the validity of that symbol:

Det skall vara svaga själar, som behöva en syndabock, på vilken de blott behöva kasta alla sina brott och synder, för att sedan lägga armarna i kors och vänta på saligheten.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 35: "My poor lamb, which will be sacrificed to greed and vanity!"

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 48:

They must be weak souls indeed that need a scapegoat, on which they need only cast all of their crimes and sins, and then cross their arms and wait for salvation.

Later Strindberg heroes are to realize that the scape-goat is indeed necessary: as expressed most clearly in *Advent*, they come to the realization that he who will not let Christ suffer for him must suffer himself! Karl, in the meantime, continues to rely on his own intelligence to guide him toward the truth: reason is the divine spark which distinguishes man from the animals, and in rejecting reason organized religion (represented by Agda's brother Gustav) reduces men to an animal state:

Du vill, att människan skall utsläcka den himlaborna gudagnistan, som just skiljer henne från djuret, och du måtte ha gjort det, ty därom vittnar ditt tal.<sup>7</sup>

Given the unorthodox nature of the views which it advocates, *Fritänkaren* has a rather curious epigraph:

Jag är icke kommen till att sända frid utan svärdet.

Jesus av Nasareth.<sup>8</sup>

The quotation is from Matthew 10:34, and its significance is given in the following two verses:

For I came to set a man at variance against his father.... And a man's enemies shall be

<sup>7</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 50:

You want mankind to extinguish the celestial divine spark that distinguishes him from the animals, and you must already have done so, for your words bear witness of it.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:

I came not to send peace, but the sword.

Jesus of Nazareth.

they of his own household. (Douay-Rheims translation.)

The reference is ironic: Karl is at variance with those around him not because of his faith in Christ, but because of theirs!

Gustav and the members of Karl's family are (like Strindberg's mother) pietists: members of a particularly austere fundamentalist movement. Theirs is a literal and joyless faith, with emphasis on sin and punishment rather than on love and reconciliation. Karl sums up their faith and his own reaction against it in terms of a biblical curse (from the Ten Commandments) which is to haunt many of Strindberg's future heroes: the others believe in the Old Testament God of retribution, he in the New Testament God of love:

... jag sökte uppriktigt i de heliga skrifterna att finna den upplysning, som skulle leda mig fram till trons härlighet, men jag fann blott ... ett förfärligt mörker, ingen ledande stjärna, som kunde sprida den minsta stråle av ljus och hopp över min sargade själ. Då vaknade omsider ett tvivel på denna lära, som utlovade så mycket men gav så litet. Det föll en gnista i min själ -- hon växte och växte, tills hon flammade upp till en härlig eld -- jag hade kommit till visshet och klarhet, och frid och försoning togo sina boningar i mitt sårade hjärta.

Nu började för mig ett nytt liv. Den fruktansvärde Jehova, som uttalade sina straffdomar över fädrens missgärningar inpå barnen till tredje och fjärde led, var förvandlad till den kärleksfulle, milde fadren, som sände den käraste bland sina söner att predika upplysning och frid på jorden. Där förr den sjuka fantasien hade sparat en fiende bakom varje buske i den fria naturen, där var nu liv och glädje -- och den lilla

blomman sände sitt rökoffer upp till den allsmäktiges tron.<sup>9</sup>

Despite its shortcomings as a play, *Fritänkaren* is not without interest, and is well worth reading, if not staging. The twenty-year old who wrote *Fritänkaren* and the sixty-year old who wrote *Stora landsvägen* (*The Great Highway*, 1909) were, after all, the same man, and one can see in the former the glimmering spark which was to erupt into "the greatest fire in Sweden".

<sup>9</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 17:

... I searched the holy scriptures diligently, looking for understanding that would bring me to the glory of faith, but I found only ... an appalling darkness, no guiding star that could shed the smallest ray of light and hope on my lacerated soul. Then, gradually, I began to doubt that teaching, which promised so much but gave so little. My soul was ignited by a spark -- it grew and grew, until it erupted into a glorious fire -- I had arrived at certainty and clarity, and peace and forgiveness made my wounded heart their dwelling place.

Then a new life began for me. The fearful Jehovah, who pronounced sentence for the sins of the fathers on the children until the third and fourth generations, was transformed into the loving, gentle father, who sent the most cherished of his sons to preach understanding and peace on earth. Where once the sick imagination had detected an enemy behind every bush out in nature, there were now life and joy -- and the little flower sent its offering of incense up to the throne of the almighty.

## Chapter 2

### Hermione

After *Fritänkaren* was rejected by Kungliga teatret in 1869, Strindberg wrote and submitted another play, this time trying to apply his talents to contemporary theatrical taste. *Den sjunkande Hellas* (*The Last Days of Hellas*) was a three-act verse drama on a classical theme: the defeat of Athens (and Thebes) by Philip II of Macedon in 338 BC. When this play too was rejected, Strindberg rewrote it (in 1870) as a five-act tragedy and submitted it in competition to the Swedish Academy, where it won an honourable mention. The five-act version of the play was named after its heroine: *Hermione: sorgespel*<sup>1</sup> (*Hermione: a Tragedy*).

It is an interesting play; Strindberg is learning his craft quickly. Although the dialogue is still for the most part declamatory and artificial, it is not so stilted as that of *Fritänkaren* (in spite of being in verse), and there is a much more successful attempt at characterization. Unfortunately, in this first attempt at historical drama, the author seems to have been overwhelmed by his material, and there is little in the play that can easily be identified as Strindberg.

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 61-163.

Hermione does, however, show the same interest as *Fritänkaren* in theological questions: the opening scenes of both present religious disputes, in this case about whether the gods of classical Greece really exist. The most telling argument in the debate is advanced by the fool Alcinous, who argues that the existence of the gods (or God: note the capitalization in the following extract) can be inferred from artistic inspiration. The sentiment is perhaps that of the idealistic twenty-one year old author, just embarking on an artistic career:

Men sägen mig uppriktigt: ha'n I aldrig i edra bröst en mäktig rörelse bemärkt -- en utesäglig känsla rönt av himmelskt ursprung, då I ha'n betraktat en härlig gudabild av mästahand? Om I det haven känt, så veten, vänner, att det en Gud är som till eder talat.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the characteristic of this play most typical of Strindberg, however, is its strong emphasis on fate. He has not yet developed his theory of the indifferent or malevolent powers which rule human destiny, but their presence can be felt in the events of the play. Driven by forces greater than herself, Hermione,

<sup>2</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 66:

But tell me truly: have you never felt within your breast a powerful commotion -- experienced feelings inexpressible of heav'nly origin, when you beheld a finely sculptured god made by a master? If you've felt that, then you must know, my friends that you have been communing with a God.



daughter of the priest of Ares, feels compelled to play a part in the destiny of Athens at the approaching battle of Chaeronea. She sets off to assassinate Philip of Macedon, hoping by this deed both to discourage the Macedonian army and to spur the forces of Athens and her allies on to victory. On her way to Philip's camp, she meets her father, who has consulted the oracle of Zeus at Dodona and received a prophecy which confirms her destiny and seems to endorse her plans: "Offret re'n färdigt står; Athenas dotter det tänder."<sup>3</sup> She comes across Philip, sleeping and unguarded, but before she can deliver the fatal blow she is filled with the realization that she is deeply in love with him, and she cannot execute the plan. She was to have signalled her success to the Greek army by waving a torch above her head, and when Philip now orders her to light it in order to guide their way back to the Macedonian camp, she realizes that her destiny was not to deliver her city, but to betray it: the sacrifice to which the prophecy referred is not Philip, but Athens! Resigned to her fate, she gives the prearranged signal, and Philip is victorious (thus ending the era of the city-state in Greece: the explanation of the title of the earlier version of the play). In the final act Hermione dies at the hand of her father, thus being spared fur-

<sup>3</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 125 (Act IV): "The sacrifice is ready; Athena's daughter will light it."

ther unwilling complicity in the humiliation of Athens. Throughout, Hermione has acted from motives of purest patriotism, but the gods have decided otherwise, and have used her as an instrument of their will; man cannot control his destiny!

Significantly, the climactic events in the play are explicitly associated with the North Star, which, with its fixed position in the skies, is a fitting symbol of the unmoved mover, immutable destiny:

KRITON:

....  
... -- Välan, Hermione,  
i denna natt, förrän Bootes,  
som sist bland stjärnorna till vila går,  
av Äos jagas i Okeanos,  
skall du ditt verk uti fullbordan bragt.<sup>4</sup>

In the second act, Strindberg presents a debate between the orators Demosthenes, who argues for resis-

<sup>4</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 126 (Act IV):

CRITON [Hermione's father]:

....  
... -- Well then, Hermione,  
upon this night, before Boötes,\*  
the last among the stars to go to rest,  
is chased by Aeos into Oceanus,  
you will have brought your task to its completion.

\* Boötes (the Ploughman) is the constellation which contains the North Star, Arcturus, to which Strindberg is in fact referring. The substitution must have been unintentional, since the words Bootes and Arkturus are rhythmically identical.

tance to Philip, and Aeschines, who argues for capitulation. Criton characterizes Demosthenes as a lion and Aeschines as a fox, and in his oration Demosthenes describes Philip as a jackal, "som själv ej mäktar ta sitt rov i öppen / och ärlig strid."<sup>5</sup> More important than this animal symbolism, however, is the curse which Criton, arguing in support of Demosthenes' position, calls down upon the heads of those Athenians who do not heed his call to arms:

... Stannen! Stannen!  
 I viljen ej! Nåväl, då skall jag rycka  
 förbannelsen ifrån din himlaborg,  
 O Zeus, och slunga över detta folk,  
 som glömskt har blivit av allt rätt och  
 heligt.

Förbannad vare den som här ej stannar  
 och väpnar sig till fosterlandets värn!  
 Må honom aldrig mer förunnas nåd  
 att medelst bön och offer sona gudar.  
 Må ej hans åkrar några skördar bära,  
 ej vin hans vingård giva. Må hans maka  
 ej njuta moderkänslans höga fröjd,  
 och må han sist kring jordens vida krets  
 av Kärerna bli jagad utan ro,  
 tills på en öde strand han döden dör,  
 att ej hans ben av människor täckas må  
 med mull, och fredlös skall han irra kring  
 på Stygens strand, att där ett osäligt liv  
 i evighet han föra må!

(Aischines och den större delen av folket  
 hava gått.)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 92" "which is not able to take prey in fair / and open strife."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 100-101:

... Oh stay and hear!  
 So you will not! Well then, I shall call  
 down  
 a malediction from your fortress high,  
 O Zeus, and cast it over all these folk,  
 who have forgotten all that's right and holy.  
 Accursed be he who does not here remain

This curse is well adapted to the religious beliefs of classical Greece, but those acquainted with Strindberg's later works will recognize in it several elements from the biblical curse delivered from Mount Ebal (Deuteronomy 28:15-68): those who bear the curse are to be denied enjoyment of the fruits of their fields, vineyards, and loins, and are to be denied burial. The curse's last two lines could well describe the Wandering Jew-Pilgrim figures that populate Strindberg's most personal works: men who are both victims of a curse and hounded by fate. The idea is essentially a classical one, which Strindberg adapts to his own situations; *Hermione* is evidence that he was aware of this.

In *Hermione* can be seen germs not only of the author's post-Inferno works; but it also contains his first use of the word *själamördare* (soul-murderer,

and come to the defence of fatherland!  
To him may never more be granted grace  
to appease the gods through prayer and  
sacrifice.  
May all his fields be quite devoid of har-  
vest,  
his vineyards give no wine. And may his wife  
not know the sweet delights of motherhood,  
and may he be at last round earth's vast  
sphere  
hunted by the Keres without rest,  
until upon an empty beach he dies,  
so that his bones will find no covering  
of earth, and exiled shall he wander round  
on Stygian shore, and for eternity  
may he there lead a damned life!

(Aeschines and the greater part of the people  
have gone.)

apparently a word of his own coinage extrapolated from the adjective *själamördande* (or *själsmördande*): literally soul-murdering, corresponding to the figurative use of the English word *deadly* (i.e., boring, stultifying, acid-tongued, humiliating, overwhelming, etc.). It is a word (and a concept) that become very important to Strindberg during his naturalistic phase, during which he was fascinated with the power of suggestion and the processes by which one mind gains dominance over another. The soul-murderer appears under several guises throughout his writings, the most important being cannibal, vampire, and parasite: all individuals who exert psychological pressures which prevent others from self-realization. The word appears in *Hermione* as Criton berates Callimachus, the prominent Athenian who was to have married Hermione until he proved himself a coward (and, eventually, a traitor):

[Du] på rakstugan nöta dagen bort  
i prat med dessa själamördare,  
som kalla sig sofister -- det är fyllest  
för att av landets ungdom bilda slavar.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 79 (Act I):

[You] waste away your days in barbershops  
in idle chatter with soul-murderers,  
the self-styled sophists -- they are all we  
to make slaves out of all our country's  
youth.

## Chapter 3

## "I Rom"

"I Rom: dramatisk situation i en akt"<sup>1</sup> ("In Rome: a Dramatic Situation in One Act", 1870) was Strinberg's first performed play: it was given ten times on the smaller stage of Kungliga teatern beginning September 13, 1870, and was presented on the larger stage on November 19 of that year, the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), the Danish sculptor who is the central figure in the play.

The play is based on a real incident in Thorvaldsen's life. After six years (beginning 1897) of studying and practicing his art in Rome, he had created a universally admired and acclaimed sculpture, Jason, but had not succeeded in finding a buyer for it. His scholarship from the Danish Academy of Art was expiring and he was in dire financial straits, considering abandoning his artistic career and returning to Denmark to take up a "real" job, when the Englishman Sir Thomas Hope commissioned the statue in marble and enabled him to remain in Rome sculpting.

The play is a bagatelle; the fact that it was the first of Strindberg's plays to receive production is in itself eloquent testimony to the theatrical taste of

<sup>1</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 165-200.

the times: the play is short, light, written in verse, and depicts an artistic milieu (a subject much in vogue). There is an autobiographical element to the play (Strindberg, like Thorvaldsen, was experiencing financial and family pressures to abandon his artistic ambitions and take a "regular" job), and one can note the young author's mastery of dialogue improving by leaps and bounds, despite the far more restrictive medium (rhyming iambic pentameter). Of greater interest, however, is the religious idealism with which he manages to permeate this inconsequential piece. As in *Hermione*, the presence of God is seen in artistic creation and in our responses to works of art; looked at from the opposite direction, artistic inspiration is a spark of the divine fire, artistic creation a religious act. This idea is first advanced by Thorvaldsen's countryman, friend, and fellow artist, Pedersen, when lack of success makes the former begin to doubt his talent:

PEDERSEN:

Till hjärtats röst din lit du blott bör  
sätta.

THORVALDSEN:

Men om den mig på villovägar för?

PEDERSEN:

Det kan den ej: -- det är Guds röst du hör.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 177 (sc. i):

PEDERSEN:

What's in your heart is what you must  
believe.

THORVALDSEN:

But if me down the garden path it steer?

PEDERSEN:

It cannot: -- it's the voice of God you hear.

Thorvaldsen's self-doubts are resolved in contemplation of his statue, and the symbol of divine fire is added to Pedersen's notion:

.... O! nu jag känner  
den eld, som ner i själens djup mig bränner!  
Ja! jag vill leva att den elden vårda,  
att den en gång må härligt bryta ut  
och må mig möta öden, än så hårda,  
jag vill dock striden modigt kämpa slut!<sup>3</sup>

Thorvaldsen was the leading Scandinavian exponent and practitioner of neoclassicism, and Rome, with its treasury of Greek and Roman sculpture, was his inspiration. The play closes with an original (and unorthodox) explanation for Rome's sobriquet, the Holy City: it is holy because it provides inspiration to artists, and artistic inspiration is divine!

THORVALDSEN:

...  
... jag vill liva upp ett gammalt minne:  
sen I, i dag är just den dagen inne,  
då jag för sex år sedan vägen tog  
till Monte Pincio, att få där betrakta  
den helga staden uti all dess prakt...  
Jag kom och såg ... mig grep en sällsam makt.  
Och mina knän sig böjde ned så sakta,  
och hjärtat klädde sig i högtidsskrud.  
En suck så andaktsfull smög från min mun:  
"Här är ett heligt rum, och här bor Gud" ...

<sup>3</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 187 (sc. iv):

.... Oh! now I know:  
deep down within my soul a fire's aglow!  
Yes! now my goal will be that fire to nurture,  
until one day its raging flames may burn;  
however hard the blows of fate in future,  
I will persist until I victory earn!



Kom, låt mig njuta än en sådan stund.<sup>4</sup>

The other image of note in the play is Thorvaldsen's earlier comparison of the artist's life to a pilgrimage along a road strewn with thorns:

Måhända var förnuftet ock förvirrat  
av ungdomsyran, då jag övergav  
för konsten allt och tog helt glad min stav  
att vandra på den törnbeströdda stig,  
där man med nöden jämt får föra krig.<sup>5</sup>

As Strindberg develops the pilgrimage symbol throughout his own artistic career, it will come to symbolize the pursuit of truth not only in art, but in life itself.

<sup>4</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 199-200 (sc. ix):

THORVALDSEN:

...  
... I want to reenact an old memory:  
it is today the very day, you see,  
on which, six years ago, I wandered up  
to Monte Pincio, there to behold  
the Holy City in its splendour dressed ...  
I came and saw ... was by strange power pos-  
sessed.  
My knees then of themselves began to fold,  
my heart put on the garb of holiday.  
And past my lips an awe-filled sigh then  
tore:  
"This is most holy ground; here God holds  
sway" ...  
Come, let me feel that moment yet once more.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 186 (sc. iv):

Perhaps my reason also was confused  
by youth's delirium when once I spurned  
all things for art, and, staff in hand, I  
turned  
to wander on the thorn-encumbered track  
where need, the foe, walks ever at one's  
back.

## Chapter 4

## "Den fredlöse"

The second of Strindberg's plays to be performed was "Den fredlöse: sorgespel"<sup>1</sup> ("The Outlaw: a Tragedy", 1871), which had six performances at Kungliga teatern beginning October 16, 1871. In the meantime, *Fritänkaren* had been published, and the young playwright was becoming something of a literary sensation: with disastrous results on his studies! Those studies were not wasted, however, for "Den fredlöse" was the result of university studies of the Icelandic sagas; the tales fired Strindberg's imagination, and inspired at least two extant works: "Den fredlöse" and "Början av Ån Bogsveigs saga" (1872).

The previous year, Strindberg had written a three-act play called *Blot-Sven*<sup>2</sup>, but burned it after it had been severely criticized by one of his friends. Rewritten as a one-acter, that play became "Den fredlöse". The setting in Iceland around the year 1100 (i.e.,

<sup>1</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 201-52.

<sup>2</sup> *Blot-Sven* (reigned 1084-87) was Sweden's last pagan king. The name *Blot-Sven* means "sacrifice-maker"; his real name may have been *Sverker*, since he is believed to have been the grandson of *Sverker Kol* (*Sörkver Karl*), who is named in the thirteenth-century Icelandic saga *Brennu-Njáls saga* (*Burnt Njall's Saga*) (Ohlmarks, 30-31). In his history play *Bjälbo-jarlen* Strindberg describes how the descendents of *Blot-Sven* contended with those of *St. Erik* for the Swedish throne during the following century and a half.

about a century after the introduction of Christianity) is a bit late for the sagas, most of which deal with the period 870-1030, but whenever Strindberg wrote on historical themes, he chose to deal with a time when one age or movement (in this case, Scandinavian paganism) was on its very last legs, about to give undisputed sway to another: the choice can be seen in *Hermione* as well as in his cycle of Swedish history plays.

The hero of "Den fredlöse" is a Swede (Thorfinn), who has fled to Iceland with his wife (Valgerd) and daughter (Gunlöd) in order to protect them from the influences of Christianity, which was overwhelming his homeland. He is a hang-over from a previous century: not only one of the last pagans, but one of the very last Vikings as well, who has chosen this remotest corner of Europe in an attempt to hold on to his way of life. This is not to be, however: history rolls on, even in Iceland, and Thorfinn is doomed to go under. "Den fredlöse" is the story of his defiant last stand.

Thorfinn does not believe in the pagan gods himself -- in his own words,

Är jag ej Thorfinn jarl den starke,  
som böjde tusen viljor under sin?  
Som aldrig krävde vänskap eller älskog,  
men själv bar sina sorger!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 239:

Am I not Earl Thorfinn the Strong,  
who bent thousands to his will?  
Who never asked for friendship or for love,  
but himself bore his own sorrows!

Even in the midst of his despair, when he commands a Christian slave to pray for him, his self-reliance asserts itself; he is beyond help because his pride will not permit him to ask for help:

THORFINN: .... Kan du dö med lugn i denna natt?

TRÄLEN: Ja, om jag bara hann göra en bön först.

THORFINN: Får man lugn då?

TRÄLEN: Ack ja, herre!

THORFINN (stiger upp och tar en bägare): Du skall få den här om du beder för mig.

TRÄLEN: Det är för litet!

THORFINN: Du skall få tio -- men om du nämner ett ord därom -- tar jag ditt liv!

TRÄLEN: Det hjälper ej om I också gåven mig hundra. I skolen bedja själv!

THORFINN: Jag kan ej! Men jag befaller dig!

TRÄLEN: Jag skall lyda -- men I fån se att det icke hjälper. (Beder.) Jesus Krist, förbarma dig över denna arma syndare, som tigger om nåd!

THORFINN: Det är lögn -- jag tigger aldrig om något!

TRÄLEN: Sen I att det inte hjälper nu!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 242-43:

THORFINN: .... Could you die peacefully tonight?

THE SLAVE: Yes, provided I had time to pray first.

THORFINN: Does that give you peace?

THE SLAVE: Oh yes, lord.

THORFINN (rises and takes a goblet): I'll give you this if you pray for me.

THE SLAVE: That's too little.

THORFINN: I'll give you ten -- but if you say a word about it -- I'll kill you!

THE SLAVE: It wouldn't help even if you gave me a hundred. You should pray for yourself.

THORFINN: I can't! But I command you to!

THE SLAVE: I'll obey -- but you'll see that it doesn't help. (Prays:) Jesus Christ, have mercy on this poor sinner, who begs for grace!

THORFINN: That's a lie -- I never beg for anything!

THE SLAVE: Do you see now that it doesn't

This is a heroic figure in the romantic *Sturm und Drang* mould. It also looks forward to existentialism: not only does Thorfinn perceive himself as bearing his own sorrows (i.e., taking complete responsibility for his own actions and their consequences), but he is so perceived by others; as his wife imagines his drowning at sea after she has received a report that his ship went down in a storm, she considers that now, finally, his self-reliance must have deserted him: "Du ropar på hjälp, du starke man, som alltid halp dig själv...."<sup>5</sup> His self-reliance has not deserted him, however: bearing the skald's harp in one arm, he heroically swims to shore. The scene which the skald Orm<sup>6</sup> paints of this episode makes a significant identification of Thorfinn with Näckén, the evil spirit of the water:

-- I skullen ha sett honom, då han sam med min harpa i handen -- Henne hade han lovat hålla reda på; havstången hade snott sig i hår och skägg, så att man var frestad att tro, det vore necken själv -- I detsamma kom

help!

<sup>5</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 220: "You call for help, strong man, who always helped yourself ...."

<sup>6</sup> The name literally means "snake", perhaps an indication that Strindberg is already developing a view of the poet's function in society as agent provocateur!

en våg -- stor som ett hus -- -- 7

Näcken appears as a character in Strindberg's play *Kronbruden* (*The Virgin Bride*, 1901), where he represents the primitive, untamed, darker side of nature (including human nature); in that play he also longs for salvation.

Thorfinn is a precursor of Strindberg's post-Inferno heroes: refusing to allow Christ to suffer for him (through his rejection of and opposition to Christianity), he must suffer himself until, like the Magistrate in *Advent*, he is driven forth to the very foot of the Cross (Thorfinn dies with an acknowledgement of the new God on his lips). His suffering takes on a form which is also characteristic of later Strindberg heroes: loneliness. One who is completely self-reliant finds himself, in the end, completely alone. The loneliness itself becomes a symbol for the emptiness of his life. His wife hates him (presumably for having transplanted her from her home in Sweden to this bleak and ice-bound land) and his daughter fears him. The latter has become a Christian, despite her father's opposition to that faith, and Valgerd, although not told of this,

<sup>7</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 221:

-- you should have seen him, swimming with my harp in his hand -- he had promised to look after it; seaweed had twined itself in his hair and beard, so that one was tempted to think it was Näcken himself -- just then a wave came -- large as a house -- --

secretly knows of and approves her daughter's actions (just as she knows of and approves Gunlöd's continuing attachment to Gunnar, her childhood sweetheart): "När såg du en mor som icke visste sin dotters hemlighet?"<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Valgerd has been exposed to Christianity too, and although she has not yet gone so far as her daughter, she too is beginning to doubt the old ways and embrace the new faith. Valgerd has long been seeking revenge on her husband for what he has made her suffer (this is the earliest example in Strindberg's writings of the love-hate relationship that has come to be known as a Strindbergian marriage), but during the storm which wrecks his ship she sacrifices her revenge to the pagan gods in order to obtain his deliverance, and places a torch in the window to guide him to shore. When a gust of wind extinguishes the torch, she is shaken; she reveals that she has long only feigned belief in the old gods in order to appease her husband, and she gropes toward a faith in the new God, about Whom her knowledge is very sketchy:

(En väderil skakar luckan och släcker blosset. Valgerd far förskräckt upp och tänder blosset ånyo.) O! han förgås -- vad skall jag göra! Bedja? till vem? Odin? Njord? Ögir? Jag har anropat dem i fyra gånger tio år, men aldrig ha de svarat! Jag har blotat, men aldrig ha de hulptit. -- Du, Gud, vad Du än må heta -- Du mäktige, som låter solen gå upp och ned, Du väldige, som råder över vind och

<sup>8</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 217: "Have you ever seen a mother who didn't know her daughter's secret?"

vatten, till Dig vill jag bedja -- Dig vill  
jag offra min hämnd, om Du räddar honom!<sup>9</sup>

The final words of this prayer are more prophetic than she knows: she does become reconciled to her husband subsequent to his delivery from a watery death, but his dying words show that he has been delivered as well from his paganism. They are still strangers to each other, however: after he has been outlawed by the (Christian) Icelandic community, and is threatened with being burned alive in his house, she expresses her love for him through her willingness to share his death, and

<sup>9</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 220:

(A gust of wind rattles the window frame and extinguishes the torch. Valgerd, terrified, relights the torch.) Oh! he's dying -- what shall I do? Pray? to whom? Odin? Njord? Aegir?\* I have invoked them for four times ten years, but never have they answered! I have offered sacrifices, but never have they helped. -- You, God, whatever Your name is -- You powerful one, who cause the sun to rise and set, You mighty one, who rule over wind and water, to You will I pray -- to You will I offer up my revenge, if You deliver him!

\* Valgerd has chosen her nordic gods well: Odin (the All-Wise) was supreme god of the later Scandinavian pantheon and was, among other things, god of war and of the dead; Njord was the god of ships and protector of seafaring men, ruler of the winds and calmer of the seas; and Aegir was the god of the sea (Benét, I, 728; Davidson, 128-38).



at least to him she continues to feign a belief in the old religion:

Thorfinn! .... . jag har svurit följa dig i döden -- så är ju gammal sed -- Se här har jag rätt min gravhög (öppnar en lucka på golvet), här vill jag dö -- under dessa sotiga bjälkar, som varit vittnen till mina sorger -- tillsammans med dessa högbänkstolpar, som visade oss vägen hit -- vill jag gå upp i lågorna och med röken skall min ande stiga mot Gimle och få klarhet och frid!<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 245:

Thorfinn! .... . I've sworn to follow you into death -- that's the old way, as you know -- See, I've prepared my burial mound here (opens a trap in the floor); here will I die -- under these sooted beams, which have been witnesses to my sorrows -- together with these high-bench pillars,\* which showed us the way here -- I'll burn up in the flames and with the smoke my spirit shall rise towards Gimli\*\* and receive enlightenment and peace!

\* The high bench was the seat of honour in an Old Norse house. Centred on one wall, upon a dais, and immediately before the open fire, it was placed between two carved pillars, which extended from the top of the dais to the ceiling beam. In his opening stage directions, Strindberg tells us that these particular two pillars were carved with representations of the gods Odin and Thor (*Ibid.*, 203). Valgerd here indicates that they had once been erected on Thorfinn's ship.

\*\* Gimli was a golden-roofed building in Asgard (the realm of the gods) to which it was said that righteous men went after death (distinct from Valhalla, another hall in Asgard, which was the final destination of

Later, however, when Thorfinn has been given the honour of dying in combat rather than being burned alive (thus preventing Valgerd and Gunlöd from sharing his fate), Valgerd confesses to her daughter that she too believes in the new God, although she knows Him but imperfectly: "Jag hoppas på den Gud, som är kärleken."<sup>11</sup>

Like so many Strindberg heroes (and like those of the Icelandic sagas after whom he is patterned), Thorfinn is a man pursued by fate. In his case, fate manifests itself as the relentless roll of history, which leaves him behind. The notion is introduced by the skald Orm (Thorfinn's blood-brother) in a highly symbolic speech which makes it clear that the new age that is dawning in Scandinavia is the age of Christendom, and that Thorfinn, who rejects the new age, will share the fate of the old gods:

Jo, Thorfinn, jag skall tala! Känner du hur marken gungar under dig -- det betyder jordbävning! Hela världen bävar i dessa dagar, ty hon skall till att föda -- hon skall föda fram, under gruvliga smärtor, en härlig hjälte. Öppna dina ögon och se! Ser du hur österns folk kämpar med västerns? Det är älskogens första strid -- den nya makan darrar för den gamlas omfamningar, hon kämpar och lider -- men snart skall hon fröjdas -- och facklor skola tändas i tusendetal och hela jorden skall stråla av frid och glädje, ty han skall födas, den unge, den starke, den

those who fell in battle) (Davidson, 28).

<sup>11</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 247: "I hope in the God Who is love."

sköne drotten, som skall härska över alla folk -- vars spira heter kärlek och vars krona heter ljus -- och vars namn är den nya tiden! -- Thorfinn! minns du sagan om Thor hos Utgård Loke? Katten lyfte han högt så att trollen bleknade -- ur hornet drack han så djupt, att trollen bävade -- men när käringen fällde honom på knä -- Då skrattade trollen! Det var tiden som besegrade honom, och det är tiden du har kämpat mot och som slagit dig -- det är tidens herre -- det är Gud som krossat dig!<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 234:

Yes, Thorfinn, I will have my say! Do you feel the ground heaving beneath you -- that signifies an earthquake! The whole world is trembling in these times, for it is about to give birth -- it will give birth with terrible pains, to a glorious hero. Open your eyes and see! Do you see how the people of the east are striving with those of the west? That is love's first quarrel -- the new bride trembles at the embraces of the old man, she struggles and suffers -- but soon she will rejoice -- and torches will be lit in the thousands, and the whole world will be radiant with peace and joy, for he will be born: the young, the strong, the beautiful king, who will rule over all people -- whose sceptre is called love and whose crown is called light -- and whose name is the new age! -- Thorfinn! do you remember the story of Thor's visit to Utgard-Loki? He lifted the cat so high that the trolls grew pale -- he drank from the horn so deeply that the trolls trembled -- but when the old woman brought him to his knee -- then the trolls laughed!\* It was time that defeated him, and it's time that you have struggled against, and that's what has beaten you -- it's the lord of time -- it's God who has crushed you!

\* Utgard-Loki (literally, Outlying Loki) was a giant who lived somewhere east of Asgard. Thor visited him there, where he and his companions were subjected to several trials of strength, at which, to their amazement, they made a poor showing: Thor succeeded in rais-

If time has left Thorfinn behind, it has also left him completely alone. It is in his loneliness that the two symbolic patterns of the play -- the birth of a new age upon the death of the old, and the leading of a sinner to the Cross -- converge: as mentioned above, the loneliness caused by the march of time becomes the suffering that leads Thorfinn to God. The first pattern is elucidated in the speech of Orm just cited; the second is embodied in Thorfinn's long and moving soliloquy on the despair of solitude, as he traces his movement

ing only one paw of a great cat from the ground (but even this caused the spectators to blench), could not empty a drinking horn which he was given (although all were amazed that he succeeded in even lowering the level of the liquid therein), and was finally forced to drop to one knee in a wrestling match with an old and decrepit woman. Later, they learned that nothing involved in these tests had been what it had seemed to be: the cat had actually been Thor's arch-enemy, the Midgard Serpent; the tip of the drinking horn had rested in the ocean (which Thor had succeeded in lowering to ebb tide); and (Orm's point here) the crone had been none other than Old Age (i.e., time), which can overcome even the strongest (Davidson, 34-35 et passim).

from his former assured self-reliance to his present  
craving for meaning in his life:

Ensam! Ensam! Ensam! ...  
(Uppehåll.)

Jag minns, det var en höst,  
dagjämningsstormen gick med våld  
fram över Englands hav. Min drake krossades  
och jag blev ensam kastad på ett skär!  
Se'n blev det stillt. -- O! vilka långa dygn!  
Blott molnfri himmel över mig  
och ändlöst, djupblått hav omkring mig!  
Ej ljud av livfylld varelse!  
Ej måsen väckte mig med sina skrän!  
ej ens en kåre kom den lätta våg  
att skvalpa mot en sten.  
Det föreföll mig som jag själv var död;  
jag högljutt talade och skrek,  
men rösten skrämde mig  
och torkan band min tunga.  
Blott hjärtats jämna slag i bröstet  
mig minde att jag fanns!  
Men när en stund jag lyssnat till dess ljud  
jag snart ej mer det hörde.  
Då for jag upp av bävan  
och så var gång, tills jag i vanmakt föll.  
När då jag vaknade till slut -- jag hörde  
invid mig sakta slag lik hjärtats,  
jag hörde flåsande från mun som ej var min,  
och modet växte åter i min själ.  
Jag såg mig om,  
det var ett säldjur, som sig sökte vila;  
det såg på mig med ögon fuktiga,  
som om medlidande med mig dem fyllt.  
Nu var jag icke mer allena.  
Jag sträckte ut min hand att smeka  
dess sträva kropp; då flydde det  
och jag var dubbelt ensam.  
Nu står jag ock på skäret.  
Vad fruktar jag? Jo ensamheten!  
Vad är då ensamheten?  
Det är jag själv!  
Vem är jag då att mig jag rädes?  
Är jag ej Thorfinn jarl den starke,  
som böjde tusen viljor under sin?  
Som aldrig krävde vänskap eller älskog,  
men själv bar sina sorger!  
Nej! nej! jag är en annan!  
Och därför rädes Thorfinn starke  
för Thorfinn svage! --  
Vem stal min kraft? Vem slog mig?  
Männ' det var havet? Slog jag icke havet  
tre gånger tio resor, och det slog mig

blott en -- men då till döden.  
Det var då starkare. Det är en gud.  
Men vem slog havet så att still det låg  
då nyss det rasade! Vem? Vem? Vem?  
Det var den starkaste!  
Vem är då du, den starkaste?  
O, svara att jag må dig tro! -- -- --  
Han svarar ej! -- Allt är så tyst! --  
Nu hör jag åter hjärtats slag!  
O hjälp! hjälp! jag är så kall,  
jag fryser -- (Går till dörren och ropar:)  
Valgerd!<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 237-39:

Alone! Alone! Alone!...  
(Pause.)

I remember, it was autumn,  
and the equinoctial gale blew hard  
on the North Sea. My dragon ship was wrecked  
and I alone was thrown onto a skerry!  
Then it grew calm. -- Oh! what long days!  
Just the cloudless sky above me  
and endless deep-blue sea around!  
No sound of living creature!  
No gull awoke me with its cries!  
and not a breeze provoked the gentle wave  
to lap against a stone.  
It seemed to me that I myself was dead;  
I talked out loud and cried,  
but my voice frightened me  
and dryness bound my tongue.  
Only the steady heart-beat in my breast  
reminded me that I was still alive!  
But when I had been listening to its sound  
awhile,  
I soon no more could hear it,  
and I was seized with dread.  
This happened every time, until I senseless  
fell.

Then, when at last I woke -- I heard  
beside me gentle beating like a heart's;  
and panting from a mouth that was not mine,  
and courage grew again within my soul.  
I looked around:  
it was a seal, which sought a place to rest;  
it looked at me; its eyes were filled with  
tears,  
as if it felt compassion for my plight.  
No longer was I now alone.  
I then stretched forth my hand to pet  
its rugged body; but it ran away,  
and I was doubly lonesome.  
Now I am on that skerry once again.

The cold that Thorfinn feels is symbolic of his spiritual emptiness. It is also winter (according to Frye, the season of the disappeared hero: both Thorfinn and Gunnar are absent when the play opens), and in Iceland, which touches the Arctic Circle, darkness reigns. The darkness is also made a symbol of Thorfinn's spiritual state, as he commands a slave to remain with him, that he might not be alone:

What do I fear? Yes, loneliness!  
What, then, is loneliness?  
It is myself!  
Who am I then, that I should fear myself?  
Am I not Thorfinn Strong, the Earl  
who has bent thousands to his will?  
Who never asked for friendship or for love,  
but his sorrows bore himself!  
No! no! I'm someone else!  
And therefore Thorfinn Strong now fears  
Thorfinn the Weak! --  
Who stole my power? Who has defeated me?  
Perhaps it was the sea? Did I not beat the sea  
on thirty voyages, and it beat me  
just once -- but then, to death.  
It was the stronger, then. It is a god.  
But who subdued the sea so it lay calm  
when it had just been raging? Who? Who? Who?  
It was the Strongest!  
Who are you then, oh Strongest?  
Oh, answer, that I might believe in you! --  
He answers not! -- All is so silent! --  
Now I hear once more the beating of my heart!  
Oh, help! help! I am so cold,  
I'm freezing -- (Goes to the door and calls:)  
Valgerd!

... du skall stanna en stund här hos mig.  
Tänd bloss -- många bloss; här är så mörkt --  
och lägg ved på ärilen; jag fryser.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, Iceland itself is a symbol of Thorfinn's state: the land he has deliberately sought out as a haven is barren, hostile, and, above all, cold and dark. The point is made early in the play, as Valgerd gently berates Gunlöd for not yet having forgotten Sweden and Gunnar:

VALGERD: Du har haft tre vintrar att göra ditt avsked på.

GUNLÖD: Du sade rätt -- tre vintrar -- ty här blev aldrig sommar.

VALGERD: När drivsen smälter blir det vår!<sup>15</sup>

Gunlöd seems to think that by her mother's omen spring will never arrive, but there is indeed a time of hope and new life in store for her. Spring will come, and her sorrows, buried deep within her heart, will give birth to joy:

GUNLÖD: Jag skall slå bort sorgen, moder.

VALGERD: Nej, nej, göm henne som det dyra-  
ste du äger. Kornet får icke ligga ovan jord,  
om det skall bli ax och kärna. Du har en djup

<sup>14</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 240:

... you'll stay here with me awhile. Light  
torches -- a lot of torches; it's so dark  
here -- and put wood on the fire; I'm freez-  
ing.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 204:

VALGERD: You've had three winters to make  
your farewell.

GUNLÖD: You're right about that -- three  
winters -- for here it's never been summer.

VALGERD: When the pack ice melts it will be  
spring!



jord, om det skall bli ax och kärna. Du har en djup sorg. Hon skall bära stor frid och stor glädje.<sup>16</sup>

Spring comes, symbolically, with the arrival of Gunnar, who has been on a crusade to the Holy Land, and now comes seeking his beloved. His story, from the time he left Sweden on his crusade until the moment he shows up in Iceland, is told through a song which Gunlöd hears through the window as she is at prayer. His association with the spring (and thus with Gunlöd's future happiness) is established by the song's refrain: "Jag kommer väl åter när granen blommar."<sup>17</sup>

Although Gunlöd is deeply in love with Gunnar, she nevertheless gives him a cold reception: life with a father who has never shown her love, in a cold and barren land, has made her afraid to give herself to another; she has inherited some of her father's stubborn self-reliance. Gunnar soon discovers that if he is to win her, he must set about melting the pack-ice that has seized her heart:

GUNNAR (trycker henne i sin famn): Gunlöd!  
Gunlöd! har snön fallit så tätt, att minnet

<sup>16</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 204-05:

GUNLÖD: I'll shake off my sorrow, mother.  
VALGERD: No, no: bury it, as the dearest thing you possess. The seed must not lie on top of the earth if it is to become a plant and bear grain. You have a deep sorrow. It will bear great peace and great joy.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 208: "I'll surely come again when the spruce tree blooms."

frusit bort -- själva eldfjället därute kan  
ju gråta eld -- och du är kall som en snövind  
-- ....<sup>18</sup>

He has brought her a wreath of spruce and blue hepatica from the garden of her former home (where he now lives): the green of the spruce and the spring flowers are symbolic of hope (and the fulfillment of the song's refrain: the spruce tree flowers!), and the blue colour of the latter reminds Gunlöd of cloudless summer skies. He wants her to return to Sweden and marry him, and he promises her the joys of summer (Frye's season of the lover and the beloved), in contrast to the frozen life she now leads:

... följ mig från detta förfärliga land dit  
bort där vår barndom flydde, och lev så fri  
som fågeln bland blommor och solljus och  
värme -- ....<sup>19</sup>

It is significant that the song that relates Gunnar's past adventures describes him as having been away on his crusade "i somrarna trenne"<sup>20</sup>, whereas Gunlöd has

<sup>18</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 209:

GUNNAR (takes her in his arms): Gunlöd!  
Gunlöd! has the snow fallen so thickly that  
memory has died of the cold -- even the volcano out there can weep fire -- and you are cold as a winter wind -- ....

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 213:

... follow me away from this dreadful country  
to where we spent our childhood, and live as  
free as a bird among flowers and sunshine and  
warmth -- ....

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 208: "for three summers".

had three winters to forget him: his love has burned clearly during those three years, and he has been in the Holy Land (where Christ was physically born), which (at least by Scandinavian standards) never knows winter. One recalls Orm's portents of the new age: the lighting of thousands of torches so that the earth is radiant to greet a king crowned with light!

The ice-maiden does not melt easily, however; she resolves that she will not bend to Gunnar's will by going to where he awaits her on his ship: if he wants her, he will have to return for her. He does return, in the final moments of the play, as Thorfinn lies dying from his wounds. Before he dies, he gives his blessing on the marriage between these two whom he has tried so hard to keep apart. In this sense too, his death is symbolic: the death of (pagan) austerity of feeling and the birth of (Christian) love!

The despair of Thorfinn's loneliness has brought him at last to the foot of the Cross; that he finally cares for someone besides himself is demonstrated by his blessing of the two children, and that his soul as well as his heart has been converted is evident from his dying breath:

GUNLÖD (stiger upp; går med långsamma steg och sänkt huvud mot Gunnar, tar hans hand och leder honom till Thorfinn, där de falla på knä.

huvud): Gud! (Dör.)<sup>21</sup>

As if to make sure that the significance of Thorfinn's last word was not lost, Strindberg expanded the line (the last in the play) in the second edition to read: "Evige -- Danande -- Gud ... (Dör)."<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the play, the winter sky has been illuminated by the eerie Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis). As Thorfinn makes his last stand, these lights take on a vivid red colour, as of blood -- an effective theatrical device for conveying offstage slaughter -- and one is reminded of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (V, ii, 144-45): "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament! / One drop would save my soul, half a drop."<sup>23</sup> In this final battle, although the new age wins over the old, Thorfinn's soul is, indeed, saved.

When Gunnar appears, he bears two symbols besides the wreath of greenery and blue spring flowers. One is a cross which he wears on his arm: token that he has

<sup>21</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 252:

GUNLÖD (rises; goes slowly and with bowed head toward Gunnar, takes his hand, and leads him to Thorfinn, before whom they fall to their knees.)

THORFINN (places a hand on each of their heads): God! (Dies.)

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 338: "Eternal -- Creating -- God ... (Dies.)"

<sup>23</sup> I am not aware of any evidence that Strindberg knew Marlowe's play, but it is possible that he intended the symbolism, without being aware that it had been used before.

visited the Holy Sepulchre, it is also a visible reminder of the choice which Gunlöd must make: the choice between allegiance to a pagan father who appears not to love her and a Christian husband who does. The power struggle which goes on between Gunnar and Gunlöd despite their love for each other is symbolized in the heraldic device which adorns his shield and dragon ship: a tethered silver falcon. Gunnar himself explains its significance, when he expresses his confidence that Gunlöd will come to him and will return to Sweden with him:

GUNNAR: Vill du veta vad silverfalken med bandet betyder, det är den vilda flickan som jag skall tämja.

GUNLÖD: Du! -- Gå innan jag hatar dig! -- Mig har ännu ingen böjt.

GUNNAR: Vilda blod, än sjuder det av vikingaelden, men han skall slockna. Gunlöd, ett dygn väntar jag dig, du skall komma, mild som duvan, när hon söker skydd, fastän du nu likt falken vill flyga över molnen. -- Jag håller ännu i bandet -- det är din kärlek -- och honom kan du ej slita.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 216:

GUNNAR: If you want to know what the tethered silver falcon means, it's the wild girl I'm going to tame.

GUNLÖD: You! -- Go, before I hate you! -- Nobody has made me bend yet!

GUNNAR: You have wild blood, still seething with Viking fire, but it will grow still. Gunlöd, I'll wait one day for you; and you'll come, gentle as a dove seeking refuge, even though now, like the falcon, you want to fly beyond the clouds. -- I still hold the tether -- that's your love -- and you can never break it. ....

He has chosen his heraldic device well: Ferguson tells us (18) that a tamed falcon is a traditional symbol for a pagan who has converted to Christianity. It is perhaps a token of Gunnar's love that his arms represent not himself but the girl he hopes to marry. The colour of the tethered falcon, silver, is traditionally associated with the moon (hence night, and comparative coldness): Gunlöd's present state, as opposed to living free as a bird in sunshine and warmth if she marries him. This association of the silver falcon with night (although falcons are diurnal birds) is perhaps the reason Valgerd (not realizing that Gunlöd is in fact referring to the returning Gunnar) thinks it is a bad omen, near the end of the play:

VALGERD: Tala -- vad ser du?  
GUNLÖD (med livlig glädje): Silverfalken!  
VALGERD: Vad såg du?  
GUNLÖD: Jag såg en falk!  
VALGERD: Det betyder något illa!<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, as the representative of the new age, Gunnar does embody an omen when he reappears: the death of the old, represented by Thorfinn.

The transition between the old age and the new (between paganism and Christianity) is made by Thorfinn

<sup>25</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 249:

VALGERD: Speak -- what do you see?  
GUNLÖD (with animated joy): The silver falcon!  
VALGERD: What did you see?  
GUNLÖD: I saw a falcon!  
VALGERD: That forebodes something bad!

in his death and by Gunlöd in her life, as she first converts to the new religion, and then leaves her pagan past in order to join a Christian husband in a Christian land. This transition is difficult for her as well. Her own account (to Gunnar) of her conversion reveals that she too has been driven by suffering and loneliness to the foot of the Cross. Her early love for her father was apparently never reciprocated, and was betrayed when he wrenched her from her happy childhood; her mother has become hardened by her own sorrows, and consumed with a desire for revenge on her husband; and the young man whom she loved had disappeared from her life, perhaps forever. She did not even possess Thorfinn's self-reliance:

Först trodde jag på min far -- han var så stark -- se'n trodde jag på min mor -- hon var så god -- sist trodde jag på dig -- du var så stark och så god och -- så skön; och när du for bort -- stod jag så ensam -- mig själv kunde jag aldrig tro på -- jag var så svag. Då mindes jag din Gud, som du så ofta bett mig älska -- och jag bad till honom.<sup>26</sup>

Gunlöd's acceptance of the new faith against the wishes of her family has apparently restored her self-

<sup>26</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 210-11:

First I believed in my father -- he was so strong -- then I believed in my mother -- she was so good -- finally I believed in you -- you were so strong and so good and -- so beautiful; and when you went away -- I was all alone -- I never could believe in myself -- I was so weak. Then I remembered your God, whom you so often bade me love -- and I prayed to Him.

esteem, for as we have seen above, her pride becomes a major stumbling block to happiness as Gunnar's wife: having freed herself from the dominance of her father, she is now reluctant to accept the dominance of a husband. Very often in Strindberg, a character who feels stifled by a stronger personality experiences difficulty in breathing; the symbol first appears here, just after Gunlöd has sent Gunnar away and has resolved that she will not go with him unless he returns for her. The recent threat to her personality makes her feel that she must get outside to breathe; the ambivalence of her feelings makes her want to walk where she can see Gunnar's ship: "O, låt mig gå ut -- på fjället -- till stranden -- här är så kvavt!"<sup>27</sup>

She has boasted that nobody has been able to bend her, but after Gunnar has gone she regrets her inability to yield to another, and prays to have it removed: "Gud! Gud! Böj mitt hårda sinne...."<sup>28</sup> Valgerd draws the parallel between her and her father during Thorfinn's last stand, echoing the words Gunlöd has applied to herself. Gunlöd's reply expresses confidence in the God who destroys that love might flourish:

VALGERD: Den mannen böjer ingen.  
GUNLÖD: Gud gör det!

<sup>27</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 218: "Oh, let me go outside -- onto the mountain -- to the shore -- it's so close in here!"

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 217: "God! God! Bend my hard will...."



VALGERD: Hans hårdhet är stor.  
GUNLÖD: Guds nåd är större!<sup>29</sup>

Thorfinn is bent to God's will, and dies reconciled to God and to his family. Gunlöd's hardness is also bent in the final moments of the play, as she goes to Gunnar (like a dove seeking refuge), takes his hand, and seeks her father's blessing. The victory of the God who is love is thus complete over father, mother, and daughter.

Despite its short initial run and indifferent-to-hostile reception, "Den fredlöse" caught the attention of the king, Karl XV (reigned 1859-72), who was so impressed with it that he granted the young author a scholarship from his personal funds. It has been seldom acted since then, but the few productions include one mounted by Max Reinhardt in 1902. It is the thematic and symbolic ancestor of Strindberg's greatest plays.

<sup>29</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 247:

VALGERD: Nobody can make that man bend.  
GUNLÖD: God is doing it!  
VALGERD: His hardness is great.  
GUNLÖD: God's grace is greater!

## Chapter 5

## Mäster Olof

Strindberg's first great success as a dramatist came with *Mäster Olof*<sup>1</sup> (Master Olof, 1872), although it took almost ten years to reach the stage. Its symbolism is in the main straightforward and sparingly used, in contrast to that of many of the later history plays, but one can recognize many types of symbolism which were to become central to Strindberg's work.

In the "low relief" scene (patterned after Shakespeare) which opens Act II, for instance, plant symbolism is used to underline the state of Swedish society at the time (Olaus Petri, the "Swedish Luther", lived 1493-1552; the actions treated in the play unfolded from the 1520s to 1540s), and to reinforce the atmosphere of desire for change:

SMÅLÄNNINGEN: ... skulle vi bönder ligga för döden av svält och knäppa oss ett så'nt där djur, ja då slapp vi dö av svält -- ty de hängde oss -- icke i en ek, Gud bevare oss, det vore skam för det kungliga trädet -- nej i en furu! Ser ni, furan hon är inte född med krona hon och därför är hon inte kunglig ... och därför står det så här i visan:

"Och böndren dem hängde vi opp  
i furornas högsta topp --"  
Det står inte krona -- hör ni det.

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, X, 5-49.

TYSKEN: Men furan sticker upp huvut ändå,  
och ä' rak i ryggen!<sup>2</sup>

A couple of remarks later comes the punch-line, as it were:

SMÅLÄNNINGEN: Ser ni -- om man skulle räkna  
ihop furorna i Smålen, tror jag allt de voro  
flera än ekarna!<sup>3</sup>

Not only is the Swedish church ripe for change, but so also is the entire social system, with its inequalities and injustices. Mäster Olof leads the religious reformation, but in the end recants his part in revolution.

The social firebrand in the play is the radical revolutionary Gert Bokpräntare (literally, Book-printer). Another effective use of plant symbolism comes at the end of the play, when he admits that per-

<sup>2</sup> Skrifter, X, 15:

THE MAN FROM SMÅLAND:\* .... ... if we farmers were starving to death and pinched an animal like that, yes, we'd escape dying of starvation then -- for they'd hang us -- not from an oak, God protect us; that'd be a dishonour to the royal tree -- no, from a pine! You see, the pine, it wasn't born with a crown, it wasn't, and so it isn't royal ... and that's why the song goes: "And the peasants, we hanged them all up / In the pine tree's loftiest top --" It doesn't say crown, you notice.

THE GERMAN: But the pine still holds its head up and keeps its back straight!

\* Småland is a province in southeast Sweden.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 16:

THE MAN FROM SMÅLAND: Look here -- if you counted all the pines in Småland, I do believe there'd be more of them than oaks!

haps Sweden was not yet ready for the sweeping social changes towards which he and Olof had been working, but looks forward to a time, albeit in the distant future, when their labours will bear fruit:

Vår skörd var ej mogen. Det skall falla mycket snö om höstsäden skall gå, ja, sekler skola förgå innan man får se ens en brodd!<sup>4</sup>

The seeds of social reform planted during the Reformation will sprout three centuries later, in the labour unrest of the late nineteenth century!

The forces working toward religious and social change are symbolized by water: the "tide of change". Olof finds himself trying not so much to stem the tide, for that would be impossible, but to control and direct it, to harness its energy rather than allowing it to rage indiscriminately:

OLOF: Jag känner hur strömmen drar; ännu har jag taget kvar i dammluckan, men släpper jag, då drar strömmen mig med.

LARS: Släpp du, de komma nog som hålla igen!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Skrifter, X, 48 (V, Tableau):

Our crop was not ripe. Much snow will fall before the autumn planting comes up. Yes, centuries will pass before even a sprout is seen!

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 8 (I):

OLOF: I feel the pull of the current; I still have hold of the flood-gate, but if I let go, I'll be carried along by the current too.

LARS:\* Let go: those who will hold it back again will come soon enough!

\* Laurentius Petri, Olof's brother.

By Act II, when he has accomplished what he first set out to do and sees that it is not enough, he decides that the tide of change cannot be restrained at all:

GERT: Du har gått i barndrömmar tills i dag!

OLOF: Jag känner det! Nu kommer floden! Nu må han komma! Ve dem och oss!<sup>6</sup>

He has fulfilled Lars' prediction about him: "... du skall in i virveln, även om du skall förgås."<sup>7</sup>

Another, though related, symbol of the irresistible forces of change is the storm. It first appears when Olof, troubled by Lars' urgings that he lead the new movement, remarks: "Vilka stormar du blåst upp i min själ.... ... varför skakas icke träden, varför mörknar icke himmelen!"<sup>8</sup> The symbol is given its fullest expression, however, by Gert:

.... ... det gnyr ... i luften och det susar och det ropar: "Tänk!" .... Det var luften som ropade, det var ingen som ropade; men rösten stiger och en stormvind far fram och han går över Alperna och han ryter över Fichtelgebirge och han väcker upp Österhavet och

<sup>6</sup> Skrifter, X, 37 (III, Tableau):

GERT: You've been living in childish dreams until today!

OLOF: I know! Now comes the flood! Now may it come! Woe to them and to us!

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 8 (I): "... you'll enter the whirlpool, even if you perish."

<sup>8</sup> Idem.: "What storms you've raised in my soul.... ... why aren't the trees shaken, why doesn't the sky grow dark!"

det ger eko mot stränderna och tusendubblat  
går ropet över världen: frihet! frihet!<sup>9</sup>

The play opens in the spring (at Pentecost, when the Disciples received the Holy Spirit), with Olof still uncommitted to leading the Reformation and with all things at peace: "... jag satt nyss och lekte i trädens skugga och det var pingstafton, och det var vår och det var frid."<sup>10</sup> At the end of the play, Gert looks forward to another spring, when the seeds of reform they have sown will sprout, and the discontent of their age will resolve itself once again into peace.

Colour symbolism is limited, but effective. Particular use is made of the colour red, the colour of love and of blood. Three times special lighting effects

<sup>9</sup> Skrifter, X, 11 (I):

.... ... there's a roaring in the air, and it sighs and it cries: "Think!" .... It was the air that cried, it was no man who cried; but the voice mounts, and a storm wind blows and carries it over the Alps, and it rages over the Fichtelgebirge Mountains,\* and it whips up the Baltic and echoes from the shores, and, multiplied a thousandfold, the cry goes out over the world: "Freedom! Freedom!"

\* The Fichtelgebirge Mountains are a range of wooded mountains in northeast Bavaria (to the east of Bayreuth).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 8 (I):

... just now I was sitting and playing in the shade of the trees, and it was Pentecost Eve, and it was spring, and it was peaceful.

are called for, all requiring the stage to be bathed in red. The first comes as Olof realizes the inevitability of his mission (like Christ, he cannot refuse the cup which is offered him, bitter though it be) and sees a vision in the sunset:

.... ... jag ser en ängel som kommer emot mig  
med en kalk; hon går på aftonskyn därborta,  
blodröd är hennes stig, och hon har ett kors  
i handen.<sup>11</sup>

The second is the rising sun which fills with the red light of love the room in which Olof's mother dies:

(Solen har börjat stiga och lyser med  
rödaktigt sken på gardinerna.)  
OLOF (springer upp): Morgonsol, du bleker  
mina ljus! Du är kärleksfullare än jag!<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the moon rises, and it too glows red, not as in the previous instance, with the colour of love, but, as in the first, with that of blood:

(Månen har gått upp röd och ett rött sken  
faller över scenen. Folket förskräckes.)

<sup>11</sup> Skrifter, X, 8 (I):

.... ... I see an angel coming towards me  
with a chalice; she is walking on the evening  
sky out there, her steps are blood-red, and  
she has a cross in her hand.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 40 (IV):

(The sun has begun to rise and lights up  
the curtains with a reddish glow.)  
OLOF (jumps up): Morning sun, you make my  
candles pale! You are more loving than I!

OLOF (stiger upp på en grav): Himlen gråter  
blod över edra synder och eder avgudadyr-  
kan....<sup>13</sup>

Olof, then, is associated with the red of blood, the tearing down of the established religious order, rather than with love. That red symbolizes both blood and love, both the end (sunset) and the beginning (sunrise), indicates a basic dichotomy in Olof's own character: the man of peace who leads a great social upheaval.

In addition to these natural manifestations of colour, the Prostitute appears dressed (like the Plague Girl in *Folkungasagan*, 1899, and Hildur Horgabrud in *Hövdingaminnen: Memories of Leaders*, 1905, in the two basic colours of the alchemic scale, red and black, representing the physical side of human nature rather than the spiritual (white and gold). Black, usually the colour of death (and hence of mourning) and elemental chaos, is given a most unusual meaning (found nowhere else in Strindberg) in this play, where it is the colour of innocence (generally symbolized by white):

Kom fram, broder Mårten, du ljusets  
ängel, som klätt dig i oskuldens svarta klä-

<sup>13</sup> *Skrifter*, X, 44 (V):

(A red moon has risen, and a red glow suffuses the stage. The people are frightened.)

OLOF (steps up onto a grave): Heaven weeps blood over your sins and your idolatry....



der och rakat ditt hår för att ingen skall  
kunna se huru du grånat i synd!<sup>14</sup>

The reference is to the black habit of a monk, innocent because celibate, but Mårten wears the habit unworthily, as symbolized by the greying of his hair (which was presumably once also black). The symbolic meaning Strindberg here assigns to black is not really new, then (monk's habits are black because of the primary symbolism of the colour), but rather a secondary meaning derived from association (black = death to the world = innocence).

The above passage identifies Mårten as Satan (Lucifer, the light-bearer, the angel of light: see 2 Corinthians 11:14-15), and the identification is perhaps a just one: Mårten is not only an unworthy monk but a seller of indulgences. More important, however, is the association of Gert with Satan. This is an association which Gert, the social and political agitator, first makes himself:

Jag heter den förkastade ängelen, som tiotusen gånger skall gå igen, jag heter befriaren som kom för tidigt, jag heter satan, därför att jag älskade er högre än mitt liv, jag har

<sup>14</sup> *Skrifter*, X, 17 (II):

Come forward, Brother Mårten, you angel of light who has dressed himself in the black clothing of innocence and shaved your hair so nobody would be able to see how you have grown grey in sin!

hetat Luther, jag har hetat Huss, nu heter jag Anabaptista!<sup>15</sup>

This would be little more than an account of the name-calling of those opposed to reform were it not for two considerations: Gert Bokpräntare is not a historical figure, but was invented by Strindberg as a symbol of those forces of change which flourished during the Reformation and survived even Mäster Olof's eventual compromise with authority; and Gert himself strengthens the association he has just drawn with a clear biblical allusion to the Temptation of Christ, casting himself in the rôle of Satan to Olof's Christ: "... jag vill föra dig på ett högt berg och du skall därifrån skåda ut över världen."<sup>16</sup> Olof himself also makes reference to this association of Gert with Satan: "Säg ut, Gert, du ser ut som satan i detta ögonblick!"<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Skrifter*, X, 10 (I):

I am called\* the outcast angel, who shall return ten thousand times; I am called the deliverer who came too early; I am called Satan, because I loved you more than my life; I have been called Luther; I have been called Huss; now I am called Anabaptist!

\* i.e., in the sense of "my name is".

<sup>16</sup> *Idem.*: "... I want to lead you up a high mountain, and from there you will look out over the word." (See Matthew 4:8-11; Luke 4:5-8.)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 (I): "Speak out, Gert; you look like Satan just now."

This identification is complemented by that of Olof with Christ, both in the allusions to Gethsemene and the Temptation already cited, and in his reenactment of the biblical story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11):

Kom fram den som är ren och kasta första stenen! .... Kvinna! Stig upp! Man har frikämt dig! Gå! och synda icke härefter....<sup>18</sup>

That Gert is identified with Satan, then, is not to be interpreted as a criticism of the Swedish Reformation, since Olof was the leader of that Reformation. What is implied, rather, is that in his relation to Olof, the man of high ideals, Gert plays the rôle of tempter, and that not all of the forces which converged to bring about the Reformation were motivated by religious considerations. Furthermore, as the Epilogue ("Efterspelet", 1877) to the verse version of the play makes clear, Strindberg's conceptions of God, Christ, and Satan, were highly unorthodox at the time!

The play successfully examines the various forces at work in the Reformation, with more sympathetic treatment given to those which strove towards social equality and justice: after Olof recants his rôle in the conspiracy to overthrow Gustav Vasa (who embodies

<sup>18</sup> Skrifter, X, 17-18 (II):

Let him who is without sin come forward and cast the first stone! .... Woman! Stand up! You have been acquitted! Go! and sin no more....

the political motivations of the Reformation), Gert emerges as the true hero of the action. If one concentrates on the character of Olof, however, the theme of the play can be seen as the ephemeral and subjective nature of truth: an attitude that was eventually to become central in Strindberg's work, developing into his regarding all earthly experience as illusion.

When all his efforts to get *Mäster Olof* produced failed, Strindberg decided to rework the play, taking into account many of the criticisms which had been levelled against it. The result was a shortened version, completed in 1874, which has become known (for reasons which will become clear below) as *Mäster Olof: mellandramat* (*Master Olof: the Intermediate Play*). I have not seen this version, but it is summarized, with extracts, in *Samlade skrifter* (II, 339-53) and discussed in Ollén (35-36). Much more pessimistic in outlook, if more tightly constructed, than the original version, it lacks its imagery and energy (Ollén says it is "like flat champagne"). The characters are more one-sided, with Olof's losing much of his vigour and Gert's being reduced to a madman, so that it is more a drama of ideas than of individuals. Strindberg had no success in getting this version produced either.

He did not give up, however, and in 1876 he had rewritten the play yet again, this time as a verse

drama.<sup>19</sup> Like the intermediate version, the verse play is about two-thirds the length of the prose version and lacks its vibrant energy. Nevertheless, it contains many fine lyrical passages, and indeed has been performed often. The main differences which affect the symbolic structure of the play are that the rôle of Gert has been severely reduced, so that he no longer emerges in the final act as the true heroic figure of the play; and that of Gustav Vasa has been entirely eliminated, with the result that the verse version concentrates steadily on Olof as a man of ideas who sacrifices everything that is most dear to him (his relationships with his mother and his wife) but is finally unwilling to sacrifice also his life. The verse version, then, emphasizes an element also present in the prose version: the illusory and evasive nature of truth. The last speech in the play, when Olof has been accused of apostasy by one of his former students, anticipates the plays of Strindberg's last decade, with its vision of life as a voyage in search of truth (i.e., a pilgrimage), but one which will not reach its goal on earth:

Och nu jag vinkar mitt: lycka på färden,  
 åt djärve seglarn, som ej vill lyss  
 till honom som förliste där ute nyss!  
 Styr högt mot vinden, rätt ut på fjärden,  
 dit bort mot målet, dit du vill så gärna:  
 du faller dock av som vi gjorde alla,

<sup>19</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, II, 185-306.

om ock ditt märke du tar på en stjärna,  
ty himlens stjärnor ju också falla!<sup>20</sup>

The point is made earlier by Bishop Brask, after parliament has legalized the Reformation (even if not as Olof wished: the church is now controlled by the state, but doctrinal changes must await the King's discretion): he sends a letter to Olof, congratulating him and warning him of what will follow:

"Du har segrat," skriver han. "Stanna här och var nöjd med vad du fått uträtta! Jag var född att bli slagen, du att segra; men efter dig kommer ett släkte, som skall nederslå ditt verk, och vad du höll för sanning skall då bli lögn och lika många martyrer skola låta korsfästa sig för den nya sanningen, men alltid skall en Pilatus stå bredvid och fråga sin eviga, obesvarade fråga: Vad är sanning?"<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Samlade skrifter, II, 305-06 (V, ix):

Now "Bon voyage!" is what I say  
to the bold sailor who pays no care  
to him who has just foundered out there!  
Sail high into the wind, straight out in the  
bay,  
away toward your goal: be it near or far,\*  
you will still go astray as we did, all,  
even if you set your course by a star,  
for, you know, the stars of heaven also fall!

\* So translated in order to retain the rhyme scheme:  
the second phrase of this line is literally "... which  
you so earnestly wish to attain...."

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 260-61 (III, iv):

"You have won;" he writes, "stop now, and be content with what you have been able to achieve! I was born to be defeated, you to win; but after you will come a breed who will tear down your work, and what you held for truth will be lies to them, and just as many martyrs will allow themselves to be crucified

Indeed, in this version of the play Olof has been bereft of his earlier identification with Christ; no more an idealistic hero, he is cast into the rôle of Pilate: the man of heavy responsibilities who can find no guidance in his decisions and consequently is filled with self-doubt. This identification of Olof with Pilate is emphasized by his unwillingness either to assume responsibility for the consequences of his actions or to oppose a deed which would further his ideals through violence, when Gert reveals to him the conspiracy to assassinate Gustav Vasa:

Jag tror, vid Gud, att denna tid är från förståndet! Jorden får icke stå stilla sedan den där stjärnsiaren sett att hon går omkring solen! Och vi, som trodde att det var tvärtom! Vad skall man tro? Den ene säger: här är Guds rike, den andre säger: där är det! Alla säga att de följa andens röst i sina hjärtan, och den ena anden säger svart och den andra vitt! Hur många andar finns det då?

Nåväl, jag skall vila mig vid vägkanten och låta världen gå några fjät! Skall hon ramla, så ramlar hon min vilja förutan!

Rulla din bana, gamla jord -- jag tvär mina händer och ser på!<sup>22</sup>

—  
for the new truth; but there will always be a Pilate standing by, asking his eternal, unanswered question: 'What is truth?'"\*

\* John 18:38.

<sup>22</sup> Samlade skrifter, II, 285-86 (IV, vii):

I believe, by God, that our age has lost all reason! The earth no longer has leave to stand still since that star-gazer observed that it goes around the sun! And we, who thought it was the other way round! What's a man to believe? One man says the kingdom of God is here, another says it's there! Everyone says he follows the voice of the Spirit

Again the symbol of the wanderer or pilgrim, again the sentiment that earthly wisdom is illusion, and again world-weariness, which in Strindberg himself will eventually lead to a rebirth of faith. This is quite a different Mäster Olof than the young firebrand of the prose version!

In 1877, with Mäster Olof still unproduced (in any version), Strindberg, still grappling with the "undramatic" ending (the spirit of the Reformation subjects himself to the will of the King) wrote an Epilogue ("Efterspel")<sup>23</sup> to the verse version, which restates, in symbolic form, the central idea of the play: the impossibility of absolute certainty in this world. Set on a spring evening some years after the events with which the play closes, it depicts Mäster Olof, now grown fat and comfortable, with his two young sons, as they watch a play outside the city wall.

The play-within-a-play is called "De Creatione et Sententia vera Mundi", or "Ett stort samtal om Världens

in his heart, and one spirit says black and another says white! How many spirits are there, anyway?

Very well, I'll rest by the side of the road and let the world take a few steps on its own. If it falls on its face, it does so independent of my will!

Roll on, old earth -- I wash my hands and watch!

<sup>23</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, II, 307-19.



skapelse och dess rätta mening" ("A Great Dialogue on the Creation of the World and Its True Meaning"), supposedly translated from a German original of 1542. It challenges our perception of the truth by standing the Judeo-Christian creation story on its head. There are four characters:

... DEN EVIGE (osynlig); GUD eller Den Onda makten och LUCIFER, ordagrant Ljusbringaren eller Den Goda makten, samt MICHAEL eller den ONDA ÄNGELEN.<sup>24</sup>

Of these, the Eternal never appears; he is unknown and unknowable, and wishes to remain that way: God says that he makes an appearance (in Heaven!) only once every thousand years! The Evil Power is the being that humans know as God, and it is he, indeed, who creates the earth, but in a fit of boredom and as a bad joke:

... av intet skall hon bliva till, och till intet skall hon bliva en gång i tiden; men de som i henne leva skola tro sig vara Gudar som vi, vår glädje skall varda att se huru de avlas och yvas. Därskapens värld skall hon ock därför nämnas.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Samlade skrifter, II, 312-13 (sc. iii):

... THE ETERNAL (invisible); GOD, or the Evil Power; LUCIFER (literally the Light-Bringer), or the Good Power; and MICHAEL, or the EVIL ANGEL.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 313-14 (The Play, Act I):

... it will be created out of nothing, and will one day return to nothing, but those who dwell in it will believe themselves Gods like us; our sport will be to watch them multiply and give themselves airs. And therefore it will be called the world of folly.

It is Lucifer who takes pity on mankind, who are thus condemned to lives of suffering and depravity; he persuades Adam and Eve to eat of the tree, not out of malice, but in order to allow them to escape from the world of vain illusion in which they have been placed:

Varje dag I äten av detta träd skolen I bliva  
vetande vad gott och ont är och I skolen då  
se, att livet är ett ont, att I icke ären  
gudar, att den Onde slagit er med dårskap,  
att I leven blott till gudarnas förströelse.  
Äten därför och I ägen befrielsens gåva --  
döden!<sup>26</sup>

To counterbalance this great gift, God endows man with life's greatest curse, love (!), so he will reproduce himself before he dies. Lucifer, now bound like Prometheus, sends the Flood, that all of mankind might be liberated from life at once, but again God outsmarts him, by rescuing "ett par av de minst vetande, som aldrig skola komma till sanningen",<sup>27</sup> that the race might continue. To counter Lucifer's gifts of war, pestilence, hunger, storm, and fire, through all of which man might win deliverance, God endows him with

<sup>26</sup> Samlade skrifter, II, 315 (The Play, II):

Every day you eat of this tree, you will gain knowledge of what good and evil are, and you will come to see that life is an evil, that you are not gods, that the Evil One has stricken you with madness, that you live only to divert the gods. Eat, therefore, and take possession of the gift of deliverance: death!

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 317 (The Play, V): "... a couple of the least knowledgeable, who would never arrive at the truth!"

love of life, so that he does not wish to take advantage of them, or will struggle against them. Finally, Lucifer sends his son "... att frälsa människorna och genom sin död borttaga dödens förskräckelse och lära dem dö!"<sup>28</sup> Some say that he (the son) is God, others that he is possessed by the devil. When Michael informs God that by "the devil" they mean Lucifer, the latter replies "Ljusbringaren! Ännu veta de intet, dårarna!"<sup>29</sup> And here the play ends.

This is a perverse view of the creation myth, but it serves its purpose: to demonstrate that it is possible to view things in another light than what is accepted as truth, that, in fact, all of history might be based on a lie, that reality might be the exact opposite of what we take it to be!

The Epilogue returns to the framing action, with protests from the audience that there was no reconciliation at the end of the play. As he is later to do in *Midsommar* (*Midsummer*, 1901), Strindberg uses the device of a play-within-a-play to speak directly to his own (still, alas! only hypothetical) audience:

RÖST II: I skall ge oss försoning! Vad är det för ett spel som inte har en försoning!

<sup>28</sup> Samlade skrifter, II, 318 (*The Play*, VI): "... to save men and through his own death to remove the fear of death, teaching them to die!"

<sup>29</sup> *Idem.*: "The bringer of light! They still know nothing, the fools!"

ANFÖRAREN: Säg åt författaren; jag har icke gjort stycket!<sup>30</sup>

If we substitute resolution for reconciliation, and history for author, we see Strindberg's perception of the problem with the ending of the play (a hero who does not end heroically), and his unanswerable defence: the historical playwright is constrained by the facts of history!

Ironically, it was the prose version of *Mäster Olof* which eventually first saw production, in 1881, after *Röda rummet* (*The Red Room*, 1879) and *Gillet's hemlighet* (*The Secret of the Guild*, 1880) had prepared the way. This, and the fact that the production was a great success, demonstrated fully that the problem was not with the play, as Strindberg had been led to believe, but with the audience, which was not yet ready for a play which departed so markedly from established theatrical traditions. The verse version did not première until 1890, but it was also a success. Both versions have become mainstays of the Swedish repertory. Unfortunately, neither is well known outside Scandinavia.

<sup>30</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, II, 319 (sc. iv):

VOICE II: Give us a reconciliation! What kind of a play is it that has no reconciliation!

THE TROUPE LEADER: Tell that to the author; I didn't write the piece!

## Chapter 6

## Anno fyrtioåtta

Together with another lost play, *Gnat* (*Nagging*, 1873), about which we know only that it was a two-act comedy, Strindberg broke the tension of his attempts to get *Mäster Olof* staged with *Anno fyrtioåtta: lustspel i fyra akter*<sup>1</sup> (*Anno Forty-Eight: Comedy in Four Acts*, 1875). The play is execrable, Strindberg's attempt to write a French farce with political overtones in a Stockholm setting. The genre does not suit him, and the play is filled with a multiplicity of characters whose endless comings and goings lead nowhere. Some of the characters, however, eventually found their way into *Röda rummet* to great effect, so the exercise was not entirely wasted.

The play is devoid of interest from the point of view of symbolism, except perhaps for one brief passage which reflects the young Strindberg's view of art as a holy flame burning bright within the artist. The passage echoes similar ones in *Fritänkaren*, and "*I Rom*", and *Han och Hon* (*He and She*, 1875-76). Although put in the mouth of the untalented dilettante Lundqvist, the sentiment is no doubt Strindberg's own:

Jag skall utmärka mig på ett eller annat sätt; jag skall bli konstnär, herre! Jag känner den gudomliga lågan brinna i mitt

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, I, 253-328.

sargade bröst, den skall antingen slå ut i blom eller den skall kväva mig!<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately for Strindberg's career and for the history of modern drama, Anno fyrtioåtta was an experiment that was not repeated: the ongoing project of the period, *Mäster Olof*, eventually proved itself one of Strindberg's masterpieces, and when he next turned his hand to drama, in 1879-80, it was with another play based upon a historical theme, also with religious overtones, *Gillets hemlighet*.

<sup>2</sup> Samlade skrifter, I, 281-82:

I'll distinguish myself in one way or another; I'll become an artist, master! I feel the divine flame burning within my wounded breast; it will either burst into flower or smother me!

## Chapter 7

## Han och Hon

*Han och Hon: en själs utvecklingshistoria, 1875-76*<sup>1</sup> (He and She: The Story of the Development of a Soul, 1875-76) is a collection of letters, mainly between Strindberg and his first wife, Siri von Essen-Strindberg, in the two years preceding their marriage. It begins just after their first meeting, when she was married to Baron Carl Gustav Wrangel, and ends just after her divorce from him to marry Strindberg.

The autobiographical novel *Tjänstekvinnans son* (The Son of the Bondswoman, 1886) deals with the whole of Strindberg's life up to the time, with one notable exception: there is nothing in it about his first marriage, then approaching its end (Strindberg and Siri von Essen were legally separated March 24, 1891, and the divorce was finalized the following year). To help fill this gap, Strindberg collected these letters together and suggested their publication. When his publisher declined on the grounds of delicacy, Strindberg planned another autobiographical novel, dealing with the marriage. By that time, however, the marriage had begun to turn sour, and the novel, *Le plaidoyer d'un fou* (A Madman's Defence, 1887) was written in French,

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 5-138.

with no plans for Swedish publication. A couple of translations into Swedish were published during Strindberg's lifetime, but he never sanctioned these, and shortly after his death, *Han och Hon* was published, as he had wished.

The work is interesting chiefly for its picture of the tempestuous emotional life of the young Strindberg. But it has a further interest: many of the symbols that inform his dramatic and other fictional works appear here in a particularly forceful form.

It is a strange collection of documents: besides letters exchanged between Siri and Strindberg, there are letters to and from Siri's husband, her mother (Elisabeth von Essen), and Ina Forstén-Lange, the mutual friend who had introduced Strindberg and Siri. The letters are mainly in Swedish, but there are also a few written in German, French, and even one in rather strained English! Siri is identified as Maria, Strindberg and Wrangel by their middle names (Johan and Gustav respectively), the Baroness von Essen and Ina Forstén-Lange by initials. There is no connecting narrative, and often the reader is hard pressed to know who is writing to whom.<sup>2</sup> In one sequence of letters,<sup>3</sup> Strindberg writes to Siri as Romeo to Juliet, as Mark

<sup>2</sup> I have relied on Lagerkranz as a guide where the text is misleading, ambiguous, or silent.

<sup>3</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 131-32.



Antony to Cleopatra, as Léon to Thérèse<sup>4</sup> (in French), and as Hamlet to Ophelia (in English), and on another occasion he signs himself with his favorite nickname, Örnén (The Eagle). Even in letters not written by Strindberg himself, the emotional content penetrates so thoroughly into his existence, that the language and images help shape the way he views the world.

The letters are presented chronologically, but are grouped under eight headings which trace the progress of the love affair, often in symbolic terms:

- I. "Under askan" ("Under the Ash": at its beginning, love is like a glowing ember);
- II. "Misslyckad flykt" ("Unsuccessful Flight": Strindberg tries to escape the situation he is in -- coming between two friends who are married to each other -- by running away);
- III. "Smolk" ("Itching", literally, a particle of dirt, as when one gets something in one's eye: an irritation that will not go away);
- IV. "Det brinner!" ("Fire!");
- V. "I ljusan låga" ("Raging Flame");

<sup>4</sup> Strindberg seems to have confused Flaubert's Madame Bovary (whose first lover was named Léon) with Zola's Thérèse Raquin (Claude Schumacher).

- VI. "Män av ära" ("Men of Honour");
- VII. "Skilsmässa" ("Divorce"); and
- VIII. "Vackert väder" ("Fair Weather").

For what are essentially love letters, they contain a surprising amount about God. Late nineteenth-century Sweden was very conservative, and this love affair was adulterous, as well as between members of different social classes; and Strindberg sees the development of the affair as a struggle between God (representing, among other things, conventional morality) and the devil. Strindberg very early adopts the attitude of the German Romantic hero, not denying God's existence, but defying Him, raging against Him with typical *Sturm und Drang*. The first instance of this is rather light and bantering, but particularly explicit:

Har Ni observerat att jag så ofta talar om blommor? Hur kommer det sig? Det är min religion för närvarande! Och jag vågar näsvis mot Gud! Och jag tror inte på Gud? Åjo, det gör jag nog; men jag tycker inte om honom, allra helst som han förstörde mina törnrosor! Det var brutalt gjort! Jag tycker inte om tyranner, därför älskar jag svagheten -- därför ber jag till blommor!  
 Mon Dieu!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 10 (§I. July 1, 1875):

So you've noticed that I speak a lot about flowers? Why should that be? They're my religion for the time being! And I dare to be impertinent to God.\* But I don't believe in God? Oh yes, I certainly do, but I don't like Him: especially since He destroyed my briar roses! That was brutal! I don't like tyrants, so I love weakness -- that's why I pray to flowers!  
 Mon Dieu!

This is written in a playful mood. A little later, in a letter full of guilt and despair (August 3, 1875), Strindberg overstates the case: "Min historia skulle kunna bli ett bevis för att Gud icke existerar!"<sup>6</sup>

In the second section, "Misslyckad flykt", Strindberg tries to run away from his problem, both physically and spiritually. He sets off for Paris, but falls ill before the boat clears the Stockholm archipelago, and he breaks his journey at the island of Dalarö. He sends for the local minister, and his visit provokes a kind of religious conversion in him. He renounces his former attitude of defiance towards God and decides as well to sever his relations with the Wrangels. Here we

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\* There is a pun in the Swedish which is impossible to translate (into a pun): *näsvis* (cheeky, impertinent) literally means nose-wise, in respect to noses; so the sentence has the secondary meaning of "I dare to compete with God where noses are concerned!", a sentiment appropriate to the context! "I dare to thumb my nose at God!" would preserve the primary meaning of the Swedish and also introduce the notion of nose-iness into the English, but it entirely misses Strindberg's implication that he has a better nose for flowers than God does!

<sup>6</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 14 (§I.): "My story could serve as a proof that God does not exist!"

have the dominant symbol of the Till Damaskus (To Damascus) trilogy twenty-three years before the appearance of Parts I and II!

På sjukhuset i hast -- febern kommer.  
Herren har slagit mig -- "Saul, Saul vi förföljer du mig", sade Hans tjänare som nyss lämnade mig. -- Jag fick inte resa. -- Nu sedan jag funnit Honom min Frälsare förstår jag allt! Och lider allt med glädje.<sup>7</sup>

Strindberg sees his illness as punishment, not only for coveting another man's wife, but for his defiant attitude towards God, and for doubting His very existence. Later in the same letter, he joins Saul's conversion to the Old Testament story of Jacob's wrestling with God (Genesis 32:24-32). The two stories are symbolically identical: a man who resists God is forced to confront Him, and is changed as a consequence. In both cases there is also a physical consequence: Saul is temporarily blinded, Jacob is wounded in the hip; Strindberg is stricken with illness:

Jag har gjort uppror mot Gud -- jag har hädat  
-- jag har kämpat mot honom som Jakob --

<sup>7</sup> Skrifter, VIII, 23 (§II. October, 1875):

Written from my sickbed in haste: the fever is coming on!

The Lord has chastised me: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" [Acts 9:4], said his servant, who has just left me. -- I was unable to travel. -- Now that I've found Him, my Saviour, I understand everything! And I suffer everything with joy.

Saul! Saul! ropade det dock aldrig -- men nu  
är min höftsena förlamad.<sup>8</sup>

It is perhaps advisable to look briefly at Strindberg's psychological state at this point. He has had a small amount of success in the theatre, but both his academic career and his attempts to become an actor (first in Stockholm, 1869-70, and then in Gothenburg, 1872) have fizzled out. He has had a considerable amount of difficulty supporting himself financially, having worked successively as a teacher (1868), an apprentice telegraph operator, and a journalist (both in 1873), and is currently an assistant secretary at Kungliga biblioteket (The Royal Library) in Stockholm (1874-82). He believes passionately in his genius, but has had a very hard time establishing it. He has attempted suicide, in 1873. The Wrangels befriend him, give him confidence in himself as an author and as a human being, encourage him, and restore his faith in humanity. He genuinely likes and admires the Baron, so he finds himself doubly treacherous when he begins to fall in love with the Baroness. What a dilemma: these are his two dearest friends, and he sees himself as a wedge, splitting them apart!

<sup>8</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 24:

I've rebelled against God -- I've blasphemed  
-- I've wrestled with Him like Jacob -- even  
though "Saul, Saul!" was never heard -- but  
now I've been lamed in the hip.

It is in this frame of mind, then, that from his sickbed, after a religious crisis, he decides to act honourably and sever all ties with the Wrangels: he will try to preserve their happiness by sacrificing his own. This, he feels, is what God is asking of him:

Det värsta, men som är oundgängligt -- om jag kommer mig -- vi måste skiljas -- jag måste vara ensam med min Gud -- Ni ha varit mina avgudar -- man får icke ha sådana. -- Hon ville icke rädda mig. -- Hon fick icke för Gud -- han ville ha mig själv.<sup>9</sup>

The letter is written to the Baron, under the salutation "Trogne vän!" ("Faithful Friend!"). The woman referred to is supposedly Ina Forstén-Lange, with whom Strindberg has concocted a romance in order to conceal his true emotional state from the Wrangels; but Strindberg is really referring to Siri. The particularly disjointed style indicates not only debilitation from illness, but his emotional agitation as well: this has been a very difficult decision for him to reach, and he needs all the support he can get, even to the extent of bringing in the First Commandment ("You shall have no gods except me." Exodus 20:3)!

<sup>9</sup> Skrifter, VIII, 23 (§II. October, 1875):

The worst thing, but unavoidable -- if I recover -- is that we must part -- I must be alone with my God -- you've been my idols -- one mustn't have idols. -- She didn't want to rescue me. -- She wasn't acting for God -- He wanted me Himself.

This letter was written on October 7, 1875. Strindberg soon returns to Stockholm, and before long the relationship is back on its old footing. The religious crisis is short-lived!

On January 3, 1876, Siri writes to Ina Forstén-Lange and seems to have adopted some of Strindberg's old ambivalence towards God:

... jag undrar ibland om ... allt jag ser omkring mig verkligen existerar ... -- och Gud -- finnes han -- jag känner att han finnes -- jag fattar att han finnes och ibland tror jag det ändå icke. -- Jag tror inte på något då. -- .... -- Den ena stunden tackar jag Gud för all hans nåd mot mig -- den andra hånar jag den som tror på honom.<sup>10</sup>

There are complications. The Baron is having an affair with his wife's young cousin, Sofia In de Betou, who lives with them. By March, 1876, Siri is sure that she in turn is in love with Strindberg, and writes to tell him so. On Dalarö, Strindberg had accused himself of blasphemy for his comparing Ina (i.e., Siri) to Christ: "Jag kallade henne för Kristus som var kommen

<sup>10</sup> Skriffter, VIII, 40 (§III.):

... sometimes I wonder if ... everything I see around me really exists ... -- and God -- if He exists -- I know He exists -- I comprehend that He exists, but still, sometimes I don't believe it. -- Then I don't believe in anything. -- .... -- One moment I thank God for all His grace towards me -- the next I mock those who believe in Him.

att frälsa en syndare! Jag är straffad!"<sup>11</sup> But listen to the words Siri uses to describe their love:

Denna kärlek utan mål -- denna innerliga själarnas förening -- den är en fläkt från himlen -- den är den känsla man vill skänka sin Gud. -- O! jag tror på honom (Gud) nu -- efter han sänt mig Er -- Ni min profet, min Messias.<sup>12</sup>

and, in the same letter:

Om jag hade Er här nu, så skulle jag kyssa Ert vackra huvud -- med samma känsla som den troende kysser Kristusbilden och lik-som han skulle jag glömma allt lågt, allt dåligt -- min själ skulle flykta hän till de regioner den varit så länge skild ifrån. -- Ack, Ni mitt ideal, jag har då funnit Er -- Er som jag sökt i så många och i honom.<sup>13</sup>

Their love seems so far to have been platonic, but at the close of this remarkable letter Siri expresses her desire that it should progress to the physical.

<sup>11</sup> Skrifter, VIII, 24: "I called her Christ, come to redeem a sinner! I've been punished!"

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 63-64 (§IV. March 16, 1876):

This love without a goal -- this inner union of souls -- it's a breath from heaven -- it's the feeling one accords one's God. -- Oh! I believe in Him (God) now -- since He has sent me you -- you, my prophet, my Messiah!

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 64:

If I had you here now, I would kiss your beautiful head -- with the same emotion as that felt by the believer who kisses an image of Christ and, like him, I would forget everything low, everything bad -- my soul would take flight towards those regions from which it has been separated for so long. -- Oh, my ideal, now I have found you -- you whom I've sought in so many and in him [Gustav].



Once more she uses religious imagery; she is convinced that their love is pure and holy:

... men säg mig varför knäpper man sina händer samman då man ber till Gud -- varför vänder man sina ögon hälst mot det höga blå? -- man tror sig i rymden skåda Guds anlete, man fattar honom mellan sina händer -- man trycker honom till sitt bröst. -- O! vi människor äro ändå kroppsliga -- vi behöva fatta tag i Gud för att hålla honom kvar.<sup>14</sup>

Thus it is Siri who takes the initiative in the affair, with her open declaration of love for Strindberg. He is not slow to respond. On March 13 he writes a very long letter, full of joy and passion, in which he declares his love for her. That letter closes with an astounding passage which is echoed in *Till Damaskus*: the lover, as if aware that perfect happiness cannot last, seeks consummation and eternal happiness through a suicide pact. The last line of the passage indicates that he thinks God will approve of this plan; can this be the same God who only a few months previously was punishing the author for blasphemy?

Har Ni icke mod att leva utan mig -- har Ni icke mod att leva med mig, så dö med mig och låt vår kärlek fortgå på andra sidan döden ren och helig då vi äro befriade från

<sup>14</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 64:

... but tell me, why do we clasp our hands together when praying to God -- why do we turn our eyes by preference towards the blue heights? -- we believe that we behold the face of God in the heavens, we clasp Him in our hands -- we press Him to our breasts. -- Oh! we humans are physical, after all -- we need to grasp God in order to hold on to Him.

dessa usla kroppar som skola dra ned allt! Dö med mig -- o, i Ert sällskap skall jag med glädje ge mig av ut i de oändliga okända rymderna, där våra själar få omfamna varandra utan att behöva blygas eller bedja någon annan än Gud om lov!<sup>15</sup>

Strindberg, it seems, still wishes to keep the relationship on a spiritual, or platonic basis. This is an early instance of the mother-goddess aspect of their relationship, a major consideration in several of his works, which will be discussed more fully below. What is of immediate interest is that each of the two lovers has idealized the other and their mutual love, in highly religious terms, and God Himself has changed, in their perception, from the guardian of conventional morality and the punisher of sin, to the God of love, nourishing and protecting those who love, whatever the circumstances of that love!

There follows a month (April, 1876) in which the two lovers both rejoice in each other and in their secret meetings, and suffer the social inconveniences of their position: the impossibility for a married

<sup>15</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 71 (§V.):

If you don't have the courage to live without me -- if you don't have the courage to live with me, die with me, and let our love continue on the other side of death, pure and holy, when we are liberated from these vile bodies, which seek to drag everything down! Die with me -- oh! in your company I would gladly slip off into the endless unknown spaces, where our souls might embrace without needing to be ashamed or to ask anyone but God for permission!

woman of her class to appear in public with a lover, the pressures from her family to seek a reconciliation with Wrangel, the decision to divorce, the constraints on both Wrangel and Strindberg to make the necessary arrangements in a friendly and civilized manner, as "men of honour", and the compromise worked out. Siri is to make a trip abroad, and the Baron to sue for divorce on the grounds of desertion (thus saving his army commission and protecting his only source of income): this against Strindberg's will, who wishes Siri to sue Wrangel for divorce, citing as grounds his adultery with Sofia In de Betou. The lovers are ecstatic when together, but at the same time bedevilled by external pressures, and Siri must impose her will on Strindberg to make him drop his plans of ruining Wrangel's career. The face of God changes also: their love is still from Him, but they begin to wonder if it is a blessing or a curse. Strindberg to Siri:

Tror du att Gud ser på oss med misshag! Är kärleken, eller varför är kärleken jordens enda välsignelse och största förbannelse!<sup>16</sup>

His problems with the idea of God are beginning again: he still believes, but is no longer sure in what:

Vet du vad jag gjorde i går kväll. -- Du är olycklig om du talar om det! Jag bad för

<sup>16</sup> Skriffter, VIII, 94 (§VI. April 9, 1876):

Do you think God regards us with displeasure! Is love, or rather, why is love earth's only blessing and greatest curse?

dig. Hos Gud eller Jehovah -- jag vet icke vem, blott till den som var starkare än jag!<sup>17</sup>

The steps leading to the divorce proceed as planned, with some minor alterations. Siri does not travel to Paris, but to Copenhagen, where she stays with an aunt. The official story is that the divorce is necessary in order that Siri might realize her ambition to become an actress: something she cannot even consider as the wife of an officer (and aristocrat) in the Sweden of Oskar II (reigned 1872-1907: the Swedish adjective *oscarisk* has approximately the same connotations as *Victorian* in English)! Strindberg and Wrangel have agreed to appear to remain friends, in order to avoid scandal, but Wrangel does not appear at the railway station to see Siri off, as planned (here begins Strindberg's true and deep-seated animosity to Wrangel, the green light in *Taklagsöl: The Roofing Celebration*, 1907); Strindberg is persuaded to accompany Siri on the train a short distance. But in general, the plan goes through and the divorce is granted. Strindberg does his very best to quell scandals and rumours in Stockholm.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 100 (§VI. April 13, 1876):

Do you know what I did last night? -- You'll be sorry if you tell anyone about this! I prayed for you. To God or Jehovah -- I don't know to whom, just to a being stronger than I am!

The day Siri leaves for Copenhagen (May 3, 1876), Strindberg writes her a long and impassioned letter: an outpouring of his own emotion, and an attempt to provide her with emotional support for the separation and trials ahead. The letter is full of religious imagery, and God is seen as definitely on the side of the two lovers; indeed, by obtaining a divorce, Siri is performing no less than God's will! The religious symbolism of the pre-Dalarö days floods back: Siri is seen once more as a heavenly being who has come down to earth to redeem Strindberg, and is compared to Christ:

... du har visat mig att även bland människorna finnas änglar även om de äro människor, att vingarne icke falla av även om de röra vid jorden.... Nu tror jag! Ty jag tror att det som hör himlen till tål vid att bli jordiskt ett ögonblick -- nu förstår jag sagan om Gud själv som kunde stiga ner på jorden och bo ibland oss....

Det är en vacker saga! Och jag skall älska den för din skull! Jag skall aldrig håna Honom ... mera, ty nu betyder han något för mig -- för oss!<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Skrifter, VIII, 103 (§VII.):

... you've shown me that even among humans there are angels (even if they are humans), that their wings do not fall off even if they touch the earth.... Now I believe! For I believe that what belongs to heaven can endure to be earthly for awhile -- now I understand the story about God Himself, Who could come down to earth and live among us....

It's a beautiful story! And I'll cherish it for your sake! I'll never make fun of Him ... again, for now He means something to me -- to us!

He knows that the coming weeks are going to be hard on her, and he tries to give her added strength to endure them. As he often does, he harks back to the Old Testament for a parallel, and he finds one: not, this time, in Jacob wrestling with his God, but in Abraham, whose faith was tested by God when he was asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac, just as God is now testing Siri's love by asking her to sacrifice her entire past life:

... var tacksam att du har ett så vackert förflutet ... som varit dig ett offer -- ett offer så stort som Abrahams, då han gav sitt barn för Herrens skull. -- Var viss Han fordrar lika litet detta offer av dig som Han fordrade det av honom. -- Han vill endast pröva dig -- luttra dig -- se om du är värdig!<sup>19</sup>

We have seen Strindberg's exaltation of Siri to the point where she becomes a Christ-bearing figure for him, and that this perception was reciprocated by her. But Strindberg also tended to identify himself with Christ, particularly with the "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". This is particularly true during the Dalarö episode, when he is feeling most hard-done-by. After saying that he now suffers everything

<sup>19</sup> Skrifter, VIII, 103-4:

... be thankful that you have such a beautiful past ... which has been a sacrifice for you -- a sacrifice as great as Abraham's, when he gave up his child for the sake of the Lord. -- Be certain that He will no more demand this sacrifice of you than He did of him -- He only wants to test you -- to chasten you -- to see if you are worthy!

gladly, he continues: "Jag är beklagansvärd men begär intet medlidande -- jag skall tömma kalken."<sup>20</sup> Later in the same letter: "Jag tycker mig ibland värdig en natt i Getsemane!"<sup>21</sup> During Siri's absence for the divorce, he again sees himself in terms of the suffering Christ:

O, om du en enda gång visste huru jag tror på din genius -- jag som redan, så ung jag är, känt törnena i kransen trycka i min panna, ehuru den var för ung och stark för att kunna såras djupt nog för att bli ärrig -- !<sup>22</sup>

The image appears again at the end of that letter, when Strindberg looks forward to the time when they are reunited and can live together openly as man and wife:

... -- jag skall bära dig på mina armar tills jag får lägga dig ner inom våra egna låsta dörrar och du får lugga min stora peruk och plocka törntaggarna ur min breda panna....<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 23 (§II. October 7, 1875): "I am pitiable, but seek no sympathy; I shall drain the cup."

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 25: "Sometimes I think myself worthy of a night in Gethsemane!"

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 104 (§VII. May 3, 1876):

Oh, if you only once knew how I believe in your genius -- I who already, young as I am, have felt the crown of thorns press into my forehead, even though it [i.e., the forehead] was too young and strong to be wounded deeply enough to scarred -- !

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 106:

... -- I shall carry you in my arms until I can set you down behind our own locked doors, and you can tug on my great mop of hair and pluck the thorns from my broad forehead....

This is an especially appropriate image of himself, in symbolic terms, if we consider two other aspects of Strindberg's emotional life: his tendency to idealize the women he loved to the status of goddesses, and his worship of the mother figure. Woman occupies two symbolic niches in his symbolic system: the chaste, pure, clean Diana and the universal mother-goddess, Rhea. In both cases, the woman, virgin- or mother-goddess, is inviolable, and Strindberg often expresses revulsion at the thought of sexual union with a woman whom he has so idealized: important instances are to be found in *Fadren* (*The Father*, 1887) and *Till Damaskus*. Christianity has taken the symbolism of Diana and Rhea and united them in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. We can see Strindberg's sexual dilemma already in operation, then, in his constant association of Siri with the Blessed Virgin. This is evident in the name by which Siri is known in these letters: every other character is known by a sobriquet in some way derived from his actual name; Siri, however, is called Maria, even though that name has no connection with any of her real names (Sigrid Sofia Mathilda Elisabeth von Essen-Wrangell). In August, 1875, when he is inventing a love affair with Ina Forstén-Lange to disguise his growing feelings for Siri, Strindberg describes to the Wrangells a scene to illustrate the extent to which he is besotted with love:



Jag ... gjorde en liten berså eller ett altare -- vilket var det? -- och där satte jag hennes porträtt -- min Madonnabild -- och så tände jag fyra stora stearinljus framför min Madonna och tillbad. -- Finns det någon som vågar tro att jag kysst detta porträtt, så må han stiga fram att jag må skära av honom läpparna!<sup>24</sup>

Two days later, he refers to this passage and says that he omitted an explanatory sentence, which he here supplies: "Förstån I nu, att hon, Ni vet, är min Madonna, hon som räddat mig från den onde!"<sup>25</sup>

That this attitude is something Strindberg really feels (rather than something he has just made up to convince the Wrangels of his imaginary love affair) is made clear on March 13, 1876, in his long declaration of love for Siri: "... Ni måste stiga ner för att icke vara för hög för mig!!"<sup>26</sup> Again, during Siri's stay in Copenhagen for the divorce, he writes to her:

... jag kysser dig på pannan och kastar mig sen på knä, ty jag måste se upp till dig, ty

<sup>24</sup> Skrifter, VIII, 12 (§I. August 3, 1875):

I ... made a little bower or an altar -- which was it? -- and there I placed her portrait -- my image of the Madonna -- and then I lit four large candles before my Madonna and prayed. -- If anyone is so bold as to think that I kissed that portrait, let him step forward, that I might cut his lips off!

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 14 (§I. August 5, 1875): "'Now you understand: she is my Madonna, you know, who has rescued me from the Evil One!'"

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 70 (§V.): "... you must step down, in order not to be too high for me!!"

jag beundrar dig, största och modigaste bland kvinnor....<sup>27</sup>

The Blessed Virgin Mary is not only the mother of Christ, but at Christ's Passion she becomes, by His wish, the adoptive mother of the Apostle John<sup>28</sup> (Johan is the Swedish form of John). All of this coalesces a month later, when this Johan writes to his Maria:

... du tror icke vad jag av hela min tillvaro håller av dig, som en mor, en syster -- allt vad du vill, men icke älskarinna! Låt mig vara ditt barn, men förakta mig icke därför.  
-- <sup>29</sup>

Certainly this throws light on a passage in the last section of the collection, in the letter written as if to Thérèse from Léon: "Aimez toujours votre pauvre petit enfant et amant!"<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 112 (§VII. May 7, 1875):

... I kiss you on the forehead and then cast myself on my knees, for I must look up to you, for I admire you, greatest and bravest among women....

cf. the Ave Maria: "Blessed art thou among women!"

<sup>28</sup> John 19:26-27.

<sup>29</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 99 (§VI. April 13, 1876):

... you don't believe how I love you with my whole being, as a mother, a sister -- anything you like, but not as a mistress! Let me be your child, but do not therefore despise me. --

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 132 (§VIII. Late May, 1876): "Always love your poor little child and lover!"

The other side of religious symbolism is the demonic. In *Han och Hon* this symbolism is most dominant in the earlier letters, decreasing steadily as the love affair progresses: for Strindberg, as suggested above, love was a God-like emotion, and redemptive in its effects. Redemptive from what? From the curse under which Strindberg's experiences of the previous few years have convinced him that he lives. Elsewhere, he identifies this as the curse of Deuteronomy; here it is less specific, but nonetheless real. It is the work of the devil on his soul. Already in the very first letter in this collection, he refers to it:

Jag är ibland böjd att tro det djävulen burit mig till dopet, ty jag är liksom född till förstörelse; allt vissnar under min hand. Händer mig något rätt lyckligt någon enda gång så vändes lyckan strax till förbannelse.<sup>31</sup>

Two days later, he paints a similarly depressing picture of himself:

Den där unge mannen med det förstörde utseendet ... han är gjord att offras upp -- han är född till att vara olycklig -- det är hans stolthet! Låt honom vara det han är -- han

<sup>31</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 7 (§I. July 1, 1875):

I'm sometimes inclined to believe that the devil bore me to my baptism, for it's as if I were born to destruction; everything withers under my hand. If something good happens to me for once, the happiness is immediately changed to a curse.

kan icke hjälpas -- låt honom gå åt helvete  
-- där mår han bäst!<sup>32</sup>

In his farewell letter to the Wrangels before his aborted escape to Paris, Strindberg again refers to the image introduced in the first letter, that of the devil as sponsor at his baptism. The ostensible reason for the trip is that Ina Forstén has married the opera singer, Algot Lange, and he is going away to nurse his broken heart in private (now that she is married, Ina becomes, of course, an even more appropriate proxy for Siri); this explains the reference to Strindberg's discovery that he cannot now rise to be an angel:

Jag sade Er en gång att Satan stått fader åt mig. Det är sant! Men vem skickade henne i min väg. Vem bad ängeln nederstiga till helvetet för att rädda en djävul! Kan jag inte få vara ängel som jag vill -- som jag av hela min odödliga själ åtrår -- jag som hatar det onda så som få -- så -- så har jag icke nog kraft kvar att bli stor som en fallen ängel -- <sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Skrifter, VIII, 15:

That young man there with the wasted appearance ... he was created to be sacrificed -- he was born to be unhappy -- that is his pride! Let him be what he is -- he can't be helped -- let him go to Hell -- he will get on best there!

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 22 (§II. Late September, 1875):

I once told you that Satan had served as my godfather. It's true! But who set her in my path? Who asked the angel to descend to Hell in order to save a devil! If I can't be an angel as I wish -- as I desire with my whole immortal soul -- I who hate evil as few others -- then -- then I haven't enough strength left to be great as a fallen angel  
--

The final important reference to the devil is in a letter written January 10, 1876, about two months before Siri's declaration of love. The passage, if not prophetic, is at least ironic: it recognizes that love can come from the devil as well as by God, and foreshadows the collapse of Strindberg's eventual marriage(s):

Jag var älskad en gång, men det var av djävulen; hon älskade mig endast för att hämnas sitt kön; hon hade svurit att göra mig lika liten som hon själv; hennes uppgift var att draga mig från arbetet, att fördunkla mitt mål, att störta mig, för att hon sedan skulle få äga mig hel och hållen!<sup>34</sup>

We are not told who this earlier love was!

Many of the section headings use the symbol of fire to describe the progress of the love affair. Fire is a very complex symbol. Here it is primarily the earthly fire: passionate or erotic love. But there are also the purgatorial fire of purification, the infernal fire of destruction, and the heavenly fire of divine love. Given Strindberg's view of love as regenerative and redemptive, fire is an apt symbol here, for all of its meanings are brought into play as the love story evolves. There is also a passage in one of the letters

<sup>34</sup> Skriffter, VIII, 43 (§III.):

I was loved once, but that was the work of the devil; she loved me only in order to revenge her sex; she had sworn to make me as small as herself; her task was to draw me away from my work, to obscure my purpose, to ruin me, so that she could then own me body and soul!

(Strindberg's declaration of love) in which he invests fire with yet another meaning; it becomes a symbol of his genius, his creative power, his talent, and of Siri's talent as an actress:

... jag har icke det skarpaste huvudet -- men elden; min eld är den största i Sverige och jag skall om Ni vill sätta eld på hela detta usla nästet! -- Ni har elden, det är denna dunkla låga, som oroar Er, som plågar Er, som jäktar Er och som legat under glöden i så många år och som så många förbannade dårar sökt kväva. -- Kom! Fyll Ert höga mål! Ni får bli skådespelerska -- jag skall göra Er en egen teater -- jag skall spela mot Er och skriva och -- älska Er -- -- -- 35

The words from this passage which are most often cited are "... min eld är den största i Sverige...." ("... my fire is the greatest in Sweden...."), and quite rightly so: it is an astonishing claim for a young author whose first major success (the publication of *Röda rummet*) is still three years in the future! This is Strindberg at his most ecstatic. Emotional happiness is always linked

<sup>35</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 70 (§V.):

... I don't have the keenest head -- but the fire; my fire is the greatest in Sweden and I shall if you wish set fire to the whole wretched mess! -- You have the fire; it's that dim flame that upsets you, that torments you, that never leaves you in peace, that has smouldered for so many years among the embers, and that so many accursed fools have attempted to smother. -- Come! Achieve your high purpose! You must become an actress -- I shall build you your own theatre -- I shall perform beside you and write and -- love you -- -- --

to a feeling of great power in Strindberg;<sup>36</sup> here he is ready to set fire to the whole of Swedish society: all the subsequent attempts to be discreet and gentlemanly and to avoid scandal in the matter of the divorce were not Strindberg's idea, and went not only against his will, but against his nature!

This outpouring of pent-up emotions on both sides has been prompted by the behaviour of the Baron; he has become quite open about his infatuation for Siri's young cousin, and has begun treating Siri with disdain in consequence. She then considers herself free to inform Strindberg of her feelings for him, and his response is, as we have seen, ecstatic. Not only does he consider that Siri owes the Baron nothing, because of the way he has treated her, but he also considers it her duty to free herself from the unwholesome atmosphere of her home as soon as possible. Here he uses animal symbolism: Siri is the noblest of all beasts, the lion,<sup>37</sup> and the household itself is a zoo:

<sup>36</sup> Vide Lagerkranz, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Here Strindberg runs into a bit of trouble with his symbolism. Because Siri is female, he makes her a lioness; but the symbolism upon which he is drawing applies to the lion, not to his mate. Incongruously (but appropriately insofar as the symbol is concerned), he gives this lioness a mane, which only the male of the species possesses. But the lioness is in herself a surprisingly appropriate symbol, given the circumstances described elsewhere in this chapter: she is a symbol of the Magna Mater (Cirlot, 182)! There is a further irony in this choice of symbol, which bodes ill for the success of the marriage: symbolically the lion, as king of the beasts, is the earthly opponent of the

... res dig unga lejoninna, skaka din guld-gula man och skicka ljugeldar ur dina härliga ögon så att fånarna darra, slit dig lös ur detta avskyvärda menageri -- ut i skogarna, i friska, fria naturen där ett hjärta, ett huvud och en famn väntar dig och en kärlek som aldrig kan dö liksom den förra.<sup>38</sup>

The symbol reappears in the long letter he writes her on the day she leaves for the temporary exile which will permit the divorce, combined here with prophecies of her future triumphs on the stage:

-- Ser du ... burens järnstänger hava bågnat för din genius' otämjda kraft och du är fri -- fri! för att få springa i skogarna och andas frisk luft, för att få bestiga fjällen och se ned för att riktigt få se huru små de äro nere i dalarna; ryt du som en ung lejoninna, ty det är du, låt din ostyriga guld-gula man fladdra fritt, lyft din höga panna och känn en gång att den icke är så låg som de små hava sagt. Framåt bär det, framåt! mot ljuset, mot höjderna, därifrån din röst skall höras som profetissans.<sup>39</sup>

Strindberg's favorite sobriquets was Örnen: The Eagle!

<sup>38</sup> *Skrifter*, VIII, 67 (§V. March 13, 1876):

... arise, young lioness, shake your golden mane and send forth flashes of lightning from your glorious eyes, making the fools quake; set yourself free from that detestable zoo -- out into the woods, into fresh, free nature, where a heart, a head, and an embrace await you, and a love which can never die, as the last one did.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 104 (§VII. May 3, 1876):

-- You see, ... the iron bars of your cage have been bent by the untamed energy of your genius, and you are free -- free! to run in the woods and breathe fresh air, to climb the mountains and look down, really to be able to see how small they are down in the valleys; roar like a young lioness, for that is what you are, let your ungovernable golden mane blow freely in the wind, lift your high fore-



That letter is a goldmine of Strindberg symbols. Although it was written in early May, winter seems to have lingered in Scandinavia that year, and Strindberg is able to turn even that circumstance into a sign of hope for the exiled Siri: if she is now suffering the winter of doubt and despair, spring is on the very brink of making its appearance, and with it will come a new and glorious life:

Blomstermånaden är inne! Tro, tro, det våras om det ock nu ligger snö! I morgon, i morgon kanske är det full vår och då -- Då sjunger det i lund och det blommar och det snöar kanske i blomman ett tag till, men sen! Sen!<sup>40</sup>

Four days later:

Vi ha så kallt och otäckt väder ... -- det blir bestämt icke riktig vår förr än till 1:sta juni, då min Maria kommer hem!<sup>41</sup>

as small people have said. Carry it forward, forward! toward the light, toward the heights, from which your voice shall be heard like that of the prophetess!

<sup>40</sup> Skrifter, VIII, 104 (§VII. May 3, 1876):

The month of flowers is upon us! Believe it, believe it: spring is coming even if there's still snow on the ground! Tomorrow, tomorrow it will perhaps be full spring and then -- Then there will be birdsong in the groves, and flowers; it might possibly snow on the blossoms a while longer, but then! Then!

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 111:

We're having such cold and nasty weather ... -- it definitely won't be real spring before June 1st, when my Maria comes home!

The last section, after Siri has returned, is entitled "Vackert väder" ("Fair Weather")!

Ironically, the archetypes which correspond to the spring cycle are the mother and child. As we have seen, this is not inappropriate!

The story is continued in *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*. It was not a successful marriage, although it lasted longest of Strindberg's three marriages, and there is reason to believe that Siri von Essen was the woman Strindberg loved most. At any rate, there are already hints in these love letters that the marriage which follows them will not work; we have seen some of these in the ambivalence of many of the symbols which Strindberg uses even in the heat of passion. Unfortunately, Strindberg himself did not see many of these things until much later!

## Chapter 8

*I vårbrytningen*

*I vårbrytningen*<sup>1</sup> (In Early Spring) was the title of a collection of Strindberg's early writings, both short prose pieces (short stories and sketches) and plays, which was published, first serially and then in book form, in 1880-81. *Samlade verk* reunites these pieces (exclusive of the early dramas) and adds an unfinished story from the same period. That organization is followed here: the early dramas have already been discussed; the unfinished story and the short prose pieces from *I vårbrytningen* are treated here.

The title of the collection is itself symbolic. This is not a collection of short pieces dealing with spring, but one, rather, of early work by a promising young author: pieces from the early spring of his career. Although probably not Strindberg's own, he apparently liked the title, as he retained it in subsequent editions.<sup>2</sup>

The unfinished story was probably written in 1872, when the author was twenty-three. Strindberg gave it no title; the utilitarian one by which it is known was given it by Torsten Eklund when he edited it for its

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, II.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Reinhold Smedmark (ed.) in his comments on *Samlade verk*, II (193).

first publication in 1948: "En berättelse från Stockholms skärgård"<sup>3</sup> ("A Tale from the Stockholm Archipelago"). It is the beginning of a story about a young student who passes the summer on a small island with three other students, (Strindberg himself had done just that, in the summer of 1872, on the island of Kymmendö, having broken off his university studies that March). As well as being incomplete, the work is immature, but is nevertheless interesting for its hints of later developments in Strindberg's work.

The hero, Larsson, has decided to spend the summer collecting algae in the archipelago, but is guided to one particular island when he hears that three other students are spending the summer there and have made it known that they do not wish to be disturbed by anyone, particularly not by another student. Entering their apparently deserted cabin, he is examining its contents when one of the inhabitants enters from another room. It is a very strange apparition indeed which appears before him:

... dörren öppnades -- och en karlkropp,  
omkring 6 fot insvept i en röd filt och med  
en mask av vitt skrivpapper -- vid vilken  
segelgarmsändar voro fastlackade vid öronen

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, II, 7-32.

-- utträdde --<sup>4</sup>

This singular costume, it turns out, is intended as protection against mosquitos. It also makes use of Strindberg's principal colour scheme, derived from the alchemical scale of perfection: black - red - white - gold, representing the progress of the human soul from primal chaos to illumination. In this scheme the two lower colours (i.e., black and red) represent the physical world, the two higher the spiritual. A figure clothed in the two middle colours, then, might be seen as straddling both worlds, in a state of transition (rose, as a mixture of those two colours, would have a similar significance). It would be a mistake to try to force the story into such a pattern, but the above observation is, in fact, a fairly good description of the young man in question, as revealed particularly at the end of the fragment. After he removes the paper mask, Larsson thinks of him as "den röde mannen" or simply "den röde" ("the red man" or "the red one", respectively).

This red man introduces himself as Örn, a student from Dalarna. Örn is the Swedish word for eagle, and

<sup>4</sup> Samlade verk, II, 24:

... the door opened -- and the body of a man, about 6 feet tall, wrapped in a red blanket and wearing a mask of white writing paper -- to which the ends of a piece of twine were attached at the ears -- entered --

Örnen (The Eagle) was Strindberg's nickname as a student. The fragment indicates that Larsson and Örn will become engaged in a psychological struggle. Perhaps this is an indication of why the story was never finished: Strindberg has cast himself in the rôle of antagonist rather than hero! Be that as it may, Örn is the most interesting character by far in the fragment, and it is his ideas which eventually become major concerns in Strindberg's writing.

These ideas are laid out for Larsson when he subsequently meets the two students who share Örn's retreat. They tell him that Örn has sought out their company because he hates the one for his good nature and despises the other for his inability to understand Kierkegaard. They explain:

... fick han nu blott tag i att du studerade naturvetenskaperna bleve ni snart goda vänner, ty han skulle hysa medlidande med din dårskap. Och hat, förakt och medlidande äro de enda känslor han tror på, och så länge han har dem är han viss på att han lever.<sup>5</sup>

Here is the young firebrand who is to lash out at the Swedish establishment with hatred, contempt, and occasionally pity!

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, II, 28:

... were he to find out that you studied the natural sciences, you'd soon become good friends, for he'd take pity on your folly. And hate, contempt, and pity are the only feelings he believes in, and so long as he feels them he's certain he's alive.

Örn has proclaimed himself a disciple of Kierkegaard (although he has read only the second part of *Enten-Eller: Either/Or*), from whom (partially understood) he derives many of his ideas. Among these are a highly unorthodox, almost adversarial relationship to God, and a curious attitude to suffering (both the nature of man's relationship to God and the question of suffering are to be lifelong preoccupations of the author):

".... Paradoxet att Gud blev människa har han kastat bort men lidandet håller han sig fast vid. Och att skapa sig lidanden är hans fixa idé. Brand är till en del hans ideal och han resonerar ungefär såhär: den som kan hata är större än Gud, ty Gud är blott kärlek -- Kärleken är en svag känsla men hatet är den starkaste och förutsätter mera själskraft därför har han inbillat sig att han hatar mig. Förakt och medlidande anser han som lägre grader av hat därför kan han lida Kjellman; nu önskar han blott en tredje som han kan ömka, en själ som blott sysslar med småaktigheter, vartill han räknar det att samla och undersöka så lågt stående varelser som örter och djur. Du är just komplementet till hans själs behov och har han redan givit dig tillstånd att bo här tre dygn, så kan du lita på hans tillgivenhet för livet ty tillgivenhet är blott vad den mannen behöver och därför kallar han densamma hat --"<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samlade verk, II, 28-29:

".... He has discarded the paradox that God became man, but he holds fast to suffering. And to fashion himself suffering is his *idée fixe*. Brand\* is, to a certain extent, his ideal, and he reasons more or less like this: he who can hate is greater than God, for God is only love -- Love is a weak emotion, but hate is the strongest, and presupposes greater strength of spirit; that's why he has persuaded himself that he hates me. Contempt and pity he views as lower degrees

In the above outline of colour symbolism derived from alchemy, it was mentioned that red is a colour identified with the world of experience; indeed one set of correspondences for these four colours identifies black with Hell (chaos), red with earth (life), white with purgatory (purification), and gold with Heaven (perfection). As the colour of earth and of life (blood), red is the colour also of earthly love and suffering (through both of which the next stage, white, is reached). It is a very appropriate colour for the red man, Örn, but it also applies to another character in the story, Gotthard, the cripple who does errands for the three students and especially for Örn:

Middan var slut. Efter något brädspel gick Örn ut i dörren och ropade på "Gott-

—  
of hate, and so he can tolerate Kjellman;\*\* now he desires only a third, whom he can pity: a soul which only concerns itself with trivialities, among which he reckons collecting and examining such low forms of life as plants and animals. You're the exact complement to his soul's need, and if he has already given you permission to stay here for three days, you can count on his affection for life, for affection is all that this man needs, and that's why he calls it hate --"

\* Brand: the hero of Ibsen's play of the same name (1866), an absolutist who does not recognize that God is love.

\*\* Örn's two companions are named Nikodemus (the speaker of these words) and Kjellman.



hard". In kom en liten fjortonårig puckel med röd luv. Denne var den enda människa på jorden som Örn kunde lida, ty han var klok och kunde tiga -- Han hette ursprungligen Ulrik, men Örn hade ålagt honom att heta Gotthard, det mest förhatliga namn han visste.<sup>7</sup>

A further reference to Gotthard expands upon his significance to Örn. His association with the colour red is strengthened by the fact that he has red hair, and the connection between this colour and suffering is clearly drawn. Örn, it seems, is a bit of a romantic, and is attracted to the so-called beauty of suffering. When the passage opens, he and Gotthard are about to go fishing:

Fiske var nämligen Örns enda nöje. Fiskekarne kunna lida och tiga därför tyckte han om dem. Gotthard var hans favorit som nyss är sagt, därför att han var pyckelryggig och rödhårig, vilka egenskaper alltid betingade lidande enligt Örns åsikt. Men hans huvudförtjänst menade Örn var den att han var elak eller fräck, som de andra kallade det, och detta förutsätter en stor själ.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Samlade verk, II, 30:

Dinner was over. After a little backgammon, Örn went to the doorway and called out for "Gotthard". In came a little fourteen-year old hunchback with a red toque. This was the only person on earth Örn could bear, for he was clever and knew how to remain silent -- His name was originally Ulrik, but Örn had browbeat him into being called Gotthard, the most hateful name he knew.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 32:

In fact, fishing was Örn's only pleasure. Fishermen knew how to suffer and remain silent, and that is why he liked them. Gotthard was his favorite, as has just been mentioned, because he was hunchbacked and red-headed, properties which, in Örn's opinion, always entail suffering. But his greatest

So much for the introduction of the characters and setting of the tale. Before breaking off, Strindberg hints at what he has in mind as a plot. Evidently this was to have been the kind of struggle for dominance which later figured in the psychological works of 1887-94: the naturalistic plays, the novella "Tschandala" ("Chandala", 1888) and the novel *I havsbandet* (In the Outer Archipelago, 1890), and the stories in *Vivisektioner* (Vivisections, 1894). Larsson will try to convert Örn. The possibility of salvation through woman, which he considers most likely to succeed with Örn, is another theme which Strindberg was to explore more fully, in such diverse works as *Gillet's hemlighet*, several of the historical plays, and *Till Damaskus*:

Larsson hade emellertid tagit in hos fiskaren. Där gjorde han upp för sig huru denne Örn skulle kunna omvändas, vilket han ej ansåg omöjligt, när det var så långt gånget med honom. Kierkegaard var honom dock en svår motståndare och Örn var en stark själ. Att föra honom tillsammans med människor vore visserligen ett sätt som man kunde börja med, men detta kunde ha motsatt verkan; att leda honom ohejdat till konsekvenserna vore ett bra sätt och detta kunde man komma efter med. Men kvinnan? Kanske hon kunde rädda honom? Man kan ju försöka!<sup>9</sup>

merit in Örn's eyes was that he was wicked, or fresh, as the others called it, and that presupposes a great soul.

<sup>9</sup> Samlade verk, II, 32:

Meanwhile, Larsson had taken lodgings with the fishermen. There he turned over in his mind how this Örn could be converted, something he did not consider impossible, when he had gone so far. He thought Kierkegaard, however, a difficult opponent, and Örn

We shall never know the outcome of this struggle, for the fragment ends with Larsson's going to the beach to meet Örn and lay the foundations of his plan. Pity.

The next section of *I vårbrytningen*, "Från havet"<sup>10</sup> ("From the Sea"), contains five short stories and sketches, also set in the archipelago. Written between 1873 and 1875, all of the pieces had been previously published in the Stockholm newspaper *Dagens nyheter* (literally, *News of the Day*) or in the women's weekly, *Svalan* (*The Swallow*). Only the fourth piece in the section, "Marcus Larsson advokat"<sup>11</sup> ("Marcus Larsson, Lawyer"), is of interest for its symbolism. It was first published in three weekly installments in *Svalan*, in May, 1875, and is the first of his newspaper pieces that Strindberg signed (with a shortening of his name, Sbg), indicating his satisfaction with the story (*Samlade verk*, II, 198).

The story's central character was a real person (Marcus Larsson, 1825-64, Swedish painter), but the

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and Örn had a strong soul. To bring him together with people was certainly one way to begin, but that could have the opposite effect; to show him the consequences of his unchecked beliefs was a good way, and one could do that eventually. But woman? Perhaps she could save him? One could certainly try!

<sup>10</sup> *Samlade verk*, II, 33-75.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-72 (*Skrifter*, I, 23-36).

incident related is Strindberg's invention. At one point in his life, so his story goes, Larsson is struck by the fate of a ship's pilot, whom he thinks has been unjustly accused of neglecting his duty, and he undertakes to defend him at his trial. His passionate belief in the man's innocence, however, is offset by his ignorance of marine law, and he succeeds only in earning his "client" a much more rigorous sentence than he would have received had he simply pleaded guilty!

Strindberg prepares the reader for Larsson's losing of the case in two ways, both using symbolism. The first is his description of Larsson himself: "Hela mannen verkade som cinnober och asfalt, hans livfärger."<sup>12</sup> Thus associated with the black and red of the lower half of the black-red-white-gold scale of perfection, he hardly inspires confidence in the success of his efforts to help others! The second way in which we are prepared for his defeat is through the association of his hapless client with the innocent victim par excellence, the crucified Christ. On their way to the trial, Larsson sees what amounts to a vision and an omen of his client's fate:

Jag yrade och såg i mänskenet Kristus på korset mellan de båda rövvarne avteckna sig över skogen och var fullt övertygad om verkligheten av synen, tills man senare förklarade den

<sup>12</sup> *Samlade verk*, II, 56 (*Skrifter*, I, 24): "On the whole, the man gave an impression of cinnabar and asphalt: his bodily colouring."

helt enkelt vara en avtacklad tremastare,  
vilken lagt sig i vinterläge vid en strand.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the explanation of the vision, its impression remains, and indeed is strengthened when Larsson notices that two of the other passengers on the ferry which is the last stage of their journey are thieves: with the pilot in the rôle of Christ, the tableau is complete!

The impression remains until the end of the story. When Larsson's ineptitude as a lawyer earns the pilot two years of forced labour instead of the three-month sentence he might otherwise have expected, the unfortunate man is seen not only as an innocent victim, but also as one who suffers for the sins of others: "Man tror att man skall få ha lotsen som en slags Kristus, som vid varje olycksfall skall bära alla sjökapteners synder."<sup>14</sup> Larsson argues that this practice must cease, but the court finds otherwise, confirming the rôle into which he has cast the poor pilot.

<sup>13</sup> Samlade verk, II, 67:

I whirled around and saw over the woods, standing out against the moonlight, Christ on the cross between the two thieves, and was completely convinced of what I saw until it was later explained to have been quite simply an unrigged three-master, which was wintering on the beach.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 70: "It is believed that the pilot has to be a kind of Christ, who, at every misfortune, will bear the sins of all sea captains."

The three ship masts suggesting three crosses atop Calvary appear elsewhere in Strindberg's work, notably in *Till Damaskus I*, and the luckless pilot is the first of a long line of Strindberg characters who are forced to play the rôle of the scapegoat.

The following section of *I vårbrytningen*, "Här och där"<sup>15</sup> ("Here and There"), contains two sketches and two short stories set in various places, both in Stockholm and abroad. The second of the two sketches, "I Notre-Dame och Kölner-Domen. Två ögonblick"<sup>16</sup> ("In Notre-Dame and Cologne Cathedral: Two Moments"), was originally published in *Dagens nyheter* on December 23, 1876, and springs from Strindberg's first trip to the continent in October of that year, a trip also commemorated in the poem "Landsflykt" ("Exile") in *Dikter* (Poems, 1883). Like the poem, it conveys an impression of cynicism and disillusionment with the glories of European civilization. The most telling passage is the surprising (in a visitor from Protestant Sweden) sympathy awakened in him by the religious images in Notre-Dame (like Örn, he feels drawn to those who have suffered):

Vi ... vandrade ensamme i koret, bland  
de döde, bland de lidande. Vad han i mot  
dessa helgonbilder, dessa monument, resta åt  
de olyckliga, som lidit och kämpat för vad

<sup>15</sup> *Samlade verk*, II, 77-109.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-87.

som, på deras tid åtminstone, var idéer; de söka icke sina platser på gator och torg för att gärna varda hälsade som världens officerare till häst och fots, vilka man så gärna tillber; tänd ljus för dessa arma, som levat i mörkret och som ännu i sin odödlighet gömma sig i kyrkans dunklaste vrå! Låt dem vara!<sup>17</sup>

The disappointment of his first sight of the Rhine prefigures a major theme in all of his writing: the contrast between the world as we imagine it and the world as it really is. One thinks especially of the Billposter in *Ett drömspel* (*A Dream Play*, 1901) for whom reality is always a disappointment when measured against his expectations of what it ought to be:

Jag började anställa självmordsdoftande reflexioner över min resa, som så vänt upp och ned på mina föreställningar om den synliga delen av världen, som så skakat mig och sållat mina illusioner att där icke fanns en kvar.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Samlade verk, II, 83:

We ... wandered alone in the choir, among the dead, among the suffering. What do you have against these saints' images, these monuments raised to the unfortunate, who suffered and strove for what, in their time at least, were ideas? They do not seek places in the streets and squares where they might be greeted, like the world's cavalry and infantry officers, whom people so willingly worship! Light candles for these poor unfortunate, who lived in darkness and who still in their immortality hide themselves in the darkest corners of the church! Let them be!

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 85:

I began to form suicidal reflections on my journey, which had so upset my preconceptions of the visible part of the world, which had so shaken me and so riddled my illusions that not one remained.

The short story "För konsten"<sup>19</sup> ("For Art"), which follows, was the earliest of the pieces in the original edition of *I vårbrytningen* it originally appeared in *Svalan* on April 26 and May 3, 1872, under the title "Konstens martyrer" ("The Martyrs of Art"). It is the story of two amateur musicians, the one untalented but persuaded that he has a great gift, the other a truly inspired performer who sacrifices everything, eventually even his life, in order to be able to make music. Strindberg had a life-long interest in music and himself played the piano; music often played an important symbolic function in his works, particularly in the poem "Stadsresan" ("The Trip to the City", in *Ordalek och småkonst* (*Wordplay and Small Art*, 1905) and in the late dramas. This is an early example of the theme.

The untalented musician is identified only as L. He is portrayed as the victim of a cruel joke on the part of God (Whose rôle here is not unlike the one assigned Him in the Epilogue to *Mäster Olof*), Who has caused him to live an illusion; he is, in fact, a sleepwalker, unaware of the reality which exists outside his fantasy:

Det ser verkligen ut som vår Herre skulle roat sig med att skämta med åtskilliga människor och detta på ett ganska underligt sätt. Han ger dem en brinnande lust att frambringa något skönt eller åtminstone reproducera vad andra frambragt, men nekar dem på

<sup>19</sup> *Samlade verk*, II, 88-101.



samma gäng förmåga att utföra det. Till ersättning slår han däremot dessa olyckliga med blindhet, så att de ej märka sin fattigdom, utan leva nöjda i sin lilla drömda värld och skratta åt den skrattande hopen.<sup>20</sup>

L., however, realizes his folly before he dies, and the scene in which he acknowledges his life has been an illusion, his death-bed in fact, is remarkable in its prefiguring of a point of view usually associated with the later Strindberg: the world is illusion, and true happiness is found only on the other side of the grave. The opening words of the following extract are spoken by L.; Gustaf is the narrator of the story:

-- Hör du, Gustaf, började han ånyo efter en stunds tystnad, tror du på ett liv efter detta?

-- Visst gör jag det, farbror.

-- Ja, det gör jag allt med! Man kan således räkna på att få leva igen ett nytt liv, ett bättre än detta, som bara för mig varit ett stort misstag .... Varföre blev jag född? Var det bara för att spela narr åt människorna? Jag vet att man skrattat åt mig, jag vet det; men jag levde ändå, ty jag trodde på min kallelse. Nu tror jag inte längre. Därföre är det slut ... Men vem gav mig den där tron? Vår Herre kanske? Då hade

<sup>20</sup> Samlade verk, II, 89-90:

It really looks as though Our Lord wished to amuse Himself by playing a joke on certain people, and in a rather curious manner. He gives them a burning desire to create something beautiful, or at least to reproduce what others have created, but at the same time denies them the ability to fulfill it. In compensation, however, he strikes these unfortunates with blindness, so that they do not notice their poverty, but live content in their little dream-world and laugh at the mocking crowd.

han väl någon mening med det? -- Giv mig min flöjt! -- -- Kasta honom i elden.<sup>21</sup>

Also present at the death-bed is Nyberg, the talented and self-sacrificing musician. As L. dies, he picks up his violin and begins to play, music inspired by the moment. The piece is his swan-song; he never plays again, and will himself shortly meet his death. Through Nyberg's last great concert, Strindberg gives us many of the associations music holds for him:

Och Nyberg stämde och stämde; till sist kom han sig i gång. Han spelade utan noter, men stirrade oavlåttligt in i kakelugnen på de ramlande bränderna. Han måtte hava sett underbara syner, ty så hade jag aldrig hört honom spela. Det var hela hans förflutna liv, som rullade upp sig för mina blickar. Först flöt ett adagio fram stilla och fridfullt, som barndomens dagar. Ljusa gestalter stego fram, ty tonerna togo form, och bland dem en kvinna, mild och helig, som minnet av en moder. Tempot ökade sig, och en virvlande vals hoppade fram över strängarna, så att det kvittrade om fiolen. Det var ynglingalust och stormen av vaknande lidelser. Stråken tröttnade vid flänget och med en sista ansats

<sup>21</sup> Samlade verk, II, 97:

"Listen, Gustaf," he began again after a moment's silence, "do you believe in a life after this one?"

"Of course I do, old friend."

"Yes, I believe it wholeheartedly! So one can count on living again, a new life, better than this one, which for me especially has been a great mistake .... Why was I born? Was it only to play the fool in society? I know that people laughed at me, I know that; but I lived in spite of it, for I believed in my talent. Now I believe no longer. And so it is finished ... But who gave me that faith? Our Lord perhaps? Then must He not have had some reason for it? -- Give me my flute! -- -- Throw it in the fire."

gjorde han en djärv övergång. Då började ett ihållande allegro agitato i de mest sönderslitande modulationer. -- Svikna förhoppningar, bruten tro, allt vad av sorg och elände som kan innebo i ett människohjärta fick nu ej längre rum i den trånga granlådan. Där hade sorgerna legat gömda i långa, långa år, som i en likkista. Nu stego de döda minnen opp. Förtrollningen var löst. Nu fick den olycklige äntligen fram vad han så länge förväges sökt. Han fick gjuta ut sitt överfyllda hjärta, men ej i sönderslitna suckar och brutna rop, dem ingen förstod, utan i fulla toner och rena harmonier. Varje sorgens mask, som frätt hans bröst, kröp fram och var en skön fjäril. Mörkret blev vårsol och suckarne fågelsång. Det var ej en ynglings hejdlösa förtvivlan; det var en manlig sorg. Själv satt han hänryckt och förvånad över sin musik, ty sådant hade han aldrig hört förr, och när han tystnat och låtit fiolen sjunka mot knät, vaknade L.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Samlade verk, II, 97-98:

And Nyberg controlled and held in his emotion, until at last he broke into action. He played without music, but stared unceasingly into the stove, at the falling ashes. He must have seen wonderful sights, for I had never heard him play like that. All of his past life unrolled before my eyes. First an adagio wafted forth, calm and peaceful, like the days of childhood. Radiant beings stepped forward, for the notes took on shapes, and among them a woman, gentle and holy, like the memory of a mother. The tempo quickened, and a whirling waltz leapt out over the strings, so that the violin twittered. This was the desire of youth and the storm of awakened sufferings. The bow grew weary of the bustle, and with a last effort made a bold transition. Then began a sustained allegro agitato in the most rending modulations. -- Betrayed expectations, broken promises, all the sorrow and misery which a human heart can contain now no longer found room in that narrow container. There sorrow had lain hidden for long, long years, as in a coffin. Now the dead memories arose. A magic spell had taken hold. Now, finally, the unfortunate man was able to express what he had vainly sought for so long. He was able to pour out his overflowing heart. not in frazzled sighs and bro-

L.'s death robs Nyberg of his only friend and his protector (L. had at least made sure that he ate well regularly, and had slipped him small sums of money from time to time), as well as his only opportunity to make music on a regular basis. He does not die friendless and alone, however. Attracted to a pietist meeting-house by the music of the worshippers, he is taken in by them and cared for until he dies, which is not long. Before he locates these benefactors, however, he wanders quite helpless and hopeless in the winter night. But he is not allowed to despair: he comes across an omen in the snow and is reminded of the all-seeing eye of God: he may have been quite unknown among men, but God has seen (and presumably heard) all; He will protect this His child:

Någon hade ritat med en käpp i snön underliga tecken. Nyberg tänkte och sökte minnas. Han hade sett dessa figurer förut. Var visste han ännu ej, men han blev så varm om hjärtat. Han kände huru dunkla föreställningar stego upp och blevo allt bestämdare. Han var tillbaka i sin första barndom. Det var en julotta i Klara kyrka. Barnen sjöngo från orgelläktaren, och han trodde det var orgeln som sjöng. De många ljusen brunno så

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ken cries which nobody understood, but in full tones and pure harmonies. Every worm of sorrow which had eaten away at his breast crept forth and was a beautiful butterfly. The darkness became spring sunshine and the sighs birdsong. He himself sat enraptured and surprised at his music, for he had never heard its like before, and when he grew silent and let the violin sink towards his knee, L. awakened.

vackert till en början, men snart blevo de rökiga, ty han hade förut med rädsla sett de stora spetsiga fönsterna stå där svarta som spöken. Nu började det dagas, och de blevo mörkblåa, men fönstret över altaret blev ljusblått, och då såg han ett öga av guld, och i detta öga stod just detta underliga tecken -- --; och ögat såg så skarpt på honom, mindes han, men ju högre solen steg, dess mindre blev dess blick. Snart stod fönstret i guld och purpur, och man sjöng julsalmen: "se natten flyr för dagens fröjd", och han gick hem för att se på sina julklappar, som han ej sett se'n gårdagen, och så glömde han bort ögat med de underliga tecken. Sedan dess hade han visserligen lärt vad de betydde, men han hade aldrig känt dem så djupt som just nu.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Samlade verk, II, 100:

Someone had drawn curious signs in the snow with a cane. Nyberg pondered and tried to remember. He had seen these figures before. Where, he still did not know, but they made his heart feel so warm. He felt dim notions rise up and become more and more definite. He was back in his early childhood. There was an early Christmas service in Klara Church.\* The children sang from the organ loft, and he thought it was the organ singing. The many candles burned so beautifully at the beginning, but they soon became smoky, adding to the dread he had felt earlier when he had seen the large pointed windows standing there, black as ghosts. Now it began to grow light, and they turned dark blue, but the window over the altar turned light blue, and then he saw a eye of gold, and in that eye were precisely these curious signs -- --; and the eye looked so piercingly at him, he remembered, but the higher the sun rose, the weaker its gaze became. Soon the window was all gold and purple, and they sang the Christmas carol "Se natten flyr för dagens fröjd",\*\* and he went home to look at his Christmas presents, which he had not seen since the previous day, and he forgot all about the eye with the curious signs. Since then he had, indeed, learnt what they meant, but he never experienced them so deeply as just now.

\* Strindberg's family lived almost literally in the

It is notable that Strindberg gives no further explanation of the mysterious signs in the snow (and on the church window): presumably his readers would have recognized the Hebrew characters spelling Yahweh, the Name of God.

Almost immediately, Nyberg finds his final sanctuary; he dies a week into the new year, happy in the knowledge that L. had been mistaken when he had foretold that his total and exclusive dedication to his art would lead him to a comfortless death. God looks after those to whom he has granted true genius, particularly if they serve that genius unswervingly. The young Strindberg is perhaps expressing his artistic credo.

The final piece in "Här och där" is, like "En berättelse från Stockholms skärgård", a fragment, but this time deliberately so. "Början av Ån Bogsveigs saga"<sup>24</sup> ("The Beginning of the Saga of Ån Bogsveig") is another of Strindberg's stories inspired by traditional

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shadow of Stockholm's Klara Church from 1851-56, i.e., when the future author was between the ages of two and seven.

\*\* Literally, "Behold! night flees before the joy of day!"

<sup>24</sup> Samlade verk, II, 102-109. Samlade verk also publishes, for the first time, an earlier version of this story in the notes to the volume (207-214).

material (like "Den fredlöse"). Ån Bogsveig is the hero of an Icelandic saga; rather than writing his own version of the tale, Strindberg has composed a little piece giving the background of its hero: in modern television and movie terms, a "prequel". The story was first published in *Vitter kalender 1872* (*Literary Annual for 1872*), a student publication of Uppsala University; although Strindberg was no longer a student when the story was completed (August, 1872), several of his friends worked on the annual and ensured its publication (*Samlade verk*, II, 194-95).

The young Ån Bogsveig is presented as a rather feeble-minded young man, unaware of either his great size or his great strength. Someone has told him that he will not be a man until he reaches a height of seven feet, and he firmly believes this, refusing to participate in any of the work expected of a man until he should reach that height. Instead, he spends his days lying by the fire in the cook-house with his only friend, Grotte the pig. He is an object of derision to all who know of him. His unevolved condition is symbolized by his colour: the smoke from the fire has made him a study in black, surmounted by a touch of red: "Ån hade ett hiskligt utseende. .... Röken hade färgat hans

hår rött och svärtat hans ansikte."<sup>25</sup> Red hair, as we have seen in "En berättelse från Stockholms skärgård", indicates a predisposition to suffering! That this colouring is significant to the author is indicated by the fact that the first version of the story contained only the detail of the reddened hair: the blackened face was added later (Samlade verk, II, 208).

Ån's great strength is first revealed at his brother's wedding feast, when he kills a man who has insulted his parents. Shortly thereafter, the brother is about to depart on a journey by ship to see the king. Ån boards the ship and refuses to leave it; his size and strength assure that nobody can force him to leave against his will. The brother tells him, to his surprise, that he is the tallest and strongest of his village, and they depart for the adventures related in the Icelandic saga. They sail off into the setting sun, but a gathering storm signifies that the real action is about to begin, as do the brother's final words:

Solen gick ned. Landet såg som en ljus-  
blå rand bakom dem. Då hördes ett dån i  
luften.

"Vad är det?" sa Ån och sprang upp.

"Det är vädret, som kommer."

"Ha vi långt kvar?"

<sup>25</sup> Samlade verk, II, 102: "Ån had a dreadful appear-ance. .... The smoke had coloured his hair red and blackened his face."



"Vi ska börja nu" sa Thore och lät hissa på.<sup>26</sup>

The final section of *I vårbrytningen* is a collection of short pieces based on student life at Uppsala University, "Från Fjärdingen och Svartbäcken: studier vid akademien"<sup>27</sup> ("From Fjärdingen and Svartbäcken:<sup>28</sup> Studies of the Academic Life"). It was originally published separately in 1877, possibly in conjunction with the four hundredth anniversary of the university that year. It is an entertaining shattering of romantic illusions about student life, but holds no interest in the present context.

<sup>26</sup> *Samlade verk*, II, 108:

The sun went down. The land looked like a light blue stripe behind them. Thunder was heard in the sky.

"What's that?" said Ån, jumping to his feet.

"There's a storm coming."

"Do we still have far to go?"

"We are just beginning," said Thore, and commanded that the sails be hoisted.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-190.

<sup>28</sup> Fjärdingen and Svartbäcken (literally, The Quarter and Black Hill, respectively) are two districts of Uppsala where many students live.

## Chapter 9

## Röda rummet

*Röda rummet: skildringar ur artist- och författarlivet*<sup>1</sup> (*The Red Room: Sketches from the Life of Artists and Writers*, 1879) contains very little symbolism. There are, however, a few scattered symbols, and these are worth examining for the light they may shed on subsequent works and for their place in the development of Strindberg's symbolic system.

The novel is a portrait of the life led by young artists and intellectuals (mostly writers and painters) in the Stockholm of the 1870's. The central character, Arvid Falk, is generally accepted as a self-portrait of the young Strindberg. In Chapter 11: "Lyckliga människor" ("Happy People"), the group of young friends whose custom it is to gather in the Red Room of Berns salonger (a famous Stockholm watering hole) have been having a celebration: one has found a job, one has sold a piece of work, one has obtained a commission for an altar-piece, Falk's poems are to be printed, etc. Reluctant to part when the Red Room closes, they visit the room of a woman of easy virtue whom one of them knows, but only that they might prolong their drinking. An evening that began in jubilation finishes in drunk-

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, VI.

eness, exhaustion, and sentimental platitudes. The mood of the chapter is thus one of joy and sorrow intermingled, a mood reflected in the person of Marie, the prostitute, whose attractive appearance and manner contrasts with the sadness and sordidness of her life; and in the three plants which decorate her modest room: "I fönstret tvinade en fuchsia, en geranium och en myrten -- Venus' stolta träd bredvid fattighusets!"<sup>2</sup> The plant of the poorhouse is the ubiquitous geranium, and the Romans held the myrtle sacred to Venus (Ferguson, 34); it still betokens sexual promiscuity (Meurice, 121). These two plants form an appropriate decoration in the room of one who makes a meagre living by selling her sexual favours!

This leaves the fuchsia unexplained. The popular name for fuchsia in Swedish is *Kristibloddroppar* (literally, drops of Christ's blood), and in Advent (1898) Strindberg transforms the Garden of Eden's Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil into a huge fuchsia bush. That symbolism seems particularly appropriate here also, in a chapter which contrasts joy and sorrow, as an embellishment in the dwelling of a fallen woman!

This fallen woman is linked to an illustrious predecessor. Over the dresser in the room hangs a

<sup>2</sup> Samlade verk, VI, 117: "In the window languished a fuchsia, a geranium, and a myrtle: the proud plant of Venus beside that of the poorhouse!"

lithograph of the crucified Christ. Below this representation of the Cross, the woman Marie leads her life. The young artist Lundell first met Marie when searching for a model for a painting of Mary Magdalene at the foot of the Cross. In nineteenth-century Swedish slang, a prostitute was known as *en Magdalena* (a term which Strindberg uses in the novel), after the tradition that St. Mary Magdalene had been a prostitute before being converted by Christ. Marie, the Magdalena, is thus connected to St. Mary Magdalen in several ways!

The chapter closes with a feeling of uneasiness and impending disaster. Marie lives in an old building, on the outer wall of which is a carving of two grinning heads, with a sword and a broad-axe between them. As the exhausted group of young revellers leaves in the early morning light, she watches their departure, and the reader gets a strong impression of the sword of Damocles hanging over her head:

Då de kommo upp i gränden vände Falk sig om: där låg Magdalena i det öppna fönstret; solen lyste på hennes vita ansikte och hennes långa svarta hår, som av solen färgades mörkrött, dröp ner förbi halsen och såg ut som om det störtade sig i flera rännilar ner i gatan; och över hennes huvud hängde svärdet och bilan och de båda ansiktena som grinade; men i ett äppelträd på andra sidan gränden satt en svart och vit flugsnappare och sjöng sin mjältsjuka strof som skulle uttrycka hans glädje över att natten var förbi.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, VI, 121:

When they reached the lane, Falk turned round and saw Magdalena in the open window. The sun shone on her white face, and her long black

The effect of the chapter is strengthened by the colour symbolism (which forms the dominant colour scheme in all of Strindberg's writing): the white of innocence almost engulfed in the black and red of the world of experience. The apple tree is another allusion to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and hence to the Fall; the flycatcher is a creature which sustains itself through the destruction of other creatures, as its name alone suggests; and the paradox that its melancholy song should seem to echo the young hero's joy is a nice crystallization of the mingling of the two emotions throughout the chapter.

Frequently in Strindberg's work spiders are associated with fate, the spinning of the insects paralleling the spinning of the thread of destiny (a related symbol is that of sewing or needlework, as in *Till Damaskus*). In *Röda rummet* the first spider, in Chapter 14, "Absint" ("Absinthe"), is in fact metaphoric, but that increases rather than decreases its symbolic value. The metaphor is applied to the actor Falander, who is

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hair, which the sun tinted dark red, fell down about her throat and looked as if it were rushing in several rivulets into the street; and over her head hung the sword and the axe and the two faces, which grinned. But in an apple tree on the other side of the lane sat a black and white flycatcher and sang its melancholy stanza, which seemed to express his [i.e., Falk's] joy that the night was over.

as original and eccentric an individual (and therefore hated or suspected by most of his peers) as he is a great artist. Shunned by most of his contemporaries, he sits alone in his cafe and drinks absinthe:

Han drack ur sin absint och sjönk med huvudet tillbaka mot väggen, på vilken syntes en lång brun strimma där röken från hans cigarr stigit upp under de sex långa år han suttit där. Solstrålarne bröto sig in genom fönstren, men sållades först av de stora asparne utanför, vilkas lätta bladverk sattes i rörelse av aftonvinden, så att skuggan på långväggen bildade ett rörligt nät, vid vars nedersta hörn den dystres huvud med dess oordnade hårlockar kastade en skugga som mycket liknade en stor spindel.<sup>4</sup>

From time to time, this spider catches a fly in his web: the young waiter, Gustaf, and a young aristocrat named Rehnghjelm, both of whom aspire to the stage, have fallen under Falander's spell. Most of the chapter is a conversation between Falander and Rehnghjelm, a conversation which is interrupted by the arrival of Falander's great rival and personal enemy, the theatre manager-director. As Falander rises to leave, attention

<sup>4</sup> Samlade verk, VI, 143:

He drained his absinthe and leaned his head back against the wall, on which a long brown streak marked where the smoke from his cigar had curled up during the six long years he had been sitting there. Sunbeams burst in through the windows, but were first filtered by the large aspens outside, the light foliage of which was set in motion by the evening wind, so that the shadow on the long wall formed a moving web, at the bottom corner of which the head of the melancholy one, with its dishevelled locks of hair, cast a shadow which very much resembled a large spider.

is once more drawn to the spider image and to the trembling aspens, both warnings of unfortunate events to come: the fly, Rehnghjelm, will become a pawn in the power struggle between Falander and the director:

Spindeln på väggen klättrade igenom sitt nät liksom för att vittja detsamma och så försvann han. Flugan satt kvar ännu en liten stund. Men solen gömde sig bakom Domkyrkan, nätets maskor upplöste sig som om de aldrig varit och asparne skälvde utanför fönstren.<sup>5</sup>

The other spider is a real one, but it too is linked in some way to Rehnghjelm's destiny (and to Falander). In Chapter 21, "En själ över bord" ("Soul Overboard") Rehnghjelm learns that his fiancée, Agnes, who has earlier been Falander's mistress, has been having an affair with the theatre director. When he awoke that morning, he had been filled with foreboding, but as he dressed he caught sight of a spider scuttling across the floor, and he took this as a good omen, which cheered him up no end. He convinces himself that the omen is so propitious that nothing untoward can happen to him that day. Falander asks him to call on him, and shortly after he arrives, Agnes too shows up, letting herself in with a key. Despite a feeling of

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, VI, 150:

The spider on the wall clambered over its web as if to inspect it, and then disappeared. The fly sat there a little while longer. But the sun hid itself behind the Cathedral, the netting of the web dissolved as if it had never existed, and the aspens outside the windows trembled.

uneasiness, he trusts in the omen of the spider, but when he relates the incident to the others, Falander quickly disillusions him: the spider is indeed an omen, but of grief rather than of happiness: "Araignée matin = chagrin...."<sup>6</sup> After the disclosure of Agnes' unfaithfulness, Rehnghjelm abandons his career on the stage and returns home, broken-hearted.

Finally, there is an interesting reference to the malignant powers which play so important a rôle in Strindberg's post-Inferno works. The words are spoken by Agnes in Chapter 17, "Natura ...", who visits Falander to complain of her impatience to marry and of the set-backs which prevent this, and learns that the situation is even worse than she had thought:

-- O vad världen är bitter, bitter! Det är som om en ond makt satt och lurade ut alla våra önskningar för att kunna mota dem, spionerade ut våra förhoppningar för att kunna krossa dem, gissade våra tankar för att kväva dem. Om man kunde önska sig själv allt ont borde man göra det för att narra den där makten!<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samlade verk, VI, 209: "Spider in the morning: take warning...."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 178:

"Oh, how the world is bitter, bitter! It's as if an evil power sat and wormed out all our wishes in order to obstruct them, spied out our hopes in order to be able to crush them, guessed our thoughts in order to smother them. If one could wish oneself every evil, one ought to do it, in order to cheat that power!"



## Chapter 10

## Gamla Stockholm

*Gamla Stockholm: anteckningar ur tryckta och otryckta källor*<sup>1</sup> (Old Stockholm: Notes from Published and Unpublished Sources) was first published serially 1880-82, then in book form in 1885. Although Strindberg did the planning and organization, he found it necessary to work with a collaborator: Claes Lundin. Each author wrote some sections of the book entirely on his own, and they collaborated on others; we here look only at those sections written entirely by Strindberg.

*Gamla Stockholm* is a logical continuation of the interests revealed in *Kulturhistoriska studier* (Studies in Cultural History, 1872-80: not dealt with in the present study) and a forerunner not only of Strindberg's major non-fiction historical work, *Svenska folket* (The Swedish People, 1881-82) but also of the short story cycle, *Svenska öden och äventyr*, 1882-91), *Bland franska bönder* (Among French Peasants, 1886), and the great cycle of Swedish history plays already begun with *Mäster Olof*. It is not a history of Stockholm, but a description of day-to-day life in that city over the centuries, as gleaned from materials in *Kungliga bib-*

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VI. Only the portions of the book written entirely by Strindberg are published in *Samlade skrifter*.

lioteket (the Royal Library, where Strindberg was employed 1874-82) and the Stockholm city archives. It exemplifies, with all his later historical writings, the principal first enunciated in *Kulturhistoriska studier*, that "furstarnas historia är en och folkens en annan."<sup>2</sup>

Because of its nature (non-fiction, and heavily reliant on sources), there is little symbolism in *Gamla Stockholm*. There are, nevertheless, a few passages that are worth looking at for the light they throw on the symbolism of other works. Here we learn, for example, that all of Stockholm's windmills had names, and that two called Adam and Eva (they figure in *Stora landsvägen*) were located just outside Sabbatsberg (a district of Stockholm not far from where Strindberg spent his childhood and final years).<sup>3</sup> More important, however, is Strindberg's explanation of the possible symbolism of the *fastlagsris* (no English equivalent: a bunch of twigs, usually birch, which Swedes still bring indoors on Shrove Tuesday; bunches of coloured feathers are tied to the tips of the twigs, which are then set in water and placed in a window for the whole of Lent; their budding is both a token and a promise of spring and the Resurrection):

<sup>2</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, IV, 100: "the history of princes is one thing, and that of peoples another."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Vad påksederna beträffar, torde väl riset, som första fettisdagen begagnas skämtsam samt som väckningsmedel, vara en åminnelse av Kristi pina, och betyder väl då de granna fjädrarne att den pinan blev världen till glädje.<sup>4</sup>

This symbolism is used to great effect in Påsk.

A chapter describing children's toys and games contains a singularly interesting passage which, if it is not the inspiration of Strindberg's pilgrimage plays, at least reveals that he found the central symbol of those plays a pervasive one; the first of the pilgrimage plays, *Lycko-Pers resa* (*Lucky Per's Journey*), was written about the same time (1881-82, published 1882) and, significantly enough, is cast in the form of a children's fantasy-play. He is speaking here of the game called hopscotch in English. After tracing it back to at least 1684 in France and at least 1796 in Germany and drawing comparisons between the game as played in Switzerland and in Stockholm, he goes on to consider its meaning:

Vem som uppfunnit denna lek är okänt, liksom dess betydelse. Dock har någon vid betraktandet av stockholmarnes hage kommit på den tanken, att leken skulle kunna äga en betydelse mera djup än troligen uppfinnaren tillämnat. Som bekant, är hagen delad i nio fält; den

<sup>4</sup> Samlade skrifter, VI, 66:

As for Easter customs, the birch switch, which is first used playfully on Shrove Tuesday to get people out of bed, is probably a reminder of Christ's suffering, and the gaudy feathers must then signify that the suffering resulted in happiness for mankind.

runda platsen i mitten kallas "helvete" och den runda platsen vid hagens övra ända "himmelriket". Vad ligger närmare till hands för en fantasi än att betrakta leken som en avbild av jordevandringen, kryssande fram mellan helvetets vådor och till himmelriket, ibland på ett ben, ibland på två; och innan man kommer in i himmelen, skall man hoppa omkring den tre gånger; sedan lägger man stenen på stöveltån, tackar för gott sällskap och kastar den ut genom hagen tillbaka hela den långa väg som den arbetat sig fram -- ett drag vittnande om stor humor och stor människokännedom.<sup>5</sup>

Since Strindberg is otherwise at great pains to credit his sources in this work, it is fairly safe to assume that the "någon" ("someone") referred to here is himself! The following paragraph in the chapter deals with another game, called *Jakobs stege* (Jacob's Ladder), which the author describes as "en annan himlavandring" ("another pilgrimage to Heaven"); the biblical Jacob's

<sup>5</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VI, 109-10:

The inventor of this game is unknown, as is its meaning. While contemplating the Stockholmers' hopscotch grid, nevertheless, someone has arrived at the thought that the game might have a deeper meaning than the inventor suspected. It is well known that the grid is divided into nine sections; the round space in the middle is called "Hell" and the round space at the top end of the grid "the Kingdom of Heaven". What is easier for the imagination than to regard the game as an image of the pilgrimage of life, forging its way through the perils of Hell to the Kingdom of Heaven, sometimes on one leg, sometimes on two? and before you enter Heaven, you must hop around it three times; then you place the stone on the toe of your shoe, thank it for the good companionship, and kick it back through the grid the whole long way along which it has laboured -- a touch manifesting great humour and great knowledge of mankind.

Ladder also appears in the final scene of *Lycko-Pers resa*.

The same chapter takes a brief look at ABC books, and observes that in Sweden such books have always ended with a full-page illustration of a rooster (usually without text). Strindberg makes the discovery from eighteenth-century ABC books that the bird is meant to serve as a model of watchfulness.<sup>6</sup>

A chapter on mediaeval guilds and journeymen's associations provides background to *Gillets hemlighet* and some of the stories in *Svenska öden och äventyr*, while one on legends and superstitions provides, among other things, the origin of the incident in "Tschandala" in which the gypsy Jensen is terrified through the use of a magic lantern.<sup>7</sup> Of more interest from the point of view of symbolism, however, is an incident related in the same chapter which throws light on the White Lady in Advent:

På Stora barnhuset visade sig en tid för många år sedan en vit fru. Sköterskorna sågo henne alla och menade, att hon vakade över att ammorna icke skulle vanvårda de små. En amma, som berättade detta, fick flytta, emedan hon med sin historia skrämde ammor från

<sup>6</sup> Samlade skrifter, VI, 115.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 186.

att söka sig in där, där de alltid voro eftersökta.<sup>8</sup>

During the final two years of this project, Strindberg also wrote *Svenska folket* (this time without a collaborator), directing many of the materials he was amassing towards it rather than *Gamla Stockholm*.

<sup>8</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VI, 192:

Many years ago, a white lady appeared at Stora barnhuset [the Great Orphanage in Stockholm]. All of the nurses saw her, and were of the opinion that she kept watch lest the wet-nurses neglect the small ones. A wet-nurse who related this was discharged, since her story had frightened off wet-nurses from applying for positions there, where they were always needed.

## Chapter 11

*Gillets hemlighet*

*Gillets hemlighet: Komedi i fyra akter*<sup>1</sup> (*The Secret of the Guild: Comedy in Four Acts*), was completed early in 1880. Although it has a mediaeval setting, and is based on an actual incident (the collapse of one of the towers of Uppsala Cathedral in 1402), it is not, strictly speaking, a history play: its intention is neither to examine nor to reinterpret either a historical period or a historical personage. It is, then, a historical play, or costume drama. Strindberg draws on his knowledge of the history of Uppsala Cathedral and mediaeval trade guilds, but the characters are all creatures of his imagination.

It has been said that comedy is a vision of the world as we would wish it to be; tragedy a vision of the world as we fear, alas! it really is.<sup>2</sup> Although a comedy, *Gillets hemlighet* deals with many of Strindberg's most serious themes: sin, punishment, suffering, expiation, the existence of supernatural powers inimical to man, and the struggle between idealism and practicality. Because it is a comedy, and also because the

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 5-42.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson Davies, from the introductory lecture to his two graduate courses on the history of the theatre, given at the University of Toronto in the mid-1960s.

author is not bound by historical facts, it allows idealism to triumph: virtue is rewarded and vice not only punished, but reformed. All the heavy, serious themes are there, and both good and evil characters suffer much, but the vision is not depressing: those themes are worked through and resolved in a vision of optimism and harmony. The main theme of the play is faith: faith that justice and truth will prevail, and that the end of present difficulties is a better world: in the words of one of the play's characters, the Rector of the Cathedral, "... Herrans hand vilar över dig; genom mycken bedrövelse skall du gå fram till seger...."<sup>3</sup>

Construction of Uppsala Cathedral (the seat of the Archbishop of Sweden) began in 1255, but its completion was continually deferred by a long series of disasters (one of which forms the historical basis of this play), including engineering errors, defective materials, and outbreaks of the plague. But eventually, after about two centuries, it was completed. By Strindberg's day, it was badly in need of repair and restoration, and he wrote the play in the midst of an often heated public debate about how that work should be undertaken (significantly for the play, the debate centred around what school of architecture -- French Gothic or North German

<sup>3</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 16 (Act I, sc. 15): "... the hand of the Lord rests over you; through many afflictions will you go forward to victory...."



-- had provided the original model for the cathedral). The play was Strindberg's contribution to the debate, in a sense. That restoration was carried out (badly) in 1885-93. A more authentic restoration (again surrounded by controversy about what the restored building should look like) has only recently been completed.<sup>4</sup>

The basic outline of the plot of *Gillets hemlighet* is fairly straightforward: Hans, the Master Builder of the cathedral, at the age of eighty is no longer able to carry out his duties. Through intrigue and election engineering, his son, Jacques, is able to get himself chosen by the builders' guild as the new Master Builder, instead of the more experienced and better qualified Sten, who is, appropriately enough (Sten, a common Swedish name, means, quite literally, stone), a master stone mason. At his installation, he must swear that he knows the secret of the guild, without which knowledge the cathedral cannot be successfully brought to completion. Although he has never even heard of the secret, Jacques swears that he knows it. He discovers it written on a piece of parchment in the guild's chest, but he cannot read, and his former ally, Gerhard, who reads the document, will not tell him what it

<sup>4</sup> Facts gleaned from Austin, 87; Johnson, *Strindberg and the Historical Drama*, 58; and Ohlmarks, 64-66; as well as from personal observations on visits to the cathedral in 1972, 1983, and 1986 (the first two visits during the progress of the most recent restorations, the last after their completion).

says. The play opens early in the year 1402, (Christmas decorations are still up), and Jacques undertakes to complete the tower of the cathedral by the end of April. He is successful, but only because he has had the stone laid during the winter. The structure is faulty, and during a violent storm it collapses, bringing with it much of the work of previous builders. Jacques is tried for faulty workmanship, perjury, and divulging the guild's secret to another (Gerhard); the guild is dissolved and construction put under the direct supervision of the cathedral chapter; and Sten is appointed the new Master Builder.

The play's central symbol is the secret referred to in its title. This secret is not revealed until near the end of the final act, but the audience is never able to forget either its existence or its importance. We know also, from the moment Jacques swears that he knows the secret, when in fact he has no more idea of it than we do, that all his ambitions and plans are doomed to failure, for even before he does so, the Rector has underlined its importance:

DOMHERREN: ....

En sak återstår: Är ni beredd att avlägga ed på att I känner hemligheten?

JACQUES (bestört): Hemligheten?

DOMHERREN: Känner I kyrkans grundtal, de Albertinska sanningarne, på vilka kyrkans

plan vilar och utom vilkas kännedom I icke  
kunnen bygga?<sup>5</sup>

Two things are of note in this exchange. First, of course, is the fact that Jacques does not know the secret and therefore cannot build. Second, when these words are spoken, neither Jacques nor the audience has any way of knowing whether the Rector is saying "the plan of the church" (i.e., the building under construction) or "the plan of the Church" (i.e., Christianity).

The next important piece of information about the secret is that Sten, the more worthy candidate whom Jacques has defeated, does know it, and that furthermore, he is the only person left in the guild who does:

<sup>5</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 11 (I, viii):

THE RECTOR: ....

One thing remains: Are you prepared to take an oath that you know the secret?

JACQUES (troubled): The secret?

THE RECTOR: Do you know the basic proportions of the church, the Albertine\* truths on which the plan of the church is grounded, and without knowledge of which you cannot build?

\* Perhaps Albertus Magnus (c. 1206-1280), but a more likely candidate would seem to be Leone Battista Alberti, the celebrated Florentine architect whose studies of proportion were highly influential. If this is whom Strindberg had in mind, it is an anachronism: Alberti was not born until 1404 (i.e., two years after the year in which the play is set), and his *De re aedificatoria* not published until 1485!

STEN: .... Jag vet -- det är stolta ord! att ingen har den stora insikten i byggnadens hemligheter och fundament så som jag fått dem; de ha druckit bort, glömt bort de stora sanningarne och därför blir kyrkan aldrig färdig.<sup>6</sup>

The Rector has told Sten that he lost the election because of his pride; he must learn humility before he can apply his talents judiciously. Sten has been practicing humility ever since, having been persuaded by the Rector and by Cecilia (ward of the guild) to remain in Uppsala rather than returning to his native Provence.<sup>7</sup> The above speech, then, spoken, as he himself admits, with pride, must be so demonstrably true that even his efforts at humility cannot suppress it.

Sten has another secret: he loves Cecilia. As often happens in Strindberg (there are important examples in *Han och hon* and in *Till Damaskus I*), the

<sup>6</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 14 (Act I, sc. 12):

STEN: .... I know -- these are proud words! -- that nobody has so great an insight into the secrets and basic principles of the building as I have been granted; they've drowned the great truths in drink, forgotten them, and that's why the church will never be completed.

<sup>7</sup> His real name is most likely Étienne; Strindberg joins the French Gothic - North German controversy by making some of his master craftsmen French, some (such as Gerhard) German, and some (such as Jurgen) good Swedes. Jacques' name would seem to indicate that he is French too, but his father is named Hans. Perhaps the child of a mixed (German-French) marriage, he is the Master Builder who fails; Strindberg's point seems to be that the restorers should choose one style or the other, but above all avoid a compromising amalgam.

expression of love takes the form of a death-wish: his rhapsodic vision combines his love for Cecilia, the death-wish, and, more to the point for this discussion, the sharing of his secret with the whole of creation:

Hör!-- I det land där jag lärde min konst, I vet det heter Provence, där ligger ett berg som kallas än denna dag för Mont Silence; det reser mot skyn sin snöiga topp, men i det berget finnes en hålväg, där stalp sig staplar på stalp; när herden mot kvällen driver hem sin hjord, då bär han sina skor i handen och icke stenarne skola giva ljud och han binder mulen på sina kreatur att de icke måtte bryta tystnaden; om någon det gör är han dödens man, ty då störtar berget tillsammans och ger den osälle både grav och begängelse.

Dit vill jag gå en aftonstund och giva berget min hemlighet; jag skall sätta järnnaglar i mina skor och koppardubbe in min stav, och glad skall jag vandra in i min grav ropande ut för berget, för skogen min hemlighet: Cecilia! Cecilia! Och när tallarne båga och klippstalpen skälva, då skall mitt hjärta i döden jubla: Cecilia! Cecilia!<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Skrifter, XI, 15 (I, xii):

Listen! -- In the country where I learned my craft -- you know that it's called Provence -- there is a mountain which even today is called Mont Silence; its snowy top rises toward the skies, but in the mountain there is a chasm, where precipice rises above precipice; when the shepherd drives his flock home towards evening, he carries his shoes in his hand, lest they make a noise on the stones, and he muzzles his animals, that they might not break the silence; if anyone does that, he's a dead man, for then the mountain crashes shut, both destroying the unfortunate one and providing him with a grave.

I want to go there one evening and tell the mountain my secret; I'll put iron spikes in my shoes and a copper tip on my staff, and I'll tramp happily to my grave, shouting out to the mountain and to the forest my secret: "Cecilia! Cecilia!" And when the pines bend and the faces of the cliffs tremble, then my dying heart will rejoice: "Cecilia! Cecilia!"

This attitude towards a secret in a way foreshadows the trial scene in Act IV: it is Sten who there proclaims and expounds the secret of the guild, and his doing so entails the guild's dissolution. His perception that sharing his secret might involve his destruction also prepares us for Jacques' downfall: one of the charges against him is that he has betrayed the secret of the guild both to the Rector and to Gerhard. The possession of a secret is a serious responsibility; revealing it a matter of grave consequence!

For a period of twenty years before the play opens, little has been accomplished in the construction of the cathedral. This was the period when Jacques' father was Master Builder; there is a suggestion that, like his son, Hans too was ignorant of the secret, committing perjury in order to obtain his position:

STEN (...): .... Avlade han eden på den förlorade hemligheten?

DOMHERREN: Ja, han gjorde det.

STEN: Fädernas missgärning inpå barnen. Ve oss!<sup>9</sup>

The impression is confirmed in Act IV, when Jacques makes a last desperate attempt to learn the secret

<sup>9</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 16 (I, xiii):

STEN (...): Did he take an oath that he knew the lost secret?

THE RECTOR: Yes, he did.

STEN: The sin of the fathers visited on the children. Woe on us!

before his trial: he swallows his antipathy towards his father and begs him to reveal the secret to him:

JACQUES: Du kan befria mig från brottet; om du ger mig hemligheten, så är jag icke -- vad det kallas, då man avlagt en ed på något som icke är.

HANS: Jag har aldrig haft hemligheten!<sup>10</sup>

This explains why no progress has been made on the building for so long: without knowledge of the secret, one cannot build!

When Jacques finds the secret in the guild's chest, Gerhard is also present. Knowing the secret to be a source of power, Jacques guards it jealously, even though he is unable to read it. At this manifestation of greed in his sometime friend, Gerhard, who has helped engineer Jacques' election, resolves to aid him no more. Jacques' words are prophetic, alluding as they do to the penetration of light into a closed structure: the secret is indeed not fully revealed until most of the roof has been torn off the cathedral!

JACQUES (gömmar pergamentet i sin barm):  
När jätten har sett solen, månen och stjär-

<sup>10</sup> Skrifter, XI, 37 (IV, ix):

JACQUES: You can free me of the crime; if you give me the secret, I won't be -- whatever it's called when you swear an oath about something that isn't true.

HANS: I've never known the secret!

norna i sin lomma, så skall du få se min hemlighet.<sup>11</sup>

Sten finds proof that Jacques does not know the secret in the way the latter acts towards the other craftsmen, using his supposed possession of it as a means of power and domination over them, giving himself airs of superiority and importance, and especially refusing to listen to the advice of others, who know their crafts better than he does. When Jacques' behaviour gets too much to take, Sten lets him know that he is aware of his deception: "I har svurit att I har hemligheten, men det har I svurit falskt!"<sup>12</sup> Sten's fellow-craftsman, all similarly victims of Jacques' tyranny, gradually come around to this view, and in a desperate attempt to save his reputation, Jacques shows the parchment to the Rector, asking him to confirm that he does indeed possess the secret. The Rector cannot deny the evidence, but nevertheless does not give Jacques the unqualified testimonial he seeks, for he suspects the truth -- Jacques either cannot read the

<sup>11</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 20 (II, iv):

JACQUES (concealing the parchment in his breast): When the giant has seen the sun, the moon, and the stars in his den, you will be allowed to see my secret.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 (II, vi): "You've sworn that you have the secret, but you've sworn falsely!"



secret or does not understand it: "I besitter hemligheten. O! att I kunde begagna den!"<sup>13</sup>

Jacques, of course, hears only what he wants, and in his triumph ironically foretells his own doom:

Ser I där, belackare och ärerövare, jag har hemligheten; ho kan mig nu fördärva; ser I där, att sanningen segrar till slutet, fastän fienden står emot!<sup>14</sup>

In a highly comic scene, Jacques shows the secret to Gerhard (who can read), having first made him swear that he will reveal it to nobody. Gerhard reads it (silently) and, true to his oath (in contrast to Jacques), then refuses to tell Jacques what it contains! He gives him a hint, however, and as it turns out, tells him everything he needs to know. Jacques proves the Rector's suspicions; even if had been able to read the secret, he would not have understood it:

JACQUES: .... Läs! (Han lämnar pergamentet till Gerhard.)

(Gerhard läser girigt, läser om igen för att pränta i minnet; återlämnar pergamentet till Jacques.)

JACQUES: Nå?

GERHARD: Här ha vi ett kors! Det synes nu, för det är rött!

JACQUES: Ja, det har jag sett också, men ett kors kan inte betyda någonting!

GERHARD: Menar du det?

<sup>13</sup> Skrifter, XI, 24 (II, ix): "You possess the secret. Oh! that you could use it!"

<sup>14</sup> Idem.:

You see, backbiters and slanderers: I have the secret! Who can hurt me now? You see: truth will triumph in the end, even though the enemy offers resistance!

(Läser vidare tyst.)

JACQUES: Nå, vad står där?

GERHARD: Vänta nu! -- Så där! Nu har jag det!

JACQUES: Nå, vad står där?

GERHARD: Vad där står? Min ed förbjuder mig, dessvärre, att yppa det.<sup>15</sup>

Ironically, Jacques ought to know better at this point, for he has already used a cross as a symbol and shown that he is aware of at least some of its implications. When he determines to finish the tower by the end of April, he marks that date on his rune-stick (a primitive calendar, with the days, weeks and months marked along the length of a stick) with a cross:

JACQUES (ensam, tar ner runstaven från spisen, tar upp en kniv och täljer): Sju alnar till Valborgsmässan! Det blir bära eller brista! Jag sätter ett kors på staven

<sup>15</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 27 (III, ii):

JACQUES: .... Read! (He gives the parchment to Gerhard.)

(Gerhard reads it greedily, then reads it again to imprint it on his memory; returns the parchment to Jacques.)

JACQUES: Well?

GERHARD: Here we have a cross! It stands out because it's red!

JACQUES: Yes, I've seen that too, but a cross can't mean anything!

GERHARD: Is that what you think?

(Reads further, silently.)

JACQUES: Well, what does it say?

GERHARD: Wait a moment! -- There! Now I have it!

JACQUES: Well, what does it say?

GERHARD: What does it say? My oath forbids me, unfortunately, to reveal that.

-- det betyder döden -- men -- det kan också  
betyda -- seger!<sup>16</sup>

This is indeed the Christian symbolism of the Cross ("In hoc signo vincis!"). Perhaps it is because Jacques sees the symbolism only in reference to his own desires and ambitions, that he fails to understand that the significance of the cross on the parchment.

Finally, we come to the moment when the secret is openly proclaimed to all. Sten, who has both possessed and understood it all along, is chosen first to expound and then to recite it. From his exposition, it is clear that Jacques did not have to be able to read the document, for it was the cross itself that was significant:

Jacques Alderman, du säger att hemligheten är borta, och du, Jorgen, menar att kyrkans grundplan är bortglömd. Tag fram din pergament, Jacques och betrakta den: -- Du ser där ett kors. Där har du hemligheten. Om du varit med när grunden lades, skulle du ha sett huru grundläggarna lade sitt stenkors i jorden -- det är den kristna kyrkans grundplan. Korset har grott i den helgade marken

<sup>16</sup> Skrifter, XI, 25 (II, xi):

JACQUES (alone; takes the rune-stick down from the stove, picks up a knife, and carves): Seven cubits by Walpurgis Night!\* All or nothing! I'll mark the stick with a cross -- that means death -- but -- it can also mean -- victory!

\* The night of April 30 - May 1. Witches were thought to hold their covens on this night; it became a popular folk festival, with roots in pagan festivities, that is observed in Sweden even today.

och vuxit, det ha vi sett -- och det har skjutit stammar och slagit ut blad -- men högst upp, närmast himlen, på varje tornspets och gaveltak har den gått i blom och se där blev en korsblomma. Förstår du än?<sup>17</sup>

The secret is straightforward enough: just as the Christian Church is founded on the Cross, so this particular church is to be built in the shape and the proportions of a cross (which are, in fact, the proportions of the human body). It is easy to see how no work could progress on the construction of the cathedral without this vital knowledge! But there is more to it than that, for the cross is referred to not only as an artifact but as a symbol, as befits the secret knowledge of a guild (guilds were, after all, also called mysteries), and as Jacques' ruminations over his runestick have already suggested. This is revealed when Sten goes on to read Jacques' parchment:

<sup>17</sup> Skrifter, XI, 39 (IV, xi):

Master Builder Jacques, you say that the secret is confused, and you, Jurgen, think that the ground-plan of the church has been forgotten. Take out your parchment, Jacques, and look at it: -- You see on it a cross. There is your secret. If you'd been present when the foundation was laid, you'd have seen how the foundation-layers laid out a cross of stones in the ground -- that is the ground-plan of the Christian Church. The cross has germinated in the consecrated soil and grown, as we have witnessed -- and it has sent out shoots and broken out in leaves -- but all the way up, nearest heaven, on the tip of every spire and the roof of every gable, it has flowered, and look! the flowers are cross-shaped. Do you understand yet?

Förstår du än? Eller jag skall läsa de rader  
den okände byggmästaren skrivit på din perga-  
ment:

"Du som bygger denna kyrka  
lita ej på egen styrka;  
bygg på korset: det är Tron!  
Det är den som slagit bron  
över valvens högsta krön;  
det är den som lyfter tornet  
och gör själva leran skön,  
och den tömmer utur hornet  
fruktbarhet och rikedomar  
så att själva stenen blommar.  
Tron till sist och tron till först  
bygger bäst och bygger störst."<sup>18</sup>

The builder, then, must be a man of faith, and if he  
translates his faith into stone and brick, the result

<sup>18</sup> Skrifter, XI, 39 (IV, xi):

Do you understand yet? If not, I'll read the  
lines which the unknown master builder wrote  
on your parchment:

"You who work upon this church,  
Put no trust in your own strength;  
Build on the cross: that is Faith!  
That is what has cast the arch  
Over the highest crest of the vault;  
That is what has raised the tower  
And beautifies the very bricks,  
And it pours from its copious horn  
Fruitfulness and profusion  
So the very stonework flowers.  
Keep faith to the end and put faith  
Faith builds best and builds greatest."  
first

The Swedish is written in iambic tetrameter and, except  
for the middle quatrain (which rhymes abab), in rhyming  
couplets. I have tried to translate with basically the  
same rhythm to the lines; further tinkering would dis-  
tort the sense.

will be both beautiful and enduring: the wise man built his house upon a rock!

That Jacques is not a man of faith is apparent from a conversation with his wife, Margaretha, as they reflect on the imminent birth of their child:

JACQUES: .... När jag ser den lille som sträcker sina armar mot mig, då ler mitt sinne, men när jag ser honom växa och blir stor som jag, då ser jag mig som en gammal man -- alldeles som den gamle -- undanskjuten, nedtrampad som gammalt gräs på ängen om vintern.

MARGARETHA: O! Jacques, så skall alltid den känna som lever i världen blott för sin skull!

JACQUES: För vilkens skull skall jag leva om icke för min?

MARGARETHA: För någras, för allas, min vän.

JACQUES: Det kan jag icke!

MARGARETHA: Och ändå måste du! Men det är ljuvt att leva för andra, och det är lätt! ....<sup>19</sup>

The symbolism of the cross also explains how Sten could be convinced that Jacques does not possess the secret:

<sup>19</sup> Skrifter, XI, 18 (II, ii):

JACQUES: .... When I imagine the little fellow stretching his arms out to me, my heart smiles, but when I imagine him growing and becoming as big as I am, then I see myself as an old man -- just like the old one -- pushed aside, trampled down like old grass in the winter pasture.

MARGARETHA: Oh, Jacques! That's the way a person who lives only for himself always feels!

JACQUES: For whom should I live, if not for myself?

MARGARETHA: For someone, for everyone, my friend.

JACQUES: I can't do that!

MARGARETHA: But nevertheless you must! It's sweet to live for others, and it's easy! ....

no man of faith could act as Jacques has been doing towards his fellow workers!

Despite everything, Jacques still does not understand: he will be redeemed, but not just yet. Meanwhile, he reveals that the revelation of the secret and Sten's exposition of it have not penetrated his obtuseness. Gerhard was absent from the scene in which the secret was revealed, but he knows what has happened; when he meets Jacques on his way to honour the new Master Builder, he takes the opportunity to taunt him:

GERHARD: .... ... Hör nu, hur var det med hemligheten? fick du reda på den?

JACQUES: Inte var det någon hemlighet; det var ju bara ett gammalt ordstäv.

GERHARD: Ja, så är det! ....<sup>20</sup>

Before considering Jacques' redemption, we should look at the second theme of the play, the whole great pattern of sin and atonement of which his story is the primary example. It has been pointed out above that the previous Master Builder, Hans, had had no more idea of the secret than his son, and it has been indicated that this is why during the previous twenty years very little progress had been made on the cathedral: Hans knew neither the ground-plan nor the proportions of the

<sup>20</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 41 (IV, xii):

GERHARD: .... ... Listen, how did it go with the secret? did you find out what it was?

JACQUES: It was no secret; it was just an old saying.

GERHARD: Yes, that's all it was! ....

building, so could not build! But like Jacques, Hans has also committed perjury in order to obtain his position. This crime has remained unexpiated (because undiscovered, although, as we have seen, Sten suspects the truth), and has resulted in a curse upon the building of the cathedral. The idea is presented very early in the play, even before we have any idea what the crime might have been or who might have committed it:

STEN: .... Vet I, vet I, jag tror stundom att det vilar en förbannelse över denna byggnad; det måste ligga ett brott begravet, det måste!

DOMHERREN: Jag fruktar att mina tankar ofta taga samma väg; ett gammalt brott som gått igen, släkte efter släkte, och nu synes vara nära att mogna ut. ....<sup>21</sup>

When Jacques has committed his act of perjury, Sten is pretty sure that he knows what that crime was, as he remarks that Jacques' crime is an example of the sin of the fathers being visited on the children. Elsewhere in Strindberg, perhaps most notably in *Folkungasagan*, this implied curse from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5) is interpreted as meaning that the children have to suffer because of and atone for the sins

<sup>21</sup> Skrifter, XI, 14 (I, xii):

STEN: .... You know, you know, I sometimes think there's a curse hanging over this building; there must be a hidden crime, there must!

THE RECTOR: I'm afraid my thoughts often run along the same lines; an old crime which has been repeated, generation after generation, and now seems ready to come to a head.  
....



of their forefathers; here the interpretation is a bit different: if the fathers' sins are unexpiated, the children are condemned to repeat them! Indeed, Jacques is himself aware of an unseen force which seems to drive him to act as he does, despite his own will:

JACQUES: .... Får jag sitta här; så; när jag är hos dig, då försvinner den där som alltid går bakom min rygg!

MARGARETHA: Vem är det som går bakom din rygg, Jacques?

JACQUES: Jag vet inte! Men jag ser honom med nacken, och jag känner hur han skjuter fram mig, då jag inte vill.<sup>22</sup>

This is the pressure of the unexpiated sin, driving Jacques on to a repetition of that sin (even though he is ignorant that it has been committed). In Act III, he feels it pushing him towards other, more serious crimes: as insurance against betrayal or blackmail (Gerhard is the only one who knows with certainty that Jacques does not know the secret), and as retribution for his refusal to help him, Jacques determines to kill Gerhard. As this plan begins to form in his head, he reflects that one crime (his perjury) leads to another,

<sup>22</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 18 (II, ii):

JACQUES: .... May I sit here? There! When I'm with you, the one who always walks behind me disappears!

MARGARETHA: Who is it that always walks behind you, Jacques?

JACQUES: I don't know! But the back of my neck is sensitive to his presence, and I feel how he pushes me forward, against my will.

but he also feels that there is another force behind that, pushing him on to further infamy:

När man börjat med lögn, går man fram till brott; det är dit jag skulle komma, det är dit han har skjutit mig, den osynlige som går bakom. En eller två -- kostar lika mycket! Det skall ske förr eller senare.<sup>23</sup>

By Act IV, Jacques has formed his plan for the murder: he will poison Gerhard with mercury. He seems unable to resist the compulsion, and in the scene before he acts on it (in fact, the Archbishop's fool, Claus, has substituted a harmless powder for the poison), he tries to explain it to his wife. For the first time, he also sees a connection between his own actions and a crime (as yet unknown) committed by his father:

JACQUES: .... Vet du, Margaretha, har du känt att bloden rinner som smält bly i kroppen, att det kyler uppe i hjässan och att man tycker det skulle bli bra först när man fått begå ett brott? Har du känt det?

MARGARETHA: Nej, himlen bevare mig, det har jag aldrig.

JACQUES: Jag tror att brottet växer i blodet, som sot eller rost och att det aldrig blir väl förrän det bryter ut; jag tror att man ärver dessa känslor som man ärver gäld. Har jag aldrig sagt, att jag ibland tror att far har begått något brott i sin ungdom, för vilket han icke blivit straffad?

MARGARETHA: Nej för Guds namn det har du väl icke sagt.

<sup>23</sup> Skrifter, XI, 27 (III, iii):

When you begin by telling a lie, you go on to commit crimes; that is the direction I've been travelling, that is where he has been pushing me, the unseen one who walks behind. One [crime] or two -- the cost is the same! It will happen sooner or later.

JACQUES: Men jag tror det; och det brottet var så stort att vi behövde vara två man att försona det. ....<sup>24</sup>

This is the crux of the matter: the unseen force is not driving Jacques to a life of crime, but rather to atonement. His crime is but a repetition of his father's (his planned murders of Gerhard and his father both fail), necessary in order to call retribution down on his own head. That retribution is devastating, and comes at the hands of both divine and human instruments. What was to have been his one great achievement, the cathedral tower, is utterly destroyed; symbolically, the plaque with which he crowned the tower (instead of a cross) -- "Jacobus filius Joannis ipsemet fecit" -- is smashed to smithereens; the work of

<sup>24</sup> Skrifter, XI, 36 (IV, vii):

JACQUES: .... Do you know, Margaretha, have you felt your blood flowing like molten lead in your body and cooling down when it reaches the brain, so that you feel you won't have peace until you've committed a crime? Have you felt that?

MARGARETHA: No, Heaven protect me, I never have.

JACQUES: I believe that crime swells in the blood, like soot or rust, and that one will never get relief until it has broken out to the surface; I believe you inherit these feelings, just as you inherit debt. Have I never said that I often think my father committed some crime in his youth for which he was never punished?

MARGARETHA: No, in the Name of God, you certainly haven't.

JACQUES: But I believe it; and that the crime was so great that we had to be two men to atone for it. ....

previous builders (including Hans) is also destroyed; Jacques loses his position; he is exiled and black-listed as a builder; and he sees his personal enemy, Sten, made Master Builder in his place. It is the old sinner, Hans, who explains why events have turned out as they have. He also provides an apologia for the pattern of divine justice operating here; in doing so, he throws light on other Strindberg works where the same pattern is evoked. The speech comes before the human penalties are applied to Jacques, which explains Hans' reference to punishments still to come:

Jag har hört och sett allt, och nu är jag straffad -- kanske dock icke nog ännu, ty mitt brott var stort; jag sökte makten och äran, jag ville göra mitt namn stort och berömt, och min släkt mäktig, och jag svor -- som du -- falskeligen. I synd byggdes kyrkan och därför ligger den i grus som mitt liv och ditt. Din skuld är mindre än min, ty du blev gisslet och det var det hårdaste straff jag kunde få!<sup>25</sup>

Following the natural progression which Jacques himself has observed (one sin leads to another), then, the perjury led to the attempt on Gerhard's life (an attempt

<sup>25</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 37 (IV, ix):

I've heard and seen everything, and now I've been punished -- perhaps, however, not enough yet, for my crime was great: I sought power and honour, I wanted to make my name great and renowned and my family powerful, and I -- like you -- swore falsely. The church was built in sin, and therefore it lies in ruins, like my life and yours. Your guilt was less than mine, for you became the scourge, and that was the hardest punishment I could receive!

which, at this point, Jacques does not know has failed), and that to the attempt on the life of his own father (thinking his father almost blind, he has just tried to manipulate the old man in such a way that he will fall down the cellar stairs). Having to witness an attempt on his life by his own son (whom, despite everything, he loves), and having to go on living with the knowledge that he has ruined not only his own life but his son's as well, is Hans' long-expected punishment: not a death sentence, but perhaps more severe!

The pattern of sin and punishment is drawing to its conclusion: the sin is finally expiated. What remains is the completion of the pattern: forgiveness and redemption. In the penultimate scene of the play, Claus (inheritor of a long tradition of wise fools), tries to convince the despairing Jacques that all that has happened has had a purpose, and that his present sufferings have worked great good: "Jacques, du har lidit för din fars missgärning, du har med ditt liv strukit ur hans skuldebok; är det för intet?"<sup>26</sup> Jacques is somewhat encouraged by these words, but cannot quite believe them, for he still feels the presence of the evil force: "Säger du? Men -- ah, nu komma de igen --

<sup>26</sup> Skrifter, XI, 41 (IV, xiii):

Jacques, you have suffered for your father's sin, with your life you have cancelled the record of his guilt; does that count for nothing?

de som gå bakom mig och skjuta på -- Jesus, Maria!"<sup>27</sup>  
 It is significant that han som går bakom (he who walks behind) has here become de (they): the force he has felt compelling him to evil has been the powers: those supernatural forces of destiny and divine justice which Strindberg posits as operating independently of man: often, if not usually, inimical to him. There is a strong suggestion, heavily influenced by Zola's naturalism, that those powers are very closely linked to the often grim laws of heredity.

Eventually, Jacques is liberated from the forces that have compelled him on his ruinous path. He is redeemed by love: the love of his faithful, good, and all-forgiving wife. Her continued faith in him, despite everything he has done, and her forgiveness, convince him, finally, that God also can and does forgive him. In the final scene, the overall pattern of Jacques' life is united to the principal symbol of the play, the secret of the guild, which is the Cross, which is Faith: Margaretha redeems Jacques through her faith, and she does it with a cross:

JACQUES (på knä).  
 MARGARETHA: Stig upp, Jacques!  
 JACQUES: Nej, Margaretha. Du skall först veta hur skuldbelastad jag är!  
 MARGARETHA: Det vet jag!  
 JACQUES: Du skall veta att det är mitt fel

<sup>27</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 41 (IV, xiii): "Really? But -- ah, now they're coming back -- those who walk behind me and push -- Jesus and Mary!"

allt och icke deras.

MARGARETHA: Även det vet jag!

JACQUES: Och ändå?

MARGARETHA: Ändå, Jacques, är du för mig detsamma du alltid varit! (Gör korstecknet på hans panna.)

JACQUES: O, nu flydde de onda andarne! Margaretha, du har förlössat min själ!<sup>28</sup>

Strindberg wrote *Gillets hemlighet* to provide Siri von Essen with a suitable rôle. Those familiar with *Han och Hon* will recognize in this scene elements of the couple's own emotional life: the young author believed that his soul also had been redeemed by the love of the actress for whom the part of Margaretha was created, and that her faith in his talent gave him the strength to continue writing, despite the cool reception given his early works by the critics.

There is another important autobiographical link: the character Sten, in his conviction that he possesses the truth, despite lack of recognition and opposition, embodies Strindberg's faith in his own genius, despite

<sup>28</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 42 (IV, xiv):

JACQUES (kneels).

MARGARETHA: Stand up, Jacques!

JACQUES: No, Margaretha. You must first learn how laden with guilt I am.

MARGARETHA: I know it!

JACQUES: You must learn that everything is my fault, and not theirs.

MARGARETHA: Even that I know!

JACQUES: And despite that?

MARGARETHA: Despite that, Jacques, you're the same for me as you've always been! (Makes the sign of the cross on his forehead.)

JACQUES: Oh, now the evil spirits have fled! Margaretha, you've redeemed my soul!

the lack of success enjoyed by his earlier plays, while other, less talented playwrights were reaping the rewards of public favour.<sup>29</sup> Brandell notes that after the *Inferno* crisis, Strindberg considered *Gillets hemlighet* one of his most important plays. The eventual emergence of Sten, through difficulties, to victory, is prophetic of greater plays still to come!

Thirty years after *Gillets hemlighet* was finished, Strindberg commented briefly on its symbolism:

Vad symbolismen är, det veta vi tragöder, som ofta måste begagna symbolen för att tydligare uttrycka dramats idé. I *Gillets Hemlighet* (1881) symboliserade jag således det förtärande tvivlet medels kyrkvalvets instörtande och den förlorade tron med gillets bortkomna hemlighet.<sup>30</sup>

Towards the end of the same year, he returns to the play, answering criticisms that it is depressing:

Hur kan man kalla *Gillets hemlighet* mörk, då den är så ljus?

Vad handlar den om, och vad går den ut på? Jo, om en ung talang, som i början trampas ner av en gammal odåga och hans framspar-

<sup>29</sup> Vide Gunnar Brandell's comments on the play (*Skrifter*, XI, 423), and Johnson, 62.

<sup>30</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, LIII, 93-94 (from an article in *Tal till svenska nationen*: Address to the Swedish Nation, 1910, titled "Kråk-sång": "Crow Song", first published in *Aftontidningen*: literally, *The Evening Newspaper*, June 25, 1910):

Symbolism is something we tragedians know something about, for we must often use symbols to express the idea of a drama more meaningfully. In *Gillets hemlighet* (1881), I thus symbolized consuming doubt by means of the collapse of the church vault, and lost faith with the forgotten secret of the guild.



kade oxe till son. Men genom förödmjukelser och oförskylda lidanden prövas den unge arbetaren, och framföres slutligen till sin plats.

....

Vidare: Gillets hemlighet förkunnar att tron är den som bygger störst och bäst. Här menas naturligtvis varken något besvärjande av kyrkliga dogmer, anarkistprogram eller preventiv, utan med tron menas den berättigade övertygelsen om en god saks slutliga seger. Med ett ord: entusiasmen (för en helig sak) och offervilligheten.

Där var ju intet mörker heller! <sup>31</sup>

Those familiar with Ibsen's *Bygmester Solness* (*The Master Builder*, 1892) will observe a certain similarity of plot and symbolism. Strindberg later worried about this because, although *Gillets hemlighet* was written before Ibsen's play, the latter made an earlier impact.

<sup>31</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, LIII, 280-81 (from an article in *Religiös renässans: Religious Renaissance*, 1910, entitled "Ljusets fiender": "The Enemies of Light", originally published in *Aftontidningen* November 20, 1910):

How can *Gillets hemlighet* be called gloomy, when it is so bright?

What is it about, and what is its main idea? Well, it is about a talented young man, who at first is trampled down by an old good-for-nothing and his unworthily promoted ox of a son. But through humiliations and undeserved suffering, the young worker is tested, and in the end advanced to his position.

....

Furthermore: *Gillets hemlighet* proclaims that it is faith which builds greatest and best. By this, of course, is not meant adherence to church dogma, anarchic platforms, or spells; rather, by faith is meant the legitimate conviction that a good cause will end in victory. In a word: enthusiasm (for a holy cause) and a spirit of self-sacrifice.

There is certainly nothing gloomy about that!

His newspaper article setting the record straight is interesting for the similarities it points out between the two plays, as well as for the charitable concession that Ibsen was no more a plagiarist than he:

... när Byggmäster Solnes kom till, med samma fabel som Gillets hemlighet skrivet minst tio år förut, då var jag i fara bli tagen som plagiatör, ty handlingen och figurerna voro påfallande lika och mitt drama var ospelat i utlandet. Huset som ramlar, den gamla byggmästarens fruktan för de unga och hans begagnande av andras arbete. Men jag gjorde intet väsen, ty jag visste av erfarenhet, att motiv icke uppträda i obegränsat antal, utan återkomma då och då.<sup>32</sup>

This testifies to the enduring validity of the symbols in the play: they resurface again in William Golding's novel *The Spire* (1964).

<sup>32</sup> Samlade skrifter, LIII, 467 (from the article "Mitt och Ditt": "Mine and Yours", first published in *Aftontidningen* September 5, 1910):

... when *The Master Builder* appeared, with the same plot as *Gillets hemlighet* (written at least ten years earlier), I was in danger of being taken for a plagiarist, for the action and the characters were strikingly similar and my play was unperformed outside of Sweden. The building which collapses, the old master builder's fear of the young, and his use of the work of others. But I did not create a disturbance, for I knew from experience that there is not an unlimited number of dramatic themes, which, rather, reappear from time to time.

## Chapter 12

*Lycko-Pers resa*

*Lycko-Pers resa: sagospel i fem akter*<sup>1</sup> (Lucky Per's Journey: Fantasy Play in Five Acts, 1882) is, as the journey symbol contained in the title suggests, an allegory of moral discovery; it is, in fact, Strindberg's first pilgrimage play. It makes fairly extensive use of symbolism, albeit in an emblematic way; there is particularly frequent use of floral and animal symbols, and the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary (redemption through a woman) is a cohesive device in the work.

In this spiritual voyage through the temptations of the world -- riches, fame, and power -- to happiness and harmony, the dominant colours are, appropriately, the black, red, white, and gold of the alchemical scale of perfection. The flowers are mainly roses and lilies, both important throughout the author's career. The rose in particular is a central symbol for Strindberg, representing purification through love and suffering. Thus, in the present play we find "... mitt i vintern röda rosor och blåa liljor [som] slagit ut sina blom-mor!"<sup>2</sup> In Act IV, Per has become an oriental pasha, and

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 43-74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 48 (I, v): "... in the middle of winter, red roses and blue lilies [which] have burst into bloom!"

is about to be married to a maiden who loves another. Before he releases her from the contract, a wedding hymn is sung, in which both roses and nightingales are exhorted to join; the honoured but unhappy maiden is referred to as a white rose (white to symbolize her purity) "... som länge sökt den höga ekens stam att stödja sig emot ...",<sup>3</sup> and the future children of this (theoretically) happy union are referred to as "... telningar med nya rosenknappar...."<sup>4</sup>

Animal symbolism is important as well, from the scene (I, vii) in which the Old Man (Per's misanthropic father) is changed into a black cat, to the point where it dominates the action:

PER: Vem var det?  
 (Han vill fly i vänster kuliss, men motas av älgar.)  
 Vilda djur mota mig!  
 (Han vill fly till höger, men motas av tjurar.)  
 Även här! Tillbaka!  
 (Djuren gå in på scenen och tränga honom.)  
 ....  
 ... Hjälp! Hjälp!  
 (Han vill kasta sig i havet, men ormar och drakar stiga upp ur vågorna.)  
 Ha natur; även du är ett vilddjur, som vill sluka allt som du rår på! Du, min sista vän, bedrog mig också! ... Vilka fasans syner!

<sup>3</sup> Skrifter, XI, 69 (IV, viii): "... which long has sought support against the trunk of the lofty oak...."

<sup>4</sup> Idem.: "... saplings bearing new rosebuds...."

Havet vill sluka mig! Vad är mitt liv mer värt; kom, död, och befria mig!<sup>5</sup>

These animals, combined with the hostile and stormy sea, symbolize Per's passing through the last of his temptations (those of the natural world) on the road to spiritual harmony. The resting points along the way, where one experiences relative peace and contentment, even if only temporarily, prefigure the final destination, and are described as verdant isles: a symbol that dominates Strindberg's post-Inferno writings and comes to stand for the destination itself (i.e., the afterlife): "Livet ... är ett stormigt hav, men som har sina hamnar invid grönskande öar."<sup>6</sup>

Per does not die, however; the verdant isle has not yet come to symbolize the afterlife exclusively,

<sup>5</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 70 (IV, ix):

PER: Who was that?  
 (He tries to flee into the left wing, but is prevented from doing so by moose.)  
 Wild animals block my way!  
 (He tries to escape to the right, but is barred by bulls.)  
 Here too! Back!  
 (The animals advance onto the stage and crowd in on him.)  
 ....  
 ... Help! Help!  
 (He tries to throw himself into the sea, but snakes and dragons rise from the waves.)  
 So, nature, you also are a beast, which will swallow up everything you can manage! You, my last friend, deceived me as well! ... What horrible sights! What is my life worth now? come, death, and release me!

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 73 (V, iv): "Life ... is a stormy sea, but it has its harbours, alongside verdant isles."

and this is, after all, a children's play. Instead he finds earthly happiness in the form of love for a woman (Lisa): i.e., through concern for somebody other than himself. This love is their verdant isle: not paradise itself (the sea still rages around them, and they must again to sea, eventually), but a token of what it will be like. The symbol recurs in the final scene of the play:

KYRKVAKTAREN: Kyrkan skall stängas!

LISA: Se, nu driver han ut oss ur paradiset.

PER: Det kan han icke! Vi ta det med oss och lägga det som den grönskande ön ute i det stormande havet!<sup>7</sup>

Per, then, finds spiritual harmony by realizing the vanity of selfish earthly ambition, and through a woman's love. Strindberg's marriage to Siri von Essen was still relatively idyllic when the play was written. A hint of the world view of the later pilgrimage plays occurs earlier, in a particularly apt metaphor used by the Old Man: "Jag har sett livet, jag känner dess Sodomsäpplen och därför vill jag skydda dig!"<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 74 (V, vii):

THE VERGER: The church is closing!

LISA: See, now he's chasing us out of paradise.

PER: He can't do that! We carry it with us and cherish it as the verdant isle out in the stormy sea!

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 50 (I, vii): "I have seen life, I know its apples of Sodom, and that is why I want to protect you!"

apple of Sodom, according to Josephus, has a fair appearance, but dissolves, when grasped, into smoke and ashes (OED)!

Chapter 13  
Svenska folket

*Svenska folket i helg och söcken, i krig och fred, hemma och ute eller ett tusen år av svenska bildningens och sedernas historia*<sup>1</sup> (*The Swedish People at Leisure and at Work, in War and Peace, at Home and Abroad, or a Thousand Years in the History of Swedish Manners and Customs*, 1881-82) is Strindberg's largest single non-fiction work. It is an attempt to describe the daily life of the Swedish people from earliest times up to his own day, based, as was *Gamla Stockholm*, on materials in Stockholm's Kungliga biblioteket and (he claims) all archives available in the Swedish capital. Although he deals with the manners and customs of all four social estates (nobility, clergy, bourgeoisie, and farmers) through the ages, his sympathies are with the lower, unprivileged classes: the ordinary people whose story he was convinced was the true history of the nation. The nation, in other words, was not to be viewed under the illumination cast by great personalities and events -- rulers (mostly foreigners, in any case), wars, treaties, etc. -- but rather from below.

The great figures who later become the subjects of Strindberg's history plays all appear here, but only

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VII & VIII.



briefly, and only as their ways of life reflect those of their class, and as their actions affect the lives of the population in general: Gustav Vasa's main appearance, for example, is in a description of his death, not because Strindberg finds it significant in itself, but because it is well documented and provides an interesting insight into the medical practices of the times. Strindberg's own times were engaged in what seemed the deification of the warrior-king, Karl XII; seen from the perspective of *Svenska folket*, his reign was one of the most disastrous the Swedish people, reduced both in numbers and in the necessities of life by constant foreign wars, ever experienced, and Strindberg's argument is persuasive: his statistics show that Sweden's population declined from 2.5 million at the beginning of Karl XII's reign (1697) to only 1.5 million at the end (1718)!

*Svenska folket* has many faults -- the sheer amount of material Strindberg consulted seems to have overwhelmed him at times, and he is accused of not being critical enough of his sources -- and earned its author many enemies in the academic historical establishment. It nevertheless remains an impressive work, full of interest and often written with great humour. No less a figure than Vilhelm Moberg (Swedish novelist, play-

wright, and historian, 1898-1973) has called it a ground-breaking work that deserves great respect.<sup>2</sup>

Since it is not a work which employs symbolism to achieve its ends, the main interest of *Svenska folket* in the present context is, as with *Gamla Stockholm*, in the light it sheds on Strindberg's other works. Both the approach to history which the book exemplifies and the enormous wealth of materials it incorporates provide a well upon which Strindberg drew in subsequent, more literary productions.

In the section on people and life in the Middle Ages, for example, Strindberg relates a legend from the Stockholm archipelago. The short tale is interesting in itself, but the description it contains of Biskopsön (literally, Bishop's Island) holds immense significance, for it is a very early occurrence of what becomes one of Strindberg's major symbols: the image of this isolated island will combine with others, including Strindberg's favorite painting, Böcklin's *Toten Insel*, to form the symbolic verdant isle: the Isle of the Blessed, which, even here, is closely associated with death. In fact, the verdant isle becomes a symbol of the afterlife; what strikes one in the following passage is the use of the phrase "en grönskande ö" ("a

<sup>2</sup> Lindström, "Forskaren", 109. Moberg's opinion is confirmed by historian Per Nyström in his article "Folkets historiker" ("The People's Historian").

greening, or verdant isle") and the associations of the island with both death and paradise:

Ännu finnas i skärgården minnen från den katolska tiden. När man seglar från Huvudskär norråt i havsbandet, upptäcker man bland kala klippor och barrskogsklädda skär en grönskande låglänt ö, vilken på avstånd synes ligga så i vattenbrynet, att den vilken stund som helst skulle kunna översköljas och uppslukas av havet, när detta börjar gå. När man tar i land, överaskas man av att härute i havskanten finna ett litet förankrat stycke paradiset. Urgamla ekar, orörda hasselbuskar, snår av törnrosbuskar, slån och hagtorn, omväxlande med vackra björkar, växa här tillsammans i en blomsterskog, som fordom aldrig avslogs. Om man frågar skärkarlen, vadan detta slöseri i en så fattig omgivning, skall han antyda att ön är förtrollad. Ön heter Biskopsön och begagnades förr till kunglig harjakt, numera ligger den i frid, utom då en upplystare samtid begagnar sig av den rika slåttern. Till bete vågade man icke nyttja den, ty ön är som sagt förgjord, vilket även visar sig i de omgivande vattnen, som aldrig giva någon fisk. Denna förtrollning eller detta bann skall hava uppkommit därigenom, att en biskop, som under kristendomens första tider blivit nödsakad hitut taga sin tillflykt, här blivit av hedningarne dödad. Man säger icke biskopens namn, men ön har fått namnet efter honom. Att denne biskop varit ingen annan än Södermanlands apostel, fiskarnes patron, Helige Botvid kan man med skäl antaga, helst om man läser den vackra legenden om honom, som länge stod i breviarierna och sedan trycktes i Stockholm 1495.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Samlade skrifter, VII, 162:

Memories of the Catholic era can still be found in the archipelago. When you sail northwards from Huvudskär [literally, Head Skerry] in the outer archipelago, among bare cliffs and pine-clad skerries you come across a verdant, low-lying island, which from a distance seems to lie so close to the surface of the water that at any moment it might be inundated and swallowed up by the sea, were it to swell. When you step ashore, you are surprised to find, out here on the edge of the sea, a little earthbound piece of para-

Those acquainted with later developments of the symbol (which is also related to Strindberg's cloud symbolism) will recognize a closer resemblance to Strindberg's own painting, *Den grönskande ön*, than to Böcklin's less lush *Toten Insel*, but they are but different aspects of the same symbol.

dise. Primeval oaks, untouched hazel bushes, thickets of briar, blackthorn, and hawthorn, alternating with lovely birches, here grow together in a flowery wood which has never been cleared. If you ask a native of the archipelago the reason for such extravagance in so needy an environment, he will tell you that the island is enchanted. The name of the island is Biskopsön, and in former times it was used as a royal hare reserve; nowadays it lies in peace, except when our more enlightened age avails itself of the abundant hay. One never dared use it for pasture, for the island is, as stated, bewitched; this can be seen even in the surrounding waters, which never yield any fish. This enchantment or curse is said to have come about because a bishop who was forced to flee here in the early days of Christianity was here put to death by the pagans. The bishop's name is not mentioned, but it is after him that the island is named. That this bishop was none other than the Apostle of Södermanland\* and patron saint of fishermen, St. Botvid [d. 1120?], can reasonably be assumed, especially when one reads the beautiful legend about him which was long included in the breviaries and was subsequently printed in Stockholm in 1495.

\* Södermanland (literally, the country of the southern men) is the province of Sweden just south of Stockholm. It includes the archipelago islands in question.

One of the few passages in *Svenska folket* which is richly symbolic in itself is Strindberg's report of one of the visions of St. Birgitta. He does not use the vision directly in *Folkungasagan* but its symbols nevertheless influenced him. The extract follows an observation that the Church Fathers who eventually approved Birgitta's canonization must have found a great deal about her that would seem unsuitable in a saint:

Illa och opassande hade hon uppträtt mot Herrans smorde, den lättfärdige konung Magnus. Under vistelsen i Stockholm hade hon tyckt sig se konungen och drottningen lysa såsom solen och månen men snart åter förlora sin glans. Lång tid förflöt, innan hon fick förklaring på denna syn, men hon fick den och offentliggjorde den i sina oppositionspredikningar. "Tolv år voro förflutna, då jag hörde Kristi röst, som sade till mig: kom ihåg, min brud, vad jag visade dig på mulen himmel i staden Stockholm. Nu vill jag förklara själva betydelsen därav. Himmelen, som du såg moln-betäckt, betydde Sverige. Detta rike, vilket borde vara liksom himmelskt, lugnt och rättfärdigt, skall bliva skakat av olyckans stormar och sucka under orättvisa och förtryck. Sådant är ej underligt; emedan konungen och drottningen, vilka lystes som solen och månen, hava blivit förmörkade såsom slocknade kol genom förändrade seder och vrång vilja. De hava upphöjt en man av huggorms släkte för att trampa mina vänner och rättsinnige tjänare under sina fötter. Solen skall blekna, det är, konungen skall gå förlustig om sin krona, emedan han ej vill bära den med rättfärdighet; och man skall säga om honom, att mörkret ökade sig i samma mån han varit lysande."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Samlade skrifter, VII, 200-201:

Improperly and unbecomingly, she had risen up against the Lord's anointed, the loose-living King Magnus. During her sojourn in Stockholm, she had imagined that she had seen the king and queen shining like the sun and moon, but soon after lose their bril-

Strindberg changes this assessment of King Magnus Eriksson in *Folkungasagan*, making him a virtuous and innocent victim rather than a loose-liver whose own sins brought disaster on his realm, but he retains St. Birgitta's prophecy of doom on king and country, giving it dramatic strength by having the two characters confront each other face-to-face. Birgitta's sun and moon symbolism appears in the costuming of the play: when Magnus first appears, he is clothed in white and gold, the colour of the sun. The moon symbolism, however, is transferred from his queen (who also wears gold) to his son and co-king, Erik Magnusson (in keeping with the symbol, but a pale reflection of his father), who, with

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 liance. A long time passed before she received an explanation of this vision, but she did receive it and made it public in her contentious sermons: "Twelve years had passed, when I heard Christ's voice, which said to me: 'Remember, my bride, what I showed you in the city of Stockholm. Now I will explain its very meaning. The sky, which you saw covered in clouds, signified Sweden. That kingdom, which should resemble the celestial one, peaceful and righteous, will be shaken by the storms of misfortune and sigh under injustice and oppression. This is not surprising, since the king and queen, who shone like the sun and moon, have been darkened like burnt-out coals by changed habits and perverse will. They have raised up a man from the generation of vipers, to trample my friends and right-minded servants under his feet. The sun shall pale, that is, the king shall forfeit his crown, since he will not wear it in righteousness; and it will be said of him that the darkness increased to the same degree as he had been radiant.'"

his wife, wears silver. Magnus' glory is dimmed when he lays aside his golden robes for the white penitential garment, and at the end of the play he and his wife are further obscured by the loss of the crown; the moon too is darkened when Erik and his wife both die. Meanwhile, with the darkening of the heavenly lights, Sweden is indeed shaken by the storms of misfortune, in the forms of plague, famine, and foreign invasion. The viper is presumably the (appropriately) green-complexioned Knut Porse, whose ambition is to rule Sweden through forming an alliance with the dowager queen, Magnus' mother.

Strindberg does directly incorporate symbolism from another of his sources. In *Svenska folket* he quotes a letter written by a mediaeval nun to a nobleman with whom she had fallen in love. That letter was to provide the point of departure for the play *Herr Bengts hustru* (*Herr Bengt's Wife*, 1882) and the short story of the same name (1883); both incorporate the caged bird and prison symbols of the source:

"... så ofta jag tänker på dig allra käraste hjärtans glädje, får jag en innerlig hug-svalelse, menar mig vara i det fängelse hos dig i famn och lunden där du lekte för mig på harpan, det haver jag sedan med många tårar och suckar betänkt, de kärliga sånger som du sang, minns du vad du sjungde: fågeln sjunger så ljuvligt i skogen, men sitter så bedrövad i buren. -- -- -- -- .....

Syster Ingrid Pärs dotter

till välborne Axel Nilsson Roos."<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, a passage from a mediaeval Swedish song, "Gottlandsvisan" ("The Song of Gottland"), finds its way into *Engelbrekt* (1901), where it is put into the mouth of Harald Månsson Natt och Dag, the son of Engelbrekt's enemy (*Skrifter*, X, 203)

Bättre är dö  
i elden röda  
än ärelös leva.<sup>6</sup>

*Svenska folket* is illustrated with drawings by Strindberg's friend Carl Larsson and others. One such illustration,<sup>7</sup> in a chapter dealing with mediaeval art, shows an allegorical ceiling painting from a wooden church. Although the text does not comment on the content of this painting, it is nevertheless a splendid illustration of a symbol which Strindberg was to use

<sup>5</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VII, 287:

"... as often as I think of you, dearest joy of my heart, I find inner comfort and imagine myself within the prison of your embrace, in the grove where you played for me on the harp. I have thought of it since with many tears and sighs, and of the dear songs you sang. Do you remember what you sang? 'The bird sings so beautifully in the forest, but sits so sorrowfully in its cage.' -- -- -- --

....

Sister Ingrid Persdotter  
to the noble Axel Nilsson Roos."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 282:

Better to die  
in fire red  
than live dishonoured.

<sup>7</sup> Illustration 65 in *Samlade skrifter*, VII (294).



frequently and effectively in his subsequent works: *Lyckans hjul* (the Wheel of Fortune). The illustration shows four figures on the rim of a wooden wheel, which is apparently spinning in a clockwise direction. Straddling the top of the wheel is an obviously wealthy and successful man; lying at the bottom is a corpse. Hanging on to the rim are two men, the one on the left rising and the one on the right falling headlong. Behind the rising man is the figure of a fool, who blows his noise-maker in his ear; beside the falling figure and appearing to pull him downwards is a devil, preparing to dig his grave. The Wheel of Fortune symbol, and the associated symbolism of rising and falling, is significant as early as *Herr Bengts hustru* (written the same year *Svenska folket* was completed) and remains important throughout Strindberg's career.

A formula which appears over and over again in Strindberg's work is that typically used in curses: others will reap where you have sown. Most often this formula is applied to innocent victims of harsh destiny, but it sometimes appears in the form of a curse also. *Svenska folket* contains two instances, both applied to the Swedish people, who are thus cast in the same mould as the long-suffering heroes of Strindberg's later plays. In the first instance, in the statement of purpose at the beginning of Volume I, it is applied to the Swedish nation as a whole (the extracted passage ends Strindberg's list of goals):

... än mer vill jag, då tillfälle erbjuder sig, ... särskilt framhålla den svenska nationens deltagande i den stora världshistoriska utvecklingen, icke minst genom dess mångfaldiga nybyggsförsök i främmande land, vilkas frukter så ofta skördats av den starkare utlänningen.<sup>8</sup>

In the second instance, the formula is applied to the Swedish farmers, who were exploited by the knightly class during the Middle Ages (Strindberg's subsequent explanation of the origins of heraldry is typical of the humorous touches which sprinkle the work):

<sup>8</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VII, 31:

... even more, when the opportunity presents itself, I want to ... emphasize particularly the participation of the Swedish nation in the unfolding of world history in general, not least through its manifold attempts at colonization in distant lands, the fruits of which have so often been reaped by the stronger foreigner.

Strindberg is thinking particularly of the New Sweden colony in North America (1638-55), which was taken over first by the Dutch (1655) and then by the British (1664), before eventually forming part of the original thirteen states of the United States of America; he also mentions the settlements of former soldiers of Karl XII, who, after the defeat at the Battle of Poltava (1709), remained as prisoners in Russia, where they performed many valuable services to the Russian tsars and helped bring civilization to the inhabitants of the remote areas in which they were forced to live.

När stormannen slagit under sig frukterna av andras arbete och befunnits lämplig för despotiens ändamål, blev han riddare. Som han icke kunde skriva sitt namn, fick han låta måla sitt bomärke, vilket kallades hans vapen.<sup>9</sup>

Witchcraft is examined and discussed on several occasions in Volume II of *Svenska folket*. Strindberg's attempt to understand the phenomenon leads him to a conclusion that has consequences in his prose fiction: women who confessed to witchcraft, even at the cost of their lives, were victims of self-delusion, who subconsciously chose this method of attracting attention when all other means of doing so were denied them by their social class, economic situation, and sex:

Ett bland de mest utpräglade och fula dragen i tidevarvets anlete, är det så ryktbara

Trolldomsväsendet,

om vilkets ursprung och väsen ännu icke sista ordet är sagt. Det är en brokig sammanfattning av gammal tradition från hedendomen, blandad med katolska helvetesmyter, en vävnad av uppsåtliga lögner och inbillade syner, självbedrägeri och elakhet, men värst av allt, och vilket är egendomligaste draget i hela saken, ett behov hos de obemärkte att vara intressanta, ådraga sig uppmärksamhet till vad pris som helst. Detta senare är en psykologisk sjukdom, som hos den bildade

<sup>9</sup> Samlade skrifter, VII, 78:

When the large landowner had monopolized the fruits of the labour of others and been found amenable to the ends of despotism, he became a knight. Since he could not write his name, he was allowed to have his mark of ownership painted, and that was known as his coat of arms.

antager den icke ovanliga formen av äregirighet, vilken kan söka uttryck i vissa konstproduktioner eller en art hjältemodiga handlingar.<sup>10</sup>

This conclusion is fully elaborated and demonstrated in Strindberg's short story "En häxa" ("A Witch", 1884). The psychological condition he describes is what he was eventually to call a short-cut: a process by which an undistinguished individual attracts attention to himself through bypassing the ordinary and accepted (but inaccessible) methods of acquiring fame. That term appears in "Genvägar" ("Short-Cuts", published 1887), a variant of "En häxa" set in the 1860s. The similarity between witchcraft and more modern religious and quasi-religious sects is first noted by Strindberg in *Svenska folket*; the realization that "En

<sup>10</sup> Samlade skrifter, VIII, 153-54:

One of the most pronounced and ugly scars on the face of the age is the so famous

Witchcraft,

on the origin and nature of which the last word still has not been said. It is a miscellaneous hodge-podge of old traditions from pagan times, mixed with Catholic myths about Hell; a weaving together of willful lies and delusive visions; but, worst of all, and the strangest aspect of the whole business, is a need among the obscure to be interesting, to call attention to themselves whatever the cost. This is a psychological illness which, among the educated, takes the not uncommon form of ambition, which can seek expression in certain works of art or a kind of heroic behaviour.

häxa" and "Genvägar" are essentially the same story thus precedes the writing of either tale:

Samma avgrunder i människosjälén, som vi sågo blottas av häxprocesserna, läggas ånyo för våra ögon, då det religiösa bedrägeriet framträder med ett obestämt begär att till vad pris som helst ådraga sig en uppmärksamhet, som icke alltid bort vara smickrande, men ändock hade sin lockelse för somliga.<sup>11</sup>

When discussing religious movements, Strindberg finds himself unable to form an opinion about Swedenborg, as he indicates in a footnote:

Om Swedenborgs andeskåderier och religiösa verksamhet har författaren icke lyckats förskaffa sig någon mening, och mannen har icke heller haft något inflytande på utvecklingens gång, varför han lämnas åt sitt öde -- att förgudas och smädas.<sup>12</sup>

The passage is rather ironic, in light of the enormous influence Swedenborg later has on the evolution of Strindberg himself, but the latter's obvious reluctance to lump Swedenborg with religious frauds perhaps indi-

<sup>11</sup> Samlade skrifter, VIII, 345:

The same abysses of the human soul which we saw revealed in the witch trials are once more in evidence when religious fraud makes its appearance, in an undefined craving to attract attention, whatever the cost: attention which need not always have been flattering, but nevertheless had its allurements for some.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 346:

About Swedenborg's visions and religious activity, the author has not succeeded in forming an opinion, and since, moreover, the man has had no influence on the course of evolution, he is left to his fate -- to be idolized and reviled.

cates that he might already be open to the influence he here denies.

Particularly interesting, especially in the light of Strindberg's own well-documented relations with women and his reputation as a misogynist, is the chapter devoted to perceptions of women through the centuries. The extract opens with a symbol borrowed from Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*, 1879), and his subsequent works seem to suggest that the historical pattern he here delineates is in fact an archetypal pattern repeated in the life of every man (not least himself):

Det är det despotiska och liderliga 1700-talet, som skapar om kvinnan till -- docka; det är en utländsk (fransysk) uppfinning, som smugglas in till vårt land under själva frihetstiden, och det är naturligtvis männen, som gjort uppfinningen; medlen heta: galanteri. En gammal gengångare från medeltidens på samma gång bigotta och otuktiga chevalerie. Kvinnan upphör att vara människa; hon blir förklarad ängel, och därmed är jämlikheten med mannen upphävd; hon skall också uppfostras som en ängel och får icke handhava några jordiska åligganden. Längre fram i tidevarvet skall hon bli en "skön själ" och ammas med dålig poesi och samtal om det överkliga eller de sköna konsterna. Men genom att avlägsna henne från verkligheten, avlägsnar mannen henne från sig själv; han, som bär den tunga brödpåsen, kan icke följa på den höga flykten, och han får snart sitt straff: blir lämnad för en annan och ser huru ängelns vingar fällas; när så överskattningens sälla dagar äro förbi, ser han bockfoten sticka fram under robe-rondens fällar. Samma tidevarv, kvinno- och kvinnodyrkans tidevarv, föder kvinno-

hatare och libertiner -- Carl XII och Gustav III bredvid Fredrik I och Adolf Fredrik.<sup>13</sup>

And oh! 'tis true, 'tis true! This model of chivalry is the basis of the conflict between man and wife in *Herr Bengt's hustru*. The same pattern is revealed in a much more modern setting in *Fadren* (1887), and indeed in most of Strindberg's works dealing with marriage. Meanwhile, the letters in *Han och Hon* (1875-76) reveal

<sup>13</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VIII. 290-91:

It is the despotic and lecherous eighteenth century which moulds woman into -- a doll; it is a foreign (French) invention, smuggled into our country during the very Age of Freedom,\* and it is, of course, men who invent it; the agent is known as gallantry: the ghost of mediaeval chivalry, which was at once both bigoted and obscene, come back to haunt us. Woman ceases to be human; she is declared an angel, and with that her equality to man is abolished; she must also be raised as an angel, and may not exercise any earthly functions. Later in the period, she has to be a "beautiful soul" and must be nourished with bad poetry and conversation about the unreal or the fine arts. But by distancing her from reality, man distances her from himself; he, who bears the heavy bread-bag, cannot follow her high flight, and he soon receives his punishment: to be left for another and to see how the angel's wings are shed; when the blissful days of overestimation are thus over, he sees the foot of a goat protruding from beneath the folds of her long skirt. The age that worships woman produces both misogynists and libertines -- Karl XII and Gustav III on one hand and Fredrik I and Adolf Fredrik on the other.

\* The Age of Freedom (*frihetstiden*) is a name given to the period 1718-72 in Swedish history, during which the power of the state rested in parliament.

that already the same pattern was operative in Strindberg's own life; viewed as the statement of a pattern far more universal than suggested here, this passage also provides an explanation of the author's frequent bouts of misogyny. But in 1882, Strindberg still believes that he is describing an aspect of a bygone historical period; his confidence that his own times either have become or are in the process of becoming different is expressed in another passage, which parallels the mood of his remarks on *Herr Bengts hustru* in the preface to *Giftas I* (Married I, 1884):

Tidevarvets brott äro försonade, princessan är löst ur förtrollningen, en ny tid går in, och i tempelportarne möter oss den älskliga bilden av den nya tidens kvinna, eller mönstret för densamma, vars förverkligande är nutidens uppgift. Anna Maria Lenngren blir sitt köns återupprättare och försvarare; hon har gisslat dess dårskaper och laster i skrift, men i liv och leverne har hon bäst visat vad vi vänta och vad vi hoppas av nittonde århundradets kvinna, självständig personlig verksamhet utan åsidosättande av husmoderns och makans plikter.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VIII, 301:

The crimes of the age have been expiated, the princess is freed from her enchantment, a new age is dawning, and at the temple gates we are met by the lovable image of the woman of the new age, or the model for her, which it is the task of the present age to realize. Anna Maria Lenngren\* has become the restorer and defender of her sex; she has scourged its follies and vices in her writing, but in her life and habits she best has shown what we expect and hope for in the woman of the nineteenth century: independent personal activity without putting aside the duties of the housewife and spouse.

\* Anna Maria Lenngren (1754-1817), Swedish author of



Among the interesting little tidbits in *Svenska folket* is the information that the worst of the torture chambers once located under Stockholm's old city hall was known as *rosenkammaren*<sup>15</sup> (the Rose Room); a fact that has more than passing interest for Strindberg's *Till Damaskus I* (1898), in which the hero spends much of his married life in a chamber called the Rose Room!

Finally, Strindberg chides what he considers the greatest weakness of his own age: hero worship, or the cult of personality (one of the main reasons he has downplayed the great personalities in this history). The passage looks forward to the sections of *Stora landsvägen* (1909) in which his literary rivals are lampooned as idols, or false gods:

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satirical and idyllic poetry. Highly talented, original, and popular, she nevertheless regarded her literary career as secondary to her role as a wife. One of her best-known poems is "Fröken Juliana" ("Miss Juliana", 1798), which has enough similarity to Strindberg's *Fröken Julie* (1888) -- besides the title -- for it to have served as at least the springboard of the idea that became the play (Gustafson, 142-45; the suggestion of a link between "Fröken Juliana" and *Fröken Julie* is, however, my own).

<sup>15</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VIII, 347.

Snilledyrkan är det sista spår av hedendomen, som vår tid har till uppgift att utrota, vilket har sina svårigheter gentemot de gamle än levande, som äro uppfödda i den bekännelsen.<sup>16</sup>

In summation, *Svenska folket* is still well worth reading, as a spirited and well-written examination of Sweden's cultural history. It gains in interest as a kind of depository of ideas and symbols upon which Strindberg continued to draw throughout his career. Even if some of its historical conclusions are questionable, its value as a literary document remains.

<sup>16</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, VIII, 387:

The worship of genius is the last trace of heathenism, which it will be the task of our age to uproot; difficulties will be encountered among the old people still alive, who were brought up in that religion.

## Chapter 14

## Herr Bengts hustru

The primary purpose of *Herr Bengts hustru*<sup>1</sup> (*Herr Bengt's Wife*, 1882) was, like that of *Gillets hemlighet*, to provide Siri von Essen with a suitable rôle. It succeeded: her performance of the rôle of Margit is accounted the most accomplished of her acting career (Ollén, 75). It is also Strindberg's first play dealing extensively with the issues of love and marriage; a reaction to Ibsen's *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*, 1879);<sup>2</sup> and, as such, a spirited contribution to the women's emancipation controversy. As in *Gillets hemlighet*, the mediaeval setting is incidental; it too is a costume drama rather than a history play.

In the "Interview" at the end of the preface to *Giftas I* (1884), Strindberg has some interesting things to say about *Herr Bengts hustru*:

Interv.: ... herrn har skrivit ... en pjäs om kvinnan, som jag inte förstår!

Förf.: Det kan vara mitt fel, men det kan vara herrns. Ni menar Herr Bengts Hustru! Jo, kära herrn, det är I:o ett angrepp på kvinnans romantiska uppfostran. Klostret, det är pensionen! Riddaren, det är han; alla äro riddare för våra unga flickor. Så komma de i livets verkligheter. Så får hon se att han är en bonde. Han tror hon är en fjolla, men

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 75-106.

<sup>2</sup> When *Herr Bengts hustru* was published, Strindberg requested that a copy be sent to Ibsen (Ollén, 74).

verkligheten utvecklar henne till en kvinna, vilket pensionen icke kunde göra. 2:o är det en apologi för kärleken såsom naturkraft, vilken överlever alla griller och kuvar den fria viljan. 3:o är det ett uppskattande av kvinnans kärlek såsom varande av högre art (med tillsats av modrens kärlek) än mannens. 4:o är det ett försvarstal för kvinnans rätt att få äga sig själv. 5:o är det en teaterpjäs, och det är synd. Men det fick sitt straff. En romantisk dogg, som hade för låg panna, bet mig i benet och ville bevisa mig att jag var romantikus, just då jag angrep och förlöjligade romantiken, och det var rätt åt mig, för man kan låta bli att skriva teaterpjäser när man vill tala allvarsamt. Kom ihåg att alla teaterpjäser annonseras under "Offentliga Nöjen".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, XVI, 29:

INTERVIEWER: ... you ... have written a play about women which I don't understand!

AUTHOR: That could be my fault, but it could also be yours. You mean Herr Bengts hustru! Well, my dear sir:

1) it's an attack on the romantic upbringing of women. The cloister is the girls' boarding school! The knight is man; all men are knights to our young girls. Then they enter into the realities of life. She realizes that he's a farmer. He thinks she's a silly goose, but reality makes her a woman, which the girls' boarding school couldn't do;

2) it's an apologia for love as a natural force, which survives all fancies and curbs the free will;

3) it's an appreciation of woman's love, which (when motherly love is added in), is of a higher nature than man's;

4) it's a defence of woman's right to own herself;

5) it's a play for the theatre, and that's a pity. But that has been punished. A romantic bulldog with too low a forehead bit me in the leg and wanted to prove to me that I was a romantic: just when I was attacking and ridiculing romanticism! And it served me right; one shouldn't write plays for the theatre when one wants to talk seriously. Remember that all theatre plays are advertised as "Public Entertainments".

This perhaps explains why Strindberg rewrote the play as a short story for *Svenska öden och äventyr* the following year. Those who have its author pigeonholed as a misogynist will no doubt find it remarkable! Those interested in Strindberg's symbolism find not only an outline of the whole symbolic schema of the play, but a rationale for the late mediaeval setting (which otherwise seems superfluous, if not anachronistic).

The language of the play is extremely lyrical, the style often highly declamatory. Siri von Essen was a Swedish-speaking Finn; the language and style minimized interference from her accent (Ollén, 75). They also allowed for a concentration of symbols such as one generally finds only in poetry. Unfortunately, audiences have found them difficult, and runs of the play have been sporadic and short (it is interesting to note, however, that Strindberg's third wife, Harriet Bosse, also enjoyed considerable success as Margit).

In the preface to *Giftas*, Strindberg has pointed out the symbolic connections between his plot and setting (the mid- to late 1520s), and the life of a late nineteenth-century woman. These are large-scale schematic symbols. It is important to realize that they are symbols, for then the play's anachronisms (Margit is a thoroughly modern character, for instance) become irrelevant: the play does not attempt to be historically accurate, but rather to use historical per-

spectives to comment upon a very topical question. What follows is a discussion of symbols which operate on a smaller scale, within the world of the play itself.

Chief among these are birds. The whole parliament of fowls is here, from the gentle dove and graceful swan to the noble falcon and imperious eagle, with all sorts and conditions in between. The associations of characters with different species of birds shift as the circumstances of the characters change, but throughout most of the play Margit is identified as a songbird, valued for its beauty and its song, an ornament. More specifically, especially as Bengt sees her, she is a blue bird:<sup>4</sup> a combination of two symbols (the bird and the colour blue) of spirituality and devotion. This is particularly apt, as Margit has spent her formative years as a nun. The thing about songbirds, of course, is that they are often kept in cages, to the great delight of those who possess them, but without too much thought for the feelings of the bird! When Margit first sees Bengt, she is a songbird in the cage of the cloister. He, on the other hand, is a falcon, symbol of nobility and, as a high-flying raptor, of the lofty ideals of chivalry. The birth of her love for him is presented as the eruption of birdsong, pure and lofty:

Jag mötte honom en morgon i skogen, han red  
en svart hingst och hade en falk på sin

<sup>4</sup> En fågel blå: a blue bird; possibly, but not necessarily, a bluebird (en blåhake).

silkessömmade handske; ... när han slog upp sina ögon och såg på mig, då var det som om solen runnit upp och fåglarne då först börjat sjunga!<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps for the first time, she feels that the world in which she lives is a prison, keeping her from the glorious creature which has so stirred her emotions: "Mitt hjärta sprang uti mitt bröst som en fågel i sin bur, när den vill ut."<sup>6</sup>

This yearning for freedom is realized when, under the tide of the Swedish Reformation, the monasteries and convents are dissolved. The order is brought to this particular convent by none other than her knight in shining armour, who has also fallen in love with her. She has fainted before his arrival, but when she recovers, they declare their love for each other. At the convent door, the passage between her past and her future, he delivers the bird from its cage:

BENGT (slår upp dörren): Nåväl, fågel blå!  
Nu öppnar jag burens dörr! Här är skogen, här

<sup>5</sup> Skrifter, XI, 79-80 (I, vi):

I met him one morning in the woods; he was riding a black stallion and had a falcon on his silk-stitched glove; ... when he raised his eyes and looked at me, it was as if the sun had risen and the birds had only then begun to sing!

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 80: "My heart sprang in my breast, like a bird in its cage, when it wants out."

är himlen! ....<sup>7</sup>

Act II opens on the morning after they have been married; the scene is an anteroom to their bedchamber, where a nuptial breakfast is being set. Among the furnishings of this room is a raven in a gilded cage. Two aspects of raven symbolism are appropriate: it is a bearer of disaster, and a symbol of solitude. Margit has escaped from one cage only to enter another; she is still as isolated from the world as she had been in the convent, and rocky times are ahead for this marriage. The room also contains a perch on which are two hooded falcons: a symbol that Margit now shares Bengt's noble rank but also, perhaps, that both of them are blinded (by their love) to the harsh realities of life.

Reality breaks into their sunny world soon enough: the king's bailiff arrives to inform Bengt that for the past five years he has neglected his duty to maintain soldiers and horses for the king's service, and that he is in danger of losing both title and land if he does not pay a large fine. He mortgages his property to raise the money, and henceforth must make severe economies and work especially hard on the land to pay back the loan. Out of consideration for Margit's sheltered

<sup>7</sup> Skrifter, XI, 80 (I, vi):

BENGT (throws open the door): Well then, blue bird! I now open the door of the cage! There are the woods, there is heaven! ....



upbringing and for the carefree life he has promised her, he decides not to burden her with these cares and responsibilities:

BENGT (...): .... Kan jag ... med gott mod föra in henne i en strid mot denna av henne så fruktade och hatade verklighet? Nej, jag kan icke se min blomma vissna, jag kan icke stänga buren om min fågel, som jag givit friheten. ....<sup>8</sup>

This turns out to be a mistake, of course. Margit cannot understand the change which has come over her husband, who now spends most of his days in the fields instead of at her side, and the economies he has had to introduce involve cutting down her favorite tree (for the wood) and letting her roses wither (the farmhands whose job it was to haul water for them are needed elsewhere). Even when not working on the land, he is worried and distracted. Margit cannot comfort him when she does not know what is wrong; she cannot help when she does not know there is a problem, let alone what it is; her complaints about his neglect of her and of her particular pleasures (the linden tree and the rose garden) strike him as petty, foolish, and exasperating, and he comes very close to striking her. The honeymoon

<sup>8</sup> Skrifter, XI, 87 (II, xii):

BENGT (...): .... Can I ... in good conscience involve her in a struggle against reality, which she both fears and hates? No, I can't watch my flower wither, I can't close the cage on my bird, to whom I have given freedom. ....

is definitely over! They quarrel, and Margit decides to apply to the king for a divorce.

The bird symbolism of this Act (III) strengthens impressions already formed. The noble Bengt, threatened with the loss of rank and property, finds himself unable to live the kind of idealized, chivalrous, romantic life Margit expects, even though he truly wants to do so: his falcon has been wounded and is earthbound. Instead of comforting her mate, she prepares to desert the nest:

BENGT: .... Jag är en vingskjuten falk, som vill lyfta sig mot skyn, men jag kan endast flaxa med mina bräckta vingar, med längtans blickar se upp till himlen och falla ner på jorden! Trösta mig! Trösta mig!<sup>9</sup>

Margit, unaware of the reason for Bengt's strange behaviour, is horrified at the sight of her knight in shining armour grovelling on the ground; in her ignorance (which has been forced upon her), she sees this as only one more sign that her world is closing in upon her; that marriage imprisons rather than liberates the soul: "Och du, Bengt, skall icke stänga in din fågel

<sup>9</sup> Skrifter, XI, 92 (III, vii):

BENGT: .... I'm a falcon that's been shot in the wing: I want to rise up towards the skies, but I can only flap my wounded wings, look up to heaven with longing glances, and fall to earth! Comfort me! Comfort me!

igen, sen du släppt ut henne ur den ena buren."<sup>10</sup> Bengt tries to assure her that all will be well again, if she will only have patience and not trouble herself about things she does not understand. Perhaps his reference to swans, which are an image of tranquillity, is also an indication that this is just wishful thinking: swans are traditionally symbols of the satisfaction of desire (Cirlot, 306; Garai, 72). Note also the ineffectual use of the pet name:

Snart skall fågel blå höra linden spela igen  
och ... vågorna skola lägga sig och de vita  
svanorna skola simma på det lugna vattnet.<sup>11</sup>

In Act IV, Bengt, bedevilled by financial problems, runs away from them. In his absence, Margit manages the estate, proving herself capable, efficient, and effective in dealing with problems. She succeeds where Bengt has failed, but is more determined than ever to proceed with the divorce; she has lost most of her material possessions in order to save the estate, but has found pride and confidence, and a determination to stand on her own; furthermore, she despises Bengt's weakness, and feels that the mistrust between them can

<sup>10</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 92 (III, vii): "And you, Bengt, shouldn't shut your bird in again, after releasing her from one cage."

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*:

Soon the blue bird will hear the linden sigh again and ... the waves will subside and the white swans will swim on the calm water.

never be bridged. It is the most stridently feminist act of the play, measuring up in every way to the preface to *Giftas*.

Margit's old spiritual advisor from the convent still serves her in that capacity. He relates the changes which have come over her in a highly symbolic fashion: the nobility of her soul has increased as her physical circumstances have deteriorated. The falcon now symbolizes not Margit, but her noble soul, which soars heavenward:

.... Om ni visste huru gudlöst högt ni en gång stått för mig. Och jag såg ... hur fågel blå skiftade hamn. Jag såg er den morgonen efter bröllopet, då ni jagade genom skogen på er vita häst; han bar er så lätt över det våta gräset; han lyfte er högt över kärrets dy, utan att en fläck sattes på er silver-skira klänning; ett ögonblick tänkte jag ...: tänk om hon faller, och tanken tog bild: jag såg er i dyn, det svarta vattnet stänkte över er, ert gula hår låg som solsken över porsens vita blommor; ni sjönk, ni sjönk tills jag blott såg er lilla hand; då hörde jag er falk uppe i luften och höja sig mot skyn och han höjde sig på sina vingar, tills han doldes i molnen.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 96 (IV, vii):

.... If you only knew how blasphemously high you once stood in my eyes. And I saw ... how the blue bird sought a new refuge. I saw you that morning after the wedding, when you chased through the woods on your white horse. He carried you so lightly over the wet grass; he lifted you high over the mud of the swamp so that not a spot of it touched your silver-gossamer dress. One moment I thought ... what if she should fall! and the thought formed an image: I saw you in the mud; the black water closed over you, and your golden hair lay like sunshine on the white flowers of the bog-myrtle; you sank; you sank until I saw only your little hand: then I heard your fal-

This scene (the falling and sinking) was only a vision that flashed through the Father Confessor's head as he watched her hunting. When she hears about it, Margit is quick to interpret his fantasy:

.... Nu säger ni, med förtäckta ord, att jag har sjunkit, därför att jag är på väg att försona mig med detta livet; jag har bytt den rikes dräkt mot fattigmans, därför att jag är fattig; jag har förlorat min ungdom, när jag uppfyllde naturens lag och blev moder; mina händer hava fördärvats av nålen, mina ögon av sorgen, livets börda trycker mig till marken, men min själ den stiger, den stiger som falcken mot himlen, mot friheten, under det min jordiska kropp sjunker i dyn bland stinkande blommor!

Så vill jag tyda er vakna dröm!<sup>13</sup>

The Father Confessor has fallen in love with Margit, whom he has placed on a pedestal and worshipped from afar (as he admits in the passage cited above). Just as Margit has been revolted at the sight of

con whirr up in the air, climbing toward the sky, lifting himself on his wings, until he was concealed in cloud.

<sup>13</sup> Skrifter, XI, 96-7 (IV, vii):

.... Now you're telling me indirectly that I've sunk, because I'm on the way to reconciling myself to this life: I've changed the garb of the rich for that of the poor, because I am poor; I lost my youth when I fulfilled the law of nature and became a mother; my hands have been ruined by sewing, my eyes by sorrow; the burden of life presses me down to the earth. But my soul, it rises: it rises like the falcon towards heaven, towards freedom, while my earthly body sinks in mud among ill-smelling flowers!

That's how I interpret your waking dream!

Bengt's grovelling in the dust, he cannot bear to see his goddess wallowing in the muck of a degrading existence. It is not only women who succumb to romantic visions of life, alienating themselves from reality! But this man's romanticism is much more dangerous: he urges Margit to commit suicide, liberating her free and beautiful soul from the chains of a humiliating existence, and he provides her with the means to do so:

BIKTFADERN: Rädda ... er själ! Lös falken och låt den stiga!

MARGIT: Jag har nog tänkt det, men kedjan är stark.

BIKTFADERN: Samma konst, som förmår hålla själen kvar för en tid i dess bur, har också givit nyckeln som öppnar.

MARGIT: Har ni den av en händelse?

BIKTFADERN: Jag har den!

MARGIT: Giv mig den!

BIKTFADERN (lämnar en liten flaska): Där!<sup>14</sup>

This is an interesting example of the same symbol's operating on two levels; for the Father Confessor, the caged bird is a symbol of the soul trapped in the body; for Bengt and Margit it is a beautiful and carefree

<sup>14</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 97 (IV, vii):

THE FATHER CONFESSOR: Save ... your soul!  
Free the falcon and let it climb!

MARGIT: I've thought of that, of course,  
but the chain is strong.

THE FATHER CONFESSOR: The same art which is  
able to keep the soul in its cage for awhile,  
has also provided the key to open it.

MARGIT: Do you have it by any chance?

THE FATHER CONFESSOR: I have it!

MARGIT: Give it to me!

THE FATHER CONFESSOR (gives her a little  
bottle): There!

creature kept (protected?) from the world in order that its beauty and serenity might be admired and enjoyed.

When confronted with a Margit who is not only unafraid to face reality, but capable of dealing with it on its own terms, Bengt, to his credit, realizes that he has undervalued her, that his attempts to protect her from reality have in fact stood in the way of her becoming the person she was capable of being:

BENGT: .... (På knä.) Förlåt mig, därför att jag underskattade er; att jag trodde er vara en vacker burfågel, som skulle vara vacker och intet annat. ....<sup>15</sup>

Margit has discovered herself, however, and she refuses his olive branch. She will remain his friend, but no longer wants to share her life with him.

In Act V the letter from the king arrives, granting the divorce. Margit has been attracted to the Bailiff (who has been living in the castle as a forced guest until the debt is settled), but when the latter tries to seduce her (she escapes rape only by the timely entrance of the Father Confessor), she turns against him too. Distracted, she takes the poison with which the Father Confessor has provided her.

<sup>15</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 97 (IV, ix):

BENGT: .... (On his knees.) Forgive me for having underestimated you; for having believed you were a beautiful caged bird, whose function was to be beautiful and nothing else. ....

He, however, has had second thoughts, and reverts to his rôle as spiritual guide. He manages to awaken in Margit a desire to continue living, and a consciousness of the love she still feels for Bengt and their child. She feels that if they can be reconciled, they can build a new life as equal partners, and that she can perform a service for her daughter by ensuring that she is not raised with the foolish romantic notions which have failed her. The Father Confessor departs to find an antidote to the poison before it is too late.

The final three scenes are grouped together under the heading *CHANGEMANG*.<sup>16</sup> Bengt is alone (except for a sleeping nurse) with his infant daughter. As far as he knows, Margit is lost to him, stolen by the Bailiff, whose intervention in his life has already caused him to flee his responsibilities. He reviews these events in sadness, longing for what he has lost and character-

<sup>16</sup> *Changemang* is a more or less phonetic rendering of the French word *changement* (Swedish lacks nasal vowels). Primarily, it indicates a scenery change (each of the other four acts has, in fact, only one set: Strindberg follows the practice of beginning and ending scenes each time a character enters or leaves the stage); but the term also indicates the change in attitude that has now come over each of the two main characters. This nuance is lost in translations which simply ignore the classical scene divisions and call this final section Act V, scene 2.



izing the Bailiff as a bird of prey<sup>17</sup> which has plundered his nest:

BENGT (...): .... Stackars min lilla dotter! -- Fågelboet är plundrat. Rovfågeln tog modern från ungen; makan tog han förut. .... (....) Och han tog sitt bo i samma träd, den stora fågeln med de starka klorna; och där sitter han nu och frossar. ....<sup>18</sup>

He hears Margit outside the room, and carries her in, collapsed. When she comes to, she asks him if, should she survive, he will take her back. Of course he will, but he is still worried about the Bailiff:

MARGIT: .... Bengt, om jag lever, ... tar du mig igen?

BENGT: Om icke rovfågeln kommer och river min skogsduva.

MARGIT: Rovfågeln har flyktat. Jägaren räddade din skogsduva, men duvan blev så bedrövad, att hon ville ge sig själv döden!<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> No matter that the falcon and the eagle are also birds of prey; the symbolism attached to them is of nobility and magnanimity. In the present instance, the symbolic quality is rapaciousness.

<sup>18</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 105 (Changemang, i):

BENGT (...): .... My poor little daughter! -- The nest has been plundered. The bird of prey took the mother from the young; the mate he'd taken already. .... (....) And he has made his nest in the same tree, the large bird with the strong talons; and there he now sits, gorging himself. ....

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 106 (Changemang, ii):

MARGIT: .... Bengt, if I live, ... will you take me back?

BENGT: Unless the bird of prey comes and pulls my stock-dove down.

MARGIT: The bird of prey has fled. The hunter [i.e., the Father Confessor] has rescued your stock-dove, but the dove was so distressed that she wanted to take her own life!

Finally, reconciliation: the antidote arrives, and Bengt and Margit, realizing that their love has survived every trial and disappointment, resolve to begin again, wounded by experience, but united in a love that is stronger than the foolish notions of romanticism. They will face reality together!

BENGT: Och nu, Margit! Låtom oss börja om igen! Örnen får väl leva, fastän han brutit vingen. Fågel blå får väl leva, fastän fjädrarne mistat sin fågring.<sup>20</sup>

Örnen (the Eagle) was one of Strindberg's favorite nicknames, acquired during his student days in Uppsala. The colour blue is associated with one of Siri von Essen's trademarks of dress, which he immortalized in one of his best-known and best-loved poems, "Segling" ("Sailing"), written in 1883.

Throughout the above discussion of bird symbols in the play, another symbolic pattern has been present: that of rising and falling. It has been said that *Herr Bengts hustru* was a preliminary sketch for *Fröken Julie* (Ollén, 73); certainly, in that play the symbolism of rising and falling is also very evident. We have seen instances of it on the spiritual plane, as the souls of

<sup>20</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 106 (Changemang, iii):

BENGT: And now, Margit! Let's make a fresh start! Surely the eagle can survive even with a broken wing. Surely the blue bird can survive even though her feathers have lost their beauty.

Bengt and Margit soar (or attempt to soar) heavenwards at the same time as harsh reality drags them down to earth. On the social plane, the symbolic pattern (the Wheel of Fortune: one side rises while the other falls) is seen in the rise in prominence and importance of the Bailiff as Bengt's resources and prospects decline, and again in the career of the Father Confessor: his influence on Margit declines as her love for Bengt grows, and as the romantic dream sours, he regains his importance in her life; the vital rôle he plays in reuniting the couple is made possible through the defeat of the Bailiff. On the personal level the pattern is also there: Margit grows in self-awareness and self-possession as her fortunes decline. It is only when she has lost everything (even, almost, her life) that hope for a better life is born: she has reached the low point on the Wheel of Fortune, and the upward swing is about to commence! By far the most common application of rising and falling symbolism, however is in the contrast between romantic idealism and hard-nosed reality, the two extremes between which Margit, Bengt, and even, to a certain extent, the Father Confessor, vacillate. The play closes with a reference to this contrast:

BENGT: Och nu, Margit! Låtom oss börja om igen! ....

MARGIT: Och lärom vårt barn att himlen är däruppe, men härnere är jorden!<sup>21</sup>

Contributing greatly to the play's lyricism is the symbolism of flowers. Of primary importance is the rose, the flower of love. It is a rich and heady flower. Early in the play, while Margit is still in the convent, she struggles with her conscience about her love for Bengt. The Father Confessor is completely caught up in her spell. He has lived in innocence, but the confluence of Margit's beauty, the nature of their conversation (love), and the sudden rush to his brain of a goblet of wine (which he has quaffed, thinking it was water), all awaken him to a world of sensuality he has never experienced:

Vin! Nej, det var glöd! Jag har aldrig druckit vin, hör du, jag har aldrig älskat, hör du, ty jag vågade icke. Jag är trettio år, har aldrig varit ung, har aldrig varit frestad, levat så lugnt. Men nu -- (...) mitt blod värmer mig, jag känner blomsterdofter, jag hör toner av luta och flöjt, icke orgel, icke orgel! Giv mig rosor, mera rosor! Upp och dansa, hetär! ....<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Skrifter, XI, 106 (Changemang, iii):

BENGT: And now, Margit! Let's make a fresh start! ....

MARGIT: And let's teach our child that heaven is up there, but down here is earth!

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 80 (I, vi):

Wine! No, that was live coals! I've never drunk wine, you know; I've never loved, you know, for I didn't dare. I'm thirty years old, and have never been young, have never been tempted, have lived such a calm life. But now -- (...) my blood makes me hot, I smell flowers, I hear the playing of lute and flute, not the organ, not the organ! Give me

The Father Confessor has fallen in love with Margit. He is a very romantic figure: serving her to the end (sometimes ill-advisedly) and neither demanding nor expecting anything in return, except the chance to be near her occasionally, and to serve her.

When Bengt arrives at the convent to announce that it has been dissolved and the nuns released from their vows, Margit is about to be physically punished and has fainted under the threat. She is, then, unconscious when Bengt finds her: a fact in itself symbolic of her cloistered state. He pours out his love while waiting for her to awaken. She is the unopened blossom of a white Midsummer flower:<sup>23</sup> the colour symbolizing her purity, the unopened state her inexperience of the world.<sup>24</sup> The beds of roses on which he would have her laid is his love:

.... Vita midsommarsblomma, låt mina blickars  
sol värma dig, att du må öppna dina blomster-  
kalkar! (....) Om din själ ännu slumrar, dröm

—  
roses, more roses! Up and dance, hetaera!  
....

<sup>23</sup> The Swedish name designates a specific flower, *Geranium silvaticum*, a wild member of the geranium family. The English name is somewhat less poetic: the wood cranesbill.

<sup>24</sup> These interpretations are confirmed by the fact that in fin-de-siècle popular works on the language of flowers, the wild geranium was an emblem of steadfast piety (F.W.L.).

att vinden bär dig i sina mjuka armar och  
lägger dig på rosenbäddar....<sup>25</sup>

When Margit comes to, Bengt addresses her as "min sköna ros" ("my beautiful rose"). Within one scene she has gone from an unopened white wildflower to a rose, the object of his affections.

Roses, of course, bear thorns: the course of true love never did run smooth! Just as the caged raven at the opening of Act II is a portent of trouble in the marriage, so are the roses which decorate the nuptial table: Strindberg makes a point of specifying in a stage direction that these are törnrosbuketter (bouquets of briar roses); the detail, let alone its significance, would no doubt go unnoticed by theatre audiences, but Strindberg also wished his plays to be read (particularly at this period in his career, when they received infrequent and short-lived productions)!

When Bengt decides not to trouble Margit with his problems, part of his reasoning is "... jag kan icke se min blomma vissna...."<sup>26</sup> And yet, among the earliest consequences of those difficulties is the withering of

<sup>25</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 81 (I, x):

.... White Midsummer flower, let the sun of my gazes warm you, that you might open your blossoms! (....) If your soul still slumbers, dream that the wind carries you in its gentle arms and lays you on beds of roses....

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 87 (II, xii): "... I can't watch my flower wither...."

Margit's rose garden, which she interprets as a sign that he no longer loves her, and which also indicates, precipitates, and accompanies the withering of her own romantic notions. In the Father Confessor's vision of her humiliation, the mire into which she sinks is surrounded, not with her customary roses, but with ill-smelling swamp flowers! That the roses symbolize not only love, but in particular the romantic idea of love which eventually fails Margit, is made clear in the scene in which Bengt apologizes for having underestimated her; after asking her forgiveness for having treated her as a caged bird, he adds a reference to the roses, to the fact that for Margit they were more important than pasture land, and to the fact that this is really his own fault. The incident he recalls is the scene in which he almost struck her: "Förlåt mig att jag blev vred, då ni begagnade den rättighet jag givit er att mera älska blommor än gräs...."<sup>27</sup>

After the divorce is granted, Margit is still a flower, but one that has been nipped by frost: the cold wind of reality. The Bailiff is right in hypothesizing that she can be revived by love, but it is not his love that will work the trick:

FOGATEN: .... Du är så kall, Margit!

MARGIT: Jag är som en frostbiten blomma!

<sup>27</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 97 (IV, ix): "Forgive me for getting angry when you exercised the right I had given you, to love flowers more than grass...."

FOGATEN (räcker henne en bägare vin): Det kan tinas upp!

MARGIT: Endast för att dö! ....

FOGATEN: Jag skall andas på blomman med min unga, varma själ och hon skall leva.

(Lägger armen om livet på Margit och kysser henne.)<sup>28</sup>

The Bailiff's kiss (and what ensues), far from reviving her, leads directly to Margit's attempted suicide. But first she realizes that her problems have been caused by the romantic notions with which she was brought up. Life is not like that, and love is not like that: roses have thorns as well as flowers. The reader, if not the theatre-goer, will recall the briar roses which graced the nuptial table of Act II. She is shocked that the Bailiff is treating her as a fallen woman; the words are addressed to him, but she ends by berating all who made her what she is:

<sup>28</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 101 (V, vi):

THE BAILIFF: .... You're so cold, Margit!

MARGIT: I'm like a frostbitten flower!

THE BAILIFF (hands her a goblet of wine):  
It can be thawed out!\*

MARGIT: Only to die! ....

THE BAILIFF: I'll breathe on the flower  
with my young, warm soul, and she'll live.

(Puts his arm around Margit's waist and  
kisses her.)

\* The frostiness here is a play on words: the Bailiff's first remark refers to Margit's frosty attitude rather than to physical discomfort and, when applied to persons, att tinas upp (literally, to be thawed out) means to become less reserved or more sociable.



.... ... när ni själv nyss öppet visade era avsikter då återfick jag tron på giftermålet; då upphörde jag att tro, det Gud låtit mitt i livets öken ett paradiset stå öppet, oaktat syndafallet drivit oss ur detsamma, då förstod jag att giftermålet var en plikt bland många andra plikter, och att kärleken var en himlens gåva av nåd som skulle göra den plikten lättare, men icke ensam vara till för sin skull, ty himlen har icke skickat oss till jorden för att vi skulle roa oss! .... Varför har ni ljugit för mig ända sedan min barndom och sagt att livet var en lustgård, där kärlekens rosor utan törnen evigt skulle blomstra? ....<sup>29</sup>

This explains Margit's taking the poison: with her eyes wide open now, she values her marriage, but she believes that it is now too late: the divorce has been granted, and she cannot expect Bengt's forgiveness for the things she has said and for her desertion of him and their child. Fortunately for both of them, his love too is stronger than his will!

Another strand of symbolism in the play is that of dreams. For the first half of the play, Margit knows only the world of illusions she has created for her-

<sup>29</sup> Skrifter, XI, 102 (IV, vi):

.... ... when you openly revealed your opinions just now, I regained my faith in marriage; I stopped believing that, in the middle of life's desert, God had permitted a paradise to remain, even though the Fall had driven us out of it; I understood then that marriage was a duty among many other duties, and that love was a gift from heaven, to make the duty lighter, but not to exist for its own sake, for heaven has not put us on earth for us to amuse ourselves! .... Why have you lied to me ever since my childhood, saying that life is a paradise, where love's thornless roses bloom eternally? ....

self, with the encouragement and contributions of everyone around her. She is walking in her sleep and must eventually awaken to reality. If that waking is a jolt, a fall from heaven, the suffering has been caused by those who have encouraged her to remain asleep, persuading her that her dream is reality. Principal among these is Bengt, whose decision to conceal his troubles is an attempt to maintain her in her dream. That deception is foreshadowed even before she leaves the convent; as Bengt waits for her to recover from fainting, he creates a scenario for her future life, and that scenario is a dream:

Om din själ ännu slumrar, dröm att vinden bär dig i sina mjuka armar och lägger dig på rosenbäddar, dröm att sunnan smekar dina kinder, och när du vaknar, sakna icke drömmen, utan låt livets fulla verklighet giva dig tusenfällt igen!<sup>30</sup>

She awakens in Act III. She has become a mother, but is still self-centred, blind to the world around her. The Father Confessor, aware of the problems with the estate, and aware also that Bengt, far from loving her less, loves her more than ever, tells her it is time she looked around and saw things as they are:

<sup>30</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 81 (I, x):

If your soul still slumbers, dream that the wind carries you in its gentle arms and lays you on beds of roses, dream that the south wind caresses your cheeks, and when you awaken, don't let go of the dream, but let the full reality of life return it to you a thousand-fold!

BIKTFADERN: Fru Margit! Lid och hoppas!  
Dröm understundom, det är gott att drömma  
också, men vakna för himlens skull när tiden  
är inne!

MARGIT: När är tiden inne?

BIKTFADERN: Nu! Just nu!<sup>31</sup>

She wakes up at least partially during the next four scenes. The cause of her awakening is Bengt's threat to strike her. All her beautiful dreams seem to be exploding around her, and she is confused and resentful, resolved not to face this unattractive reality but to escape it: she will petition for a divorce. When the revelations end, she is left alone to reflect on her awakening. She is not impressed:

MARGIT (ensam): Vad har hänt? -- Man vaknar i en vacker dröm; man sluter ögonen och väntar på att den skall fortsätta. Man går igenom i tankarne det drömda, men fortsättningen, slutet, slutet, det kommer icke.

Hon satt fången och misshandlad; hon var ung och hennes blod brinnande; så kom han och befriade henne. .... Så kommer bröllopsmusik, vin, blommor, solsken, ett litet moln; himlen klarnar och solen lyser varmare än förr -- och så vaknar hon! Men fortsättningen, slutet! Slutet är att man vaknar! Man är vaken och verkligheten tar vid. Han högg ner min lind, han lät mina rosor vissna och han ville slå mig!

....

Detta är verkligheten! -- O, Jesus Kristus, världens frälsare, låt mig somna in i den eviga sömnen och aldrig, aldrig mer vakna,

<sup>31</sup> Skrifter, XI, 91 (III, v):

THE FATHER CONFESSOR: Lady Margit! Suffer and hope! Dream now and then -- it's good to dream also -- but for heaven's sake wake up when it's time!

MARGIT: When is it time?

THE FATHER CONFESSOR: Now! Right now!

utan drömma, drömma min vackra dröm till slut! (Döljer huvudet i kuddarna.)<sup>32</sup>

While awake, Margit proves herself admirably capable of both facing up to and dealing with reality. But she has not forgotten her dream, and she tries to recapture it with the Bailiff, with whom she naively believes she can have a platonic relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and truth. She still clings to a shred of the romantic dream. Her final awakening comes when the Bailiff tries first to seduce and then to rape her. She awakens to the reality that she loves her husband and her child, but believes that she has lost the chance of being reunited with them. Defeated, she takes

<sup>32</sup> Skrifter, XI, 94 (III, x):

MARGIT (alone): What's happened? -- You awake in the middle of a beautiful dream; you close your eyes and wait for it to continue. You go over what you've dreamed in your mind, but the continuation, the ending, the ending, it doesn't come!

She was imprisoned and treated badly; she was young and her blood was ardent; and he came and liberated her. .... Then there was wedding music, wine, flowers, sunshine, a little cloud; the heavens cleared and the sun shone more warmly than before -- and then she woke up! But the continuation, the ending! The ending is that you wake up! You're awake and reality takes over. He chopped down my linden tree, he let my roses wither, and he wanted to strike me!

....  
This is reality! -- Oh, Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world, let me fall into eternal sleep and never, never again wake up, but dream, dream my beautiful dream to the end! (Hides her head in the cushions.)

the poison, her entry to the eternal sleep from which she will never awaken, or so she thinks.

After the Father Confessor has convinced her that there is a very good chance of reconciliation, she informs him of what she has done. The suicide attempt and the reasons behind it are clothed in the symbolism of a dream:

Jag hade en fasans dröm förliden natt. Jag vandrade i en skog, som sluttade ned mot havsstranden. Det var en höstdag; det var så tyst, att jag hörde daggdropparnes fall från löven såsom ett sakta regn, men himlen lyste så blå mellan trädtopparne. Jag gick framåt, framåt på den fuktiga mossan, som sjönk under mina fötter; då kom en sällsam fågel, som jag aldrig sett, och satte sig i ett träd. Han knackade på stammen och flög vidare; jag följde, tills jag befann mig i ett tätt snår; då var fågeln försvunnen. Jag ville vända om, men fann att jättestora spindlar spunnit sina nät från buske till buske; vart jag skådade, endast spindelnät. Instängd från alla sidor satte jag mig på en sten och grät av förtvivlan. Då hörde jag bakom mig ett knastrande och knittrande och när jag vände mig, såg jag, att skogen stod i ljusan låga. Jag störtade upp, men elden förföljde mig; den drev mig genom näten som slog mig i ansiktet; den drev mig allt längre framåt, framåt tills jag befann mig på en brant havsklippa. Här stannade jag; under mig och framför mig låg havet som en halvmåne nedfallen från himmelen; bakom mig nalkades skogsbranden med sina kvävande rökmoln och sina svedande lågor; framför mig det oändliga, solbelysta, fria havet med sina svala vågor, som sträckte mot mig sina mjuka armar, för att få vagga mig till sömns. Tror ni jag tvekade i valet om framåt eller tillbaka? Jag bredde ut mina armar såsom emot min befriare och jag störtade framåt och sjönk i ett moln av solljus och

förintelse!<sup>33</sup>

The dream is her life: the forest is the mysterious world outside the convent, the strange bird is Bengt, the thicket and the spiderwebs their marital difficulties, the fire the destruction of her world, and the sea is the ultimate destination of all life, death. Death is not feared here (for it is life that is hor-

<sup>33</sup> Skrifter, XI, 104 (V, viii):

I had a horrible dream last night: I was wandering in a forest, which sloped downwards to the sea. It was an autumn day, so quiet that I could hear the dewdrops falling from the leaves like a gentle rain, but heaven shone blue through the tree-tops. I walked on and on over the damp moss, which sank under my feet. Then a strange bird appeared, such as I'd never seen, and perched in a tree. He tapped on the trunk and flew on; I followed, until I found myself in a dense thicket; then the bird was gone. I wanted to go back, but discovered that gigantic spiders had spun their webs from bush to bush: everywhere I looked, nothing but spiderwebs! Hemmed in on all sides, I sat down on a rock, and wept in despair. Then I heard a crackling and a snapping behind me, and when I turned around, I saw that the forest had broken into bright flames. I sprang up, but the fire followed me; it chased me through the webs, which struck me in the face; it chased me farther and farther forward, forward, until I found myself on a steep cliff overlooking the sea. There I stopped; beneath me and before me lay the sea, like a half-moon fallen from heaven; behind me the forest fire was approaching, with its suffocating clouds of smoke and its scorching flames; before me the endless, sunlit, open sea with its cool waves, stretching towards me its gentle arms, seeking to rock me to sleep. Do you suppose I hesitated in my choice of forward or reverse? I stretched out my arms as towards a liberator, and I sprang forward and sank into a cloud of sunlight and annihilation.

rifing and threatening); it is, rather, the peaceful sleep where dreams can last forever. In reality, love pulls her back from the precipice and she reenters the forest, trusting that she can find her way through it without getting burned. Love conquers all.

Apart from Margit's awakening reference to the Garden of Eden story, cited above (Paradise was lost forever at the Fall and cannot be recaptured on earth) two other biblical allusions are worth commenting upon. One is made by the Father Confessor near the opening of Act II; he regards the scene of domestic bliss, which is nevertheless filled with omens that the bliss will not last (as well as the caged raven and the briar roses, there is Margit's wedding veil, which has been torn, and the bridal wreath, which has withered), and sums it up with a slightly expanded biblical quotation: "Förgänglighet, förgänglighet! Allt är förgänglighet utom våra lidelser."<sup>34</sup> The words link up to the dream symbolism of the play, and in fact sum up Strindberg's apprehension, which grew stronger as the years went by, of the illusory nature of human experience, and especially of happiness. They appear again as the refrain

<sup>34</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 83 (II, iii): "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity except our sufferings." The reference is to Ecclesiastes 1:2. The Swedish word *förgänglighet* actually means transitoriness, but this is precisely the sense of the passage in Ecclesiastes: all of man's accomplishments are in vain, because they will all pass away.

of the Nurse in *Fadren*. They are not necessarily as pessimistic as the Father Confessor's rider seems to indicate; when the Magistrate's Wife echoes the allusion in Act IV, she indicates that life's unpleasantnesses are also transitory. Reviewing her own marriage for Margit, she observes that the fervent love of early marriage did not last, but was replaced with a deep and abiding friendship; when Margit objects that it could just as easily have been replaced by animosity, she is unruffled: "Kära fru, när allting är förgängligt på denna jorden, varför skulle fiendskapen då vara evig?"<sup>35</sup> This foreshadows Margit's eventual reconciliation to Bengt, even though her early love has been replaced by a strong antipathy.

Bengt also is filled with something like animosity towards Margit before reconciliation occurs; he has admitted his responsibility for her short-sightedness, but he resents her desertion. Nevertheless, he knows he still loves her, and even while bemoaning the trouble she has brought him, he recognizes that she has also given him much happiness:

(Han tar en bok från bordet och bläddrar i den.) "Förbannad vare jorden för din skull!"

<sup>35</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 94 (IV, i): "Dear lady, when everything is transitory on this earth, why should animosity last forever?"



Det var för kvinnans skull! Och ändå är det  
hon som ger vårt liv dess välsignelse!<sup>36</sup>

Despite Bengt's contention, the curse is addressed to Adam, not Eve. Perhaps this is Bengt's way of saying that, like Adam, whatever wrong he did, was done out of love for his wife. The final sentence cited refers to the two Christian paradigms of woman: Eve and Mary: it was through woman that sin first entered the world, but it was through woman that salvation entered it as well! This sentiment is echoed in *Fadren*.

Misogynistic? "Sexist"? "Chauvinist"? Perhaps, but that is not the end of Strindberg's play: the power of love supersedes all such considerations, and Margit's love is the greater for she has suffered most!

The treatment of the convent in this play is also interesting. Throughout most of the play, it is seen as a rather terrifying place, an impression conditioned by the rather grim setting of the first act (the convent's discipline room, with its graphic painting of the flogging of Christ), and by the sadistic scene in which the Abbess orders Margit's face disfigured. It is a place

<sup>36</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 105 (*Changemang*, i):

(He takes a book from the table and turns over its pages.) "Cursed is the ground for thy sake!"\* That was for the sake of the woman! And nevertheless it's she who gives our life its blessing!

\*Genesis 3:17.

from which Margit has to be set free, and even after she has discovered that the world outside can be just as grim, she refers to the convent as a prison. Not very much here of the place of tranquil meditation to which the battle-worn soul can withdraw for solace and protection from the struggles of the world which monastic institutions come to represent for Strindberg!

And yet, when Margit has reached the lowest point, prompted by the Father Confessor, she recognizes the convent as just such a refuge. Unfortunately, the convents have all been dissolved, so returning there is not an option open to her. The Father Confessor goes on to describe domestic life as a kind of convent, not so much a refuge from the world as a place where the qualities necessary for dealing with it can be nurtured and developed; not a joyful place, perhaps, but one where peace and tranquillity of soul can flourish:

BIKTFADERN: .... Säg mig: skulle ni icke återvända till klostret, om det ännu fanns? Skulle ni icke ... vilja draga er undan detta yttre liv, som gäckat er, och åter i lugn tänka över livets gåta?

MARGIT: Jo; men det finns ju inga kloster mer!

....  
BIKTFADERN: .... Ja! Det finns ett kloster, där ni kan stänga er inne från världens larm och ondska; där äro svala gångar, där ni kan andas, när luften blir kvav; där finns penitens i ömsesidig självförsakelse; där finns andaktsövningar i uppfyllandet av plikten, där finns stilla frid efter tvenne själers strid; där kan ni öva er i ödmjukhetens och lydnadens svåra dygder och där kan ni öva barmhärtighet mot den felande, som under

mödans sargande gissel låter vännen dela slagen! Det klostret heter: hemmet!<sup>37</sup>

This speech contains an indirect reference to difficulty in breathing caused by the pressures of existence. Strindberg characters experience difficulty in breathing fairly frequently, and it is always an indication of heavy emotional stress (Strindberg suffered periodically from angina pectoris). A more direct example is furnished by Bengt, who, humiliated by the way he has acted under duress and by the fact that Margit has managed the estate more capably than he had, desperately seeking forgiveness for the way he has treated

<sup>37</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 103 (V, viii):

THE FATHER CONFESSOR: Tell me: wouldn't you return to the cloister, if it still existed? Wouldn't you ... choose to withdraw from this superficial life, which has disappointed you, and once again meditate on the mystery of life in tranquillity?

MARGIT: Yes, but there are no more cloisters, are there?

....

THE FATHER CONFESSOR: .... Yes! There is a cloister, where you can shut yourself away from the din and malice of the world; there are cool walkways there, where you can breathe when the air becomes heavy; there is penitence through mutual self-denial; there are acts of devotion in the fulfilling of duty; there is serene peace after the conflict of two souls; there you can train yourself in the difficult virtues of humility and obedience; and there you can exercise mercy towards the offender, who under the lacerating scourge of hardship allows his friend to share the blow! That cloister is called: home!

her, must now face the possibility that he might nevertheless lose her:

BENGT: .... Vad ämnar ni göra i det fall  
att konungen beviljar -- er anhållan?

MARGIT: Arbeta! -- Tjäna!

....

MARGIT: .... Vad ämnar ni göra?

BENGT: Jag blir förvaltare hos fogaten! --  
Sångfågeln för plogen, ängeln sy kläder och  
tvätta; då tystnar sången, de små händerna  
bli röda, kinden så blek. Och varför detta?  
Därför att han högg ner hennes lind, därför  
vissnade hennes rosor. -- Hjälp mig! Jag kan  
icke andas. Hjälp mig!<sup>38</sup>

The smothering cloud of smoke from the forest fire that seems to drive Margit into the sea is another example.

There are critics who view *Herr Bengts hustru* as essentially misogynistic and anti-feminist (Vide Steene, 43-45, for a good example). Certainly Margit does not act in the spirit of the modern feminist movement. But she could hardly be expected to do so; the play was written more than a century ago! That it acknowledges that marriage was often a prison for women, that it goes farther and seeks the cause of this

<sup>38</sup> *Skrifter*, XI, 98 (IV, ix):

BENGT: .... What do you intend to do in the  
event the King grants -- your petition?

MARGIT: Work! -- Go into service!

....

MARGIT: .... What do you intend to do?

BENGT: I'll become the bailiff's steward!  
-- The songbird at the plough, the angel  
sewing clothes and doing laundry! Her small  
hands will redden, her cheeks will pale. And  
why? Because I chopped down her linden tree  
and her roses withered. -- Help me! I can't  
breathe. Help me!

situation in the attitudes of society (and of husbands), and that it claims for woman a right to be treated otherwise would all seem quite remarkable manifestations of a liberal and enlightened attitude, especially in an author so often stereotyped as a neanderthal of misogyny. The play is an answer to Ibsen not because it refutes Ibsen's observations -- if anything, it confirms them -- but because it refutes his conclusion: Strindberg believes that love is a stronger force than injustice, and will eventually triumph over it!

## Chapter 15

*Det nya riket*

*Det nya riket: skildringar från attentatens och jubelfesternas tidevarv*<sup>1</sup> (*The New Kingdom: Sketches from the Age of Assassination Attempts and Jubilees*) was written and published in 1883. The title refers to the Swedish parliamentary reform of 1865, when representation according to estate (social class) was replaced by a bicameral system. This was heralded as a great social advance, ushering in a classless society and placing power squarely in the hands of the people (rather than the king and aristocracy). Writing almost twenty years later, Strindberg points out that in fact the new kingdom is very much like the old in all respects that really matter.

Strindberg's first two works of social criticism, *Röda rummet* (1879) and *Svenska folket* (1881-82) won him both instant fame and instant notoriety; on the one hand, he became the spokesman of a new generation of artists who wished to reform Swedish literature and Swedish society along with it, and on the other he was greeted with almost universal animosity by the old literary order: critics, established writers, members of the Swedish Academy, etc. *Det nya riket* is both a con-

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, XII.

tinuation of the debunking of institutions and official attitudes begun in the two earlier works, and a chance for Strindberg to lash out at some of his enemies: for the most part those who had been most outspoken in their attacks on *Röda rummet* and *Svenska folket*, but also those he regarded as political, literary, and artistic imposters (the book's epigraph is from Chapter 30 of Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*, in which Mr. Pickwick confronts Mr. Winkle with the words: "You are a humbug, sir!"). Its ten satirical pieces combine the characteristics of the essay and the short story: the stories are more parables than fiction. Strindberg is writing about real events and real people, and the veneer of fiction is purposely transparent enough for the butts of his attacks to be easily identified.

For this reason, there is little symbolism in *Det nya riket*. What little there is, is found in the story "Clariss majorum exemplis eller ärftlighet utan moral"<sup>2</sup> ("Clariss Majorem Exemplis,<sup>3</sup> or Heredity Without Morality"): an attack, thinly disguised as a historical tale, on one of Strindberg's foremost critics, Hugo Nisbeth (1837-87), editor of the Stockholm weekly

<sup>2</sup> Samlade verk, XII, 90-101.

<sup>3</sup> "Following the shining example of our ancestors," part of the Latin inscription on Riddarhuset (the House of Nobility) in Stockholm: for two centuries the meeting place of the first estate of the realm.

Figaro. Strindberg portrays him as the most noteworthy scion of the thoroughly undistinguished noble family, Hund av Hutlösa (literally, Dog of Impudent): Nisbeth may have been a clever dog, but he was a dog all the same, and an impudent one at that!

The story opens in Riddarhuset, where an accident has befallen the Hund coat of arms, and then goes back in time to the family's ennoblement, during the reign of Magnus Ladulås (reigned 1275-1290), and traces its tawdry career up to the time of its most illustrious member, Agathon<sup>4</sup> Hund, who founded and edited a scurrilous newspaper called Farao (Pharaoh)<sup>5</sup> during the reign of Karl XI (1660-97).

The first extract comes from the modern frame of the story, in which the accident which has befallen the Hund coat of arms is described; it is an allegory of how "the shining example of our ancestors" has become dimmed and besmirched:

Saken var nämligen den att en plåtslagare hade trampat in taket då han skulle reparera dygderna till sista riksdan, vilket åter haft till följd att det regnat in på vinden och runnit ner genom trossbotten samt sugit sig ner genom gipstaket och starkt angripit en

<sup>4</sup> from the Greek *agathos*: good. He is a good -- dog! An *agathist* is a person who believes that all things tend toward an ultimate good (i.e., that things are improving all the time), as opposed to an *optimist*, who believes that all things are already good (OED).

<sup>5</sup> As well as being the title of Egypt's ancient monarchs, Farao was the name of a game of chance (Karl-Åke Kärnell, in *Samlade Verk*, XII, 164).



vapensköld.... Det var en ful fläck i taket; den såg ut som ett träsk, men från träsket kröp en rödbrun orm ner för väggen. Den hade kunnat störta sig ner på ... vilken som helst av femtio [vapensköldar], men det gick förbi dem som om den vita ängeln hade satt sitt tecken på dem och den träffade sitt mål som en välriktad pil. Det var icke något ovanligt med vapnet. Hjärtskölden var delad i tre silverfält, på vilka voro tre hundhuvuden i guld; den var icke krönt med hjälm eller krona utan hade överst tre påfågelsfjädrar på vilka ögonen voro utförda med en ovanlig naturtrohet så att de skådade omkring sig med vilda skelande blickar. Men nu hade ormen krupit in i fjäderbusken, dragit sitt smutsiga slem över ögonen så att de sågo ut som grå starren och den hade slingrat sig ner mellan lövverket och utgjutit sitt gröna etter, som den samlat uppe bland dygderna på koppartaket, över de tre silverfälten, men hundhuvudena råde den icke på ty de voro av guld.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samlade verk, XII, 91:

It was like this, you see: a tinsmith had put his foot through the roof while he was repairing the virtues\* before the last parliament, with the consequence that rain came into the attic, ran down through the double flooring, seeped through the plaster ceiling, and made a fierce assault on a coat of arms.... There was an ugly stain on the ceiling; it looked like a swamp, and from the swamp a reddish-brown snake crept down the wall. It could have cast itself down on ... any of fifty [coats of arms], but it passed them by, as if the white angel\*\* had set its sign on them, and it reached its mark like a well-aimed arrow. There was nothing unusual about the crest. The shield was divided into three silver fields, on which were three dog's heads in gold; it was not surmounted by an armet or a crown, but at the top were three peacock feathers, the eyes of which were executed with such rare faithfulness to nature that they gazed on their surroundings with wildly crossed eyes. But now the snake had crept into the plumes, dragging its filthy slime over the eyes, so that they seemed to have cataracts; and it had wound itself down among the foliage and discharged its green venom, which it had collected up

The dog was an animal which Strindberg held in the utmost contempt. In the story "Tschandala" in Svenska öden och äventyr, dogs, snakes, and peacock feathers are all associated with the gypsy Jensen, who is the very lowest type of humanity. Here the eyes on the peacock feathers appear, appropriately enough, on the coat of arms of a newspaperman, suggesting the vigilance and observation appropriate to his profession: but these eyes are crossed (although he notices things,

—  
among the virtues on the copper roof, over the three silver fields; but it did not damage the dog's heads, for they were of gold.

\* The Virtues: presumably an allegorical grouping on the roof. In Kärnell's notes to Samlade verk, XII (162), he refers to a ceiling painting in the building, entitled "Dygdernas rådslag" ("The Counsel of the Virtues"), but this explanation does not seem to square with the other details in the paragraph. At any rate, it is a nice satirical touch that the virtues of the noble estate are in need of repair, and that the "snake" can gather venom from association with them!

\*\* i.e., the Angel of the Passover: a subtle reference to the title of Agathon Hund's newspaper: it was the children of Pharaoh (and of the Egyptians in general) who were not passed over!

his vision is warped) and, furthermore, clouded as if with cataracts (poisonous prejudices)!

Strindberg has more fun at the expense of his victim (and, incidentally, of the aristocracy in general) when he turns to the origins of his family's noble estate. It seems that Magnus Ladulås' doctors had prescribed a day's hunting to revive his drooping spirits and provide much-needed exercise, but alas! no dogs could be found. The day (and the king) was saved when it was found that Agathon's ancestor, Måns, a bootblack to one of the king's generals, could bay like a hound, so convincingly that he succeeded in raising enough game to give the king good sport. For this service he was knighted on the spot:

-- Vill du ha guld eller ära? Välj, ty du kan icke få båda!

-- Ära, Ers Majestät!

-- På knä din hund!

Måns borstare föll på knä, fick tre slag på axeln av en pamp och han steg upp adelsman.

-- Du skall föra tre hundhuvu i din sköld till minne av dina utmärkta förtjänster, men i stället för hjälm skall du ha tre påfågelsfjädrar, ty din fåfänga var större än din snålhet. Du är fri Måns Hund; gå ut, föröka dig och uppfyll jorden!<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Samlade verk, XII, 95:

"Do you want gold or honour? Choose, for you can't have both!"

"Honour, Your Majesty!"

"On your knees, dog!"

Måns the bootblack fell to his knees, received three taps on the shoulder with a rapier, and arose a nobleman.

"You shall bear three dog's heads on your shield, in token of your extraordinary merits, but instead of an armet you shall

This is the shining example which Måns' descendants emulate. Like him, their chief talent is their ability to bay like dogs; as the name Agathon suggests, they get better and better at it as one generation succeeds another! Poor earth, to be so replenished!

Strindberg's attacks were very savage if one happened to be on the receiving end, but extremely witty and amusing if one were just a spectator. The latter characteristic assured a brisk sale of *Det nya riket*; the former that the barrage of negative criticism and official animosity which had begun with *Röda rummet* and continued with *Svenska folket* was renewed and strengthened, to the point of making life in Sweden intolerable for Strindberg: he and his family moved to the continent in September of that year. Another consequence of the outcry against the book was Strindberg's defence of himself (in "*Esplanadsystemet*": "*The Esplanade System*", for example) and further ridicule of his enemies in his first volume of poems, *Dikter*.

—  
have three peacock feathers, for your vanity  
was greater than your greed! You are free,  
Måns Hund; go, increase and multiply and fill  
the earth!"\*

\* Genesis 1:28 (Douay-Rheims translation).

## Chapter 16

## Svenska öden och äventyr

*Svenska öden och äventyr: berättelser från alla tidevarv*<sup>1</sup> (*Swedish Destinies and Adventures: Tales from All Ages*) was written and published serially between 1882 and 1904. Its eighteen stories relate fictionalized incidents from Swedish history, from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, strongly coloured by his opinions and criticisms of contemporary Swedish society. They are beautiful prose poems, and as such were much admired, even though their political and sociological views sometimes caused dismay.

The first story, "Odlad frukt"<sup>2</sup> ("Cultivated Fruit"), is set in the Middle Ages, and is a parable of the declassification of society. The upper classes are seen as a kind of delicate hybrid plant: perfect of its kind but unproductive and unable to survive the harsh realities of life or historical change.

The hero is a young nobleman, Sten Ulvfot (literally, Stone Wolf-foot), who discovers that his inheritance has been squandered and that he must fend for himself. Unsited to do this, he is eventually forced to admit defeat and commits suicide.

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, VI. The first eight stories have also appeared as volume XIII of *Samlade Verk*.

<sup>2</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 7-47.

As the title indicates, the principal symbol is that of fruit cultivation. The historical lesson conveyed by the tale is in a lecture given by a Dominican monk to the hero, after he has been refused admission to that order (his last hope):

Ni tror att odling är utveckling; den är blott en sjuklig utbildning. Se på detta päronträd! Detta är en avkomling från ett päronträd i Santa Lucia i Spanien, där det odlats i fem hundra år. Ni tycker att det är en förträfflig sak, att det kan frambringa härliga frukter, som smaka vår tunga väl. Naturen tycker icke så, ty den har skapat fruktköttet för kärnornas skull, vilka skola fortplanta släktet. Se på detta päron, när jag skär det itu! Ser ni några kärnor? Nej! Odlingen har tagit bort dem! Se på detta äpple, som lyser så praktfullt i guld och rött! Det är en engelsk parmän! Det har ännu kärnor, men sår jag ut dem, så får jag surkarl till frukt! Men blir det sträng barvinter, då fryser parmänen ned, men surapeln fryser icke. Därför skall man låta bli att odla människor, i synnerhet som det alltid göres på andras bekostnad. Vårt land och vårt hårda klimat passa inte för sådan fruktodling!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 45-46:

You think cultivation is progress, but it's just a sickly development. Take this pear tree! It's a descendant of a pear tree in Santa Lucia, Spain, where it has been cultivated for five hundred years. You think it's an excellent thing, that it produces glorious fruit, well pleasing to our tongues. Nature doesn't think so, for it has formed the fruit for the sake of the seed, which should reproduce the species. Look at this pear, when I slice it in half! Do you see any seeds? No! Cultivation has made them disappear! Look at this apple, shining so splendidly with gold and red. It's an English apple! It still has seeds, but if I plant them the fruit they produce will be green and sour! But if it's a hard winter with no snow, the cultivated apple will freeze, but the sour apple tree won't freeze. That's why we should forget

As if to strengthen the connection the monk is making, it has already been related that one of Sten's skills is the cultivation of fruit. But this skill proves useless in his present problems: poverty and survival. The passage occurs when Sten takes leave of his ancestral home:

Han besökte trädgården; såg huru aplarne blommade. Vem skulle plocka frukterna av dessa träd, som han odlat och på vilka han väntat i årtal?<sup>4</sup>

Later, on the road, Sten is overcome with hunger, and is rescued by the discovery of a few apples remaining in a tree from the previous season. Presumably these are of the hardy, uncultivated variety to which the monk refers at the end of the story, an impression supported by the fact that Sten (who knows something about apples) mistakes the trees for wild ones until informed otherwise. Unlike his own cultivated fruit, as yet but a promise, pleasant to the senses but inedible, this more common variety, with all its unsavouriness, is immediately and generously useful:

—  
about cultivating people, especially since it's always done at the cost of others. Our country and our climate aren't suitable for such cultivation of fruit!

<sup>4</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 9:

He visited the orchard, and saw that his apple trees were in bloom. Who would pick the fruit of these trees, which he had cultivated and upon which he had waited for so many years?

... [han] steg ... upp i apeln, där han sett en hel mängd små äpplen som övervintrat, och vilka visserligen voro bokna, men ändock kunde fylla magen. När han ätit några stycken, tog han sig för att skaka trädet, så att de nedfallande frukterna smattrade på marken.<sup>5</sup>

The wasting of this resource gets him into trouble (with the owner of the tree, a man with a very legalistic mind) for the first time on his journey. He escapes punishment; he cannot escape the fact that he is himself a cultivated fruit, unable to perform life's most basic tasks and unable to survive adversity.

Sten leaves home wearing a white velvet jacket, the colour symbolizing his innocence of the world and its ways. His fate parallels the history of this jacket, as it becomes first soiled, then worn, and is finally replaced by a more somber, coarse garment. The jacket plays a part in a kind of heraldic pageant at the beginning of the story, in which the animals and the colours of heraldry are skillfully made to reveal the story's outcome, which is greatly at odds with the happy, carefree young man who here frolics like a boy:

... hans hjärtvapen, ulvfoten, upprepades i sitt röda fält sex gånger, och han fann ett nöje i att trampa i de röda fälten på de svarta fötterna ... men var gång han satte

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 12: "... [he] climbed ... up in the apple tree, where he had seen a whole lot of small apples which had survived the winter. They would certainly be half rotten, but they would fill his stomach nevertheless. When he had eaten a few, he began shaking the tree, so that the falling fruit pelted the ground.



sin fot i solmålningen, såg han ulvfoten teckna sig på sin gula älgskinnsstövel; när han då gjorde ett steg framåt, flyttade den sig upp på hans bröst, och den röda skölden satt som ett blodigt hjärta på hans vita sammetsjacka och revs av den svarta tassens med de spärrade klorna.<sup>6</sup>

Here the bleeding heart and the ravening foot of the wolf, traditional symbol of destruction, reinforce the colour symbolism, in which the red of suffering and the black of annihilation are superimposed on the white of innocence and the noble gold.

A similar combination of animal and colour symbolism (black-white, in this case) occurs when Sten mounts the stairs to the rooms in which his parents had lived. Here his home and perhaps even his way of life seem marked for destruction by the sign of the black predator: "... kolen från spiseln hade sprakat ut åt rummet och bränt ut teckningen av en panterhud."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 8:

... his insignia, the wolf-foot, was repeated on its red field six times, and he had fun stamping on the black feet in the red fields ... but every time he put his foot into the pattern projected by the sun, he saw the wolf-foot form itself on the yellow moose hide of his boots; when he then took a step forward, it moved up to his breast, and the red shield sat like a bloody heart on his white velvet jacket, and was riven by the black paw with the outspread claws.

<sup>7</sup> Idem.: "... live coals from the stove had jumped out into the room and burned out the shape of a panther skin."

The hybrid apple to which the Dominican compares Sten near the end of the story is gold and red, perhaps appropriate to his suffering nobility, and he meets his end in a dazzling golden radiance. Unfortunately, the golden sheen only conceals the black pit of destruction: "Den guldglänsande vattenspegeln öppnade sig som en mörk grav...."<sup>8</sup>

A symbol from the bird world contrasts Sten's helplessness to the adaptability of simpler forms of life. It is spring, and the swallows have returned:

Svalorna ... svärmade skrikande omkring honom och uppsökte sina gamla bon i tak-kransen; några funno dem, andra icke; ... men ... medan de voro hemlösa, hade de hus i varje dunge och under takhalmen på varje koja.<sup>9</sup>

Swallows, as harbingers of spring, are also symbols of cyclic regeneration, and thus of the forward thrust of time and of nature. That Sten's degeneration begins in the spring is another indication of how out-of-phase he is with his environment.

Working with and complementing the symbols from nature, is the Strindberg symbolism (cf. *Fröken Julie*)

<sup>8</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 46: "The sparkling golden mirror of the water opened like a dark grave...."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 9:

The swallows ... swarmed and shrieked around him, looking for their old nests in the eaves; some found them, others did not; ... but ... while they were homeless, they had a place to live in every clump of trees and under the thatching of every hut.

of rising and falling. It is introduced very early in this story and continues throughout, forming, indeed, an essential element of the hero's demise. In the first instance, Sten is identified with the lofty world of ideals, and his end is foreseen:

... när han ... såg upp mot de tågande vita vårmolnen, föreföll det honom som om han stod på ett sagans luftskepp och seglade fram mellan skyarne, och när han sedan såg ner på jorden, föreföll den honom som en samling mullhögar, som en avfallsbacke utkastad från himlen; men han hade en förkänsla av att nu måste han dit ner och gräva i mullhögarne för att söka mat; han kände att hans fötter stodo fasta på jorden, oaktat hans villade blickar seglade däruppe bland de silverglänsande skyarne.<sup>10</sup>

Later, in Stockholm, Sten meets a clerk who gives him this piece of social wisdom:

-- Ser ni, det ligger i människonaturen att vilja sträva uppåt; med uppåt menas att slippa arbeta. Det är dit vi kravla och streta! -- Det finns två sätt att komma upp:

<sup>10</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 9:

... when he ... looked up at the scudding white spring clouds, it seemed to him that he stood in a fairytale airship, sailing among the clouds, but when he then looked down to earth, it seemed to him a collection of dust heaps, like a garbage dump cast out of heaven; but he had a presentiment that he had to go down there now and dig in the dust heaps for food; he felt that his feet were firmly planted on the earth, notwithstanding the fact that his deluded gazes were sailing up there among the shimmering silvery clouds.

ett hederligt och ett ohederligt! Det senare är vigast, men kan sluta med ett nedåt!<sup>11</sup>

These words are prophetic; at the end of the story Sten, all hope of survival vanquished, commits suicide by jumping off a cliff into the sea.

Sten's suicide at the end of his journey establishes one of the larger symbolic patterns in the story: not only is the history of the aristocracy the story of a journey ending in annihilation, but, Strindberg suggests, life itself is like that:

Vad är vår vandring här annat än antingen en strid på liv och död eller en likvaka, där man sitter och väntar på att den döde bäres ut?<sup>12</sup>

Whatever our station in life, then, and however ill or well we are prepared to face life's adversities, it is still a pilgrimage which will end in death. Sten himself had realized this a few pages earlier, as he watched with simple delight a wedding celebration:

... nu rycktes brudgummen in i ringen och måste dansa med bruden. Sten blev underlig

<sup>11</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 27:

"You see, it's human nature to want to struggle upward, by which is meant not having to work. That's the goal towards which we crawl and strive! There are two ways to rise: an honourable one and a dishonourable one! The latter demands most agility, but can end in a plunge!

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 35:

What is our wandering here but either a life and death struggle or a wake, where one sits and waits for the corpse to be carried out?

till sinnes och han tyckte sig se dödsdansen från kapellväggarna hemma vid sin fädernegård. Arme man, tänkte han, och arma flicka!<sup>13</sup>

That realization itself has been foreshadowed in one of the few mentions of Christ in this story. As is usual in Strindberg, Christ is primarily one who suffers and dies, but in the early pages of this story, that fate is contrasted vividly to the joy and innocence, the promise of a bright future, of the Infant Jesus:

I modrens rum satt ännu en väggfast stentavla, föreställande Maria och barnet; hon betraktar sin son med blickar fulla av förhoppning och utan aning om att hon håller en blivande straffånge på sitt knä.<sup>14</sup>

Death, then, is not something for which Sten has been singled out; what distinguishes him from the ordinary people of his society is not that he dies -- so will they all, eventually -- but that he dies young and without a struggle, the last member of a noble family, which dies with him. He is the hybrid fruit: incapable

<sup>13</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 22:

... now the bridegroom was pulled into the circle, and had to dance with the bride. A strange expression came over Sten, and he imagined he was watching the dance of death painted on the walls of his ancestral chapel. "Poor man," he thought, "and poor girl!"

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 8:

Fastened to the wall in his mother's room was a stone tablet, on which Mary and the Child were represented; she is looking at her Son with eyes full of hope and with no suspicion that she is holding a future convict on her knee.

of surviving in a hostile environment, and seedless (he dies childless). The forces opposed to him, which eventually overwhelm him, are all natural forces, i.e., the world of nature and nature's laws, as opposed to the world of artificial cultivation, which is doomed.

That world has been seen in the hardy, uncultivated fruits and in the swallows, both of which had close connections to the dominant symbol of nature (and hence of life): the relentless, inevitable, and totally democratic phenomenon of the changing of the seasons. If spring brings life and hope, if summer brings warmth and happiness, if autumn brings the bounty of harvest, winter too must come, and it too must be survived, if life is to go on. This is the meaning of the Mayday procession which Sten happens upon; the cyclical nature of the process (new life in fact begins at the very dead of winter) is emphasized by the allegorical figure representing winter: the hoary old man is in fact played by a youth; he rides backwards because winter is not a forward-looking time, but nevertheless his horse pulls him willy-nilly forward:

I spetsen rider en yngling med en krans om pannan och ett grönklätt spjut i handen, efterföljd av pipare och trummare med stic-  
kelbärslöv i mössorna, och därefter en hel skara utklädda med svarta tygmasker, rödmålade trämasker och de mest fantastiska dräkter i romerska och grekiska mönster, men sist rider bakvänd på en hästkrake en yngling iförd skinnpäls och med löst skägg och hår,

föreställande vintern. Det var majgrevens tåg, som hälsat vårens ankomst....<sup>15</sup>

Sten dies ignominiously: not only is he alone, but it is made very clear that his death matters to nobody whatsoever; just as he leaves behind him no descendants, no trace that his family ever existed, so too all physical traces of his passing quickly disappear. Despite this, Strindberg allows him a moment of glory, however fleeting and insignificant: Sten, has, after all, been an attractive hero, and the social class and way of life he represents was at times dazzling:

Den guldglänsande vattenspegeln öppnade sig som en mörk grav, vilken genast lades igen, en stor ring som en gloria syntes på vattnet; den vidgades och blev flera ringar, vilka förtunnades och dogo bort. Snart syntes de små vågorna komma igen, och de lekte och hoppade i månskenet så muntert som om de aldrig blivit skrämde.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 22:

At the head rode a young man with a wreath on his brow and a spear decorated with greenery in his hand, followed by pipers and drummers with gooseberry leaves in their caps, and after them a whole troop dressed in masks of black cloth or of wood painted red, and the most fantastic costumes after Roman and Greek patterns, but last, riding backwards on a jade, came a young man clad in hides, with a false beard and hair, representing winter. It was the procession of the Lord of the May, greeting the arrival of spring....

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 46-47:

The sparkling golden mirror of the water opened like a dark grave, which closed again at once. A large ring, like a halo, appeared upon the water; it widened and became several rings, which thinned out and died away. Soon the small waves came back again, playing and jumping in the moonlight as cheerfully as if

*Sic transit gloria mundi*

The second story, "En ovälkommen"<sup>17</sup> ("An Undesirable"), like "Odlad frukt", was written in 1882-83. It is an ironic tale of a child who had been unwanted from birth, and whose greatest desire is to be accepted by his family and his community. When he finally attains acceptance, through not entirely honest means, he finds that the price he has had to pay is far too high, and leaves to search for a new life.

The figure of the hero, Kristian, is a Strindberg archetype; he is the solitary figure, despised and cursed by all, who wanders through such works as *Tjänstekvinnans son*, *Till Damaskus*, and *Syndabocken* (The Scapegoat, 1907), and is known variously as Cain, Ishmael, the Stranger, the Unknown, the Wanderer, etc.. The name chosen here is significant, for the story is a kind of morality drama; the difference is that it deals with the ways of this world and earthly salvation, rather than with the path to spiritual perfection.

Kristian is identified early in the story as an outcast, and the double use of the word *aldrig* (never) emphasizes that he will not change in this respect:

Kristian.... syntes vara född med tvenne egenskaper som aldrig lämnade honom: den ena

—

they had never been frightened.

<sup>17</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 48-65.



var att alltid gå i vägen, den andra: att aldrig vara välkommen.<sup>18</sup>

As a child, unwanted by his family, he becomes a familiar of lonely places, searching the woods and beaches for food and sleeping in a deserted fishing hut. One night he overhears a Swedish fisherman talking with an Estonian, and learns there is a market in Russia for the skins of small animals and for eiderdown (commodities the Swedes do not exploit, out of love and concern for nature). He sees a way to earn the respect and acceptance of family and community by becoming rich, and he views the stranger who has brought him this knowledge (and who presumably will return to purchase the pelts and down he gathers) as a liberator. His aspirations reveal the extent of his ostracism:

... hans öga ... tyckte sig ... se ett fjärran land, där befriaren bodde som skulle komma och göra honom lika med de andra människorna; han skulle upphöra att gå i vägen, han skulle bli hälsad välkommen, vila under eget tak, kanske äga en liten del av denna jord där han jagades som en hund på andras jaktmark!<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 49:

Kristian.... seemed to have been born with two characteristics which never left him: one was always to be in the way, and the other was never to be welcome.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 54:

... his eye ... seemed to ... see a far-off land, where the liberator lived, who would come and make him like other men: he would no longer be in the way; he would be welcomed, rest under his own roof, perhaps own a little bit of this earth, where he was hunted like a dog on someone else's hunting-ground.

His plan succeeds, and he gets rich, but not exactly as he had foreseen; because of his family's greed, he does not profit from the sale of pelts and down, but becomes instead a brigand and a thief, a plunderer of wrecks and corpses. Society is not concerned with how he has earned his riches, however, only with the fact that he has them, and he achieves all he has ever wanted: respect and acceptance. It is a hollow victory: "What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life?" (Matthew 16:26, Jerusalem Bible) He has come to despise those who have forced him into a life of crime, and he despises what he has had to do in order to arrive where he is. Ironically, in the midst of his triumph, he turns his back on society, and decides to strike off on his own, in search of a new, honest, self-fulfilling life. He is no longer completely alone, however: he has found unconditional acceptance from Olga, his wife:

.... ... jag vill icke äga något av denna jord som människorna slåss om; jag vill icke bli aktad av detta sällskap som misstänker mig vara en skurk, men förlåter mig, därför att jag har murad spis och dricker vin. .... -- Låtom oss lämna detta land, som icke hade plats för oss då vi voro hederliga, men öppnade sina portar då vi blevo ohederliga.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 64-65:

".... ... I don't want to own any of this land, which men fight over; I don't want to be respected by this society, which suspects me of being a scoundrel but forgives me because I have a built-in fireplace and drink wine. ... Let's leave this land, which had no place for us when we were honourable, but

He realizes that his past life has been a lie because he has been trying to please others rather than be true to his own nature; as he turns his back on those others in order to begin a new life with the one person who has accepted him for what he is, he also turns his back on his own past, which will no longer haunt him:

.... Dina ögon, Olga, fråga mig om jag icke skall sakna det gamla hemmet där min barndom förflutit! Jag hade ingen barndom; ingen hälsade mig välkommen när jag kom och ingen säger farväl när jag går; när jag såg dig, Olga, då började min barndom, och där du är, där är mitt hem!<sup>21</sup>

Before he leaves he is also symbolically purified of his links to the past, the last traces of which are destroyed by purgatorial fire:

Om aftonen ... en vådeld tände Kristians stuga. Vid skenet sågs hans största båt styra till havs och hålla österut.<sup>22</sup>

opened its doors to us when we became dishonourable."

<sup>21</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 65:

".... Your eyes, Olga, ask me if I won't miss the old home where I spent my childhood! I had no childhood; nobody made me welcome when I came, and nobody says farewell when I go. When I saw you, Olga, that was when my childhood began, and where you are, there is my home!

<sup>22</sup> Idem.:

In the evening ... his cottage caught fire. In the reflection, his largest boat could be seen heading out to sea on an easterly course.

The east has a symbolical importance in the story. The point where the sun rises, it represents illumination, the fount of life, new beginnings. As such, it is the focus of Kristian's aspirations, beginning with his early plan to become rich and respected through pelts and eiderdown. An Estonian (and therefore a man from the east) puts the idea into his head, and as that idea gels he feels almost mystically drawn to the east:

Den uppgående solen belyste det öppna havet.... För Kristian var denna scen icke ny men i dag syntes solen lysa gladare och synkretsen var vidare; hans öga som svävat över vattenytan utan att finna ett mål bakom den blåa randen vilken begränsade den som ett stängsel, tyckte sig i morgonskyarne se ett fjärran land, där befriaren bodde.... Hoppet vaknade i hans själ, och när han såg estens kogg hissa segel och hålla ut mot den gyllene gata solen målade på de blanka vågorna, såg han sig själv stå vid roret och med den dyrbara lasten styra mot det fjärran landet som låg bakom det blåa strecket, och nu fattade han beslutet att börja ett liv.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 54:

The rising sun lit up the open sea.... For Kristian this scene was not new, but today the sun seemed to shine more cheerfully and the horizon was wider; his eye, which swept over the surface of the water without spying anything beyond the blue stripe which delimited it like a fence, seemed, in the morning light, to see a far-off land, where the liberator lived.... Hope awakened in his soul, and when he saw the Estonian's ship raise sail and head out toward the golden pathway which the sun painted on the shining waves, he saw himself standing at the helm, steering the precious cargo towards the far-off land beyond the blue line, and he then made a decision: to begin a life.

As Kristian and Olga sail towards the land of the rising sun, it is evening: one phase of their life is coming to an end; another is about to begin.

"Högre ändamål"<sup>24</sup> ("Higher Ends", 1882-83) deals with the imposition of priestly celibacy upon the Church in Sweden,<sup>25</sup> particularly as it affected one Peder Decius, a married priest in the parish of Rasbo. It is a story of the struggle of conscience in one man's soul, as he is torn between his love of God and his love for his wife. Herr Peder attempts to find a way around the new regulation; when no way out is discovered, he attempts to conform, sending his wife away; he finds that he cannot live without her, however, and at the end of the tale resolves to leave not only the priesthood and the church which demands such sacrifice of its clergy, but also the worship of the God who permits such demands to be made in His Name.

The story is not, however, atheistic, or even particularly anti-Christian or anti-Catholic. Strindberg's concern is historical rather than polemical; he is interested above all in the dramatic struggle within a character trapped in a situation over which he has no control; and he sees the events from a sociological rather than a religious perspective.

<sup>24</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 66-88.

<sup>25</sup> This happened in 1248. The papal legate was Cardinal Vilhelm of Sabina.

Strindberg believed that the history of Sweden is that of its people, not that of institutions such as church and monarchy; indeed, these stories were written to illustrate that conviction. This story brings out a little variation on the theme: people, after all, can be viewed either collectively or individually. With some justification, Strindberg presents the demand for priestly celibacy as the formulation of what was essentially a popular demand: the will of the people; that it conflicts with the will of an individual adds poignancy to the tale. The will of the people changed -- the Roman Catholic Church was completely annihilated in Sweden during the Reformation, and with it the doctrine of priestly celibacy -- so eventually it was the resistance of Herr Peder which prevailed. Strindberg is always in sympathy with the individual, but he takes pains to show that what oppresses the individual may, nevertheless, have something to be said in its favour.

The focus of the story is Herr Peder's crisis of conscience: how can he choose between God and the woman he loves? His heart is torn in two. And the heart, principal symbol of love, is of necessity a dominant symbol in the tale. It is first met in the papal pronouncement which is relayed to Herr Peder, commanding him to conform to the new regulation; that document says, among other things:

-- ... en rätt Herrans tjänare kan icke  
leva i köttslig förbund med en kvinna ... och

hans hjärta kan icke delas mellan Kristus och en syndig ättling av den första kvinnan.<sup>26</sup>

But if his heart cannot be shared, to whom is it to be given? In terms of the symbol, the decision has already been made, even though it takes Herr Peder some time and a great deal of anguish to realize this, for it immediately becomes obvious that his heart is synonymous with his wife: i.e., his love is embodied in her:

... människorna började tvivla på prästernas befogenhet att vara domare och bödlar, ty människorna hade funnit sina domare fulla av mänskliga svagheter; nu skulle prästerskapet visa, att de själva kunde för Kristi saks skull riva hjärtat ur bröstet och lägga det på altaret. Men ... kristendomen hade ju avskaffat människo-offer.<sup>27</sup>

But this is in general terms; the identification heart-love-wife becomes clearer when Herr Peder visits his church after he has made the decision to comply with the new regulation, sending his wife and children away:

Han såg ... ner på ... bönpallor, vilka i skymningen liknade knäfallande.... Han rev

<sup>26</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 76-77:

"... a true servant of the Lord cannot live in fleshly alliance with a woman ... and his heart cannot be divided between Christ and a sinful descendant of the first woman."

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 78:

... men were beginning to doubt the competence of priests to be their judges and executioners, for men had found their judges to be full of human weaknesses; now the priesthood would demonstrate that they themselves could, for the sake of Christ's cause, tear heart from breast and lay it on the altar. But ... had not Christianity put an end to human sacrifice?

upp sin rock och visade dem sitt blodiga bröst, där det var ett tomt hål efter hjärtat, som han skänkt sin Gud....<sup>28</sup>

Wife and children do not leave immediately, however; he manages to hang on to them until the day before Christmas Eve. So despondent and broken is he when they finally do depart, that he falls ill, and remains so until April. The following month, he takes a trip into the country, and revisits a place where he and his family had enjoyed a picnic the previous year. This is when he himself finally realizes what has been evident to the reader for some time: that once his wife has left, he no longer has a heart to give to God:

... han ville finna något ... som påminde om henne. Slutligen stannade han vid en hagtornsbuske; där hängde en liten flik av ett rött ylletyg på en torn; den sattes i rörelse av vinden och fladdrade som en grann fjäril...; en fjäril uppträd på en nål; så kom en annan vindfläkt och vände på den, så att den tog bild av ett blodigt hjärta; ett hjärta ryckt ur bröstet på ett offer och upphängt i lundens träd.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 60:

He looked ... down on ... prie-dieu, which, in the twilight, looked like kneeling figures.... He tore open his coat and showed them his bloody breast; there was an empty hole where his heart, which he had presented to his God, had been....

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 85-86:

... he wanted to find something ... which reminded him of her. Finally, he stood by a hawthorn bush. There, hanging on a thorn, was a little fragment of red cloth. It was stirred by the wind, and fluttered like a garish butterfly...: a butterfly transfixed by a pin. Then came another gust of wind and turned it around, so that it took on the



Significantly, these references to the heart symbol link it to the practice of human sacrifice. In this instance, the most significant in the story, human sacrifice is specifically linked to the primitive, pre-Christian religions of which it formed a major element. The material is treated exhaustively in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Strindberg could not have known this work (it was not published until 1922), but was familiar with much of the material, particularly with those elements which formed part of the pre-Christian Scandinavian religions. He has combined elements from two primitive rituals, both designed to propitiate the forces of nature and assure prosperity to the community: the offering up of the heart of the sacrificed victim,<sup>30</sup> and the observances connected with the sacred grove.<sup>31</sup> This symbolic link reinforces the idea, elsewhere expressed explicitly, that Herr Peder is being asked to make his sacrifice for the good of the community. It also prepares us for his ultimate decision to renounce the priesthood, the Church, and Christianity itself in

—  
shape of a bloody heart: a heart wrenched  
from the breast of a sacrifice and hung in  
the boughs of a grove.

<sup>30</sup> As practiced in Mexico, this ritual is graphically described by Frazer in Chapter LIX: "Killing the God in Mexico". See *The Golden Bough*, 771.

<sup>31</sup> In Scandinavia, associated with the worship of the god Balder. See Frazer, Chapter LXI: "The Myth of Balder" (795-97).

favour of the primitive religion of his country: the heathens, he reasons, at least killed their victims instead of offering them up as living sacrifices:

-- ....

Herr diakonus, hälsa den heliga fadern och säg, att jag icke mottager hans smutsiga anbud, hälsa honom och säg, att de gudar, våra förfäder dyrkade över molnen och i solen, voro mycket större och framför allt renare än dessa romerska och semitiska kopplare och indrivare, som ni narrat på oss; hälsa honom och säg att ni träffat en man, som skall egna hela sitt återstående liv åt att omvända kristna till hedendomen och att en dag skall komma, då de nya hedningarne skola hålla korståg mot Kristi ståthållare och hans anhang, som vilja införa bruket att offra människor levande, då hedningarne nöjde sig med att döda sina.<sup>32</sup>

With the term new heathenism, Strindberg is looking ahead to the Renaissance, the Reformation, and even farther, to the secularization of Swedish society.

Of the four main colours with which Strindberg paints his symbolic landscape, black, red, white, and

<sup>32</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 87-88:

"....

"Lord deacon, greet the Holy Father and say that I do not accept his sordid offer; greet him and say that the gods which our ancestors worshipped, beyond the clouds and in the sun, were much greater and, above all, cleaner than these Roman and semitic panders and money collectors you have foisted on us; greet him and say that you have met a man who will devote the whole of his remaining life to reconverting Christians to heathenism, and that a day will come when the new heathens will wage a crusade against Christ's vicar and his followers, who want to introduce the practice of living sacrifices, whereas the heathens were content to kill theirs."

gold, three play minor roles in this story. The red of suffering is most apparent in the frequent references to bloody breasts and hearts, and in the fragment of cloth which reminds Herr Peder of his wife; it also contrasts effectively with the gold of the altar tabernacle in Herr Peder's church, in the scene in which he finds a hole where his heart had been: "Det förgyllda altarskåpets dörrar stodo öppna och frälsarens vandring till Golgata belystes av aftonsolens röda strålar."<sup>33</sup> The phenomenon strengthens the comparison the priest makes on several occasions, of his own sufferings to those of Christ, the human sacrifice of the Christian tradition. White (innocence) emphasizes the sufferings of the wife, who is innocent of any wrongdoing: the red butterfly (a piece of her clothing which comes to represent the heart of a human sacrifice) stands out "bland de vita hagtornsblommorna."<sup>34</sup> Another use of white is a biblical allusion: the papal legate who has brought the order which sparks the story's action is described as one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse: "Han steg upp på sin vita häst och red därifrån

<sup>33</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 78:

The gilded doors of the tabernacle stood open, and the Saviour's progress to Golgotha [i.e., the Stations of the Cross on the church wall] was illumined by the red beams of the evening sun.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 86: "among the white hawthorn flowers."

... som apokalypsens ryttare."<sup>35</sup> The rider of the white horse in the Apocalypse (6:2) is traditionally identified as Conquest, perhaps here a reference to the power of the papacy or the havoc wrought in the path of this decree (or does Strindberg have in mind the rider of the pale horse -- white is, after all, pale -- Death?). Interestingly enough, there is another rider of a white horse in the Apocalypse (19:11-16), who is given three names: "Faithful and True", "The Word of God", and "The King of kings and the Lord of lords" (Jerusalem Bible). Strindberg, who knew his Bible intimately, may or may not have intended the ambiguity.

The title of "Högre ändamål" is characteristically ironic. The phrase is first used in the papal legate's answer to one of Herr Peder's objections to the decree:

-- Vad Gud förenat skall människan icke  
åtskilja, svarade prästen....  
-- Detta gäller endast församlingen, men  
när Kristi kyrkas högre ändamål fordra, då  
blir brottet lag.<sup>36</sup>

A nice piece of jesuitical reasoning, the full irony of which is revealed at the end of the story:

<sup>35</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 78: "He mounted his white horse and rode away ... like the horseman of the Apocalypse."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 77:

"What God hath joined together let no man put asunder," answered the priest....  
"That applies only to the congregation, but where the higher ends of Christ's Church are concerned, the crime becomes a law."

Ni har med era osynliga högre ändamål varit nära att mörda två människor här på orten endast...."<sup>37</sup>

The story "Beskyddare"<sup>38</sup> ("Patron", also 1882-3) deals with mediaeval trade guilds and the Hanseatic league. It also is very ironic, describing how innovators are shunned by their colleagues until their innovations are adopted by foreigners, and the troubles those colleagues then have catching up with the foreign competition. Although the story is well worth reading, it contributes little to our understanding of Strindberg's use of symbolism.

One short passage is of note, however, for the way a Christian symbol, the seed which must die before it can give rise to new life, is extended even to the world of business! The speaker, Mäster Påvel, is a master craftsman who has learned through costly experience that he had been wrong to dismiss the innovations of one of his journeymen:

Han uttalade som sin mest brinnande förhoppning att mänskligheten evigt måtte få se det sekelgamla, vilket som bekant har stor benägenhet att övergå till förruttnelse, giva vika för det bättre, vilket ofta hade den tillfälliga egenskapen att vara nytt. Man såg ju örter som ruttnade efter ett år, man såg människor och djur ruttna inom ett sekel, man såg visserligen gamla trän som hunno seklet men de voro också ruttna ini om man såg noga

<sup>37</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 88: "You have, with your invisible 'higher ends', come close to murdering two people in this district alone...."

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 89-113.

efter. Nåväl skulle vi sorja därför? Ingalunda! Genom förruttnelsen skapades nya liv; förruttnelsen var endast en annan form för uppståndelsen; Kristus måste ruttna i graven innan han fick stå upp, alla måste vi därnå och det hjälper inte att streta emot.<sup>39</sup>

The next story, "På gott och ont"<sup>40</sup> ("Both Good and Evil", also 1882-3), concerns the introduction into Sweden of the moveable type printing press, the very beginnings of the Protestant Reformation spirit there, and how the two were intertwined, both for good (the spreading of knowledge through the new technology, and the reform of the abuses which abounded in the mediaeval Church) and for evil (some of the uses to which the new invention was put, and the disastrous consequences to the lives of many). The "moral" of the story, inas-

<sup>39</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 112:

He expressed as his most ardent hope that mankind might always be able to see the time-honoured, which, as everyone knows, has a great tendency to transform into decay, give way to the better, which often has the temporary peculiarity of being new. Didn't one see plants which decayed after a year; one saw men and animals decay within a century; true, one saw old trees which reached a century, but they were also rotten inside, if one looked closely enough. Well then! should all this make us sad? Not at all! Through decay, new life takes shape; decay is only another form of resurrection; Christ had to rot in the grave before he could rise again; so must we all, and it's no use resisting.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 114-47. The title is a pun which does not work in English; the Swedish idiom is equivalent to the English "which cuts both ways", in the sense of a two-edged sword, but Strindberg also intends the literal sense, an allusion to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good (gott) and Evil (ont).

much as it has one that can be reduced to a few words, is the old adage, "One man's meat is another man's poison," or in it's Swedish version, as expressed by the story's hero: "Den enes bröd den andres död;"<sup>41</sup> there are several sophisticated and ironic variations on this theme woven into the action.

The story opens in a Franciscan monastery on Riddarholmen, one of the islands of central Stockholm.<sup>42</sup> A discussion among three of the monks provides the symbolic framework of the story:

-- Kan någon säga mig, avbröt Franciscus ... vad som menas med att kunskapens träd var på gott och ont?

-- Jag tror, svarade Martin, att kunskapen gör människorna gott därigenom att den gör dem mäktiga, och gör ont därigenom att den gör dem -- vad skall jag säga? -- ont!

-- Jag tror, svarade Antonius, att med kunskapens träd på gott och ont, menades, att kunskapen bär både goda och onda frukter, ty vad som är gott för den ena är ofta ont för den andra.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 136: Literally, "Bread for one, death for another."

<sup>42</sup> Riddarholmen was formerly known as Gråmunkeholmen, literally Greyfriars Island.

<sup>43</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 122-23:

"Can anyone tell me," interrupted Franciscus [the monastery's chief scribe] ..., "... what we mean when we say that the tree of knowledge is both good and evil?"

"I think," answered Martin [the monastery librarian], that knowledge does people good inasmuch as it makes them powerful, and evil inasmuch as it makes them -- what shall I say? -- evil!"

"I think," answered Antonius [a middle-aged, conservative monk], what was meant by saying that the tree of knowledge was both good and evil was that knowledge bears both

The three brothers had been discussing some of the latest ecclesiastical scandals before Brother Francis began this discussion. Brother Antonius now returns to that dangerous ground, by way of illustrating what he has just said:

Antag att någon gick åstad och upplyste folket om att påven icke kan förlåta synder; den kunskapen skulle göra folket gott, men påven skulle icke kunna intaga och plundra det sköna Sicilien som han nu gör, ty han hade då icke fått några pengar till krigets förande; vi skulle icke heller mått gott som ha andel av uppbörden, men sicilianarne skulle må gott som fingo vara i fred och slippa få sina vingårdar nedtrampade av fiendens hästar.<sup>44</sup>

The ethics of an action, it seems, depend on whether one stands to profit or lose from it; everything is relative, as they say.

The central character is Hans Brevmålare, who, in keeping with his name (literally, Letter-painter: he is obviously related to Mäster Olof's Gert Bokpräntare), is a printer. He has heard of the introduction of move-

—  
good and evil fruits, for what is good for one is often evil for another."

<sup>44</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 123:

"Suppose someone were to inform the people that the pope can't forgive sins; that knowledge would do the people good, but the Pope wouldn't be able to invade and plunder Sicily, as he's doing now, for he wouldn't have received any money to wage the war; it wouldn't do us any good either, who get a share of the collection; but it would do the Sicilians good to be able to live in peace and no longer have to watch their vineyards being trampled by the enemy's horses.



able type in Germany, and sets about equipping his print shop for adoption of the new process. Simultaneously, his aid is solicited by the religious reformers, who see the new possibilities in publishing as a potential ally. This is unwittingly pointed out to them by Hans himself, as he manufactures his first set of moveable type, in a speech which draws on the Greek myths of the origin of the alphabet:

-- Ser du dessa små træklossar som jag sågat isär; när de ligga så här i en hög om varandra, då äro de icke farligare än en oordnad folkmassa, som kan trampas ner av några tjog ryttare; men ordnar jag dem i leder och ställer dem tillsammans som höra ihop, då bliva de fruktansvärda som ett folkehär, och sätter jag så en fanbärare i spetsen med en röd och blå fana då gå de i striden med mod och lust; och de skola alltid segra om de ha en god anförare.

-- Det är bokstäver, tror jag?

-- Det är bokstäver, av bokstäver bli ord, och orden tala ut tankarne.<sup>45</sup>

What a perfect image to express the power of the printed word!

<sup>45</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 127-128:

"See these little wooden blocks that I've sawed apart? While they lie like this, piled one on the other, they're no more dangerous than an unorganized crowd, which can be trampled down by a few score horsemen; but if I arrange them in rows, and place together those which belong together, they become as fearsome as a popular army, and if I place a standard-bearer at the head with a red and blue banner, they'll march to battle with courage and appetite; and they'll always win if they have a good commander.

"They're letters, I believe?"

"They're letters. Of letters one makes words, and words express thoughts."

Brevmålare joins the reformers because he thinks their cause is right, even though he knows that doing so could lead to his death; in a variation on the theme of both good and evil flowing from the same action, the reformers and Hans' sister convince him that even should it come to that, the good consequences of his involvement will far outweigh the sacrifice; indeed, his sister goes so far as to suggest that his very death would have good consequences, even for himself: in death he might be reunited with his dead wife. When he asks what his wife would think of the manner of his death, she replies:

-- Hon skall säga så: du gick i den bittra döden för att rädda din son och allas söner från lögnens andar och därför skall du sitta vid lammets tron. Det skall hon säga!<sup>46</sup>

One of the chief activists is a young man named Nigels. He is quick to see the use to which Hans and his printing press can be put, but, as he is by profession a copyist, he also stands to be made redundant by the invention (the two-edged sword again). He steals Hans' type, publishes some highly inflammatory anti-clerical tracts, and through this expedient manages both to advance the reformist cause and to ensure that

<sup>46</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 137:

"She'll say this: 'You embraced a bitter death in order to rescue your son and the sons of all others from the spirits of falsehood, and therefore you will sit by the throne of the Lamb.' That's what she'll say!"

Hans (and no doubt his printing press) will suffer retribution: his actions also cut two ways! He succeeds: he receives a job at court, the printing press is put under royal licence, and Hans is burned as a heretic.

Hans Brevmålare is another typical Strindberg hero: the innocent victim who is punished and suffers for the crimes of others, helplessly caught in and eventually destroyed by a situation about which he can do nothing. Others benefit from his suffering and death; he himself dies ignominiously. Hans sympathizes with the views for which he is executed, but he is innocent of the charges against him: they are the work of Nigels. All of his reformist allies desert him in his hour of need, and he does not even receive the posthumous consolation of being remembered as a precursor of the Reformation, the cause for which he died. He is missed, after his death, but not for his ideas or even his professional innovations:

-- ... [det var] ... synd om brevmålarn.  
O! sådana spelkort han gjorde. Ni skall se  
att ni kommer nog att sakna honom!<sup>47</sup>

From what is ostensibly a simple story of courage and betrayal, Strindberg has created a complex and ironic moral tale, because of the two-edged symbolic

<sup>47</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 147:

"... [it was] ... too bad about the letter painter. Oh! such playing cards he made! You're certainly going to miss him, you'll see!"

framework upon which he has hung his plot. It is a very cynical view of life and society, but tracing the reverberations of the debit-and-credit system of good and evil is fascinating!

In "Högre ändamål", Herr Peder had foretold the eventual triumph over the Church of a new heathenism. That is mentioned in this tale also, but as something already existing within the Church, something which has always been there, and which breaks through the orthodox surface from time to time in such manifestations as gargoyles on old churches, the mediaeval Feast of Fools and carnival, and a host of other indications that man worships the flesh as well as the spirit. The triumph of the new heathenism, then, will be nothing new in history, but the unleashing of a force which is very old indeed. The character in this tale who has most to say about the new heathenism is Brother Martin. Brother Franciscus has just mentioned several inconsistent practices within the Church, to which Martin replies:

-- .... Det är hedendomen som lever igen! Ty det fanns hos hedendomen också en tanke, en stor tanke, som aldrig kan dö: den dyrkade naturkrafterna, och de äro eviga; kristendomen dyrkade människan, och hon är dödlig. Veta vi icke huru de första kristna i Rom byggde om de gamla templen till kyrkor! Och vad är väl den kristna kyrkan annat än ett grekiskt tempel med välvt tak? Gjorde de icke Kristusbilder av gamla Apolllostoder?

Inga språng i naturen, säger den hedniske filosofen, och han har säkerligen rätt.<sup>48</sup>

The new heathenism, then, is the coming Renaissance, with its revival of classical learning and art, as well as subsequent events such as the Reformation! Through his use of the contrast between eternal nature and mortal man, Brother Martin also implies that the triumph of the new heathens is inevitable.<sup>49</sup>

"Utveckling"<sup>50</sup> ("Progress"), the sixth of the tales from 1882-83, deals with the moment of that triumph: the establishment of the Protestant Reformation, and with it, the ideals of the Italian Renaissance, in Sweden. The symbolic moments are the closing of the Carthusian monastery at Mariefred, not far from Stockholm, and the subsequent reopening there of Gripsholm

<sup>48</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 121:

".... Heathenism is alive again! For heathenism was also based on a principal, a great principal, which can never perish: it worshipped the powers of nature, which are eternal; Christianity worshipped man, who is mortal. Don't we know how the first Christians in Rome rebuilt the old temples as churches! And what is the Christian Church, after all, but a Greek temple with a vaulted roof? Didn't they make images of Christ from old statues of Apollo? There's nothing new under the sun, says the heathen philosopher, and he's certainly right!"

<sup>49</sup> His reasoning is faulty, however, for mankind is immortal in the same sense that nature is: individual components perish but are replaced with new life, and the whole goes on forever -- at least until both mankind and nature are destroyed!

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 148-97.

Castle.<sup>51</sup> The story opens a short while before these events and closes a short time after them, in order that they might be seen in their context.

Monasteries appear in several of Strindberg's works. Usually, they are imaginary monasteries, places of refuge rather than of prayer, with a more or less pronounced secular air about them. Here, the monastery is real: furthermore, it follows the strict rule of the Carthusian Order. He does not ignore the austerity or asceticism of the monks, but nevertheless, we sense a good deal of admiration in his description: the monastery is already for him a powerful symbol of refuge from the cares and persecutions of the world:

Kartusianerklostret pax Mariae eller Marias frid var en sällsam företeelse i svenska klosterhistorien. Anlagt vid nya tidens ingång då knappt någon mera trodde på munkliv eller lära, befolkades det med ledamöter av den strängaste orden som funnits nämligen kartusianerna. Dessa voro väldiga världs-föraktare och ansågo livets uppgift vara att strida för andens frihet. Och de stredo. .... Dessa munkar åtnjöto stort anseende av folket och de visade också en stor och hos den tidens klosterfolk ovanlig ringaktning för jordagods. .... De voro sålunda i alla

<sup>51</sup> The town of Mariefred (literally, Mary's Peace) is named for the Carthusian monastery which was once there, the full name of which was Monasterium Pacis Mariae. It was founded in 1493 by Sten Sture the Elder. Mariefred is now chiefly known as the site of Gripsholm Castle, founded around 1380 and named after its owner, Bo Jonsson Grips (literally, Griffin). The monastery was dissolved by Gustav Vasa in 1525, which dates the action of this story. By that time the castle had fallen into disuse, but Vasa rebuilt it in 1537. It still exists. The present church in Mariefred dates from 1624, so is not the church referred to in the story.

avseenden så goda Kristi lärjungar som någon kunde bli, och de voro inga lättingar, ty de hade icke tjänare utan gjorde alla sina sysslor själva.<sup>52</sup>

The day of dissolution arrives: "Marias frid var ute."<sup>53</sup> The monks are smoked out of the monastery, and everything but the church is destroyed. The Reformation and the Renaissance are established in Sweden: spirituality has been replaced by worldly power, a fact emphasized by the rebuilding of Gripsholm Castle with materials from the monastery.

Then the plague strikes, and among the first victims is the daughter of the castle watchman, an indication that the plague has been sent as punishment for the destruction of the monastery: "... pesten är här, folket har stormat huset och sade att det var kloster-

<sup>52</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 149-50:

The Carthusian monastery Pax Mariae (or Mary's Peace) was a singular phenomenon in the history of Swedish monasteries. Founded around the beginning of the modern age, when hardly anybody believed in monastic life or discipline any more, it was occupied by members of the strictest order there was, namely the Carthusians. These men held the world in great contempt, and believed that the purpose of life was to strive for the freedom of the spirit. And they strove. .... These monks were held in great esteem by the people, and they also displayed a great and, among the monasteries of that time, unusual disdain for real property. .... They were thus in all respects as good disciples of Christ as anyone could be, and they were no slouches, for they had no servants, but did all their chores themselves.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 176: "Mary's peace had ended."

skändarnes straff!"<sup>54</sup> The Reformation in Sweden was complete -- even Germany did not succumb to it so completely -- but there are indications that it was not particularly deep: the outward forms changed, but the content remained much the same. The treatment of the plague as punishment is one indication of this phenomenon; another is the similarity between Roman Catholic and Swedish Lutheran rituals (in Anglican terminology, the Swedish Church is very "high": the main religious service of the Swedish Church is still referred to as *högmässan*: literally, High Mass): "Man ville ha igen det gamla, och man fick igen -- mässan."<sup>55</sup>

The hero of "Utveckling" is a young artist named, appropriately, Botvid Målare (the surname means, literally, painter). Unfortunate enough to live in times of great change, he vacillates between the old order and the new for most of the story:

... han var sonen av två tidevarv och detta gav honom två synpunkter över tingen, munkens och satyrens; han kunde ännu bli hänförd av något stort, skönt, gott, men så kom genast

<sup>54</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 139: "... the plague is here; the people have stormed the house, saying that this is punishment for the desecrators of the monastery!"

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 190: "People wanted the old ways back, and they got back -- the Mass."



tvivlets löje och upplöste allt....<sup>56</sup>

As an artist, he has some sympathy for the humanism of the Renaissance; he still paints very much in the style of Giotto, but he also tries to introduce as much truth to nature into his paintings as possible. This tendency gets him into trouble with the monks, who have commissioned him to paint an Annunciation for their church, and he has a great deal of difficulty trying to understand just why this should be so. The point Strindberg is making through the symbolism of his painting is that even before any of the revolutionary events occur, and before he meets the embodiment of Renaissance ideals, Botvid is caught between opposed views of life. The description of the painting is the most highly symbolic passage in the story on several levels (Strindberg shows, for instance, that he is quite aware of the Freudian aspects of symbolism); it presents in concentrated form the major differences between the old order and the new, even though the new is represented by a practitioner who is far from adept in its ideology:

Täta överläggningar huru ämnet skall behandlas hava skriftligen hållits mellan bröderna

<sup>56</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 194:

... he was the son of two eras, and that gave him two points of view on matters: the monk's and the satyr's; he could still be transported by something great and beautiful and good, but immediately he heard the ridiculing laughter of doubt, and everything disintegrated....

och Botvid Målare har råkat i en svår anfäktelse med sig själv huru han skall framställa den heliga jungfrun i det hemlighetsfulla ögonblick då hon mottager änglahälsningen Ave Maria gratia plena, och blir underkunnig om sitt välsignade tillstånd. Botvid var visserligen en ung man av fromma seder, men det visste han väl att utan en man och en kvinna blev intet mänskligt fött. Han måste därför å ena sidan fasthålla det naturliga i förloppet, men å andra sidan icke glömma underverket, eller det onaturliga, och det var genom uttrycket i jungfruns ansikte han skulle söka få fram det högsta osinnliga parat med det sinnliga. Detta hade han dock sparat till sist och börjat med ängelen. .... Enligt bibelns ord skulle det vara ängelen Gabriel som sändes av Herren att bebåda Maria hennes blivande lycka. Som alla änglar vilka förekomma i skriften äro nämnda vid mansnamn hade Botvid icke tvekat att framställa denna i mans skepelse; men detta hade ådragit honom skarpa tillrättavisningar på griffeltavlan, ty änglarne som stå över alla sinnliga förhållanden hava intet kön, och för övrigt gick det icke an att på samma tavla framställa en man ensam med en jungfru i synnerhet då han skulle framföra ett så grannliga ärende. Ängelen fick således den man-kvinnliga utseende som utmärker änglar. Ansiktet var en ynglings, håret en kvinnas, armar och ben, så mycket som kunde skönjas genom dräkten, en ynglings, men bröstet hade en svag höjning och höfterna började svälla strax vid veka livet. .... I ängelens hand hade han målat kärlekens blomma, rosen, men den röda färgen misshagade de helige emedan den påminde om kött, och blomman erinrade förövrigt om hedniska kärlekssagor. Nej, en lilja skulle det vara, en vit lilja, oskuldens och renhetens sinnebild. Botvid målade en vit lilja och var mycket glad åt den verkan de sex saffransgula ståndarknapparne gjorde, ty det var icke många tillfällen till färgverkan i de vitklädda figurerna. Men när han dagen därpå kom in i kyrkan för att återtaga sitt arbete, såg han att man struckit över ståndarne och lämnat den öppna kalken tom. I någon utredning av frågan hade munkarne icke velat inlåta sig och Botvid trodde att detta härrörde av några troslärans hemligheter som ej fingo röjas.

....

En varm vårkväll gick Botvid i trädgården och drömde. .... På trädgårdssängarne

blommade saffran och liljor; liljorna doftade starkt och gjorde honom rusig. Han kom att grubbla över munkarnes hemlighetsfulla beteende med ängelens lilja. Varför skulle man stympa vad Gud skapat? Hade Gud skapat något syndigt?<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 151-152:

Frequent written discussions had been held among the brothers about how the subject should be treated, and Botvid Målare had gotten into great difficulty with himself over how he would portray the Blessed Virgin at the mysterious moment when she receives the angel greeting, "Ave Maria, gratia plena," and becomes aware of her blessed condition. Botvid was a young man of pious habits, but nevertheless, he knew very well that without a man and a woman nothing human could be born. He must therefore on the one hand adhere to the natural in the course of events, but he must not on the other hand forget the miraculous, or the supernatural; it was through the expression on the Virgin's face that he would seek to reconcile the most exalted and invisible with the visible. He had saved that for the last, though, and begun with the angel. .... According to the Bible, it was the angel Gabriel who was sent by the Lord to inform Mary of her approaching happiness. As all the angels mentioned in Scripture have men's names, Botvid did not hesitate to portray this one in the shape of a man. But this brought down on him sharp reprimands on the slate-board [the monks are observing the Grand Silence, and therefore communicate with Botvid in writing], for angels, who are superior in all respects, have no sex, and besides, it would not do to portray in one picture a man alone with a virgin, especially when he had so delicate an errand. And so the angel acquired the hermaphroditic appearance peculiar to angels: the face was that of a young man, the hair a woman's, the arms and legs, insofar as they could be discerned through the clothing, a young man's, but the breast was slightly raised, and the hips began to round immediately below the pliant waist. .... In the angel's hand he had painted the flower of love, the rose, but the red colour displeased the holy ones, for it suggested flesh, and besides, the flower brought to mind heathen

Another artist arrives to take over Botvid's commission when the latter falls ill. The new artist, Giacomo, is from Italy, and brings with him the humanism and interest in classical antiquity associated with the Italian Renaissance. Just as the monks represent the age which is passing away, Giacomo represents the age which is dawning: he is the satyr referred to above, or the "new heathen". When Botvid recovers, he is engaged as Giacomo's assistant, so he gets a good opportunity to study this new phenomenon.

His infectious personality, scorn of everything associated with the monks, and fervent faith in secular humanism are strong influences on Botvid. He seduces and becomes engaged to Maria, the castle watchman's

love stories. No, it should be a lily: a white lily, symbol of innocence and purity. Botvid painted a white lily, and was very pleased at the effect of the six saffron yellow anthers, for there was not much opportunity for effects of colour with the white-clad figures. But when he entered the church the next day to resume his work, he saw that the anthers had been struck out, and the open calyx left empty. The monks had not wished to embark upon any explanation of the matter, and Botvid believed that it proceeded from some secret doctrine which could not be revealed.

....

One warm spring evening Botvid went into the garden and dreamed. .... In the flower-beds saffron and lilies bloomed; the lilies were strongly scented and went to his head. He began to ponder over the monks' secretive behaviour concerning the angel's lily. Why should anyone suppress what God had created? Had God created anything sinful?

daughter, and he finishes the painting, using Maria and her father as models for the Blessed Virgin and the angel: again the painting reflects the pull of historical perceptions!

Giacomo completes the painting by working where the monks cannot interfere, choosing as his studio two rooms in the old castle. When he and Botvid had visited the castle in search of working space, they discovered it to have a very eccentric decorative scheme. In fact, the decoration of four of the rooms is highly symbolic. These rooms are named after the four elements, and a suggestion is made that two of the rooms (Earth and Air) represent the intellect, or spirit, and two (Fire and Water) the senses. The arrangement is another symbol of the differences between the past and the future; this, time, however, the differences are seen from Giacomo's point of view, as it is he who explains the significance of the rooms to Botvid. Earth, Air, Fire, and Water are, respectively, an alchemical laboratory, an observatory, a dining room in which a crime of passion has been committed, and a bath:

-- ....

Det var en vis man som bebodde detta hus! Har du förstått de fyra inseglen ovan dörrarne? Det tror jag icke! Det första hette jord! Där sökte han stoftets urämnen. Han lade jord i sin degel och glödgade tills han fann urämnet -- intet av vilket Gud skapade världen. Det andra rummet hette luft! Han spejade i fjärrglaset för att finna himlens hemligheter. Nattens dimmor lade sig på glaset, och vad såg han mer än hans blotta öga såg? En svärm lysande gnistor i mörkret och

utom det -- intet! Då fann han att vad han sökte däruppe, redan fanns härnere. Vatten och eld, köld och värme heta livets urkrafter, som hålla varandra i vila genom strid. Håll elden brinnande, men vattnet tillhands, att du icke förbrännes; när elden slocknar och du blir kall då är det slut! Din jordiska sinnenatur skulle brinna ner om icke det sköna avkylde dig! Du kände dig ren som snön och kall som den inför den obeslöjade skönheten! Glödga dig med vinet, släck branden i kärlekens armar, tro på vad du har, men dyrka endast skönheten, ty den är det högsta!<sup>58</sup>

The alchemists themselves saw their activities as symbolic of the spiritual quest, and it is not unusual in Strindberg's works to find alchemical laboratories in close proximity to monasteries: the two have the same

<sup>58</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 168-9:

"It was a wise man who lived in this house! Do you understand the four devices over the doors? I don't think so! The first room was called Earth! There he searched for earth's primal matter. He put earth into his crucible and heated it up until he found -- nothing, from which God created the world. The second room was called Air! He peered into the telescope looking for heaven's secrets. Night mists settled on the glass, and what did he see more than his naked eye saw? A swarm of bright sparks in the dark and besides that -- nothing! Then he discovered that what he sought up there, already existed down here. Water and fire, cold and heat are the primal forces of life, which hold each other in balance through strife. Keep the fire burning, but keep water handy, so that you don't burn up; when the fire goes out and you're cold, that's the end! Your earthly physical nature would burn itself out if the beautiful didn't cool you down! You felt yourself pure as snow and as cold, in the presence of unveiled beauty! Heat yourself up with wine, extinguish the fire in the arms of love, believe in what you have, but worship only beauty, for it is supreme!

goal. Astronomy (or astrology) can be seen as a natural symbol of the same quest: man searches the heavens literally rather than metaphorically. These two rooms, then, are symbolic of man's spiritual quest: the world of the monks. In Giacomo's view that quest is doomed to failure: what is turned up is, in fact, nothing. The meaning of life is not to be found there, he says, but in the sensual life of the body (fire) and the abstract sensuality of art (water).<sup>59</sup>

The freezing of Botvid in the presence of beauty is a reference to his singular lack of success with women, a consequence of his shyness.

After this scene, Botvid resolves to lead a new life, following the example and exhortations of Giacomo. When he sees himself with the eyes of the new heathenism, he feels he has scarcely lived, that life owes him something: "Han tyckte sig som en fordringsägare på livet som så länge vägrat gälda."<sup>60</sup>

After the monastery is destroyed, Giacomo and Botvid are engaged to decorate the rebuilt castle. Instead of illustrating events in salvation history, the new heathenism reigns everywhere:

<sup>59</sup> It is to be noted that this use of the elements is unorthodox; traditionally, earth and water are the two "material" elements, and air and fire the two "spiritual".

<sup>60</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 169: "He felt that he was a creditor in respect to life, which had refused his claims for so long."

Giacomo.... nu behövde ... ej måla bibliska tavlor utan fick ohejdat frossa i hedendomens glada världar där allt ännu befann sig i det oskyldiga tillstånd som antogs ha varit före syndafallet.<sup>61</sup>

After Maria dies of the plague, Giacomo leaves, and Botvid continues with the castle's decoration on his own. He becomes increasingly dissatisfied with this work: painting nymphs and satyrs can be just as boring as painting Biblical figures, and a lot less meaningful, as are the commissions he receives to immortalize local worthies, people he considers little more than ruthless destroyers and profiteers. This is symbolic of his growing inner dissatisfaction with the values of the new heathenism:

Hans arbete väckte hans vämjelse; satyrer och nymfer som han måste rita och måla blevo djävlar som med frestelsens och syndens bågare sprungit omkring och lockade människor; ... självbedrägeriet som icke underblåstes av Giacomos sofisterier lät honom icke längre se gudar och gudinnor; något mer än nakna män och kvinnor blev det icke.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 177:

Giacomo.... did not now need ... to paint Biblical pictures, but could revel unchecked in the happy scenes of heathenism, where everything was still in the innocent state which is supposed to have existed before the Fall.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 188-89:

His work aroused his disgust: the satyrs and nymphs he had to draw and paint became devils, who ran around with goblets of temptation and sin, enticing people; ... self-deception, unsupported by Giacomo's sophistries, no longer permitted him to see gods and goddesses; there was nothing there but naked men and women.



Fire and Water, then, are also empty rooms!

Botvid refuses an important commission, and Giacomo shows up unexpectedly to do the work instead, but receives a mortal wound through the eye with an arrow, probably at the hand of Maria's father. Before he dies, in Botvid's arms, this scorner of all things religious asks Botvid to pray for him, and, snatching his hand out of Botvid's, utters a most ambiguous remark: "Släpp mig, för satan i helvetet!"<sup>63</sup>

When Botvid does let him go, he is left alone in the world: the two people he loved have both died, a new sweetheart has been seduced by a powerful nobleman, the monks who had given him employment have long since disappeared, and he finds no comfort either in the new society or in the work it can offer him. A world-weary hero, whose ideals have been built up only to be shattered, he resembles many of the heroes of Strindberg's later works; we should not be surprised at the direction he takes at this crossroads in his life:

Åtta dagar senare packade han sin ränsel  
och for med en vedbåt till Stockholm för att

<sup>63</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 195. The remark is difficult to translate, because of differences in Swedish and English modes of swearing. "Släpp mig" means "Let me go." "För satan i helvetet" (literally, "for Satan in Hell") is an exasperated interjection, roughly equivalent to the English blasphemy "for Christ's sake!" Like that phrase (but directly opposite in literal meaning), it can also be taken quite literally: "Let me go for [i.e., that I might go to] Satan in Hell!"

därifrån fortsätta resan till det Swabiska landet i Tyskland, där han ämnade ingå i ett åt jungfru Maria helgat kartusianerkloster.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, Strindberg has symbolically prepared us for just this outcome. Through all the changes in the story, one object remains unchanged; through all the dislocations, one object remains fixed: the black crucifix on the altar of the church. It is there before the story begins, the only object with any decorative value at all in the stark Carthusian world: "Kyrkan saknar alla yttre prydnader utom ett svart kors på högaltaret...."<sup>65</sup> After the fall of the monastery and the conversion of the church to Lutheran worship, Giacomo, unable to face the sight of the plague-stricken Maria, breaks into the church in order to worship her beauty where it is preserved, in his painting. He finds that the new minister has mutilated the painting and removed all other art works from the church; only the crucifix remains:

Där fanns icke en bild eller en målning kvar mer än den svarte Kristus på korset, han som hade fel i vänstra knäet och vars ögon voro skelande. Han hade överlevat förödelsen så

<sup>64</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 196:

A week later he packed his knapsack and travelled with a boatload of wood to Stockholm, in order to continue his journey from there to the province of Swabia in Germany, where he intended to enter a Carthusian monastery dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 115: "The church lacks all outer ornament except for a black cross on the high altar...."

ful han var med sina avskräckande sår i sidan och på händer och fötter och med sin blodiga panna.<sup>66</sup>

There is a hint of triumph here: far from being overthrown by a revived Apollo, as Giacomo had foretold, Christ has survived even the destruction of Giacomo's supreme goddess, beauty, symbolized by his picture!

Later, the crucifix gains in importance as a symbol by contrasting sharply with the face of the new age. This is after Botvid has grown disaffected with his work and the values of the new heathenism, and Giacomo has returned:

... Botvid ... kunde icke undgå att rysa då han såg Giacomos faun-ansikte i kyrkfönstret och bakom honom den svarte Kristus på korset.<sup>67</sup>

Once again, a strong symbolic contrast between the old and the new, but this time it is the old which seems better. Giacomo has forgotten whatever he felt for Maria, if not the girl herself, and he no longer wor-

<sup>66</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 185:

There was not a statue or a painting left, other than the black Christ on the cross, he with the faulty left knee and the squinting eyes. He had survived the devastation, ugly as he was, with the frightful sores in his side and in his hands and feet, and with his bloody brow.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 194:

... Botvid ... could not prevent himself from shuddering when he saw Giacomo's faun-face framed by the church window, and behind him the black Christ on the cross.

ships beauty (symbolized by his love for Maria); he has become cynical and an artistic hack, pandering to popular taste because it pays. His hold on Botvid is shattered. The black Christ waits.

In the epilogue to the story, Strindberg skips ahead to 1571, when Erik XIV was imprisoned in Grips-holm Castle after being deposed by his brother, Johan III, who had himself been imprisoned there (by Erik) for four years. They were sons of Gustav Vasa, the king who had ordered the destruction of the monastery and the rebuilding of the castle. His family found little peace in Mariefred! Strindberg is careful to point out that to this humiliation of the secular power there was a silent witness: "Den svarte träkristus hänger kvar som förr...."<sup>68</sup>

The crucifix draws its colour from the symbolism of alchemy, where black is associated with the beginning of all things, the chaos or initial stage which comes before all development. Sometimes associated with evil or death, in this story it is a link between Christ and the room Earth in the castle. Christ is the origin of all life, and as such the primal matter which was sought in that room. This strengthens the identification of the first two rooms with the spiritual life, the world of the monks. Two other symbolic associations

<sup>68</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 196: "The black wooden Christ still hangs there as before...."

of the colour black, with penance, and with time, drive home the image of a long-suffering Christ, perpetually atoning for the follies committed before Him.

Another hint of the story's end is the irony of the title: as Strindberg presents them, none of the events in this tale represent progress! Or at least, they do not represent progress in the modern, onward and upward sense. Instead, the view of history presented here is essentially cyclical, linking this tale to the Wheel of Fortune, or rising and falling symbolism elsewhere in Strindberg's works: everything returns to its origins, and every story ends where it began -- in this case, in a Carthusian monastery dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This historical tendency is explicitly referred to three times in the story. The first is by the old castle watchman, who remarks: "... allting går framåt, säger man. Kan väl hända, men nog gå mänskorna bakåt, det är säkert."<sup>69</sup> More significant are two remarks by Giacomo containing cyclical imagery. When he expounds upon the new heathenism to Botvid for the first time, he comments that the reappearance of pagan values is only to be expected: "Allting är ju hedendom! Mänkskodyrkan är gammal som världen! Ni tror att det går

<sup>69</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 156: "... everything goes forwards, they say. That may well be, but mankind certainly goes backwards, that's for sure."

framåt! Det går bara i en krets!"<sup>70</sup> When he returns, cynical and bitter, he refers to this earlier remark: "Minns du vad jag sade dig en gång: världen går icke framåt, den går i kretsar! Allting är förgängligt!"<sup>71</sup> Allting, of course, includes the victory of the secular over the spiritual! The phrase "Allting är förgängligt!" echoes the refrain of the hymn which the Nurse sings in *Fadren*, where the obvious reference is to Ecclesiastes 1:2: "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity!"

"Nya vapen"<sup>72</sup> ("New Weapons"), the last of the 1882-3 stories, is set on Öland, the large island off the southeast coast of Sweden, during the reign of Johan III (1569-92). The king takes possession of the island and converts it into a royal game park. The peasants, who are forbidden to shoot the game but must provide food for it in the winter and watch their crops being destroyed by both game and hunters all year, resent this, but there is not much they can do about it: they have been disarmed, not only to prevent their shooting the game, but to stifle rebellion as well. When the island is invaded by Russia, the disarmed

<sup>70</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 164: "Isn't everything heathenism? The worship of man is as old as the world! You think everything moves forwards! It only moves in a circle!"

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-93: "Do you remember what I said to you once: that the world doesn't go forward, it goes in circles! Everything is transitory!"

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-48.

peasants are unable to defend themselves or the king's property; they have only one "weapon" at their command, and that a new one forced upon them by the king: flight! The Russians provoke a forest fire on the island, destroying its protection against the Baltic winds, and it is almost swallowed up by sand. Chief among the victims is a court official, who is literally buried alive.

Although the story does not make extensive use of symbolism, some of it is worth comment, both in its own right, and as developments of symbols noted elsewhere. One such case is the treatment of the sun. One of the reasons the forest fire is able to wreak such havoc is that it has been a long, hot, dry summer on Öland. The story opens on Midsummer Day, but already the sun is emphasized, to prepare for what is to come. Its effects are described as mainly beneficent, but towards the end of the passage there is a hint that not everything the sun brings is comfortable and convenient:

På den lilla kyrkogården i backslutningen stå de vita korsen som små barn med armarne utbredda, för att giva famnen åt solen, som torkar daggens tårar, dem natten gråtit över dem, icke av sorg därför att det var natt, ty det var ingen natt, utan av glädje över att solen icke var nere så länge. Och den gamla svarta träkyrkan ... förgylles upp av den rika solen, och tuppen på flöjeln tittar åt väster, därifrån vinden sist blå-

ste, om icke det skall blåsa mer, ty det börjar bliva för varmt.<sup>73</sup>

A group of girls arrives to decorate the church, and the sun becomes more than just a phenomenon of nature; the old sun god of pagan religions is revived. Again, he is portrayed as largely beneficent, but there is just a hint of the sinister in the reference to his receiving offerings (in Swedish the same word, offer, does service for both offering and sacrifice):

... när [kyrkvaktarn] vänder sig om och ser utåt kyrkan, finner han en hop unga flickor längst nere på stora gången. De bära löv och blommor i sina förkläden och komma för att klä' kyrkan. Icke är det för stackars Kristus, icke är det för stackars Johannes heller, vars dag det är, ty han vandrade icke på rosor; nej, det är för den stora hednaguden, den, som aldrig gått bort än, fastän han döljer sig understundom, han som håller allt vid liv och är godare än kärleken, ty han värmer båda goda och onda, det är den gamla solen som skall få offer. Och de unga soldyrkarne, som icke veta att de äro hedningar, komma fram till Kristi altare för att sätta lilje-

<sup>73</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 229-30:

In the little graveyard on the hillside the white crosses stand like little children, with their arms outstretched to embrace the sun, which dries the tears of dew wept over them by the night, not out of sorrow because it was night, for it was not really night, but out of joy that the sun had not been down too long. And the old black wooden church ... is gilded by the rich sun, and the rooster on the weather-vane looks westward, the direction from which the wind last blew, to see if it will not blow again, for it is beginning to be too hot.



konvaljer i ljuspiporna och strö björklöv på golvet.<sup>74</sup>

As a pagan deity who is still worshipped, the sun is in conflict with Christ and His Church (indicated here by the phrase *stackars Kristus*), just as Apollo (who, under the aspect of Phoebus, was a sun god) is in other stories in *Svenska öden och äventyr*. He and his unwitting worshippers can, then, be associated with the new heathenism of the other stories. By this point, one can identify the new heathenism with the Renaissance and the Reformation, both movements with which the Vasa dynasty was intimately associated. The sun contributes (with the Russians, fire, and wind) to the havoc wreaked on the island; with Johan III, the essentially benign Vasas also bring about destruction. Once again, as in "Utveckling", Christ looks on. The events of the

<sup>74</sup> *Samlade verk*, XIII, 231:

... when [the verger] turns around and looks out into the church, he discovers a group of young girls at the end of the main aisle. They carry leaves and flowers in their aprons, and have come to decorate the church. This is not in honour of poor Christ; neither is it in honour of poor John [the Baptist], whose day it is, for his path was not strewn with roses; no, it is in honour of the great pagan god who has never yet gone away, although occasionally he hides himself: he who preserves everything living and is fairer than love, for he gives heat to both good and evil; it is the old sun who will receive the offerings. And the young sun-worshippers, who do not know that they are heathens, come up to the altar of Christ in order to put lily-of-the-valley in the candle-holders and strew the floor with birch leaves.

tale are not so much divine punishment, as a consequence of man's foolishness:

Den korsfäste hänger som vanligt mitt emot  
den inträdande, hänger förgäves som vanligt,  
lutande sitt huvud mot bröstet hopplöst, mod-  
löst, som om han övergivit tanken på att  
kunna få utrett om människorna äro mera  
olyckliga än brottsliga, större dårar än  
skurkar.<sup>75</sup>

In fact, the common people in this story are in a typical Strindberg predicament: they are suffering the effects of a curse for a crime they are not aware of having committed. This is indicated by a verbal echo of the curse of Deuteronomy: when attacked by a boar (among the game introduced for the king's sport) which has been despoiling his fields, a young farmer refers to the king's game with the words, "De skörda där vi sått...."<sup>76</sup> The beasts which ravage the crops (the

<sup>75</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 231:

The Crucified One hangs, as usual, directly facing the entrance, hangs there in vain, as usual, bowing His head towards His breast in desperation and discouragement, as if He had given up the idea of being able to discover whether men are more unfortunate than criminal, greater fools than villains.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 237: "They reap where we have sown...." Variations of the curse (Deut. 28:15-68) are scattered throughout the Old Testament. The version which comes closest to the wording here is Job 31:7-8:

If my feet have wandered from the rightful  
path,  
...  
let another eat what I have sown,  
and let my young shoots all be rooted  
out.

This seems based on Leviticus 26:16: "You shall sow

"enemies" of the Old Testament curse) are symbols of the privileged classes, who have permitted this devastation. The reference is a small one, but it links the story to other Strindberg works, in which the curse of Deuteronomy plays a much more visible role.

Near the beginning of the story, one of the local farmers is sentenced to the stocks for having killed a boar. In an amusing little scene, the verger takes the stocks out of storage and inspects it to see whether it is in working condition. He finds his own legs too long to permit testing of the leg-holds when locked, so he finds a substitute to sit in the stocks while he operates the lock. This is a statue of St. Stephen left over from the church's former life as a Catholic sanctuary! St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr, and also its first deacon, responsible for dispensing charity to the needy. His story is told in Acts 6:1-8:2, where it becomes clear that his martyrdom was brought about by his defiance of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish governing body in both religious and civil mat-

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your seed in vain -- your enemies shall feed on it;" which, in turn seems to paraphrase Deuteronomy 28:33: "A nation you do not know will eat the fruit of your soil and of your labour." (All quotations from The Jerusalem Bible.)

ters. One need not look very far for a parallel between him and the peasant who is subsequently put in the same stocks for defying the orders of a king who also concerned himself with religious matters!

The last passage of note in the tale is the one describing the death of the lagman, a court official responsible for enforcing the king's decrees in Öland. He is buried alive by the sand which overwhelms the island after the forest fire, inside a hut in which he has taken refuge. Strindberg uses dream symbolism here (the conceit of a man's continuing to dream after he is dead is a nice one), something which was to play a larger part in the plays of his mature years; but what is noteworthy is the symbolism of the sand itself; through the use of the hourglass symbol it becomes obvious that the filling of the hut with sand represents the passing of time. The lagman is engulfed and killed, as, in the course of time his power over the people, and that of his class, will also be extinguished. The sand seems to whisper as it runs slowly into the hut: the whisperings of social change blown by the winds of history:

Lagmannen.... raglade vidare framåt, tills han nådde målet för sin vandring. Det var ett litet lönnhus ... som nu efter skogselden skyddades av en hög sandvall som vräkt sig upp bakom det.... Inkommen letade han efter elddon och hade snart ljus tänt.... Men ... luften [var] så kvav, att han måste lägga sig på bädden.... Han hörde ett sakta viskande på golvet, som när de minsta gräshopporna säga ziss, ziss, ziss i höet. Så tittade han ned och såg en liten sandhög på golvet. Ju längre han såg på den, dess större blev den. Då tit-

tade han upp i taket. Där var ett hål, genom vilket det rann något. Så föll han i sömn. Och han drömde att han låg ini ett ofantligt timglas och såg på hur sanden rann. Och han räknade ut, att han måste vara död, innan glaset var utrunnet. Han ville rädda sig ut; men det var glas på alla sidor, så hårt glas att han icke kunde få hål på det. Så drömde han, att han drömde att han låg i ett timglas som rann, men att han icke kunde vakna. Så drömde han att han drömde, att hans mun var full med sand och att han hörde en röst som sade: ät nu! Och han ville väcka sig för att komma ifrån den svåra drömmen. Och så drömde han, att han väckte sig; men han vaknade icke.<sup>77</sup>

These are the last words of the tale.

<sup>77</sup> Samlade verk, XIII, 247-48:

The lagman.... continued to stagger on, until he reached the goal of his wandering. It was a little hideaway ... which now, after the forest fire, was sheltered by the high wall of sand which had piled up behind it.... Once inside, he searched for the tinder-box and soon had a lamp lit.... But ... the air was so close, that he had to lie down on the bed.... He heard a gentle whispering on the floor, as when the smallest grasshoppers say "ziss, ziss, ziss" in the hay. So he looked down, and saw a little pile of sand on the floor. The longer he looked at it, the larger it became. Then he looked up at the ceiling. There was a hole there, through which something was running. Then he fell asleep. And he dreamed that he was lying inside an enormous hourglass, watching the sand run. And he calculated that he would be dead before the glass ran out. He wanted to save himself, but there was glass on all sides, glass so hard he could not make a hole in it. Then he dreamed that he dreamed that he was lying in an hourglass which ran, but that he could not wake up. Then he dreamed that he dreamed that his mouth was full of sand, and that he heard a voice which said: "Eat now!" And he wanted to wake up, to get out of this distressing dream. And then he dreamed that he woke up. But he did not wake up.

Of interest also is the reference to difficulty in breathing, a symbol that appears in many of Strindberg's works, reflecting his own fear of smothering to death (he suffered periodically from angina pectoris).

"Herr Bengts hustru"<sup>78</sup> ("Herr Bengt's Wife", 1883) is a short story version of the play of the same name from the previous year. A more detailed discussion of the symbolism will be found in the chapter dealing with the play. There are, however, a few differences between play and tale, and those will be dealt with here.

The short story is a tale within a tale. The outer framework concerns a young count who is traveling to Prague accompanied by his tutor. They fall into a discussion of the nature of love, and the story of Herr Bengt and his wife is told by the tutor as an illustration of one kind of love: the kind which can survive all adversities, even the indifference of one or both of the parties involved.<sup>79</sup> As elsewhere in Strindberg, passionate love is identified with the element of fire:

-- .... Jag skulle nu tala om Amor eller älskogen, den eld, som brinner utan att

<sup>78</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 205-16.

<sup>79</sup> Swedish has two words for love, where English has only one; *kärlek*, the more common word, which is love in general (affection, devotion, charity, etc.), corresponds to the Greek *philia* and *agape*; *älskog* is much more passionate, corresponding to the Greek *eros*. Before beginning this tale, the tutor tells us that it is an illustration of *älskog* (205).

släckas, när den är på den rätta viset, men som ganska snart slocknar, om den är på den orätta, och som kan till och med bli hat, om det är riktigt galet.<sup>80</sup>

There follows a comparison of types of human love to the love lives of birds. This is not original to Strindberg -- variations exist at least as early as Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* -- but it is perhaps more than a little coloured by the author's own experience of marriage: by 1883 he had been married to Siri von Essen for six years, and that marriage was to last another eight years. It was a troubled marriage from the beginning, and subsequent events perhaps reveal Strindberg himself to have been one of the "little birds", who change partners frequently!

-- .... människorna äro födda med olika art och lynne i detta avseende liksom fåglarne eller annan kreatur. Somliga äro lika skogens höns, tjädern och orren, där herren skall hava en hel seralj liksom storturken; varför så är, veta vi icke, men så är det, och det är deras natur, andra äro lika småfåglarne som taga en maka för varje år och så byta om, andra åter äro snälla såsom duvor och bygga tillsammans för livet, och när den ena maken dör, så vill den andra inte leva.

-- Har du sett några duvor, du, bland människors barn? ....

-- Jag har sett mycket, kära herre; jag har sett orrar som tagit duvor och duvan har blivit mycket olycklig, jag har sett duvohan-

<sup>80</sup> Skrifter, VI, 205:

".... I was just going to speak of amor, or love: that fire which burns without being consumed if it's properly directed, but which is soon extinguished if it isn't, and which can even turn into hate, if it's really mis-directed."

nar som fått gökar, och göken är den värste av alla fåglar, för den vill bara vara med i älskogslusten men inte i barnanöden, och därför sätter han ut sina barn; men jag har också sett duvor, herre.

-- Som aldrig hackades?

-- Jo, vad de hackades, när det var trångt i boet, och det var ont om mat, men de voro lika goda vänner ändå, och se det är kärleken. Det finns också en sjöfågel som heter svärt, herre. Makarne gå alltid i par; och skjuter ni bort den ena så flyr icke den andra utan kommer fram och låter skjuta sig, och därför anses svärten vara den dummaste av alla fåglar.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Skrifter, VI, 205-6:

".... people are born with different characters and predispositions in this respect, like the birds and other creatures. Some are like game fowl, the capercaillie and the black grouse, where the male has to have an entire seraglio, like the great Turk; why it's so, we don't know, but it is so: that's their nature. Others are like small birds, which take a new mate every year, and then change. Still others are as sweet as doves, and nest together for life, and when one mate dies, the other doesn't want to live."

"Have you yourself seen any doves among the children of men?" ....

"I've seen a lot, my dear lord: I've seen black grouse that have taken doves, and the dove became very unhappy; I've seen male doves paired with cuckoos, and cuckoos are the worst of all birds, for they only want to do with the pleasures of love, but not with the trouble of raising children, and that's why they desert their children; but I've also seen doves, Master."

"Who never pecked at each other?"

"Yes, how they pecked at each other when the nest was too crowded and there wasn't enough food! But they were just as good friends, nevertheless, and that, you see, is love [note the distinction between *kärlek* here and *älskog*, with which the passage began]. There's also a water fowl called the scoter, Master. The mates always travel in pairs, and if you shoot one of them down the other won't fly off, but will come right up and let itself be shot. That's why the scoter is regarded as the dumbest of all birds."



Lifelong devotion and fidelity is all very well, it seems, but can be carried too far! At any rate, the domesticity of the bird symbolism here contrasts sharply with the bird symbol used by Herr Bengt's wife, Margit, herself, after she has given up her property and her life of ease in order to save her husband's estate. Here the falcon flies alone, and it soars upward, in what, we are told (Cirlot, 26), is an alchemical symbol for sublimation:

"... livets börda trycker mig till marken, men min själ den stiger, den stiger som falcken mot himlen, mot friheten, under det min jordiska kropp sjunker i dyn bland stinkande blommor."<sup>82</sup>

It is interesting that in this story Strindberg seems to have lost his habitual respect and admiration for monastic institutions: the convent in which the heroine spends her early years is pictured as avaricious and worldly. Not only do the nuns entertain a totally different perception of her once she has lost her inheritance, but it is also evident that there are very few religious values within the convent walls. The symbol of refuge from the tribulations of the world, it

<sup>82</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 213:

"... the burden of life presses me down to the earth, but my soul rises; it rises like the falcon towards heaven, towards freedom, while my earthly body sinks in the mud among stinking flowers."

seems, is reserved for male institutions! It might also be significant that Margit did not enter the convent voluntarily, but was placed there by her guardians after her parents had died, apparently to enable them to get their hands on her money.

The tale also refers to what today would be called sexual stereotypes, but what could just as accurately be called archetypes. Strindberg has recognized elsewhere, notably in *Fadren*, that one of the sources of difficulty between the sexes is the contradictory and seemingly irreconcilable nature of the images men have formed of the ideal female: the chaste Diana, the sensuous Venus, and the bountiful mother Rhea. In Christian symbolism, Diana and Rhea are subsumed into the Blessed Virgin Mary, but there is still a conflict between this ideal of femininity (the goddess on a pedestal) and the image of woman as mistress. This aspect of psychological iconography fascinated Strindberg, and the tensions between archetypes play a role in this story. Not only does Herr Bengt suffer, from this type of psychological dislocation, but the narrator admits that he himself is or has been a victim of it. Herr Bengt regrets the change in his wife when she "lowers herself" to striving for the survival of the estate, giving up her hitherto empty-headed and selfish life of idleness, and he wishes his delicate and impractical creature were back:

Så underligt är människohjärtat, och så mycket surdeg hade han kvar från den gamla riddartiden, då man hade kvinnan som en Mariabild och en sängkamrat.<sup>83</sup>

Strindberg did not regard this problem as peculiar to the Middle Ages!

Finally, a biblical allusion emphasizes the purpose of the tale, which is to celebrate all-conquering human love. The tutor emphasizes this with the words: "... kärleken frågar icke varför? Den vet bara att: så är det!"<sup>84</sup> This is a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13:7: "Love ... is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes." (*The Jerusalem Bible*). Not stated explicitly here, but implied, is the ensuing verse: "Love does not come to an end."

"De lycksaliges ö"<sup>85</sup> ("The Isle of the Blessed") was written in 1884. The story takes its title from a painting by the Swiss artist, Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901): one of two companion pieces called "The Isle of the Blessed" and "The Isle of the Damned" (or, some-

<sup>83</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 209:

So peculiar is the human heart, and he had so much leaven left from the old age of chivalry, when man regarded woman both as an image of Mary and as a bed partner.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 212: "... love doesn't ask why; it simply knows that that's the way things are!" Note that here, again, we are speaking of *kärlek* rather than *älskog*; the latter must pass into the former if love is to survive.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-53.

times, "The Isle of the Dead" and "The Isle of the Living", respectively). The paintings gripped Strindberg's imagination: not only do they appear as increasingly important symbols in his work but, when it came time to design his own Intima teatern in Stockholm, he placed copies of these paintings one on each side of the proscenium. Life, he seemed to be saying, fluctuated between these two scenes. The chamber plays, which were written for Intima teatern, all unfolded between these two symbolic landscapes.

This story is a biting satire on Swedish history and Swedish society, written in the utopia genre. Strindberg, the social reformer reviews Swedish history under the guise of describing a fictional ideal society, and finds that, in fact, utopia and anti-utopia (not an invention of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley!) are the same place; heaven-on-earth for some is hell-on-earth for others; there is no difference between the Isle of the Blessed and the Isle of the Damned! The last words of the story are:

... de styrande ... ansågo och läto bevisa att detta var den sanna de lycksaliges ö, under det att de styrda alltjämt stärktes i deras gamla tro att det visserligen var de olycksaliges.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>86</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 253 (ch. 11):

... the governors ... were of the opinion and had it be proclaimed that this was the true Isle of the Blessed, while the governed were constantly confirmed in their old belief that it was assuredly the Isle of the Damned.

The story is set sometime during the existence of the New Sweden colony in North America (1638-55). A group of colonists, mostly criminals, sets off for the new world. Already we have one possible identification of the Isle of the Blessed: the New Sweden colony (not an island physically, but one symbolically, perhaps), a great utopian scheme which ultimately failed.<sup>87</sup> At any rate, our shipload of colonists never gets there!

Two of the passengers on the ship are students at Uppsala, Lasse Hulling and Peter Snagg, who are being transported for having doubted a book written by one of the university's professors which purported to demonstrate that the lost island of Atlantis was none other than Sweden!<sup>88</sup> Here are two more candidates for the

<sup>87</sup> Only sporadically and inefficiently supported by the mother country, New Sweden (or Nova Svecia) was captured by the Dutch in 1655, and subsequently by the British in 1664. A Swedish-speaking community persisted in the area (Pennsylvania-Delaware), however, until late in the eighteenth century.

<sup>88</sup> Strindberg did not make this up! Both the professor, Olaus Rudbeck (1630-1702), and his book are historical realities. A distinguished scientist, Rudbeck was misled by patriotism and by the resemblances of some early Scandinavian words to Greek and Hebrew, into propounding a theory that not only were all languages ultimately derived from Swedish, but Sweden was the cradle of European culture: the lost Atlantis of Plato and the Hyperborean region of mythology! Strindberg's story is anachronistic, however: the five volumes of Rudbeck's *Atland, eller Manheim* (Atlantis, or Manheim) did not begin appearing until 1679, so nobody could have been transported to New Sweden (which had ceased to exist twenty-four years previously) for disagreeing with his conclusions. But it makes a good story.

Isle of the Blessed, then: Atlantis and (metaphorically, at least) Sweden. The former remains irrevocably lost; the latter, as Strindberg abundantly demonstrates in this tale, is no utopia, and never has been!

In their most basic characteristics, the two students represent between them the optimistic and the pessimistic, i.e., the utopian and the anti-utopian points of view:

Lasse hade av natur och uppfostran kommit till den världsåskådning, att allt som sker är bäst; Peter däremot ansåg, att allting var ohjälpligt.<sup>89</sup>

Another candidate for Isle of the Blessed arises when the ship, the Swedish Lion (as in Britain, a symbol of the monarchy), puts into the Azores to take on supplies for the second half of the journey: "Så anlände de till Azorernas nio öar. .... De trodde att de kommit till Paradiset...."<sup>90</sup> There is, in fact, a theory that the Azores are all that remains of the otherwise submerged Atlantis, but they do not remain there long enough to find out. It is clear, however, that Atlantis, Paradise (the biblical Eden), and the Isle of

<sup>89</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 218 (ch. 1):

By nature and upbringing, Lasse had arrived at the view of life that all things work for the best; Peter, on the other hand, thought that everything was hopeless.

<sup>90</sup> *Idem.*: "And so they arrived at the nine islands of the Azores. .... They thought they had arrived in Paradise...."

the Blessed are but different names for the same place, or ideal.

As frequently happens in the voyages of satirical literature, the ship is wrecked and passengers and crew come ashore on a previously unknown land; in this case an uninhabited volcanic island. They soon organize themselves, and reach a not surprising conclusion as to their whereabouts:

... Lasse blivit utropad till hövding och som sådan hållit ett tal, däri han uppmanat dem att äta, dricka och vara glada, ty nu hade de kommit till en av de Lycksaliges öar, därom var intet tvivel, och han önskade bara han hade professor Rudbeck här....<sup>91</sup>

They stay on this island for three years, and it seems a utopia indeed. They function without laws and without organized religion, and while it is true that Lasse exercises authority as leader, he does so in an unobtrusive and altruistic manner. Only two considerations trouble their idyllic existence: memory of the past, which causes them nightmares, and concern for the future, for must not all good things come to an end? This unease about the future is symbolized by the volcano, which, while it has created the island and main-

<sup>91</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 221 (ch. 2):

... Lasse had been acclaimed leader and as such had made a speech, wherein he had exhorted them to eat, drink, and be merry, for they had come to one of the Isles of the Blessed, there was no doubt of it, and he only wished that he had Professor Rudbeck here....

tains them in a perfect climate nevertheless poses the constant threat of eruption.

Erupt it does, and the devastation is total: the island disappears, sinking into the sea like the lost Atlantis, which prefigured it. Utopias, it seems, if they exist at all, are doomed to be short-lived! No lives are destroyed in the conflagration, however; the entire population escapes to sea, which devours their beloved island before their very eyes.

Eventually they come to another island, but it is not nearly so utopian as the one they had been forced to leave. It is, in fact, the other side of the coin: an anti-utopia, the Isle of the Damned. On the Isle of the Blessed, everything had fallen into their hands; here they have to work for what they get; social and family structures become necessary; possessions create power; religion is reinstituted to reinforce social values and maintain the power structure; war and slavery are rediscovered; a hereditary monarchy is constituted; education and the arts develop in order to control the young and further inculcate the values of the state; and, in fact, the entire history of Sweden is paralleled, in very satirical terms. No utopia this, despite the rulers' eventual claims!

It is interesting what happens to the "real" Isle of the Blessed, where the people had known almost perfect happiness. It becomes transformed in their minds



into a kind of tribal memory, or archetype, playing the same role in their society as the Garden of Eden does in the Judeo-Christian tradition, or as myths of a glorious and heroic past (exactly the kind of myth that Rudbeck was trying to establish with his book) do in the life of a nation: if that is what we were, that is what we can become again! Eventually, however, although that mythical function survives, the hopelessness of present earthly conditions prevails, and the realization of the myth is seen as something which can be achieved only after this life has been left behind:

Dödsstraffet skrämde ingen, ty de väntade sig alla att efter döden få komma tillbaka till De lycksaliges ö, och de gingo till döden som till ett kalas.<sup>92</sup>

It is at this point, when the people have placed their hope for happiness elsewhere than in this world, that the state proclaims itself the true Isle of the Blessed. The myth, meantime, is demoted, to the status of fairy tale. This is done by the country's second king, Lasse II Axel<sup>93</sup>, following, of course, the model

<sup>92</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 238 (ch. 7):

Capital punishment did not frighten anyone, for they all looked forward to being able to return to the Isle of the Blessed after they died, and they went to death as to a party.

<sup>93</sup> The name is a lampoon of Gustav II Adolf (sometimes known in English as Gustavus Adolphus, reigned 1611-32), who began the Swedish royal custom of being designated by two names, only the first of which determines the monarch's ordinal (Gustav Vasa was known as that until his grandson also took the name Gustav, at which point he became, in retrospect, Gustav I Vasa). The name contains a further spoof on royal nomenclature.

of Rudbeck:

... Lasse II Axel ... lät ... författa en rikshistoria, i vilken med stöd av Lasses, fadrens, efterlämnade exemplar av Rudbecks Atlantica, till fullständig evidens bevisades, att nuvarande rike verkligen var det fullkomligaste av alla riken och att detta var i själva verket Atlantica eller De lycksaliges ö. Den, som deras förfäder hade bebott och där de inbillat sig att de voro sälla, hade aldrig funnits. Den var bara en De Missnöjdas uppfinning för att göra folk missnöjda.<sup>94</sup>

The final step is both logical and inevitable: the state is officially named Atlantis! The people have come full circle: they had left a country which claimed to be Atlantis but was far from utopian in order to found -- a country which claimed to be Atlantis but was far from utopian! The cyclical view of history suggested in "Utveckling" resurfaces: with a vengeance!

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ture: Lasse is the diminutive form of Lars (English equivalents are Larry or Laurie, and Lawrence)! Another example of this type of satire is the name of Lasse II Axel's successor (the country's third king), Anders VII: one would be hard pressed to find thirteen previous royal namesakes of Erik XIV, for instance!

<sup>94</sup> Skrifter, VI, 245 (ch. 9):

... Lasse II Axel ... had a history of the nation written in which, with support from the copies of Rudbeck's Atlantis which his father, Lasse, had left behind him, it was proved conclusively that the present state was the most perfect of all states and that it was, in fact, Atlantis, or the Isle of the Blessed. The one which their ancestors had inhabited and where they had deceived themselves that they were happy, had never existed. It was merely one of the inventions of the Malcontents, designed to make people malcontent.

Why does history repeat itself? The answer seems to lie in the nature of man: inheritor of a corrupt nature, even if he himself is innocent, he is born under a curse, like Ishmael (the original Son of the Bondswoman): "His hand will be against all men, and all men's hands against him...." (Gen. 16:12. Douay-Rheims translation), so whatever he touches turns to dust. The Isle of the Blessed and the mythical Atlantis both sank into the sea; man was banished from the antecedent of both, Eden, because of sin, which might also exclude him from the celestial paradise of which these are but weak imitations. Man is kept from perfect happiness, in other words, by his own imperfections.

The passengers on the Swedish Lion are for the most part criminals. The consequences of sin are recalled during the visit to the Azores, with the passenger who thinks he is Adam, but Adam after the Fall:

... mannen bevisade med den heliga skrift och bibelska historien, att Adam efter syndafallet bara gick i ett fikonlöv, varför han ansåg sig ha rätt att gå i ett tobaksblad.<sup>95</sup>

Then, when the ship is foundering in a storm, the sinful nature of all aboard her is again emphasized, and a sacrifice proposed:

<sup>95</sup> Skrifter, VI, 218-19 (ch. 1):

... the man demonstrated from Holy Scripture and biblical history, that after the Fall Adam went about in only a fig leaf, so he considered himself right to go about in a tobacco leaf.

Stormen rasade i tre dar.... Prästen läste och predikade och förklarade, att man icke kunde vänta annat, då man hade brottslingar ombord. Han erinrade om Jonas och föreslog kaptenen att på grund av profeten Micha kap. XII vers 16 och följande man skulle vräka alla brottslingar över bord för att rädda de rättfärdiga, men kaptenen avstyrkte.<sup>96</sup>

Everyone on board then confesses his sins, except the criminals: "... emedan de inga brott hade obekända...."<sup>97</sup> All, even the minister, are found to have committed secret crimes: "Vid verkställd undersökning fanns icke en rättfärdig."<sup>98</sup> The minister, who had proposed the example of Jonah, is unanimously chosen to perform Jonah's function, and is thrown overboard. It

<sup>96</sup> Skrifter, VI, 219 (ch. 1):

The storm raged for three days.... The minister read and preached, and explained that one could expect nothing else when one had criminals on board. He reminded the captain of Jonah, and suggested that, following Micah 12:16 ff., they should throw all the criminals overboard in order to save the righteous, but the captain refused to authorize such an action.

There is an inaccuracy in the text here (whether Strindberg's fault or his editors', perhaps the new edition will show). The Book of Micah contains only seven chapters, so the reference given above does not exist! The relevant passage is Jonah 1:12-16.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 219 (ch. 1): "... since they had no unconfessed crimes...."

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 219 (ch. 1): "A thorough search failed to discover one righteous person."

does not work; the storm continues to increase, and finally the ship is wrecked. Or does it? the life of everyone but the minister is spared (and even he, it is later discovered, has managed to swim ashore unharmed)!

At any rate, these are the people who settle the Isle of the Blessed: not a very blessed crew! Lasse persuades them that they have no need of organized religion, since there will be no temptation to sin: everyone may have whatever he wishes:

-- .... Människorna gingo nakna i lustgården och arbetade intet. Gott! Så åto de med olydnad av kunskapens träd och blevo utdrivna kring jorden att arbeta! Nåväl! Vi ha återfunnit paradiset, men ett paradiset utan något kunskapens träd. Vi kunna sålunda icke synda, om vi också ville det aldrig så gärna. Och om vi också gjorde det, så kunna vi varken utdrivas, ty vi ha ingenstans att ta vägen, ej heller tvingas att arbeta, ty vi ha ingenting att arbeta med. Alltså förfaller syndafallet och kan icke ha någon tillämpning på nuvarande förhållanden....

-- ....  
-- Alltså ... efter intet kunskapens träd finnes, finnes ingen synd; efter ingen synd finnes, behöves ingen försoning och därmed faller hela läran.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Skrifter, VI, 223 (ch. 2):

".... Man went naked in the Garden and did no work. Good! Then in disobedience they ate of the Tree of Knowledge and were driven out over the earth to work! Well! We have rediscovered Paradise, but a Paradise with no Tree of Knowledge. We can, therefore, not sin, even if we had never wanted so much to do so. And even if we could sin, we could neither be driven out, for we have nowhere to go, nor could we be forced to work, for we have nothing to work at. And so the Fall becomes inoperative, and can have no application in the present circumstances...."

"...."

"and so since there is no Tree of

But even in this state of recaptured innocence, the fallen nature of the inhabitants remains. Because of "människans medfödda behov av en religion",<sup>100</sup> four great festivals are organized during the year; into these celebrations, Strindberg introduces a reminder of sin and its consequences: "... förstlingarne offrades åt den allgode Givaren, såsom redan Abel och Kain offerat åt Herren...."<sup>101</sup> Cain and Abel did indeed offer their first fruits to the Lord, but the offerings were not accepted as of equal value, and led to Cain's murdering his brother. This in turn resulted in God's placing a curse on Cain, a curse which runs like an echo through many of Strindberg's works, along with the curse of Deuteronomy and that on Ishmael: "You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer over the earth." (Gen. 4:12. The Jerusalem Bible.) A nice note to introduce into a harmless festivity! But the celebrants do, indeed, become fugitives and wanderers once more!

This is the significance of the memory of the past which troubles their idyllic interlude: even in the

—

Knowledge, there is no sin; since there is no sin, there is no need for atonement, and with that, all religion collapses...."

<sup>100</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 223 (ch. 2): "mankinds innate need for a religion".

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 225 (ch. 3): "... the first fruits were offered to the all-bountiful Giver, even as Abel and Cain made offerings to the Lord...."

midst of prosperity and bliss, their crimes weigh heavily on their souls. So distressing are these memories, that when a berry is discovered which wipes out all memory of the past, the entire population eats of it, all except Lasse. The man who does not know history is condemned to repeat it! Lasse still remembers the past, and he is the first, after the forced relocation, to exploit a possession (this knowledge) for power. Not even the Candide of the story is allowed to maintain his innocence!

In "Atlantis" the full effects of man's fallen nature are made manifest in the corrupt and exploitive power structure which evolves. Religion is reinstituted, but it is a grotesque parody of Christianity, with all the emphasis on sin, punishment, and fear, and none on love, peace, forgiveness, etc. This new religion is called *helvetesläran*: the Creed of Hell! The all-powerful deity is not the Judeo-Christian God, but the Devil, the principal motivating force not love of God and of one's fellow man, but fear of Hell. It is, of course, an instrument of the state, used to keep the people in line and content with their lot: if one believes that one deserves no better, one expects no better! This is a vituperative attack on the Swedish Church as Strindberg perceived it, but it is coloured as well by the feeling which often surfaces in Strindberg's works, that the world is governed by a malignant

rather than a beneficent deity: one thinks particularly of the epilogue to the verse *Mäster Olof*.

At the end of the story there is a brief mention of another of Strindberg's favorite symbols for society: the madhouse: "... samhällstillståndet [råkade] i det närmaste likna ett dårhus, där patienterna gjort uppror och inspärrat sina läkare och väktare."<sup>102</sup>

A cynical work? Perhaps, but Strindberg's cynicism is tempered with a sardonic irony that infuses a great deal of humour into an otherwise gloomy view of society. It is important to stress this: Strindberg has a reputation for gloom, but he is above all a master of irony! His art lay in being able to be cynical and humorous simultaneously.

"En häxa"<sup>103</sup> ("A Witch") was written in 1890 and, like several of the last ten stories in *Svenska öden och äventyr*, is closer in length to the novella than to the short story (the Swedish word *berättelser* covers both). Its historic setting is around 1649, when Sweden abolished the legal prosecution of witches). Despite that, "En häxa" is a very modern tale. Written under the influence of Zola and naturalism, "En häxa" finds its closest parallels in *Fadren* (1887) and *Fröken Julie*

<sup>102</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 252 (ch. 11): "... the state of society happened most to resemble that of a madhouse where the patients had rebelled and locked up their doctors and keepers."

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 254-307.



(1888) among Strindberg's plays. It is, in fact, a case study of psychotic delusion.

A young girl, Tekla Degeners (the surname is significant, in its suggestions both of degeneration and of actions which proceed from generande: self-consciousness or embarrassment), daughter of a stadsvakt (a municipal guard, sentry, or watchman; a policeman, in fact), is extremely sensitive to her own social inferiority and goes through life trying to attract the attention of, ingratiate herself to, and become accepted by her social superiors. When all fails, she decides that notoriety is better than ignominy, and accuses both herself and one of her upper-class friends of witchcraft. Since that is no longer a crime, however, she accomplishes nothing, but at her own appearance in court (where she is to be sentenced for trying to use the law for her own ends) she mistakenly persuades herself that she is going to be tortured, and dies of fright: a tormented and obsessed individual who at last finds peace with herself and her environment.

The dominant symbolism of the tale is that of darkness and light, with the former symbolizing her socially deprived background, and the latter the glittering world of the upper classes. Examples abound. Her childhood home is in Stockholm's Gamla Stan (the Old Town), on a street called, significantly Svartmunkaga-

tan (Blackfriars Street):<sup>104</sup> "kanske den dystraste plats in den gamla staden mellan broarna."<sup>105</sup> It is "en åldrig svartnad byggnad med små dunkla fönsterrutor, som varken tycktes kunna släppa igenom eller reflektera något ljus."<sup>106</sup> So cramped together are the buildings in this part of town, that the young Tekla, confined to the courtyard of her house, has never seen the sun, and in winter her life is particularly dismal:

... då var hon instängd hela dagen i den trånga kammaren, där det var så mörkt att ljus måste brinna på förmiddagen....<sup>107</sup>

Compared to this black, gloomy, and stifling atmosphere is the upper-class home of her friend, Ebba von Schlippenbach:

... genom rummet föll ett orangefärgat ljus av fönstrens sargegardiner, men på den ljusa tapeten tecknade sig en fläck med regnbågens

<sup>104</sup> This street is presently called Svartmangatan (Blackman Street). Tyska kyrkan (the German Church), across from Tekla's house, is the seventeenth-century church of St. Gertrude.

<sup>105</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 254: "perhaps the gloomiest place in the old city between the bridges [the City between the Bridges is the official name of Stockholm's Old Town]."

<sup>106</sup> *Idem.*: "an old blackened building with dark narrow windowpanes, which seemed capable neither of admitting nor of reflecting light."

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 256: "... then she was confined all day in the narrow room, where it was so dark that a candle had to be kept lit even in the forenoon...."

sju färger brutna av en slipad kristallbägare  
som stod på fönsterbrädan.<sup>108</sup>

The same symbolism is used in the scene describing the first indelible impression on the young Tekla's life, when she hears in Confirmation class that before God, all men are equal and brothers. As he expounds this doctrine, the old instructor is a point of radiant light in an otherwise dimly lit room: he stands on a small platform, and only his bearded face is high enough to catch the light coming through the windows:

Det var kvavt i det lilla mörka rummet, från vars väggar stränga mörka ansikten blickade ner ur svarta tavelramar; ... den gamla kopparlampan spridde ett svagt sken över de bleka anletena, som då och då upplystes av återskenet från den gamle lärarens av det vita håret strålande ansikte.<sup>109</sup>

To strengthen his point, the teacher has the Confirmation class participate in a ritual of his own devising: after significantly stepping down out of the sunlight,

<sup>108</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 283:

... the window valances tinted the light which filled the room orange, but a patch with the seven colours of the rainbow, refracted by a polished crystal goblet which stood on the window-sill, was delineated on the bright wallpaper.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 257:

It was stuffy in the dark little room, from the walls of which austere dark faces gazed down from black picture-frames; ... the old copper lamp cast a dim glow over the pale faces, which now and then were lit up by the reflection from the radiant white hair of the old teacher's face.

he has the children, who come from all social classes, embrace and kiss each other, and it is here that darkness takes on another significance: during this ostensibly innocent ritual Tekla discovers the dark secret world of sex, falling in love with Robert Clement, the dark young man she embraces and kisses as a gesture of equality and brotherly love. He is a junker (young nobleman, squire), and she does not rest until she has captured and married him.

When she marries, the symbolism of light and darkness indicates how much her life has changed. Her childhood ends when her mother's body is carried out of the house on Svartmunkagatan to be buried. When we next see her, she is a married woman, in her own home:

... sex gevaldiger taga kisten på svarta selar och bära den ut på den svarta båren ... och porten slås igen till det mörka huset, med dess mörka minnen; och dottern åker bort ... från barndom och hem genom döden ut i ett eget liv!

\*

Och nu sitter den unga frun i sitt eget bo vid Fiskehamn, där solen skiner in hela dagen, när den skiner. Hennes hy, som varit blek ... började taga färg.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>110</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 278:

... six junior policemen lift the coffin with black slings and carry it out on the black bier ... and the door slams shut on the dark house with its dark memories; and the daughter leaves behind ... her childhood and her home to go out, through death, into a life of her own!

\*

The short phrase "när den skiner" ("when it shines") is significant, for Tekla's new life is, in the words of *Ett drömspel*, not quite as she imagined it would be. She is happy to have escaped the dinginess and squalor of her past, but as the wife of a young noble, with nothing to do all day, she soon grows bored. She is the centre of her home and has risen socially: "... hon ... insåg ... att hon stigit, att hon var någon, och att hon hade fått makt."<sup>111</sup> But it is not enough: she had wanted to live in the full dazzling light of the world, not to be the sun of a microcosm.

Things come to a head on her birthday, when she runs away from her home and both witnesses and participates in a scene which becomes a second epiphany for her: she witnesses the trial by water of a witch, and rescues one of the other bystanders, Ebba von Schlippenbach (another member of the Confirmation class), who is pushed into the water by the excited crowd. Again, this scene is bathed in light:

Nu strålade vårsolen på häxans ansikte, sken på hennes vita kläder, och i detsamma sköt

—

And now the young wife sits in her own home near Fiskehamn [literally, Fish Harbour], where the sun shines in all day, when it shines. Her skin, which had been pale ... was beginning to take on colour.

<sup>111</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 278: "...she realized that she had risen, that she was somebody, and that she had acquired power."

bödeln henne framför sig ... och störtade henne i vattnet....<sup>112</sup>

Tekla is welcomed into the circle of Ebba's family, and finally seems to be living the kind of life and getting the kind of attention for which she has longed. But that does not last either. Once again she is overwhelmed by the powers of darkness: the mysterious promptings of sex once again sweep her away, and she falls in love with Baron Magnus, Ebba's fiancé. Ebba catches them in a clinch, and Tekla is once again banished from glittering halls. According to the symbolism, it could not have been otherwise, for the young baron comes to her in the last fading light of day:

Och se, nu skymtade i fjärran, belyst av den nedgående solens sken, blandat med det gröna ljuset från lindlövet, den unge mannens smärta gestalt.<sup>113</sup>

Tekla spends a dark night wandering alone in the environs of Stockholm, coming finally to the public gallows. There she conceives her plan to denounce her-

<sup>112</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 283:

The spring sun now illuminated the witch's face and shone on her white clothing, and just then the executioner pulled her in front of himself ... and pushed her into the water....

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 297:

And lo, now appeared, dimly seen in the distance, lit by the light of the setting sun mingled with the green light shining through the linden leaves, the young man's slender form.

self and Ebba as witches, thereby gaining a glorious moment of public attention for herself and at the same time wreaking vengeance on Ebba. As the last piece of the plan falls into place, the sun rises over the city:

... hon såg morgonsolen lysa på Marias och Katarinas tornspiror som reste sig över Södra malmén. Och en enda tanke, att snart skulle denna stad, från palatset till kojorna, känna hennes namn, veta att hon var vänninna till greve Schlippenbachs dotter, och att hon stod i förbund med den ande, vars makt i dessa tider var större än att den kunde bekämpas av Herren och hans tjänare.<sup>114</sup>

We know the outcome of this plan. Once more Tekla's aspirations are frustrated. Or are they? Just before she goes to what proves to be her death, she notes with satisfaction that the sun is shining, and the room in which death comes to her is filled with sunlight:

Därpå leddes hon ut i gången, steg upp för en mörk trappa och befann sig i en stor sal. Dagsljuset föll här skarpt in....<sup>115</sup>

<sup>114</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 300:

... she saw the morning sun shine on [St.] Mary's and [St.] Catharine's church spires, which rose over Södermalm [Stockholm's southern district]. And she had but one thought, that soon this city, from the Palace to the simplest hovel, would know her name, would know that she was a friend of Count von Schlippenbach's daughter, and that she was in league with that spirit whose power was so great in these times that the Lord and His servants could not control it.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 306:

She was then led out into the corridor, went up a dark stairway, and found herself in a large room. Here the daylight poured in abundantly....

She is the centre of attention after all, although for different reasons than she had foreseen, and the manner of her death ensures that she will continue to be for some time: the medical authorities have some difficulty determining the cause of death. This interpretation, borne by the symbolism of light and dark in the story, is confirmed by the fact that in death the expression on her face is one of complete calm and innocence, as if at last her troubled spirit had found what so desperately it was seeking:

... döden nu bredde ett oändligt lugn över den unga kvinnans anletsdrag, vilka tycktes jämna ut sig och antaga ett uttryck av oskuld, fritt från lidelser och smärtor.<sup>116</sup>

This principal symbol in the story is supported by others. Chief among these is the black-white colour symbolism, which is so prevalent as to create the impression that one is looking at a series of old wood cuts, with the very few details in other colours perhaps painted in by hand. The black-white contrast parallels and supports the dark-light contrast throughout the story, and perhaps enough examples have crept into the discussion of the latter that none further have to be given here. It should be pointed out, however, that

<sup>116</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 307:

... death now spread an eternal calm over the young woman's features, which seemed to level themselves out and take on an expression of innocence, free from suffering and pain.



the strong contrast between black and white adds another dimension to the principal symbolism: the traditional associations of these colours with evil and good, and with death and purity: Tekla's black dress of mourning for her mother contrasted with her naked white body lying on the coroner's table at the end of the book, or the black dress that her mother wears to the Confirmation, contrasted to the white dresses of the girls who are being confirmed. Strindberg intentionally has the witch who underwent trial by water dressed in white, as a signal to the reader that she is innocent: the poor woman does drown after all!<sup>117</sup>

Another support to the dark-light symbolism is the use of noise. Tekla's childhood may have been dark and gloomy, but it was filled with noise:

I detta lilla rum kom Tekla till världen under det att porten dunkade, klockan pinglade och sjömän slogos med kniv i portgången.... Hon tycktes vara född med avgjord ovilja för porten och klockan, och kunde på de fem första åren icke vänja sig vid dem, och när hon sedan blev van, hörde hon ljuden även då hon var frånvarande. Satt hon på skolbänken eller var i vakten hos fadern,

<sup>117</sup> According to the perverted logic of this procedure, a real witch thrown into the water would float on its surface, borne up by the devil, with whom she was in league (this is why Ebba's demonstration of floating while swimming is a token that she may, indeed, be a witch). Attempts were often made to rescue the (therefore innocent) women who, on the contrary, sank to the bottom (their hands and feet were usually bound, so they could not aid themselves), but a large proportion of them drowned. One way or the other, society rid itself of undesirables!

hörde hon klockans: ping-ping-ping, regelns:  
klack, och portens: bom-bom.<sup>118</sup>

Like the darkness, these noises symbolize for Tekla everything that she wants to escape, all the miseries of the past: she yearns not only for a place in the sunshine, but for quiet and serenity as well. It is in terms of this symbol that we know things have begun to go wrong in her marriage:

Men dagarne i ensamhet och utan arbete  
blevo långa, långa som många helgdagar kunna  
bli ... då man riktigt längtade ... höra gat-  
buller och bli oroad av ringklockor, spring i  
trappor och dörrar.<sup>119</sup>

That is a sign of boredom, however; Tekla does not really want to return to her past, as is evident when she is invited to the Schlippenbach castle. Along with

<sup>118</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 255:

It was in this little room that Tekla was born, while the street-door banged, the bell tinkled, and sailors fought with knives in the entryway.... She seemed to have been born with a marked aversion to the door and the bell, and during her first five years could not get used to them, and when she did get used to them, she heard the noises even when she was away from home. Whether she were in school or in her father's guard-room, she heard the tinkle-tinkle-tinkle of the bell, the rasp of the bolt, and the bang-bang of the door.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 279:

But the days spent alone and without work were long, as long as many holidays could be ... when one really yearned ... to hear street noises and be disturbed by door-bells, coming and going in the stairways and doors.

the colour and light of life there, she is impressed with the absence of noise: "... intet gatbuller hördes, intet spring i portar eller boddörrar, inga slagsmål, ingen vakt, inga gesäller."<sup>120</sup>

During the week before her death, Tekla seems to return to her childhood, as she finds herself once more confined to a small dark room. One of the symptoms of this condition is that, as in her childhood, she begins to hear nonexistent noises: "Ensamheten och bristen på intryck ... började framkalla ... hörselvillor där inga ljud hördes."<sup>121</sup> The expression on her face in death indicates that, like the darkness, these sounds have disappeared forever.

Noises also play another role in the story. Because we know that Tekla is unusually sensitive to noises, Strindberg is able to use the appearances of unexpected noises in the tale as pointers, indications that something important is about to happen or (most usually) has just happened. More often than not, these pointers are introduced by another one: the formula *i detsamma* (at that very moment, just then). We have had one example of this use of noises (without the formula)

<sup>120</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 288: "... one heard no street noises, no coming and going in entrances or shop doors, no fighting, no police patrols, no workmen."

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 305: "Solitude and lack of stimulation ... began to produce ... auditory illusions where there was no sound to be heard."

above, as the door to Tekla's childhood home slammed shut, signifying the end of that stage of her life. A few more examples follow, to establish the pattern.

The first both brings about and underlines the end of the "kiss-of-peace" ritual in the Confirmation class: "I detsamma tog någon i dörrlåset, som gav ett kort vresigt ljud ifrån sig."<sup>122</sup> Later that evening, Tekla has her first sexual fantasy, in which she relives the kiss-of-peace ritual and sees a mysterious flower growing up between her breasts. This vision is cut short by a fire in the Old Town which, significantly, is described mainly in auditory terms:

I detsamma hör hon hornstötat uppifrån torget; det ringer i en skeppsklocka oupphörligt, oupphörligt; hundar skälla, gossar skrika, och så kommer ett buller rullande fram för den smala gatan, ett tunt men dovt buller som av hamrad koppar; det tjocknar och vältrar fram, och nalkas stort, rött som ett eldsken, som lyser upp skyltar och stenornament och små fönsterrutor; det nalkas henne, och nu rusa fyra svarta hästar ... och en blodröd vagn ... förbi ... allt under det klockan ringer, hornen tuta och eldskenet yr omkring vagnen.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>122</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 258: "Just then, somebody pulled on the door lock, which let out a short irritable noise."

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 260:

Just then she hears bugle blasts from up in the square. A ship's bell rings incessantly, incessantly; dogs bark, boys shout, and then a noise comes rolling down the narrow street: a thin, dull noise as if from beaten copper. It thickens and rolls forward; it gets nearer: large, red like firelight, which lights up sign boards and ornamental stonework and narrow windowpanes. It reaches her, and now four black horses ... and a blood-red

As Tekla approaches the cottage where she will see Ebba consulting a woman who seems to be a witch, we are alerted that something important is about to happen by the sound of a woodpecker (black and red: the colours of penitence and suffering) tapping on a tree, and her eavesdropping is punctuated with an involuntary noise made by Tekla herself:

...hon lade sitt ansikte mot dörren för att genom en springa se vad som förehades därinne, då hon med ett svagt anskri ryggade och skyndade att dölja sig bakom knuten.<sup>124</sup>

The same device of an involuntary cry is used later, to recall Tekla to the stark reality that she is at the public gallows. Up to that point she had been under the impression that she was in an outdoor theatre: "I det samma kände hon en rysning, märkte att hon störtade upp och hörde sin hesa röst utropa: Herre Jesus!"<sup>125</sup>

A bit earlier, the sight of Ebba floating on the water is followed by three of these pointers, one visual and two auditory: a cloud passes in front of the

wagon ... rush past ... and all the while the bell rings, the bugles blast, and the fire-light whirls around the wagon.

<sup>124</sup> Skrifter, VI, 290:

... she laid her face to a crack in the door in order to see what was going on in there; then she recoiled with a little shriek and quickly hid around the corner.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 290: "Just then she felt a shudder, noticed that she had sprung to her feet, and heard her hoarse voice cry out: 'Lord Jesus!'"

sun, causing it to get darker, a gull screams, and (with the *i detsamma* formula) the dinner bell is heard. To these sounds Tekla adds her own: "... i ett anfall av moderpassion började hon att skrika fram en bön till Gud och hans enfödde son."<sup>126</sup>

In contrast to these occasions when Tekla cannot prevent herself from making some kind of utterance, she dies "utan förmåga att ge ett ljud ifrån sig."<sup>127</sup>

In all of these instances, not only do the noises point to and underline the action, but they serve to recall Tekla back to reality from a world of imagination, or to emphasize for her the significance of what has just happened. As in the simile of the bored holiday-maker the noises symbolize the real world, as opposed to the world of dreams and aspirations. Even her speechlessness at her death is consistent with this interpretation: Tekla is killed by the power of her own imagination, and confronted with that power mundane reality is left speechless.

Like the naturalistic plays which were written around the same period, this story makes extensive use of rising and falling (or Wheel of Fortune) symbolism. It seems to go with the thematic territory: Jean in

<sup>126</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 294: "... seized by fear she began to shout out a prayer to God and His Only-Begotten Son."

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 307: "unable to utter a sound."

Fröken Julie and Tekla are both social climbers, and they both bring down (or attempt to bring down) someone else in their efforts to claw their way to the top.

The symbolism is introduced very early in the tale, before any of the major events have occurred:

... barnet hade upptäckt att hon tillhörde en lägre samhällsklass, ur vilken föräldrarna sökte höja henne genom uppfostran, och i vilken lärarna sökte kvarhålla henne genom att predika förnöjsamhet med den lott Gud givit var och en här i livet.<sup>128</sup>

When the family takes a Midsummer boat excursion (an activity of the middle and upper classes), Tekla's mother suffers, not only from the unaccustomed daylight, but from having been raised from her accustomed level: "Modren sitter tyst och skrämmd över att se sig utdragen ur sin håla...."<sup>129</sup> On the excursion she meets Robert Clement again. Significantly, she has to look up to see him.

This symbolism comes most forcibly to the foreground in Tekla's moments of reflection at critical stages in her life. Her decision to run away from home

<sup>128</sup> Skrifter, VI, 256:

... the child had learned that she belonged to a lower social class, from which her parents were trying to raise her through education, and in which the teachers were trying to keep her by preaching contentment with the lot which God had given each and every one of us in this life.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 270: "Her mother sits in silence, frightened at having been drawn out of her hole...."

is triggered by the appearance of her father, drunk and making passes at the maid, when she is expecting company. She sees her past closing in on her again:

Allt annat glömde hon, och utan besinning störtade hon gatorna framåt, likasom flydde hon ett ogunstigt, elakt öde, vilket förföljde henne personligen och nu på hennes födelsedag, nu då hon arbetat sig upp ur fattigdomens mörker, infann sig och ville draga henne ner igen.<sup>130</sup>

After she has rescued Ebba and been brought to her home, Tekla sees her position in the same terms:

Tekla hann icke mer än i tysthet prisa samma ödes otroliga nåd, som för ett par timmar sedan stört hennes fest och utdrivit henne ur paradiset och som nu upphöjt den förnedrade, räddat henne från förödmjukelsen att komma hem och uppbära förebråelser för uraktlåtna plikter....<sup>131</sup>

She tries to get her husband to share her enthusiasm for her new friends, but without success; when she has been invited to visit Ebba's family and he begins to

<sup>130</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 281:

Without consideration for anything else, she ran along the streets, as if she were fleeing an inauspicious and evil fate, which pursued her personally, and now on her birthday, when she had worked herself up from the darknesses of poverty, turned up and wanted to draw her down again.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 284:

Tekla had only enough time to praise the unbelievable grace of that fate which a couple of hours ago had ruined her party and driven her out of Paradise, but which now raised the fallen one up again, saving her from the humiliation of coming home to face reproaches for neglected duties....



miss her, he writes, entreating her to return home. She sees his pleas as threats to her happiness: "Det var som om en främmande rå hand ville rycka henne ur hennes himmel och trampa ner henne igen."<sup>132</sup>

The Schlippenbach castle is built atop a hill. In spite of her happiness there, Tekla seems instinctively to know that she does not belong there, seeking out less elevated areas of the estate:

Tekla greps av en stark längtan att komma ut ur trädgårdens hägnad ... och ... vandrade ... ner i stranden.

Det tycktes henne som om hon strax andades friare.... [Hon] vandrade ... i stranden, småsjungande och upprymd.<sup>133</sup>

And so it continues. This strand of symbolism reaches its height at the public execution ground. Tekla climbs up onto what she thinks is the stage of a summer theatre, and from this elevated position she realizes that what she has really wanted all along was to be noticed, to be raised up above the common level of humanity, the centre of everyone's attention. As

<sup>132</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 289: "It was as if a coarse alien hand wanted to snatch her out of her heaven and trample her down again."

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 289-90:

Tekla was seized by a strong desire to be outside the garden fence ... and ... wandered down to the shore.

It seemed to her that she immediately breathed more easily.... [She] wandered ... along the shore, singing softly to herself and exhilarated.

När hon stod på denna sommar-teater och tänkte sig åskådarne sitta med sina hundra sinom hundra huvuden nere på gräsplanen, erfor hon något av den beundrans avund hon alltid hyst mot de uppträdande på teatern. Att få visa sig, stiga upp ur hopen, över hopen; äga allas blickar och öron riktade på sin person, under det att alla de andra glömde varandra, det vore att leva, njuta av att ge sin kraft in i de andra som skulle gå därifrån med sina känslor sätta i dallring av hennes.<sup>134</sup>

Her upraised position and the thought of having all eyes focused on her, together with her discovery that she is not on a stage but a gallows, cause Tekla to remember the trial by water, with the accused witch, high up on the bridge from which she is pushed, attracting the attention of all. This is when she decides that she will die, but in a sensational manner, attracting as much attention to herself as possible. And she will take Ebba with her: "Ja hon ville dö, men först hämnas, och i döden draga med sig den hon

<sup>134</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 299:

When she stood on this summer stage and imagined the audience, with its hundreds upon hundreds of heads, down there on the lawn, she experienced something of the jealous admiration she had always felt for theatre performers. To be able to make a show of oneself, to rise up out of the crowd, over the crowd, to have everyone's eyes and ears directed toward one's person, while all the others forgot each other: that was to live, to rejoice in injecting one's energy into others, who would leave with their emotions vibrating from hers.

hatade...."<sup>135</sup> If she cannot rise to Ebba's level, Ebba must be made to fall to hers.

But Ebba does not share her fate. Instead, Tekla spins around on the wheel of fortune until the force is too much for her. It is as if she is destroyed by centrifugal force, which concentrates all of her sufferings in one place and then casts aside her empty body:

Med inbillningens otroliga makt hade hon på några sekunder samlat alla plågor i sitt känslsinne, och oförmögen att bära dem, kunde hon icke motstå trycket, utan vridande sin kropp i ett halvslag, föll hon, liksom om alla känseltrådarne i hennes inre blivit sönderskruvade, föll utan förmåga att ge ett ljud ifrån sig.<sup>136</sup>

This impression is borne out by the use of the word *hull* (shell) in the final description of Tekla's body: "... den magra men fintbyggda kroppen, genom vilkens vita hull nervstränger och blodkärl tycktes skina."<sup>137</sup>

As can be seen in one or two of the above examples, the symbol of Paradise is closely associated with the

<sup>135</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 300: "Yes, she wanted to die, but first to be revenged, and drag down into death with her the one she hated...."

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 306:

With the incredible power of the imagination she had in a few seconds made all of her torments tactile. Unable to bear them, or to withstand the pressure, she twisted her body into a knot and fell, as if all the nerves in her inner being had been forced apart; she fell unable to utter a sound.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 307: "... the thin but well-made body, through the white shell of which nerve fibres and blood vessels seemed to shine."

rising and falling symbolism. Paradise is that to which Tekla aspires, and from which she is repeatedly ejected. At one point she considers her own home, as Clement's wife, to be Paradise: in a passage quoted above she thinks of her father's appearance there and her own subsequent flight as expulsion from Paradise. This expulsion seems to have been psychologically permanent, for when she visits Ebba's family, she sees herself as readmitted to Paradise: but Paradise has changed its location! "... Tekla gick att drömma om det förlorade och återöppnade paradiset."<sup>138</sup> This is where it remains to the end of the story, and when she is driven off the estate by Ebba she has truly fallen. However, as we have seen, she felt uncomfortable there anyway....

Of minor importance in this story but of interest because they form another link to the dramas of the same period, are vampirism and its related symbol, the parasitic plant. Tekla falls in love with two men in this tale, and in each case the love is parasitic, unhealthy. Her first love is Clement, but it soon becomes clear that theirs is a vampiric relationship: they feed on each other, sucking each other dry, then cast each other aside. This is how she perceives the beginning of Clement's courtship:

<sup>138</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 286: "... Tekla went to dream of the lost and reopened Paradise."

Hon kände sig förskönas, växa, fyllas med kraft från hans nerver, tappas på med ny blod av hans blod, andas med hans lungor, tala med hans läppar. Ibland kände hon sig förlorad, bortkommen, försvunnen, och ville ta igen sin själ som han sugit i sig, men det var så ljuvt att vara en annan än sig själv, att likasom företa en själavandring in i en annans starkare kropp, bäras av en annans ben, göra åtbörder med en annans armar, under det man själv försjönk i vila. Så var det han skulle komma och befria henne från arbetet att tänka, tala, handla; ... o så ljuvt att slippa leva själv och ändå dock leva.<sup>139</sup>

Two vampires cannot live off each other; which is another way of saying that Tekla and Robert cannot fulfill each other's expectations: she seeks in him a saviour from her past and a passport to a brighter, more exalted world; he seeks in her a goddess for his own hearth. They are on opposite sides of the wheel of fortune; one cannot rise without pulling the other down.

<sup>139</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 274:

She felt herself become beautiful, grow, become replenished with energy from his nerves, fill up with new blood from his blood, breathe with his lungs, talk with his lips. Sometimes she felt that she was lost, out of her element, vanished, and wanted to take back her soul, which he had sucked into himself, but it was so sweet to be someone other than oneself, to make a journey in spirit, as it were, into another's stronger body, to be borne by another's legs, to make gestures with another's arms, while oneself sinking to rest. He would be the one who would come and free her from the work of thinking, talking, acting; ... O how sweet to stop living oneself and nevertheless live!

Her love for the young Baron Magnus shows remarkable similarities. There is the same desire to become one with the object of her love, an image which is not only sexual, but also represents her desire to rise above her own background by aligning herself with a person of more exalted standing. Once again the imagery is parasitic, this time from the plant world. This scene is imaginary -- it takes place in Tekla's mind immediately before the Baron actually appears for the love scene which results in her expulsion from Paradise -- and for that reason represents his psychological importance to her:

Nu ... trängde sig bilden av den unge baron Magnus fram. Och den såg på henne med ögon, ur vilka växte tvenne rot-tågor som kröpo in i hennes ögon, sköto sugrötter uppåt, birötter nedåt, kastade ut revor och skott ändå ut i hennes kropps yttersta fibrer, så att hon kände sig sammanvuxen med denna yngling, uppfylld av hans ande....  
[Hon] älskade honom.<sup>140</sup>

It is interesting that it is the young baron who is seen as a parasitic plant, rather than Tekla herself. Perhaps this is because it is Tekla who is doing the

<sup>140</sup> Skrifter, VI, 296:

Now ... the image of the young Baron Magnus arose before her. And it looked at her with eyes from which grew two root filaments, which crept into her eyes, sent fibrous roots upwards, ancillary roots downwards, put out tendrils and shoots even into the outermost fibres of her body, so that she felt that she and this young man had grown together, and she was filled with his spirit.... [She] loved him.

seeing and perhaps she recognizes, even if only subconsciously, that he too is using her (to provide an excuse for breaking off with Ebba, with whom his relationship is less than passionate). Be that as it may, the important image in the passage is the fusion of the two beings into one entity. Whether Tekla really is in love this time or not, she feels the passion very strongly: "Hon visste, tycktes det henne, att den dag hon icke mer fick se honom, skulle hon dö."<sup>141</sup> As it turns out, that day has already arrived, and Tekla does not die. But it is on that day that she takes the resolution which leads to her death.

Finally, we cannot leave a story called "En häxa" without a look at the significance of the title. As with most of the titles in *Svenska öden och äventyr*, it is ironic, for either there are four witches in the story, or there are none: the "real" witch on Blasieholm Bridge proves her innocence in the trial by water; there is a simple, natural, and completely innocent explanation for all the "suspicious" things Ebba does; and the "witch" she visits in the forest is just a harmless old lady who ekes out her existence by selling herbal tonics and recipes. As for Tekla herself, Strindberg leaves the question open, even if he stacks

<sup>141</sup> Skrifter, VI, 296: "She knew, it seemed to her, that on that day when she could no longer see him, she would die."

the deck heavily in favour of our reaching the conclusion that Tekla's problems were psychological rather than supernatural. The assistant judge who speaks the last words in the story is content to leave the judgement up to God: " -- Endast Gud, som skådar in i människohjärtat ... skulle kunna säga om detta var en brottsling eller en sjuk,"<sup>142</sup> he observes. And then he changes his mind, or at least qualifies the word *endast* (only), in the very last words of the story (words which may not be his but the author's): "Frid över stoftet, vila åt anden! domen åt Gud -- eller framtiden!"<sup>143</sup>

"Tschandala"<sup>144</sup> ("Chandala", 1888) is almost long enough to be published separately, as a short novel. It is most closely related to the short plays "Den starkare" ("The Stronger", 1888-89) and "Paria" ("Pariah", 1889), and the novel *I havsbandet* (1889-91).

"Tschandala" is set in Lund and environs toward the end of the reign of Karl XI (1660-97), although its

<sup>142</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 307: "Only God, who sees into the hearts of men, ... would be able to tell if she were a criminal or sick."

<sup>143</sup> *Idem.*: "Peace over her remains, rest to her spirit! to God be the judgement -- or to the future!"

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 314-98. The four Hindu castes are the Brahmin (priestly), Shatriya (princely), Vaishya (merchant), and Sudra (peasant). The Chandala (untouchable) is a fifth group, and are outcastes. Children of Sudra fathers and Brahmin mothers, the religious books are sealed to them, and they are considered to be cursed in this world and without hope.



historic setting is of minor importance. It is the story of the life-and-death struggle between the forces of civilization, represented by Professor Andreas Törner, of Lund University (Sweden's oldest, founded 1668), and the forces of barbarism, represented by a (Danish) gypsy named Jensen, the manager of an estate on which the professor spends an eventful summer. It should not be seen, however, as an avowal of the doctrine of Aryan supremacy; the Aryan does triumph over the primitive in the end, but, as in all of these tales, there is a great deal of irony in the outcome: he has had to lower himself to his adversary's level in order to do so. As in "Den starkare", we are left asking ourselves who the real victor is!

Professor Törner, in order to study the people of the area around Lund, rents accommodation in an old castle between Landskrona and Helsingborg. His landlady calls herself the Baroness Ivanoff, and her lover-cum-estate manager is the gypsy Jensen. The estate is a run-down shambles, and it the professor soon realizes that things are not what they seem: some very shady business is going on and he is being drawn into it against his will. Finally, he feels that his honour, his values, and perhaps even his life are in danger of annihilation, and that he must strike back, in defence of himself and of civilization! This he does by bringing about the death of Jensen, in a most ingenious way, so that he cannot be held criminally responsible.

The atmosphere of the entire story is one of filth, neglect, slovenliness, and corruption. This is the atmosphere of Jensen, the chandala, and symbolizes the primordial chaos out of which civilization, with its cleanliness, order, rationality, and the rule of law, has arisen. Here on this ramshackle estate, the inhabitants of which all seem to be throw-backs, civilization seems in danger of being swallowed up again. The place even smells bad:

... när äntligen porten kunde öppnas ...  
inträdde man i en ryslig förstuga, där en  
stank av ruttet kött eller våta hundar slog  
emot de inträdande.<sup>145</sup>

The unwholesome smell, it is soon discovered, pervades not only the castle and the whole estate, but, as if in support of the professor's fear that there is a threat to civilization as a whole, it spreads out even into the surrounding woods (nature in all its purity):

Stund efter annan kom en ljusglimt av  
besinning över magistern, när han såg på sina  
barn i detta smutsiga sällskap, som förde med  
sig ut i själva skogen sin lukt av skämt kött  
och våta hundar.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>145</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 317:

...when finally the door could be opened ...  
one came into a dreadful entrance hall, where  
one was struck with the stench of rotten meat  
or of wet dogs.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 368:

Moment by moment the professor's presence of mind returned, as he beheld his children in this sordid company, who bore with them even out into the very woods their odour of tainted meat and wet dogs.

Note that the smell is now described as being of rotten meat and wet dogs, instead of the or used at the first encounter with it. A more detailed analysis is given some fifty pages earlier than this second passage: "... [en] blandning av diskvatten, orent linne, gamla kläder, ruttet kött och våta hundar...."<sup>147</sup>

In the house, this odour is compounded by the stench of the droppings of the many animals which are kept indoors; outdoors there is also the manure of the farmyard animals and that which is imported (but apparently never used) for spreading on the fields. Törner is revolted by it all, and gradually finds himself almost a prisoner in the only place he can seem to find untainted air: sitting on his balcony. Jensen, on the other hand, seems either not to notice the stench, or even to actually seek it out, particularly when he is in low spirits:

... zigenaren hade förlorat sin självförtrostan och sin oroliga verksamhetslust. Han låg för det mesta bland kaninerna ... och solade sig, rökte eller sov. Varför han just hade valt denna plats, var svårt att förstå; kanhända ... kände sig hans parianatur dragen till lukten där, som påminde om förruttnelse,

<sup>147</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 318: "... [a] mixture of dish-water, dirty linen, old clothes, rotten meat, and wet dogs...."

träck och avfall.<sup>148</sup>

Associated with the smell is another symbol, that of dirt, or uncleanness. For if the baroness and her household are odiferous, they are also noticeably unwashed, and that also is symbolic of the dark, primordial, unevolved state of their moral natures. This particular strand of symbolism is perhaps seen most clearly when the two cultures, civilized and barbarian, come closest together, in the sexual liaison between Törner and Magelone,<sup>149</sup> Jensen's sister. Forced to lead a celibate life when his wife deserts him, the professor is both shocked and disgusted when Jensen suggests that Magelone might be available, for a slight fee. But the idea has been planted, and he finds the young girl increasingly attractive, even while remaining fully aware of the unappetizing aspects of her appearance:

Bilden av flickan i den blå dräkten sprang fram som ur en laterna magica, med de blottade axlarna, de eldiga ormlika rörelserna på höfter och rygg. Och han tillbakaträngde med

<sup>148</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 375:

... the gypsy had lost his self-confidence and his restless thirst for activity. For the most part, he lay among the rabbits ... and sunbathed, smoked, or slept. Why he had chosen that particular spot was hard to understand; perhaps ... his pariah nature felt itself drawn to the smell there, which was redolent of putrefaction, excrement, and garbage.

<sup>149</sup> The name is a variant of Magdalene, which is a Swedish slang word for a prostitute (see the chapter on *Röda rummet*).

våld minnet av det fula i blicken, det elaka draget kring munnen och det smutsiga hos hela personen.<sup>150</sup>

Eventually, against his own better judgement, he succumbs to his lust. Immediately he is filled with loathing and remorse. He fears that he and Magelone have been observed in their love-making, and he feels that the act has lowered him not only in his own eyes, but in those of the other inhabitants of the estate as well. The champion of civilization has sunk to the level of the barbarian. Significantly, this perception comes to him as a feeling of uncleanness, as if he were now wallowing in the filth with his antagonists:

... när den första kraft- och lustkänslan var över, kommo fruktan och vämjelsen. Fruktan -- ty han hade ute på vinden hört något röra sig och smyga sig bort, varav han slöt, att man hade spionerat; och så vämjelsen, den förfärliga förnimmelsen av smuts, vilken hans sinnen kunde fatta först när ruset hade gått över, en förnimmelse så stark, att han tyckte allting var nedsmutsat, hans rum, hans kropp, hans själ. Något så gränslöst motbjudande hade han aldrig trott vara möjligt, och hans

<sup>150</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 366:

The image of the girl in the blue dress sprang forth as out of a *laterna magica*, with her bare shoulders and the inflaming sinuous movements of her hips and back. And he violently suppressed the memory of the ugliness of her expression, the suggestion of evil around her mouth, and the filthiness of her whole person.

lustar utsloknade vid blotta tanken på vad han hade utstått.<sup>151</sup>

This episode marks a triumph of base instincts over civilized morality, not only within Törner's own person, but in his relationship to Jensen as well: for now the gypsy can use the professor's weakness to discredit any evidence of wrongdoing in other spheres that the latter might raise against him. Törner sees this too as a triumph of uncleanness: "... nu satte [zigenaren] sin smutsiga häl på den överlistades nacke."<sup>152</sup> He discovers just how much he has fallen from respectability when he tries to lodge evidence that Jensen is a horse-thief; he finds that Jensen has been there before him, cleared himself of the crime, discredited Törner as a witness because of his relationship with his sister, and even suggested that the professor him-

<sup>151</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 370:

... when the first feeling of energy and pleasure had passed, fear and disgust appeared. Fear because he had heard something move and sneak away out on the loft, from which he concluded that someone had been spying; and disgust, that appalling sensation of filth, which first took hold of his senses when the ecstasy had passed, a sensation so strong, that he felt that everything had been begrimed: his room, his body, his soul. He had never thought that anything so completely repugnant were possible, and his desires were extinguished at the mere thought of what he had undergone.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 372: "... [the gypsy] now placed his dirty heel on the neck of the dupe."

self is guilty of poultry theft! Once again, the professor feels himself soiled and besmirched:

När magistern kom ut, kände han sig....  
fläckad utan utsikt till att kunna tvätta sig  
ren, tvärtom, ju mera han gnede på fläcken,  
desto mera skulle den äta sig in.<sup>153</sup>

The professor does eventually triumph, however, and comes across an explanation both for the foul odour and for the uncleanness of his adversaries, as he reads how *The Laws of Manu*<sup>154</sup> describe the Chandala outcasts:

Tschandala ... må äta endast vitlök och  
lök med förruttnelsens smak....

....  
Tschandala må icke tvätta sig, allden-  
stund vattnet endast må förunnas honom till  
att släcka sin törst med.<sup>155</sup>

Jensen and his associates, then, are not despicable because they are dirty and smell; those things are rather consequences of their degenerate natures!

<sup>153</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 384:

When the professor came out he felt himself.... sullied with no prospect of washing himself clean; on the contrary, the more he rubbed at the spot, the more it penetrated.

<sup>154</sup> *Manusmṛti*, an Indian treatise on religious law and social obligation, attributed to Manu, the common ancestor of mankind, but probably compiled 200 B.C. - 200 A.D.

<sup>155</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 398:

Chandala ... may eat only garlic and onion with the taste of putrefaction....

....  
Chandala may not wash himself, inasmuch as water may only be given him to slake his thirst.

Another sign of their lack of evolution is the intensity of their feelings for animals, as if they feel a closer kinship with them than with fellow humans. Indeed, Jensen says as much; in the early days of the professor's stay on the estate, the two develop a very close friendship, so close that the gypsy confesses he loves Törner as a friend and a brother, adding significantly, "Jag älskar er, för ni är den första människa som har behandlat mig som människa."<sup>156</sup> He goes on to explain his own fondness for animals (the professor, like Strindberg himself, was not fond of animals, and detested dogs; Strindberg evidently viewed this as an attribute of civilization):

... djuren, magister, de äro mycket bättre än människor -- mycket bättre! De äro tacksamma och förstå att sätta värde på en välgärning, men det göra människorna inte. Å, fy, så usla människorna äro!<sup>157</sup>

Not only are the baroness' quarters filled with all kinds of animals (eight dogs, an ancient blind rooster, goats, turtle-doves, siskins, chickens, a cat

<sup>156</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 330: "I love you, because you're the first person who has ever treated me like a person." Jensen nevertheless uses the formal *ni* form of the second person pronoun, rather than the more familiar *du*, denoting his respect for Törner's elevated social position.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 331:

... animals, professor, are much better than people much better! They're grateful and know enough to value a good deed but people don't. Ugh! People are so vile!



and six kittens, and a brood of ducklings), but the garden also abounds with animal life (besides the horses and dogs, there are two heifers, a cow, three jades, chickens, ducks, turkeys, rabbits, sheep, and, wonder of wonders, two peacocks: most of them extremely run-down and/or defective in some way): "... liksom i Noachs ark...."<sup>158</sup> Of all of these creatures, the peacocks are the most symbolically suggestive.

The peacock has a dual symbolism. In its negative aspect, it is a symbol of worldly pride and vanity.<sup>159</sup> Its brilliant plumage is also said to contain all colours.<sup>160</sup> Here is Jensen, the human peacock:

... förvaltaren.... bar ... en gul sam-  
metsjacka med blå halsduk, en besynnerlig  
mössa, sådan som endast hästskojare brukade  
begagna, och med en påfågelsfjäder i, samt  
röda strumpor och blond peruk.<sup>161</sup>

The peacock feather in his cap has further significance: it is a symbol of the evil eye.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>158</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 331: "... just as in Noah's Ark...."

<sup>159</sup> Chetwynd, 48; Ferguson, 23; Meurice, 131; etc.

<sup>160</sup> Cirlot, 239; Garai, 76; etc.

<sup>161</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 323:

... the manager.... was wearing a yellow velvet jacket with a blue neckerchief, a peculiar cap, such as only horse traders usually wore, with a peacock feather in it, red stockings, and a blond wig.

<sup>162</sup> Garai, loc. cit.

In its positive aspects, the peacock symbol applies to the struggle for supremacy between civilization and barbarity. In Christian symbolism, the peacock is a symbol of immortality, with its attendant attributes of regeneration and resurrection, and an emblem of wholeness or unity.<sup>163</sup> Its presence here would seem to indicate the ultimate victory of the forces of civilization, an interpretation which seems to come naturally from the following passage, which occurs near the end of the tale, but before the destruction of Jensen:

... på stora gödselhögen stod ännu påfågeln och bredde ut sin prunkande stjärt, ... det enda mitt i all smutsen, som ögat med välbehag kunde dröja vid.<sup>164</sup>

Cirlot also notes (307) that the peacock is a symbol of rational thought.

It has been mentioned that the inhabitants of the estate have a superstitious veneration for animals: "Barn äro heliga väsen liksom djuren!"<sup>165</sup> says the baroness. This characteristic reaches its fullest expression in Jensen's veneration for grass snakes, which

<sup>163</sup> Cirlot, 239; Ferguson, 23; Garai, 76; etc.

<sup>164</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 393:

... the peacock still stood on the large manure pile and spread out its resplendent tail, ... the only thing, amidst all the filth, upon which the eye could pleasurably rest.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 388: "Children are sacred beings, like animals!"

helps to bring about his downfall. The snake is another example of an ambiguous symbol: it is obvious that for the professor and for the gypsy its significance is entirely different. For the former it is evil and disgusting, something to be destroyed; for the latter it is a sacred animal, to be venerated and protected:

... magistern ... kände någonting kallt och obehagligt, som rörde vid hans hals. Han vände sig hastigt om, i det han steg åt sidan, och varseblev en stor svart snok, som hängde ned från taket med den utsträckta tungan. Magistern lyfte ögonblickligen spaden för att slå ihjäl besten, då han i samma stund hörde en ängsligt bönfallande röst borta från dörren:

-- Nej, för himlens skull, slå inte ihjäl min snok!

Det var förvaltaren.

-- Varför får jag inte slå ihjäl den?

-- Jo, för att snoken är ett heligt djur och för lycka med sig.

-- Det finns inga heliga djur längre, svarade magistern.... Men om den också annars bringar lycka med sig, så synes det i alla fall inte här inne.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>166</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 323:

... the professor ... felt something cold and disagreeable touch his throat. He turned around quickly, taking a step to the side as he did so, and discovered a large black grass snake hanging down from the roof and flicking its outstretched tongue. The professor instantly lifted his spade to beat the beast to death, but at that very instant he heard an anxiously pleading voice from the doorway:

"No, for heaven's sake don't hit my grass snake!"

It was the manager.

"Why shouldn't I beat it to death?" asked the professor with surprise.

"Why, because the grass snake is a sacred animal and brings good luck."

"There are no longer any sacred animals," answered the professor.... "But

As with the peacock, the Christian symbolism (the snake as the embodiment of evil) applies for the professor, whereas for Jensen the snake has its pagan significance, a primordial deity of force and energy (Cirlot, 272-77).

After the initial period of friendship and toleration between the two men, when the struggle for survival begins in earnest, Törner uses both his own antipathy for the snake and Jensen's veneration of it to strike a demoralizing blow against his opponent, the first in the series of events which is to lead to Jensen's destruction:

Genom att företaga en hopsummering av zigenarens anlag och genom att registrera hans själs inventarium hade magistern utletat två punkter ... på vilka under ett angrepp själ kunde kämpa direkt mot själ, förstånd mot förstånd, så att det fanns hopp om seger för det förstånd, som var det starkare. Zigenaren hyste först och främst halvvildans fruktan för det okända, och mot denna fruktan hade han sökt beskydd i tron på tillvaron av okända makter. Om man nu ... berövade honom detta värn, skulle hans fruktan väckas till liv, tron på lyckan fråntagas honom, och han skulle falla ihop tillintetgjord.... Huruvida han trodde på de kristnas gud, visste magistern icke, dock hade han aldrig sett honom gå i kyrkan; däremot visste han, att han satte ut mjölk åt sina snokar, som han visade religiös vördnad.

Följaktligen borde snokarne utrotas, tron på deras beskydd dräpas och fruktan för

—  
there's no evidence of it here, at any rate."

ett oblitt öde slå mannen med andlig lamhet.<sup>167</sup>

The professor kills the snakes by poisoning their milk with mercury (a singularly appropriate means of killing them: in alchemy mercury symbolizes the transmutation of matter and spirit from the inferior to the superior) (Cirlot, 198). This has the predicted effects on Jensen, who is reduced to the state in which we have already seen him: sunning himself, smoking, and sleeping among the rabbits!

The killing of the snakes and its symbolic significance are prefigured by a bizarre decoration in the baroness' quarters: "I taket hängde en uppstoppad stork

<sup>167</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 373:

By making a résumé of the gypsy's natural abilities and taking stock of his spiritual inventory, the professor had discovered two counts upon which, under an attack, soul could contend directly against soul, intellect against intellect, with the hope of victory to the intellect which was stronger. First and foremost, the gypsy suffered from the semi-savage's fear of the unknown, and he had sought refuge from this fear in belief in the existence of unknown powers. If he were now ... deprived of this protection, his fear would be revived, his belief in luck taken from him, and he would collapse, utterly defeated.... Whether he believed in the Christian God, the professor did not know, although he had never seen him go to church; on the other hand, he did know that he set out milk for his grass snakes, for which he displayed a religious veneration.

Consequently, the grass snakes had to be exterminated, the belief in their protection squashed, and fear of an unpropitious fate made to fill the man with spiritual meekness.

med utbredda vingar och med en förtorkad huggorm i näbben."<sup>168</sup> As a destroyer of reptiles, the stork is a beneficent creature, and both as a water bird and as a harbinger of spring, it is associated with the beginning of new life (Cooper, 66-7). A snake similarly destroyed by a bird (in this case, an eagle) appears in the *Iliad*, portending the victory of the Greeks over the Trojans, the Aryans over the Asians (Cirlot, 276): not an irrelevant consideration here!

Also of significance because of their seeming omnipresence in the story, because of the professor's antipathy to them, and because of the vital role they play in the destruction of Jensen, are the dogs. Generally in the West, dogs are seen as symbols of loyalty, devotion, and fidelity, in their role as "man's best friend". There is another, much older tradition, however, which surfaces in such expressions as "in the doghouse", "leading a dog's life", "I wouldn't give that to my dog", etc. This is related to the Semitic tradition, which regards the dog as unclean and a symbol of impurity, associated with the snake as evil and demonic (Cooper, 54). Although the antiquity of a tradition generally attests to its psychological truth, in

<sup>168</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 333: "From the ceiling hung a stuffed stork with outspread wings and a dried adder in its beak."

this case much would seem to be determined as well by one's personal attitudes to dogs!

As mentioned above, the dog is a creature to which the professor had an antipathy:

-- Tycker ni inte om hundar?  
-- Jag avskyr hundar, svarade magistern.<sup>169</sup>

When he first goes to look at the estate, before deciding to stay there, he is assured that there is only one watchdog, always chained, and a lapdog, always indoors. Once he has established himself, however, the number of dogs increases alarmingly, none of them possessing any qualities that might change his opinion of dogs:

Dag för dag märkte han, att hundarnas antal växte, så att efter åtta dagars förlopp åtta större och mindre hundar ströko omkring, lågo på trapporna, skällde på solen, blåsten, kråkorna, på allt, som kom inom deras synkrets. Och alla sågo utsvultna ut....<sup>170</sup>

This would explain the element of wet dog in the smell which pervades the place! We are not told whether these eight dogs include the four which are later seen in the baroness' chambers; at any rate, the way in which the

<sup>169</sup> Skrifter, VI, 316:

"Don't you like dogs?"  
"I loathe dogs," answered the professor.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 322:

Day by day, he noticed, the number of dogs increased, until, at the end of a week, eight dogs prowled around, lay on the stairs, and barked at the sun, the wind, the magpies, at anything which came into their field of vision. And they all looked starved....

latter are treated indicates the high esteem in which they are held, two of them apparently possessing their own bed. As animals, they fall into the category of "sacred beings" for the household. Curiously, the dog as a sacred being has always been associated with death and the underworld, a fact that is not without significance in the outcome of this story.

At any rate, Jensen is very strongly associated with the dogs not only by the smell which accompanies him everywhere, but also linguistically: the professor usually refers to him as "the gypsy" or "the manager", but increasingly in the second half of the tale, he is "the pariah". The primary reference of this word is to the lowest of the Indian castes, and it is usually applied by Europeans to outcastes as well. But the word also applies to "a yellow vagabond dog of low breed which frequents towns and villages in India and the East." (OED) Jensen has a recurring dream, in which he sees himself transformed first into a grass snake, then into a rat, and finally into a dog: perhaps, since Strindberg is here dealing with Hindu concepts, his three previous incarnations!

At any rate, the traditional association of dogs with death and the underworld and Jensen's strong association with the animals come together in the scene in which Jensen finally meets his end; it is, in fact, the dogs which actually kill him, but they mistake him for



another dog! And he himself seems to believe that he is a dog at that point. The whole has been engineered by Törner, who has persuaded the gypsy to spend the night outdoors and to build a fire. Using the recently invented *laterna magica*, the professor then projects images on to the smoke which repeat Jensen's recurring dream: first a grass snake, then a rat, and then:

Nu var zigenarens hjärna satt i den rätta rörelsen, och den väg, som den vidare skulle gå, var i förväg så tydligt angiven, att offret, redan innan nästa bild kom fram, hade rest sig högt på alla fyra, dock alltjämt behållande det vita täcket omkring sig, och då hundens skepnad dök fram i röken, var han genast redo att sätta i med ett förfärligt skällande, som hade han bara väntat på detta. Nu hördes ett gräsligt larm från husets baktrappa, och åtta gånger smällde baddörren upp och igen, medan de åtta utsvultna hundarne störtade ut för att falla över den närgångna främmande hunden.

I samma ögonblick förutsåg magistern, vad slutet skulle bli, och för att påskynda det riktade han lyktan nedåt, så att hundbilden föll rakt på det vita täcket.

Kopplet kunde icke taga miste, och i raseri lågo alla åtta i en tjutande hög ovanpå sin ihjälbitne herre.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Skrifter, VI, 397-8:

The gypsy's brain was now properly stirred up, and the subsequent path was so clearly indicated in advance that even before the next image appeared, the victim had raised himself up on all fours, still wrapped in the white blanket; when the shape of the dog emerged from the smoke, he was immediately ready to let loose with a terrible barking, as if he had only been waiting for that. Then a frightful alarm was heard from the back stairs of the house, and the back door opened and slammed shut eight times, as the eight starved dogs rushed out to fall upon the impertinent strange dog.

In that instant, the professor foresaw how it would end, and in order to help

And so the professor has his victory, civilization triumphs over barbarism; indeed, Strindberg goes so far as to say that the Aryan had triumphed over the lower race. But he does not leave it at that. He goes on to suggest that the means by which he won his victory were far from civilized:

Paria var död, och ariern hade segrat; segrat tack vare sitt vetande och sin andliga överlägsenhet över den lägre rasen. Men det kunde lätt ha hänt att han själv blivit på platsen, om han icke ägt styrka att begå förbrytelsen.<sup>172</sup>

This is something that the professor could not have done at the beginning of the story; it is not civilized and it is counter to the values in which he believed:

... för att kunna upptaga striden med en fiende som denna måste man kunna hålla honom stången i bristen på finkänsla, måste han ha förmåga att icke sky skändliga medel, icke skämmas för att snoka i hans hemligheter, lyssna vid dörrar, avlocka hans anhöriga förtroliga bekännelser och efteråt betjäna sig av dessa. Men allt detta ansåg magistern sig

things along, directed the projector downwards, so that the image of the dog fell directly on the white blanket.

The pack could make no mistake, and in a frenzy all eight formed a howling heap over their master, who was bitten to death.

<sup>172</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 398:

The pariah was dead, and the Aryan had conquered: conquered thanks to his knowledge and his spiritual superiority to the lower race. But it could easily have happened that he himself had been defeated, if he had not had the strength to commit a crime.

icke i stånd till. Det bar emot för honom att begå en låg handling, att känna sin självkänsla kränkt, sin aktning för sin egen person nedbruten. Denna strid kunde han alltså icke föra utan att gå under....<sup>173</sup>

He is, in other words, a gentleman. But not for long; the test of his civilized principles is Magelone, and he fails that test miserably, even to the point of identifying with the detested dogs. This is even before the consummation of his lust (and before the above reflections, which are therefore suspect): "En längtan att omfamna henne rått, djuriskt, som en hanhund sin tik, vaknade hos honom...."<sup>174</sup>

He realizes that he cannot defeat his enemy without becoming like him, but that process has begun:

Då han nu började iakttaga sig själv, upptäckte han att han hade tagit upp en del gester ifrån zigenaren, lånat tonfall i hans

<sup>173</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 372-3:

... in order to be able to take on such an enemy, one must be able to match him in lack of discretion, one must have the ability not to shrink from nefarious means, not to be ashamed of poking about in his secrets, listening at doors, prying intimate confidences from the members of his family and putting them to use afterwards. But of all this the professor thought himself incapable. It went against the grain for him to perform a low action, to feel his self-esteem violated, his respect for his own person shattered. And so he could not wage this battle without being destroyed....

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 366: "There awakened within him a desire to embrace her crudely, brutally, as a dog his bitch...."

röst och, vad värre var, blandat in danska ord och vändningar i sitt språk.<sup>175</sup>

Part of this process is unconscious, of course, and the professor tries to eradicate it, but, like Adam, he is undone by a woman. Even in the heat of his sexual fantasies he had resolved, for a reason he could not explain, that he would make love to Magelone, but not kiss her. What he had not counted on was that she would kiss him, and the reason for his aversion becomes clear; it has to do with the animal symbolism:

Han hade famnat ett djur, och efter omfamningen hade djuret kysst honom som en katt, och han hade vänt sig bort, som om han var rädd för att inandas en oren andedräkt.<sup>176</sup>

Dogs are connected with the male principle, cats with the female, and both can have the same sinister associations. Törner is here being infused with the same unclean and evil spirits represented by Jensen's dogs:

Cats are often representative of the uncanny and the strange, of some depth of the unconscious that is difficult and perhaps undesirable to understand, of some aspect of the

<sup>175</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 354:

Now when he began to observe himself, he discovered that he had picked up some of the gypsy's gestures, had borrowed tones of voice from him, and, what was worse, was mixing Danish words and turns of phrase into his speech.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 370:

He had embraced an animal, and after the embrace the animal had kissed him like a cat, and he had turned away, as if he were afraid of inhaling unclean breath.

personality that is mysterious and revolting and quite possibly evil (Borden, 94).

After this encounter the professor abandons his scruples and decides that if becoming like his adversary is what is necessary to defeat him, then that is what he will become. He forms a plan and puts it into action, first poisoning the grass snakes and then robbing Jensen of his connection with nobility, by revealing that the baroness is not only no aristocrat, but in fact the daughter of a brothel-keeper and a prostitute, (confirming what the symbols have told us all along: that she is on the same social level as Jensen). When the next step of his plan, to get Jensen into trouble with the law, backfires, he abandons more of his principles, although he continues to rationalize. Still regarding himself as the embodiment of civilization, he manages to convince himself that the "higher" civilized beings are in fact subjugated to the "lower" barbarians (symbolized by the imagined placing of Jensen's grubby heel upon his neck), and that as a member of a subjugated people (of demonstrably superior stock) he has the right to overthrow his oppressor, and his full savagery comes out:

Därvid kröp han likasom ut ur sin egen personlighet, ställde sig under den lågt stående varelse, som redan hade satt foten på honom, hatade honom med den underkastades hat, inbillade sig, att den andre var härskaren och att han själv var folkets barn, som är ut och är in skulle slita och släpa för dagdrivaren, giva honom sitt blod och sin hjärna, såsom hans förfäder hade gjort, och nu reste

han sig, vild och utom sig, och fattade sin påk för att dräpa fienden, krossa hans huvud och kasta kadavret för hundarne.<sup>177</sup>

Ironically, the corpse does end up among the dogs! But who now represents civilization?

"Tschandala" is a demonstration that civilized and barbarian qualities, higher and baser natures, are mingled in all of us, and that it is circumstances which determine with which set of responses we act. This is enforced by the ambivalent nature of so many of the symbols: their associations, like man himself, can be either positive or negative. They are consistently applied to Jensen in their least favourable aspects and to Törner in their most positive, but we see the tale from Törner's point of view, and his attitudes are often belied by his actions. The tale can, indeed, be regarded as a psychodrama, with Törner and Jensen representing the ego and id respectively.

<sup>177</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 391:

Thereupon he crept out of his own personality, as it were; placed himself under the lowly creature who had already set his foot on him; imagined that the other was the ruler and he himself the child of the people, who year in and year out must toil and moil for the layabout, give his blood and his brain to him, just as his forefathers had done; and now he rose up, wild and beside himself, and grasped his cudgel, in order to slay the enemy, crush his head, and toss the corpse to the dogs.

Written 1890-91, "Vid likvaken i Tistedalen"<sup>178</sup> ("Vigil in Tistedal")<sup>179</sup> is not so much a story as an essay on the characters of Karl XII (reigned 1697-1718) and members of his family, cast into the form of a conversation between a Swedish army lieutenant and the royal physician as they watch over the king's body on the night of his death, the circumstances of which are dramatically presented in Strindberg's history play, *Carl XII*<sup>180</sup> (Karl XII, 1901).

The present tale gives Strindberg an opportunity to present a revisionist view of one of Sweden's royal heroes. A warrior-king par excellence, Karl XII held the balance of power in northern Europe for most of his reign: king-maker in Poland and formidable enemy of

<sup>178</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 399-406.

<sup>179</sup> Tistedal (literally, Thistle Valley), in Norway, was the Swedish headquarters for the siege of Frederiksten (a strongly held fortress on the road to Kristiania, now Oslo), where the Swedish King Karl XII met his death November 30, 1718. Norway had passed back and forth between Swedish and Danish hands, and Karl had begun a campaign to win it back from Denmark. He was fatally shot while watching his men dig assault trenches outside the fortress, and his body was transported in secrecy back to Tistedal: it was feared (as proved the case) that knowledge of his death would demoralize the Swedish troops and put an end to the campaign.

<sup>180</sup> Strindberg wrote before the reform of Swedish spelling and grammar earlier this century. Karl is now the preferred spelling of the Swedish form of Charles, and Swedish monarchs by that name are so styled. The exception is the present king, Carl XVI Gustaf, both of whose names retain archaic spellings (Gustaf is generally spelled Gustav).

Peter the Great of Russia, the brilliance, audacity, and (usual) success of his military exploits, combined with his contempt for personal danger, made him a respected and/or feared figure throughout Europe (and as far as Turkey, where he spent four years), and won him the reputation of invincibility.

The young king (he was only seventeen at the time) left Stockholm to wage war against Denmark in 1700 and never returned to his capital city. Indeed, the next fifteen years were spent outside of Sweden, waging wars in Denmark, Russia, Poland, and Saxony, and even after he returned to Sweden, he continued to combat his enemies. Sweden was proud of the dashing young king who struck fear into the hearts of her enemies and won her a central place in the European politics of the time. By the time of Karl XII's death at the age of thirty-five, however, the country, almost drained of men and resources by the continuous state of war, greeted the news almost with relief. This is the Karl XII upon whom Strindberg focuses: a man who almost destroyed his country in the process of defending its glory! The story is about the king, and the people of Sweden are scarcely mentioned in it, but they remain the essential concern of the author.

Strindberg's task is one of demythologising, or iconoclasm. Instead of concentrating on the young king's heroic exploits, he focuses on his weaknesses,



in order ultimately to show him not as the dashing and invincible hero of his legend, but as somewhat of a monster. One of the methods he uses is to point out the weaknesses in character of his immediate predecessors on the throne, his grandfather and father, Karl X and Karl XI, and of his maternal grandfather, Fredrik III of Denmark, resurrecting the mythology of metempsychosis (which, despite its Greek name, originated in Egypt, as Strindberg suggests, and in India) to suggest that all of these weaknesses concentrated themselves in Karl and his two sisters, Hedvig Sophia and Ulrika Eleanora. Nature here becomes a dynamic force, relentlessly pursuing its own ends regardless of the consequences to humanity, very much like the unseen powers in other Strindberg works. The words are put into the mouth of Dr. Neuman, a German (and therefore, presumably, able to be objective about the Swedish royal family) and the royal physician (who is intimately acquainted with those of whom he speaks):

Det är som om själens kvaliteter, perfektioner och debiliteter vandrade genom materiens substrater ... De gamle Egypterne kallade det metempsykosen eller själavandringen och vi säga ... att det är påbrå ... ehuru ofta genom en naturens lex contradictionis eller motsättnings lag de negativa egenskaperna bytas i positiva ... Var inte farfadern tionde Carl en fyllhund, en flickjägare, en slåsskämpe. Men Carl den tionde födde nykteristen och kvinnohataren Carl den elffte ... se nu börjar motsättningarne, men slåsskämpen sitter lite kvar.... Carl den elffte födde Carl den tolfte, och naturen behåller nykteristen och kvinnohataren, slår ett bakslag och får fram slåsskämpen, ifrån

farfar.... Men se på fan, säger naturen, nu ha vi gjort en karlakar! och så känns det som efter ett Beischlaf, man får en lust att sova, och vara över den saken. Natura numquam perfectrix, säger Aristoteles, naturen gör aldrig något fullkomligt, och här behövde hon tre generationer för att knåda till ett stort ämne, så stort att degen tog slut. Slut, för om man tänker efter, så fanns det en svag punkt någonstans mitt in i nodus vitalis eller livsknuten hos denna jätte. Svagt som hos den store morfadern ... Fredrik III i Danmark. En enväldig, slug, vidskeplig herre, som var så stark och så vek, så klok och så full av misstag. Och så, se på vår hjälte. Modig som en björn, när man såg på honom, men när natten och olyckan kom, så då kunde han inte sova ensam. Då skulle han ligga i knä på någon, eller i sängen hos gubben Piper ibland, och så fram med bönboken ... Och tänk på det här då, att han som rådde på andra, kunde inte dubblera sin person och sätta en vilja över sin egen vilja.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Skrifter, VI, 400-401:

It is as if the qualities, perfections, and debilities of the soul travelled through the substrata of material ... The ancient Egyptians called it metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls, and we say ... that it is breeding ... even if through a *lex contradictionis* or law of contradiction in nature the negative characteristics are changed to positive ... Was the grandfather, the tenth Karl, not a drunkard, a skirt-chaser, and a scrapper? But Karl the Tenth fathered the teetotaler and misogynist, Karl the Eleventh -- see, now the contradictions begin -- but a bit of the scrapper remained.... Karl the Eleventh fathered Karl the Twelfth, and nature retained the teetotaler and misogynist, but reached back and brought forward the scrapper from the grandfather.... But then nature said, "Look here, damn it, now we have made a Karl to end all Karls [there is a pun here: the literal meaning of *en karlakar!* is a man's man, a real man], and it feels as one does after a bender: one wants to sleep and be done with the business." Aristotle says, "*Natura numquam perfectrix*: nature never makes anything perfect," and in this case she required three generations to knead together the sub-

The word *kvinnohatare* (misogynist, literally woman-hater) perhaps strikes one as strange here; it is obviously being considered a weakness in character, but it is a word often applied to Strindberg himself, not without some justification. What Strindberg is referring to here is Karl XI's habit of practicing sexual abstinence while Sweden was at war and the fact that his son remained chaste all of his life (Massie, 417-18). Strindberg regarded abstinence from both alcohol and women as unnatural and therefore unhealthy.

As for alcohol, Karl XII practiced total abstinence from the age of sixteen, except for two well-publicized occasions when he was either wounded or overcome with thirst in battle (Massie, 318). The charge of being unable to sleep alone seems based on Karl's habit, in later years, of having a page sleep in his room; for most of his life he did indeed sleep

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stance of greatness, so much greatness that there was not enough dough. Not enough, for if one thinks about it, there was a weak point somewhere inside this giant's *nodus vitalis*, or centre of life. He was weak like his celebrated maternal grandfather ... Fredrik III of Denmark: an autocratic, sly, superstitious man, who was so strong and so weak, so clever and so full of errors. And look at our hero! Brave as a bear, when he was being watched, but when night and misfortune came, why then he was unable to sleep alone. Then he had to lie on someone's knee, or sometimes in bed with old man Piper; and out with the prayer-book ... And imagine this: he who dominated others could not control his own will.

alone (*Ibid.*, 418). It is notoriously true that he was extremely headstrong, refusing ever to change his mind in the slightest detail once he had made a decision.

The good doctor goes on to point out how nature has treated the other members of Karl's family: his elder sister (who predeceased him), his younger sister (who succeeded him), and his elder sister's son (the other possible heir to the Swedish throne). Nature seems to have ensured that the line will not survive:

Jag sade det fanns något svagt! Och det syns alltid när en släkt går ut. Hade inte fadern motvilja att couchera med sin lagliga gemål! Och blev det icke litet kient med avkomman.... Systemen Hedvig Sophia ... hade dubbla tummar ... och hennes son blev svagelig och hade svårt att tala, man sa till och med att han var nästan stum. Och vår nådiga drottning, Ulrika Eleanora är ... icke av naturen förlänad med det övermått av andliga förmögenheter, som man har hopp att vänta av en så framskjuten person ...<sup>182</sup>

<sup>182</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 401-2:

I said there was a weakness! And that always happens when a family dies out. Did the father not have an aversion to sleeping with his lawful spouse! And was the offspring not a bit feeble? .... The sister Hedvig Sofia ... had double thumbs ... and her son was delicate and had difficulty talking: they even say he was almost dumb. And our gracious queen, Ulrika Eleanora is ... not endowed by nature with the measure of intellectual faculties which one would hope to find in so prominent a person ...

What a picture of the declining Vasa dynasty!<sup>183</sup> Leaving aside the question of whether Hedvig Sofia had a physical deformity, her son, Karl Fredrik, seems transformed into a near-mute by Strindberg as a symbol of his failure to contest his aunt's assumption of the throne upon Karl XII's death, and that lady's feeble-mindedness seems to have manifested itself chiefly in her complete devotion to a worthless and unfaithful husband: both circumstances which could not have been known (especially in their implications) within hours of Karl XII's death! Strindberg was not above taking liberties with history!

At any rate, Dr. Neuman reaches his conclusion about Karls X, XI, and XII: nature has exterminated them:

-- Med ett ord ... så vill det synas som om en hemlig drift hos naturen ställt så till att det blev en ända med den ätten. Naturen hade gjort sitt och var trött. Den hade nog med Carlar, och blev slut med Carlar!<sup>184</sup>

<sup>183</sup> Although Karl XII's successors continued to be styled the House of Vasa until the accession of Karl XIV Johan (Bernadotte) in 1818, the connection of two of them, Fredrik I (1720-51, husband of Ulrika Eleonora) and Adolf Fredrik (1751-71, younger brother of Karl XII's other brother-in-law) was extremely tenuous.

<sup>184</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 402:

"In a word ... it seems that nature harboured a secret impulse to put an end to the dynasty. Nature had done its part, and was tired. It had had enough with Karls and stopped making Karls!

Considering that the next monarch was a woman, there is

a pun here: as well as being the Swedish form of

So ends a royal line, not as might appear, snuffed out by a musket ball, but the victim of far larger forces, call them unseen powers, fate, destiny, nature, what you will. Strindberg does not leave the memory of Karl XII there, however, but uses the undisputed fact that the king was killed by an anonymous shot and in darkness to suggest that the musket which fired it may have been Swedish and not Norwegian: it was not only nature, he suggests, that had had enough of Karls!

... Carl XII var ett spöke som stått upp ur hunnergravarne, en göt som skulle ha bränt om Rom igen, en Don Quixote som befriade förtryckta galärslavar, under det han slog sina egna undersåtar i järn och blod, och hade inte den kulan som i afse föll, kommit från väster, så hade den en gång kommit från öster, ehuru själva fan inte vet var dem kom ifrån.<sup>185</sup>

This is pure fantasy: there is no doubt that Karl XII was shot down by the Norwegian defenders of Frederiksten. But it is symbolically correct: he had been away from Sweden for so long, and was responsible for impos-

Charles, karl is also a word for man!

<sup>185</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 405:

... Karl XII was a ghost risen from the graves of the Huns, a Goth who would have burned Rome again, a Don Quixote who liberated oppressed galley-slaves, while he suffocated his own subjects in iron and blood; and if the bullet which descended last night had not come from the west, one day it would have come from the east, although the devil himself doesn't know where it did come from.

ing such heavy burdens on the country, that the population did not mourn his death (Massie, 722). He was beyond doubt a great man, but, and this is Strindberg's point, no blessing to his people. Or, as Dr. Neuman puts it, "Något fint arbete hade naturen icke gjort i vårt nådige Herre och Konung! Stort och grovt! Gärna; men icke fint."<sup>186</sup>

Written in 1890-91, "Stråmannen"<sup>187</sup> ("The Man of Straw") is Strindberg's version of the reigns of Ulrika Eleanora the Younger (Karl XII's sister, who succeeded him and reigned for two years, 1718-20, before abdicating in favour of her husband) and her husband, Fredrik I (1720-51). Surely two of Sweden's least glorious monarchs, she was well-meaning, but stubborn, high-handed, and apparently besotted with her unworthy and unfaithful husband; he dishonest, greedy, debauched, and indolent, a man who never even took the trouble to learn Swedish (Ohlmarks, 126-29)! Their story is told here because it was during Fredrik I's reign and in direct opposition to his will, that the principles of constitutional monarchy were established in Sweden: a high point in the history of the people.

<sup>186</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 402: "Nature did not create a fine piece of work in our gracious Lord and King! Large and rough, granted! But not fine."

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 407-42.

Indeed, the title of the story refers to just this circumstance: early in the tale Fredrik protests the principles of constitutional monarchy using just that expression. He does not want to become a man of straw, a king with no power, a man of no substance:

-- .... Jag vill inte bli stråmannen  
eller vad ni kallar det för, jag har inte  
lust att vara under mina undersåtar, ty vad  
är jag då?<sup>188</sup>

A political man of straw is exactly what Fredrik becomes once he consents (unwittingly: he has not read the papers before signing them) to the abrogation of his powers. But he is a man of straw in another sense too. His marriage to Ulrika Eleanora is childless, so his having achieved the hereditary position of king is a hollow victory: he will not become the founder of a dynasty. This impotence in respect to posterity is something of which he is sadly aware; it is one reason he wants to maintain at least his political power:

-- ... när jag dör lämnar jag intet  
efter mig, ej ens minnet av en stor gärning,  
då mitt åtliggande har varit att ingenting  
göra.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>188</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 412 (Ch. I):

".... I have no wish to be a man of straw, or whatever you call it; I have no desire to be subject to my subjects, for what would I be then? ...."

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 415 (Ch. II):

"... when I die I leave nothing after me, not even the memory of a great deed, if my function has been to do nothing."



The King's principal political opponent is Count Arvid Horn (1664-1742). A general under Karl XII, Horn became Sweden's leading politician during the two decades following that king's death. Leader of the forces seeking to limit the powers of the King, he nevertheless manages to insinuate himself into the confidence of the Queen (whom, as we have seen, Strindberg considered none too bright), and she unwittingly provides him with information he can use against her husband. Reprehensible tactics, perhaps, but in a good cause! Strindberg leaves no doubt about which side of the dispute has his sympathy, sending a signal to his readers through the attitudes his characters display towards dogs, as in "Tschandala". Horn emerges clearly as the guardian of civilization. The Queen is talking with her friend and confidante, Ermentia Düben:

-- ... det är våra känslor som leda oss rätt, och utan känslor är människan blott ... ett okänsligt djur -- nej icke det, ty min lilla Fidèle saknar icke känslor....

-- Ack ja, ifogade fröken Düben, djuren ha mycket mera både förstånd och känsla än människan.

-- Ack ja! det ha de visst det, och Fidèle, kan du tänka dig, vet precis när det kommer en vän eller en fiende. Greve Horn, den springer han rätt i knä på bara han sätter sig, och det ändå fast greven inte tål hundar.<sup>190</sup>

<sup>190</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 424-25 (Ch. III):

"... it's our feelings which lead us along the right path, and without feelings, man is but ... an insensate animal no, that isn't fair, for my little Fidèle doesn't lack feelings...."

"Oh dear me" added Miss Düben "and the

In the immortal words of W.C. Fields, "Any man who hates ... dogs can't be all bad!" And, Strindberg might add, anyone who dotes on dogs as Ulrika Eleanora does (to the point of relying on their judgement of character), must have something missing! Note also how closely Miss Düben's speech parallels the sentiments of Jensen in "Tschandala"!

Shortly after this exchange, Strindberg indicates that Horn is no friend to the Queen and her family: Fidèle, like Fredrik (upon whom the Queen also dotes), is motivated entirely by self-interest:

Fidèle avklippte den trassliga ordhärvan med ett sakta bjäbb, som kunde betyda att han var sann vän med vem som helst, bara han fick en bit kandisocker.<sup>191</sup>

Perhaps this is also a reflection on the fickleness of the political loyalties of the populace!

Curiously, Fredrik identifies himself with dogs at the end of his protest against measures to limit his

—  
have much more of both understanding and feeling than people."

"Dear me, yes! they certainly have. Fidèle, can you imagine, knows exactly whether a visitor is a friend or an enemy. He jumps right up on Count Horn's knee just as soon as he sits down, in spite of the fact that the count can't stand dogs."

<sup>191</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 425:

Fidèle cut off the tangled skein of the conversation with a gentle yelp, which could have meant that he was a true friend of anyone at all, so long as he got a bit of sugar-candy.

authority, through use of a Swedish idiom (from a man who spoke no Swedish!); the speech also introduces the symbol of the scapegoat into the story:

-- .... Tror ni att jag ... har lust att sitta och se på huru riksens regerande ständer regera åt fanders, under det jag skall bära hundhuvudet?<sup>192</sup>

The role of scapegoat is precisely the function the King's political opponents have in mind for him. After the royal powers have been abrogated, Count Carl Gyllenborg (1679-1746), the Chancellor, reveals that Fredrik has also signed a paper (also without reading it) promising to renounce his mistress, Hedvig Taube, and their child. When Fredrik offers to relinquish the crown instead, he upsets the applecart: it is desirable that the King be a man of straw, but that does not mean that he is not needed; as he himself has foreseen, his function is to be a scapegoat for the government, and that is a necessary function:

Greve Gyllenborg syntes ett ögonblick slagen, ty, oaktat allt, var konungen en högst nödvändig person ... som syndabock åt

<sup>192</sup> Skrifter, VI, 412:

".... Do you think I ... would enjoy sitting and watching how the governing estates of the realm govern, damn it, while serving as a scapegoat [literally, while I wear the dog's head]?

de stridande partierna....<sup>193</sup>

The man of straw wins that round: a compromise is reached whereby he is allowed to marry Hedvig Taube morganatically after the death of Ulrika Eleanora in 1641. But he remains a man of straw: although he has at last proved himself capable of fathering children, the issue of the marriage are excluded from the succession. The only thing the King will be able to pass on to his descendants, it is ironically suggested, is the rubber stamp of his signature, symbol of his status as a man of straw!

Fredrik finds fulfillment in his role as pater familias: as a private person he can leave a legacy of love and harmony to his family, even if he can make no mark as a public figure. From the beginning of the story he has been experiencing a mid-life crisis:

Arvfursten Fredrik var vid denna tid en man i bästa år, mellan fyrtio och femtio då ungdomens sådd skulle stå mogen till skörd.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>193</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 434 (Ch. III):

Count Gyllenborg seemed beaten for a moment for, in spite of everything, the King was a highly necessary person ... as a scapegoat for the contending political parties....

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 410 (Ch. I):

Crown prince [of Hesse-Kassel] Fredrik was at this time a man in his best years: between forty and fifty, when the seed sown in youth should stand ripe for the harvest.

Strindberg was in his early forties when he wrote this.

Despite this, he feels that so far in his life he has accomplished nothing, and the prospect of constitutional monarchy bodes ill for future accomplishment. For these reasons he is beginning to feel like an old man, despite Strindberg's statement that he is in his prime. He expresses this sentiment using the symbolism of the seasons: "Jag kommer alltid till hösttänkar när det våras!"<sup>195</sup> and "Jag tänkte på att mitt livs höst står för dörren...."<sup>196</sup> In cyclical symbolism, autumn is the time of the old man and the crone. Significantly, he expresses these thoughts in February: winter is the time of the disappeared hero, reflecting his insignificance at this period of his life. Shortly afterwards, he meets Hedvig Taube, and their relationship begins in the spring, with its associations of renewed life and energy.

The summer of this new life is a period of peace and harmony both for the King and the government. Fredrik moves out of the palace and sets up house with his mistress and their child, leaving parliament to get on with the affairs of the nation in peace, without royal intervention. All seems to be going well for everybody concerned, except for the Queen, of course, and she is

<sup>195</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 415 (Ch. II): "I always have thoughts of autumn when spring is on the way!"

<sup>196</sup> *Idem.*: "I was thinking that the autumn of my life is knocking at the door...."

too closely associated with the policies of Karl XII to be popular. A tranquil summer indeed!

It does not remain tranquil for long: if summer is a time of peace and sunshine, it is also a time of thunderstorms and, as one of the wits in parliament remarks, "... fred kan icke vara beständigt, ty ju längre det varit klart väder, dess närmare är det till regn."<sup>197</sup> The storm approaches one summer day as the King and Broman, a court official and friend of the King and his "little family", have finished plucking mulberry leaves to feed the silk worms the King is raising (it is the period of *chinoiserie*). Broman feels that parliament is about to move against the King:

-- Här är åska i luften! sade [Broman].  
 -- Du tror det, Broman? Jag har också tyckt mig känna något sådant i luften.  
 -- Uppriktigt sagt så tror jag att åskan redan har börjat gå -- borta i kanslikollegium.<sup>198</sup>

When the chancellor arrives with a stack of papers for the king's signature, Fredrik resents the intrusion and does not relish reading through the documents. To

<sup>197</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 428 (Ch. IV): "... peace can never last, for the longer the weather has been clear, the closer we are to rain."

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 428 (Ch. 4):

"There's thunder in the air!" said [Broman].

"Do you think so, Broman? I also thought I felt something like that in the air."

"Quite frankly, I think the thunder has already begun to sound -- over in the chancellery."

gain a little time, he makes small talk about the weather, but Gyllenberg's response is knowingly ironic:

-- Det är visst åska i luften! sade [konungen]....

-- Jo, det är säkert det, svarade greven med ett elakt leende.<sup>199</sup>

The king signs the documents without further ado. When Gyllenberg informs him that he has just signed away significant portions of his power, including the right to be consulted in foreign affairs, and that he has further signed an agreement to renounce Hedvig Taube and their child, the storm finally erupts:

-- ... medgivandet är underskrivet.

-- Oläst ja!

-- Varför läste ni inte först?

I detsamma upplyste en blixtnad det i mörker fallna rummet, och gjorde ett avbrott i samtalet.<sup>200</sup>

And so Sweden became a constitutional monarchy. Fredrik is eventually allowed to keep his little family, but he is more than ever a man of straw: the one lasting contribution of his reign will be something to

<sup>199</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 433 (Ch. IV):

"There's thunder in the air, don't you think?" said [the king]....

"Yes, there certainly is," answered the count with a malicious smile.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 434 (Ch. IV):

"... you've signed the concession."

"Unread, yes!"

"Why didn't you read it first?"

Just then a flash of lightning lit up the room, which had grown dark, and interrupted the conversation.

which he was bitterly opposed and to which he gave his consent unwittingly and through indolence! Strindberg ends his story immediately after Ulrika Eleanora's death, as Gyllenborg, Horn, and Archbishop Benzelius decide that the king's morganatic marriage to Hedvig Taube may now be recognized:

Och därmed började ett nytt kapitel i den olycklige konungs historia, som kallas Friedrich, under vars regering svenska folket och landet hade det gott, utan att man ändock ville tillskriva konungen förtjänsten.<sup>201</sup>

The last story in *Svenska öden och äventyr*, "En kunglig revolution"<sup>202</sup> ("A Royal Revolution") deals with Gustav III (reigned 1771-92). The story was planned as early as 1883, but did not appear in its

<sup>201</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 442 (Ch. VI):

And therewith began a new chapter in the history of the unfortunate king known as Friedrich, during whose reign the Swedish people and the country had it good, although the King could take no credit for that.

Strindberg's reversion in this final paragraph to the German spelling of the king's name would seem to be as an indication that henceforth Fredrik played no more role in the national life of Sweden than any other citizen -- of Germany! There is a further irony: the German spelling was what the king used when he signed his name (Ohlmarks, 129)!

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 443-58.



present form until 1904; in the meantime, the history play *Gustav III* (1902) was published.

Gustav III was an eighteenth-century enlightened despot. Nephew to Frederick the Great, disciple of Voltaire and Rousseau, friend of poets, playwrights, and artists, Gustav worked diligently both to increase his own power (to the point where, by 1789, he had become almost an absolute monarch) and to establish humanitarian and popular institutions in Sweden: abolishing torture in 1772, establishing a discount bank in 1773, establishing free trade and state distilleries in 1775, etc. (Ohlmarks, 132). All of these measures made him very popular with the ordinary people and the merchant class, but extremely unpopular with the aristocracy, who suffered politically through the king's enhancement of his own position, and economically through his social reforms. Thoroughly grounded in the philosophical underpinnings of the French Revolution, Gustav saw himself as the champion of the Swedish people against the wealth, power, and property of the aristocracy. His method of accomplishing social reform was to wrench power from the aristocracy and concentrate it in himself, the guardian and protector of the people. In this way, he hoped to accomplish a social revolution (hence Strindberg's title) without bloodshed, and he was largely successful. Unfortunately, blood was shed: his own. On March 16, 1792, Gustav III was shot by Captain

Jacob Anckarström while attending a masquerade ball; he died thirteen days later. Anckarström was the tool of an aristocratic conspiracy formed of General (and Baron) Carl Fredrik Pechlin (1720-96) and others.

Gustav III's avocation was the theatre. Not only did he befriend poets and playwrights, but he wrote, directed, and performed in plays himself, and was both a patron and a builder of theatres. The famous Drottningholm slottsteater (Drottningholm Court Theatre) was built for him by his mother as a wedding present in 1766, and in 1773 (only two years after assuming the throne) he founded Stockholm's Kungliga teatern (The Royal Theatre).<sup>203</sup> Characteristically, when he received news of his father's death in 1771, he was attending a theatrical performance in Paris.

This passion has made Gustav III a favorite among playwrights: not only did Strindberg tell his story twice, but he is the subject of a play by the French playwright Scribe (Gustave III) and was the inspiration for Verdi's opera *Un Ballo in maschera* (the change of locale from Europe to Boston was a requirement of the Italian censors, who were not happy with an opera deal-

<sup>203</sup> Kungliga teatern is now more often called Operan (The Opera), to distinguish it from Kungliga dramatiska teatern (The Royal Dramatic Theatre), which is similarly generally known as Dramaten. Operan's present building dates only from 1898. Drottningholm slottsteatern, on the other hand, has been carefully restored to and maintained in its original state, except for the addition of electric lighting.

ing with regicide!). It is a passion which supplies the unifying symbol of Strindberg's story: the theatre.

"All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players," wrote Shakespeare. It is a sentiment with which Strindberg's Gustav III is in full accord: given the proviso that he gets the star rôle:

... nu stod i dörren den lilla, spensliga person, som ... hållit Sveriges öde i snart aderton år.... en diktare, som behandlade liv och leverne som teaterpjäs, själv uppträdande i alla roller; ... framför allt en komediant och en deklamator.<sup>204</sup>

His theatrical mannerisms only infuriate his opponents: it is bad enough to have him pursue policies against their interests; to have him do so dramatically, with style and flourish, attracting the attention and admiration of all, is to add insult to injury.

The doorway in which Gustav appears unexpectedly leads to a room in which the conspirators have been having a supposedly secret meeting. Anckarström has informed Pechlin (who arrived late, having met Gustav on his way there) that they plan to kill the king. Gustav has followed Pechlin to the meeting place and has presumably been listening to at least part of the

<sup>204</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 448-49:

... there, standing in the doorway, was the short and slender person who ... had held the fate of Sweden in his hands for almost eighteen years.... a poet, who treated life and living as plays, himself appearing in all the rôles; ... above all, an actor and a declaimer.

conversation, although it is not clear just how much he has heard. The stage is set, as it were, for Gustav's dramatic entry: before he appears, the conversation is phrased in theatrical terms. The following exchange is between Pechlin and Anckarström. Pechlin begins by expressing his disbelief at the impractical and unrealistic nature of the plan to kill the king:

-- Men detta är ju komedi!  
 -- Ja, vi ska spela komedi med den stör-  
 ste komediant, som suttit på tron ...  
 -- Bara inte han spelar tragedi med er!  
 .... Tänk, om han kommer hit! Han älskar dra-  
 matiska scener....<sup>205</sup>

When the King does make an appearance, the conspirators have been singing a revolutionary hymn to freedom. He appears in the doorway just as they have finished the third verse. The king confounds the group not only by his sudden appearance, but by himself reciting the next verse of the hymn. The irony is that both conspirators and conspired-against consider themselves true revolutionaries (the room in which the conspirators meet is decorated with symbols of the French Revolution). Both want freedom; the difference is in the considerations freedom from whom? for whom? and to do what? They are

<sup>205</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 448-49:

"But surely this is play-acting!"  
 "Yes, we're going to perform a play with  
 the greatest actor who has ever sat upon the  
 throne ..."  
 "So long as he doesn't perform a tragedy  
 with you! .... What if he comes here! He  
 loves dramatic scenes...."

the obstacle to the people's freedom, he to theirs. Not only is his continuation of their revolutionary hymn a dramatic flourish, which as an actor he relishes, but it is sincere! Note again the highly theatrical language in which Strindberg relates the confrontation:

Scenen han nu bevittnade slog an på honom; hans entré var väl förberedd; han hade själv givit repliken och var nu inne i rollen. En banal hälsning skulle ha förstört akten, och därför kastade han sig genast in i ämnet, som var Thorild, vilken författare han en gång beundrat, lärt av och uppmuntrat.

Fortsättande versen, deklamerade han:

-- ....

Det är ett fel i versen, men det gör ingenting. Och så minns jag inte mer!<sup>206</sup>

<sup>206</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 449:

The scene upon which he now looked took his fancy; his entrance had been well prepared; he had himself given the cue, and he was now immersed in the rôle. A banal greeting would have spoiled the act, and therefore he threw himself immediately into the text, which was Thorild [Thomas Thorild, 1759-1808, disciple of Rousseau and author of the poem the conspirators have been singing], an author he had once admired, learned from, and encouraged.

"The following verse," he declaimed:

[he recites the verse]

"There's a mistake in the poetry, but no matter. And that's all I remember!"

The verse Gustav recites contains a reference to Engelbrekt (c. 1400-36), a popular Swedish leader in the struggles for freedom against Erik of Pomerania. As Regent of Sweden for most of the year 1435, he can be seen as a precedent for a royal revolutionary!

The King then defuses a potentially explosive situation by performing magic tricks for the assembled company and dazzling them with his light banter and sparkling wit, all the time leaving them guessing about how much of their conversation he has overheard. He then notices Anckarström in the company (now his audience), and becomes unsettled. The two are personal enemies, for reasons unknown even to the other conspirators. On seeing him, the King experiences a familiar Strindberg symptom, difficulty in breathing, and has an urge to flee the room (as if forewarned of his death). But an actor cannot just walk off the stage for no apparent reason; he needs an exit line. Pechlin sees the situation, knows it is dangerous, and generously changes the subject: they talk about recent events in France, and this gives the king time to compose his wits and prepare his exit, while at the same time driving home that his ends are identical to those of the French Revolution: to liberate the people through crushing the aristocracy. His exit is superb, so dazzling in its sheer theatricality that even this assembly of his enemies breaks out in applause. Throughout his political discourse on the true nature of revolution, he has been preparing: drawing on one glove and raising a glass of brandy in the other as if to propose a toast. After a political exposition, Gustav proposes his toast, but in a very unusual and dramatic manner; he has regained control of the situation:

Därför, mina vänner, tänder jag detta dryckesoffer i härden, på den heliga elden, i detta samma hus där ... Göran Persson levat och lidit som sin monarks rådgivare! Göran Persson kämpade mot adeln vid sin folkkäre suveräns sida ... Erik XIV:s, bondekonungens! (Här slog han glasets innehåll på elden, så att det fräste i lågorna; och därmed hade han fått anledning att resa sig från stolen och draga på den andra handsken.)

-- Och nu, mina herrar, mina vänner (han drog sig baklänges mot dörren efter balettsättet på operan), inbjuder jag er till morgondagens möte på rikssalen ... (här gjorde trollkarlen en volt med kortleken och trolade bort hela situationens allvarliga innebörd med en fransk sortie-replik, som måste framkalla ett leende och en applåd), såvida inte general Pechlin genom oförsiktigt beteende låter arrestera sig som vanligt!

Han skrapade med foten, avskedande sällskapet med en handgest, som begärde applåd; och han var lyckligt ute ur rummet, då verkligen applåden brann av, mest åt det utmärkta spelet och den sublimt cyniska humorn.

För att njuta triumfen, steg konungen igen i dörröppningen, bugande sig på skådespelarsätt med handen på hjärtat, men med ett sataniskt leende i ögonen, som alldeles tydligt sade ut: Er gås biter inte min räv! Spela komedi med mig, får vi se! (Och han försvann.)<sup>207</sup>

<sup>207</sup> Skrifter, VI, 450-51:

"And so, my friends, I ignite this drink-offering in the hearth, in the holy fire, in that same house where ... Göran Persson lived and suffered as advisor to his enlightened monarch! Göran Persson fought against the nobility at the side of his sovereign, whom the people loved ... Erik XIV, the peasant-king!" (Here he threw the contents of the glass upon the fire, making it sizzle in the flames; and therewith he had found an opportunity to rise from his chair and draw on the other glove.)

"And now, gentlemen, my friends (he moved backwards towards the door, in the fashion of ballet dancers at the opera), I invite you to tomorrow's meeting in the Chamber of State ..." (here the conjurer scattered the deck of cards and made the serious content of the whole situation vanish with a

The short story writer and the dramatist are very close here (to the point of including stage directions in narrative prose!); the mixing of genres is singularly appropriate to the subject matter!

But Gustav III is not all glitter and style. Later, when he returns to Drottningholm,<sup>208</sup> we learn that he is afraid of the dark. This is symbolic of his fear of death, the darkness representing an unknown or uncontrollable danger. He deals with this fear in a characteristic manner: by disguising his bedroom as a stage! As long as he has the eyes of the public upon him, he believes, nothing can happen to him. No doubt he appreciated the irony of his end: the fatal shot is fired at a very public occasion, and in a theatre!

---

French exit line, which could not but draw forth a smile and applause), "provided General Pechlin doesn't get himself arrested for unseemly conduct, as usual!"

He drew his foot along the floor, took leave of the company with a hand-gesture which sought applause; and he was successfully out of the room when the applause actually broke out, mostly for the remarkable performance and the sublimely cynical humour.

To savour his triumph, the king reappeared in the doorway, bowing in the style of actors, with a hand on his heart, but with a satanic glimmer in his eyes, which said clearly and plainly, "Your goose can't bite my fox [i.e., compared to me you are all amateurs]! You see what happens when you try play-acting with me!" (And he disappeared.)

<sup>208</sup> Like the present Swedish monarch, he preferred the spaciousness and rural setting of Drottningholm Palace to the Royal Palace in Stockholm, and made the former his home.



The shooting and death of the King are not included in the story: Strindberg's readers all know what happened to Gustav III anyway. His death came only a year before that of Louis XVI, an event he seems to foresee after receiving news that Louis has fled Paris and the French Revolution has begun. The use of theatrical reference links Louis' destiny to his own:

-- .... Schröderheim har nog depescher från Paris ... och det skall bli roligt att se min kusin Ludvig spela sin komedi med det suveräna folket. Haha!<sup>209</sup>

Gustav is by now pretty sure that the tide is turning against him, and that his own future is uncertain. But he scorns the advice of his favourite, Gustaf Armfelt, to conduct himself more cautiously. Strindberg ends his story with the rejection of this advice; Gustav's gesture is, of course, theatrical:

Han svängde sig om på sitt vanliga sätt, en gest som kunde betyda, att han vände ryggen åt alltsammans, eller att han med piruett dansade vidare över stenar och törnen.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>209</sup> *Skrifter*, VI, 458:

"Schröderheim is sure to have dispatches from Paris ... and it will be fun to see how my cousin Louis plays out his comedy with the sovereign people. Haha!"

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 428:

He swung himself around in his usual manner, a gesture which could mean that he turned his back on the whole business or that, with a pirouette, he was continuing his dance over stones and thorns.

The show must go on! he seems to be saying; Gustav III dances towards his destiny.

## Chapter 17

*Dikter på vers och prosa*

Poetry was an art form Strindberg held in contempt, principally because by his time Swedish poetry had become highly conventionalized in language, form, and content, and elitist both in its audience and its practitioners. It was the literary form farthest divorced from reality, and therefore least suited to the kinds of things Strindberg felt he had to say. His contempt is expressed, ironically enough, in the preface to his first collection of poems, *Dikter på vers och prosa*<sup>1</sup> (*Poems in Verse and Prose*, 1883): "... jag anser versformen slå tanken i onödiga fjättrar, vilka en nyare tid skall bortlägga."<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, Strindberg considered himself (with justification) a harbinger of that "nyare tid"! Nevertheless, he was himself drawn to the writing of verse throughout most of his life, and his three collections of poems -- *Dikter*, *Sömngångarnätter* (*Sleepwalking Nights*, 1884 and 1889), and *Ordalek och småkonst* (*Wordplay and Small Art*, 1905) -- contributed to, invigorated, and helped reform Swedish poetry.

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 5-85.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7: "... I believe the poetic form binds the thoughts in unnecessary constraints, which a newer age will cast aside."

*Dikter* contains four groups of poems, from three periods in Strindberg's life. The first two groups, "Sårfeber" ("Surgical Fever") and "Högsommar" ("High Summer"), contain poems written mainly in 1882-83; the third group, "Stormar" ("Storms"), dates from the mid-1870's; and the final group, "Ungdom och ideal" ("Youth and Ideals"), from the period 1869-72. As might be expected of poems written over a period of almost fifteen highly eventful years, they form a heterogeneous collection. As Spens observes (72), this heterogeneity in itself gives a valuable insight into the mind and art of Strindberg:

... där finns ... spänningar och motstridiga tendenser som sammanhänger med det samman-satta i Strindbergs eget väsen: pendlingen mellan romantik och realism, mellan satir och idyll och mellan våldsam känsloutlevelse och rofylld kontemplation.<sup>3</sup>

The first group of poems, "Sårfeber," is in the satirical vein. These are the poems which drew most notice when *Dikter* was first published, not so much for their poetic innovations (which were really remarkable), as for the often violent attacks on easily identified figures of the literary establishment of the

... there are ... tensions and conflicting tendencies, which form part of Strindberg's own complicated character: wavering between romanticism and realism, between satire and idyll, and between the violent expression of emotion and peaceful contemplation.

day. This is not the place for detailed analysis of Strindberg's poetry; as much as possible we will confine ourselves to his use of symbolism in the poems, concentrating particularly on those aspects which are paralleled or reflected in the main body of his work.

"Sårfeber" opens with a poem called "Biografiskt"<sup>4</sup> ("Biographical"). It treats of a man who experiences a long series of set-backs and disappointments in life; whatever he sets his hand to either lands him in difficulty with the authorities or does him physical harm. It is a remarkable poem. The reader can easily find many parallels between Strindberg's experiences and those of his poetic persona. But in fact, most of the events in Strindberg's life which seem referred to here had not yet occurred when the poem was written: he had not yet been brought before the law accused of blasphemy, left Sweden to live on the continent, or become the champion of the Swedish working classes in Strindbergsfejden (The Strindberg Controversy), which occupied the last two or three years of his life. By the early 1880's, however, he had known many set-backs and disappointments, and had certainly had as many occupations as the persona of his poem. The occupation into which he settles, that of a soldier, is indicative of the kind of writer Strindberg considers himself to

<sup>4</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 9-14.

be: the untiring and unconquerable enemy of cant, hypocrisy, and worn-out convention!

In 1882 the first of Strindberg's pilgrimage dramas, *Lycko-Pers resa*, appeared. He was to return to the form many times in the years ahead, right up to his last play, *Stora landsvägen* (1909): the metaphor of life as a journey through strange and often hostile territories exercised a continual fascination for him. It is interesting, therefore, to see in this poem another very early occurrence of the pilgrimage symbol, combined with a possible allusion to the Wandering Jew:

Så vandrar jag kring världen  
att söka äventyr,  
att glömma och att glömmas  
och bota min blessyr.<sup>5</sup>

As the years go by, scar tissue forms over the wounds and he finds peace and tranquillity. But he is restless: this is not the life of action he seeks. A stanza expressing his discontent with a life of inaction echoes *Herr Bengts hustru* (1882), in which the heroine finds herself increasingly pulled down to earth, while her spirit longs to soar. Two of the symbols used in that play to represent the stultifying existence which is hemming her in are the flowers of

<sup>5</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 10:

So round the world I wander,  
Adventure as my lure,  
To forget and be forgotten  
And all my wounds to cure.

the bog-myrtle which, with their overpowering smell, surround the mire in which the Father Confessor envisions her as sinking, and the webs of giant spiders which hem her in in one of her own dreams. Here they appear again:

Där porsen ensam vakar  
och sprutar sin morfin  
tills hela kärret snarkar  
bak spindlars grå gardin.<sup>6</sup>

The poem's conclusion, that defeat is a necessary part of life and makes one determined to keep struggling, thereby ensuring ultimate victory, is Strindberg's statement of artistic faith: he will overcome the set-backs he has experienced, persevere in the course he has chosen, and eventually triumph! A very optimistic variation on the purification-through-suffering theme which is central to Strindberg's work!

The next poem, "Urarva"<sup>7</sup> ("Waiver") is Strindberg's dissociation from the traditions and conventions (literary and otherwise) of the past. He puts himself in the position of an heir who renounces all claims on the estate of his forebears: everything which was of any value in the past, they used up, and now there is

<sup>6</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 10:

Bog-myrtle only watches  
And sends forth its morphine  
Till all the marsh is snoring  
Behind grey spider-screen.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

nothing left that he wants to inherit from them. Firmly directing this poem is another notion, deriving from the Ten Commandments (particularly Exodus 20:5), which played a central rôle in all of Strindberg's works: that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. The main thing the past has to pass on, besides unfulfilled promises and lies, is a heap of unexpiated sins, for which we must suffer! Probably the most graphic realization of the principle of children suffering for their fathers' mistakes is hereditary syphilis, and Strindberg makes this a symbol of his outrage and rebellion against the past, at the same time flouting the poetic convention of his day that poetry must deal with noble and pure subjects in elevated and refined language:

Man ej är glad när andras skuld  
man nu skall sitta och betala;  
I söpen Er till ett försvarligt hull  
och därför äro Era barn så smala.

Vi ärvde Era skulder och Er syfilis  
och Era löften ifrån fyrti-talet,  
sen väl I slukat varje Leckerbiss,  
I lämnaden åt oss att gnaga idealet.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 14:

There is no joy when others' debts  
Must now be paid by those who follow;  
You drank yourselves to fair but empty shells  
And that is why your children are so hollow.

You left us all your debts and syphilis  
And promises you made back in your youth;  
Since you've wolfed down each Leckerbiss,\*  
We've nothing left to eat but your ideas of  
truth.



The biblical allusion comes in the final stanza, which ends a bitter poem on a note of fatal pessimism:

Urarva skulle vi oss gjort,  
men äpplet faller icke långt från trädet,  
och sådant arv, det ärvs på barnen ner  
till tredje och till fjärde ledet.<sup>9</sup>

The next poem of note is "Lokes smädelser"<sup>10</sup> ("The Defamations of Loki"). It is a seething tirade against the Swedish literary establishment and, like the poems we have already seen, expresses Strindberg's determination eventually to triumph over his literary enemies. The poem draws its symbolism from Norse mythology, where Loki was one of the most important of the minor gods. A curious mixture of good and evil, he was a close associate of the major gods, and welcomed by them in Asgård, the dwelling of the gods. But he often scandalized and shocked them with his behaviour, and was noted for his frequent highly defamatory accusations of the gods and their wives. He was always forgiven his eccentricities, however, until he slew the god Balder.

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\* Strindberg uses the German word *Leckerbiss(en)* = *läckerbit* (Swedish) = tasty morsel.

<sup>9</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 15:

Our rights as heirs should have been waived,  
But the apple always falls close to the tree,  
And such estates are passed down to the heirs  
Of heirs, and children yet to be.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-20.

As punishment for this, he was bound to a rock, there to remain until Ragnarök, the destruction of the gods and of the world). He is the father of the two monsters Fenrir (the wolf), and Midgårdsormen (the World Serpent), and, freed from his bonds, himself pilots the ship which carries the giants to their last battle with the gods.<sup>11</sup>

Strindberg's *Det nya riket* had appeared in September, 1882, and won him many new enemies. He was finding himself increasingly fettered by almost universal opposition, which eventually resulted in his moving to France in September, 1883. "Lokes smädelser" was written in the midst of this furor. Strindberg himself assumes the voice of Loki, already bound by his enemies, the great gods, but still railing against them with his unfettered tongue:

Tidens gudar, som jag smädat,  
smäda vill jag än en gång!  
Tidens gudar, som jag hädat,  
häda vill jag i en sång!

I han makten, jag har ordet,  
jag har ordet i min makt;  
tretton ären I vid bordet;  
det betyder, har man sagt,  
dödsfall, ofall, onda tider:  
gudar, tagen Er i akt,  
ty vad rätt nu tiden lider:

<sup>11</sup> Summarized from Davidson, 176-82 et passim.

gudar, varen på Er vakt!<sup>12</sup>

Loki goes on to say that his bonds are a punishment for having revealed the secrets and exposed the weaknesses of the gods. They have taken revenge on his lack of respect for them; it is therefore ironic that they now accuse him of seeking revenge; his exposure of their faults has, in fact, been nothing but the punishment they deserve:

När den svage straffar styrkan,  
då nämns straffet hämnd;  
jag ej våldet gav min dyrkan,

<sup>12</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 16:

Gods of the times, whom I've defiled,  
I'll defile you one more time!  
Gods of the times, whom I've reviled,  
I'll revile you now in rhyme!

You have power, words are mine,  
I have words at my behest;  
You are thirteen when you dine;\*  
And that means, as all attest,  
Bad times, ill luck, end of the line:  
Gods, don't let your caution rest  
When a new dish is served by time:  
Gods, your turn is coming next!

\* There were thirteen major Norse gods, including Odin (Davidson, 28); it would be nice if there were also thirteen members of the Swedish Academy, but their number is, in fact, eighteen. The members of the Academy are nevertheless included among Strindberg's intended victims here.

hämnd min bragd är därför nämnd.<sup>13</sup>

Loki then reviews all of his defamations of the gods and his acts of desecration, up to the time of his enchainment, and he looks forward to the time which is fast approaching, when the gods will be unseated and destroyed. According to the Ragnarök myth, even though the regions of the gods and man will be destroyed, earth will rise again from the sea, and will be repopulated by two living creatures who have taken shelter from the general destruction in the World Tree (Davidson, 38). Strindberg interprets this to mean that only the evil will be destroyed, and that which is worth preserving will survive:

Då går branden över världen,  
bränner allt som brännas bör,  
skedar guld det ifrån flärden,  
men vad leva skall, ej dör.<sup>14</sup>

The new race which repeoples the world will be free from the tyranny of the old gods, and wander "i evigt gröna lund."<sup>15</sup> In the final three stanzas, Loki

<sup>13</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 17:

When the weak chastises force,  
He's said to act from spite;  
I'm called vindictive now, of course,  
For I would not bow to might.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:

When fire turns the world to ash,  
Setting what should be burnt ablaze,  
Separating gold from trash,  
What should survive, it will not raze.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20: "in eternally green groves."

identifies himself as a worshipper of the One God, and states that while he will not regret the passing of the pagan gods, he will not revel in their defeat either: that false gods should succumb to the truth is inevitable. The poem as a whole prefigures *Stora landsvägen*, where Strindberg once again characterizes his literary enemies as idols (false gods); its ending is echoed there by the Hunter's presenting himself as a defender of the One True God against idolatry. Since, when the poem was written, Strindberg had not yet undergone the spiritual reorientation of the *Inferno* crisis, it is clear that he is here using God as a symbol for truth in general, and artistic truth in particular:

Men vid Era svarta bårar,  
när I slutat Edert lopp,  
Loke äger inga tårar,  
blott sitt evigt unga hopp.

Sina smädelser han sände,  
störde Eder gudaro,  
ty han trodde på den Ende,  
ej på Er han kunde tro.

Över Era graver ljudar  
fridfullt som ifrån en vän:  
här I vilen, Tidens Gudar;  
Evighetens lever än!<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 20:

But at the sight of your black biers,  
When at last your course is run,  
Loki finds he has no tears,  
Only hope, forever young.

He committed desecration,  
Disturbed the peace enjoyed by gods,  
To give the One his adoration:  
With faith in you, that was at odds.

On your graves he now inter-

"Esplanadsystemet"<sup>17</sup> ("The Esplanade System") is another justification of Strindberg's attempts to tear down the literary establishment. A group of young people is demolishing a row of old shacks. A old man who passes by seems saddened by the destruction, especially when he learns that, instead of being built up again with a new housing development, the area is to become an esplanade. Strindberg's moral is in the last stanza: he tears down not to replace what he destroys with something newer but essentially the same, but rather to let in a little air and light:

-- "Ha! Tidens sed: att riva hus!  
Men bygga upp? -- Det är förskräckligt!"  
-- "Här rivs för att få luft och ljus;  
är kanske inte det tillräckligt?"<sup>18</sup>

One of the charges brought against Strindberg was that the means he used against his enemies (direct personal attack, bitter vituperation, and ridicule) were coarse and raw, not at all in good taste. They could use subtler means; their influence on the press, the publishers, and theatre managements was considerable.

Peacefully, as from a friend:  
"Here, gods of the times, lie your bones;  
The One lives on without an end!"

<sup>17</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 24:

-- "Ha! Nowadays they just undo!  
But build again? -- That is outrageous!"  
-- "Now air and sunlight can get through;  
Isn't that more advantageous?"

He had to use what was at his disposal. This is the point he makes in the short poem "Taga rävar"<sup>19</sup> ("Dealing with Foxes"). The poem is given here in its entirety, as a short but effective example of how well Strindberg's poems work both on their literal and their symbolic levels:

Att taga rävar är en särskild konst  
om icke just ibland de sköna.  
Att jaga dem för hund på öppen mark  
för fattigman lär ej sig löna,  
ty därtill fordras dyra don  
förutom det att räven har det laget  
att icke gå på öppen mark,  
ty helst bak busken gör han slaget.

Nåväl, man tar en gammal åtel --  
en åtel är ett självdött djur --  
tillräckligt ruttet för en Mickel,  
som, fastän han är stor filur,  
likväl har sinne för den höga smaken.  
I åteln lägger man stryknin,  
ett gift som fås på apoteken  
och brukas ock i medecin.

Sen runt omkring man kastar brockar --  
en brock är en bit bröd med flott --  
den dödar ej, den bara lockar  
och är med åteln i komplott.

Nåväl, vår Mickel kommer, äter;  
ger strax ett skri, ett fasligt ett,  
gör skutt i luften, väter  
och lämnar livet under stank.

\*

Så går det till att ludra räv,  
en vidrig sak att se och höra,  
men när det icke finnes andra sätt

<sup>19</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 24-25.

vad skall i Herrans namn man göra?<sup>20</sup>

When Strindberg is the quarry, his enemies pursue him with all the trappings of the formal fox-hunt; they have money and power, but he often eludes them by not keeping to the open ground. When he hunts them, he uses more modest but surer means: his books are the carrion, his exposés the strychnine, and the publicity around his work the sops that ensure his quarry takes the

20

To deal with foxes takes a special art  
When one's not of the chosen few.  
Hunting with foxhounds on the open ground  
For the poor folk will just not do:  
The trappings needed cost too much;  
Besides, the fox is far too limber:  
Not keeping to the open ground,  
He'd rather fight where there is timber.

Well then, one takes an aged carrion  
(An animal that just dropped dead)  
That's gamey enough for our Reynard,  
Who, though he has a cunning head,  
Has also a taste for high cuisine.  
The carrion with strychnine sew,  
(It's sold by any pharmacist  
And is used in medicine also).

Then scatter sops around the site  
(Pieces of bread well soaked with fat),  
They do not kill, they just invite  
Him to the carrion, which does that.

When Reynard comes, he eats the baits;  
Just once, but dreadfully, he cries,  
Leaps in the air, and urinates,  
And in the stench he dies.

\*

And that is how a fox is slain,  
A loathsome sight to be around,  
But what can one do in God's name  
When other means cannot be found?



bait! The death-throes are not a pretty sight, but he has accomplished what he set out to do, and with the only means at his disposal!

In "Folkupplagan"<sup>21</sup> ("The People's Arsenal"), Strindberg celebrates Nobel's invention of dynamite some twenty years earlier. It is a very ironic poem: Strindberg was often called an anarchist by his enemies, and here he revels in the accusation, which happened to fit in with his conception of himself at the time. The poem goes well with others in the section, particularly "Esplanadsystemet" (he is accused of destroying without putting anything in the place of what he has torn down, i.e., anarchy), and "Taga räven": when kings want to kill people, he says here, they use armies and cannons; when the people want to kill a king they use the less expensive, more accessible, and equally effective means of dynamite! Nobel, then, is a true benefactor of the people! Little did Strindberg realize that the name of Nobel was to become associated almost twenty years later with his literary foes (the first Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded by the Swedish Academy, was in 1901)!

The poem contains one image of interest here: a startling linking of the colour white and snow with

<sup>21</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 29-30.

both innocence and death: "Så vit som snö är dynamiten,  
/ `som oskuld och som arsenik!'"<sup>22</sup>

The poems contained in the next section, "Högsommar," date from the same period in Strindberg's life, but are quite different from the bitter satires of "Sårfeber." These are songs celebrating Stockholm's archipelago, and particularly Strindberg's favorite summer retreat, the island of Kymmendö; they also deal with Strindberg's first marriage during a period when it was still a peaceful, harmonious, and happy association (Strindberg and Siri von Essen had married at the end of 1877). These idyllic poems are among the best-known that Strindberg wrote, and include the one example of a prose poem promised by the collection's title.

This is "Solrök" ("Heat Haze")<sup>23</sup>, two passages of evocative and closely-observed prose separated (or perhaps connected is a better term) by a short poem on butterflies, written in 1880. The second prose passage describes how, after being confined indoors by a week of rain, the poem's central figure visits a small island that has been beckoning to him through his window. When he arrives, he is at first captivated by the lushness of what he takes to be unspoiled nature, but

<sup>22</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 30: "As white as snow is dynamite: / `Like innocence and arsenic!'"

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-46. The Swedish word is much more "poetic" than its English equivalent: it is, literally, sun-smoke!

he soon notices signs that even this small island has been visited and exploited by man, and this saddens him. His feeling that man corrupts nature is expressed through a natural symbol, which links itself in his mind with the doctrine of Original Sin:

... där växer en brännässla, mänskan har varit här; det kan icke slå fel, ty nässlan är mänskans parasit, som icke vågar sig ut i skogens ensamhet eller i ängens villande marker; nässlan är en ohyra, som föds av människan, som endast kan leva där människor finnas; den samlar allt damm och smuts den kan åtkomma på sina ludna klibbiga blad och den bränns när man rör den. En härlig avkomma född av synd.<sup>24</sup>

Saddened, disappointed, and disgusted by this and other signs of man's unfeeling inroads into the serenity and perfection of nature, he flees the scene, and is confronted with evidence that he too is a marauder:

Han flydde ifrån förödelsen och styrde sina steg ner till båten.

Fotspår i sanden! Han bannade och ville fly, men då märkte han att han bannat sig själv ... och han trampade igen sina spår, ty

<sup>24</sup> Skriffter, XIII, 45:

... a stinging nettle grows there: man has been here. There can be no mistake, for the nettle is the parasite of man, not venturing out into the solitude of the forest or into the boundless domains of the meadow; the nettle is a vermin, nourished by man, which can only live where man is found; it collects all the dust and filth it can get hold of on its hairy, sticky leaves, and it stings when you touch it. A fine offspring, born of sin!

han kunde ju icke fly sig själv.<sup>25</sup>

This is an idyll, however, and it does not end on this note of despair: from the boat the wanderer catches sight of his wife's white dress and the blue canopy on his child's white carriage,<sup>26</sup> and he castigates himself for his temporary discontent "du som har fått allt vad du önskat, det bästa livet ger, vad bråkar du då för?!"<sup>27</sup>

The poem "Segling"<sup>28</sup> ("Sailing"), describes Strindberg's first sight of Siri von Essen, with her "fluttering blue veil". Another of these poems, "Ballad,"<sup>29</sup> first appeared in "Odlad frukt," the first story in *Svenska öden och äventyr*, where it is sung by the young hero at the working-class wedding he attends.

<sup>25</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 45:

He fled the devastation and directed his steps down to the boat.

Footprints in the sand! He cursed and wanted to flee, but then he noticed that he had cursed himself ... and he walked back over his own footprints, for he certainly could not flee himself.

<sup>26</sup> This baby carriage also appears in the fifth station of *Stora landsvägen*, where Strindberg telescopes memories of his last daughter, Anne-Marie (b. 1902, to Harriet Bosse), and his first, Karin (b. February, 1880).

<sup>27</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 46: "... you, who have been given everything you desired, the best life offers, what are you kicking up a fuss about now?!"

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

All of the poems in the group are delightful, but their forthright lyricism makes them ill-suited, on the whole, to a discussion of Strindberg's symbolism.

The third grouping, "Stormar," was written about a half-decade earlier than the first two, and in the arrangement of *Dikter* is a return to the more cynical mood of the opening section. In both style and attitude these poems were influenced by the German poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), but they are no slavish imitations: with what he has learned from Heine, Strindberg has produced something new, lively, and his own (Spens, 74). The poems of "Stormar" are, in fact, the best in the whole collection.<sup>30</sup>

"Stormar" opens with a long travel poem entitled "Landsflykt"<sup>31</sup> ("Exile"). It is a poetic description of the journey to France which Strindberg made in October, 1876: his first trip abroad, except for a visit to Copenhagen in 1869. The poem in is seven parts, paralleling his route from Stockholm to Paris via Kristiania (renamed Oslo in 1925). It is a very ironic, very amusing poem, gently self-mocking and somewhat less gently satirical of the people and places he encounters.

<sup>30</sup> I share this assessment (arrived at independently) with Spens (loc. cit.), but it is only fair to point out that Brandell (*Skrifter*, XIII, 441), along with the vast majority of Swedes, prefers the more tranquil "Högsommar" poems.

<sup>31</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 53-65.

Part V is notable for the picture it paints of England (a country which Strindberg visited only once, in June, 1893, with his second wife, Frida Uhl; he did not like it then, either): an accursed land, whose politics of empire scandalized him, a whited sepulchre (a allusion suggested by the white cliffs of Dover, seen from the ship), fair to behold, but full of corruption. And, despite all this, the birthplace of many of Strindberg's heroes, literary and other. The section opens with a prophetic formula:

Östersolen lyser på vita berg,  
och jag hörde en röst från söder som talade  
och sade:

Förbannelse!  
Förbannelse över dig, England,  
så kritvitlimmad utanpå  
som en vitmenad grav  
men inuti så svart,  
så sotigt svart  
som en stenkolspräm,  
ankrad mellan Nordsjön och Atlanten.  
Förbannelse över dig, grosshandlarö,  
och din minuthandlarpolitik!  
Förbannelse över lord Beaconsfield,  
som i den mänskliga kärlekens namn  
skötte sitt medlarekall  
mellan Asien och Europa  
som en veritabel provisionsresande!  
Förbannelse över din heliga kyrka  
och dina sanna kvinnor,  
dina sanna strumpstickande  
tevattens-kvinnor!  
Förbannelse över dina Tauchnitz-editions-romaner  
dina missionshus och frälsningarméer!  
Men jag svarade från norr och sade:  
Du sotiga vita Albion!  
Om än dina synder vore blodröda  
som dina rostbiffar,  
om ditt hjärta vore svart som en stenkol,  
jag, den mäktige och landsflyktige,  
jag tar ditt marina kritlager  
och strycker ett streck  
över ditt stora debet

på din stora svarta tavla;  
 icke därför att jag är duperad  
 av ditt förträffliga Pale Ale  
 och dina goda rakknivar;  
 jag förlåter dig  
 dina ostindiska synder  
 dina afrikanska brott  
 och dina irländska nidingsdåd;  
 jag förlåter dig, England,  
 icke för din skull,  
 men för er  
 Dickens, Darwin, Spencer och Mill!<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Skrifter, XIII, 61-62:

The eastern sun shines on the white rock,  
 and I heard a voice from the south, which  
 spoke and said:

"A curse!

A curse on you, England,  
 as chalk-white-limed\* without  
 as a whitewashed grave,  
 but inside as black,  
 as sooty-black,  
 as a coal barge,  
 anchored between the North Sea and the Atlan-  
 tic

A curse on you, greengrocer isle,  
 and on your retail-trade politics!  
 A curse on Lord Beaconsfield,  
 who in the name of human charity  
 exercised his calling as mediator  
 between Asia and Europe  
 like a veritable travelling salesman!  
 A curse on your holy church  
 and your honest women,  
 your honest stocking-knitting  
 tea-water women!

A curse on your Tauchnitz-Edition novels  
 your mission-houses and salvation armies!"  
 But I answered from the north and said:

"You sooty white Albion!

Even if your sins were as blood-red  
 as your roast beef,  
 if your heart were as black as your coal,  
 I, the mighty and the exiled,  
 I take your marine chalk deposit  
 and draw a stroke  
 through your great debt  
 on your great black board;  
 not because I am taken in  
 by your excellent Pale Ale  
 and your good razors;  
 I forgive you

The passage is also notable for its reliance on three of the four dominant colours in the Strindberg spectrum: white, black, and red. Only gold is missing: there is no perfection in England, unless it be Pale Ale (which is golden in colour)! Strindberg could have added the names of other Englishmen whom he admired, most notably Shakespeare, but he has confined himself to contemporaries of Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield: 1804-81). Darwin (1809-82) and Spencer (1820-1903) were still alive when the poem was written; Dickens (1812-70) and Mill (1806-73) had only recently died. Strindberg's admiration for Darwin (and presumably for Spencer, whose philosophy is an application of Darwinism) disappeared during the Inferno crisis, displaced by Swedenborgian mysticism. His later antipathy to Darwin and his disciples is expressed in the Tophet scene of *Stora landsvägen*.

—

your East Indian sins,  
 your African crimes,  
 and your Irish outrages;  
 I forgive you, England,  
 not for your own sake,  
 but for your  
 Dickens, Darwin, Spencer, and Mill!

\* Strindberg invented many of the Swedish adjectives used in these poems; I have tried to retain something of their flavour in my translations.



In Part VI, as the traveller anticipates his arrival in Paris, using the "unpoetic" image of the sewage discharged through the Seine into the sea, he implies that Paris too has sins to expiate, despite the fact that it is the cultural capital of Europe:

...  
 jag har sett dig, Seine,  
 där du kryper ut i kanalen  
 som en jätteål;  
 för att tvätta dina synder,  
 dina parisiska kloaksynder  
 i världshavet!  
 Jag har sett dig, Seine!  
 Nu vill jag se Paris --  
 och leva!<sup>33</sup>

If we are to believe the evidence of this poem, the young Strindberg did not think much of "... det korrespondent-besjungna / aktrisdyrkande, världsförbättrande / Paris"<sup>34</sup> either: he found it to stink of sauerkraut and ham, to resound with the din of street-cars, to be overcommercialized and dirty. He did all of the things proper to a young man visiting the centre of

<sup>33</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 63:

...  
 I have seen you, Seine,  
 where you creep out into the Channel  
 like a giant eel;  
 in order to cleanse your sins,  
 your Parisian-sewer sins,  
 in the world's sea!  
 I have seen you, Seine!  
 Now I want to see Paris  
 and live!

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 68: "... the newspaper-correspondent-celebrated, / actress-worshipping, world-amending / Paris."

civilization to round out his education, but he had to pretend to be devastated by the beauty of the Venus de Milo, he found the Théâtre Français<sup>35</sup> boring, and, in general, just went through the motions of enjoying himself; in fact, the only thing which seems to have impressed him was the site of the recently (1871) razed Tuileries, which, he says, stirred his republican zeal! He finds himself longing for Sweden, "det stolta öl- och-brännvinslandet / och dess europeiskt ryktbara / kakelugnar,"<sup>36</sup> despite its conservatism and its monarchy! This has a great deal to do with the fact that back in Sweden the newly-divorced Siri von Essen was waiting for him!

By far the most remarkable poem in the collection, especially for the striking originality of its imagery, is "Solnedgång på havet" ("Sunset at Sea"). It is a quietly reflective poem, pervaded with the sense of guilt and sorrow that haunted Strindberg for most of his life. The passage on the Seine in "Landsflykt," quoted above, uses the sea as a symbol of cleansing

<sup>35</sup> i.e., the Comédie-Française, but according to Lagerkranz (84) the performance Strindberg mentions, Mme Judic in the title rôle of *La belle Hélène*, was at the Variétés. It is hard to imagine that Strindberg would have visited the theatre only once on this trip; the poem no doubt telescopes several performances at different theatres.

<sup>36</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 64-65: "the proud beer-and-aquavit land, / and its celebrated-in-Europe / tiled stoves."

from guilt; the same symbol appears here, united, through the colour green (hope), to absinthe-induced oblivion, symbolic of forgetfulness. The vision of the homeland in the final stanza must surely be one of the most original in all of literature! The poem is quoted in its entirety:

Jag ligger på kabelgattet  
rökande "Fem blå bröder"  
och tänker på intet.

Havet är grönt,  
så dunkelt absintgrönt;  
det är bittert som chlormagnesium  
och saltare än chlornatrium;  
det är kyskt som jodkalium;  
och glömska, glömska  
av stora synder och stora sorger  
det ger endast havet,  
och absint!

O du gröna absinthav,  
o du stilla absintglömska,  
döva mina sinnen  
och låt mig somna i ro,  
som förr jag somnade  
över en artikel i  
Revue des deux Mondes!

Sverige ligger som en rök,  
som röken av en maduro-havanna,  
och solen sitter däröver  
som en halvsläckt cigarr,  
men runt kring horisonten  
stå brotten så röda  
som bengaliska eldar  
och lysa på eländet.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Skrifter, XIII, 67-68:

I lie atop the cable-tier  
smoking Five Blue Brothers,  
thinking of nothing.

The sea is green,  
so mysteriously absinthe-green;  
it is bitter, like magnesium chloride;  
and saltier than sodium chloride;\*  
it is chaotic, like potassium iodide.

The last word is deliciously ambiguous (does it apply to Sweden, to the gloomy picture created by the half-light, or to the poet's mood?), as is the picture of Sweden: smoke is insubstantial and extremely transient, being blown this way and that by every passing wind, but, on the other hand, this is the smoke of the very best cigar, and the poem's opening image of the poet, smoking, suggests that he appreciates such things!

"Indiansommar"<sup>38</sup> ("Indian Summer") is the most cynical of the poems in this section. It describes a sick man who steps out on his balcony to get a breath

and forgetfulness, forgetfulness  
of great sins and great sorrows,  
is given only by the sea  
and absinthe!

Oh, you green absinthe-sea,  
oh, you tranquil absinthe-forgetfulness,  
dull my senses  
and let me sleep in peace,  
as formerly I slept  
over an article in  
*Revue des deux mondes*!

Sweden lies like a trail of smoke,  
like the smoke of a maduro havanna,  
and the sun hovers over it  
like a half-expired cigar,  
but round about the horizon  
the breakers are as red  
as Bengal fires\*\*  
and illuminate the misery.

\* common table salt.

\*\* a type of firework.

<sup>38</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 68-69.

of fresh air and look upon the sea. We have the same linking of the sea and absinthe as in "Solnedgång på havet," but here the symbols are associated with death:

Svept i min blommiga filt  
lät jag oktersolen skina  
på mina gula kinder  
och på en flaska absint,  
grön som havet,  
grön som granriset  
på en snöig gata  
där ett liktåg gått fram.<sup>39</sup>

A butterfly alights on the flowered pattern of his blanket. This ought to be an uplifting, hopeful sign: the butterfly (*psyche* in Greek) is the age-old emblem of the soul. But it is a cynical poem: when the hour has passed, the butterfly is still there:

Han hade upfyllt sin bestämmelse  
och var död,  
den dumma djäveln!<sup>40</sup>

It is a grim little poem, but this inversion of a traditional symbol, forcing it, quite naturally (butter-

<sup>39</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 68:

Wrapped in my flowered blanket,  
I let the October sun shine  
on my yellow cheeks  
and on a bottle of absinthe,  
green as the sea,  
green as the spruce bough  
on a snowy street  
where a funeral procession has passed.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 69:

He had fulfilled his destiny  
and was dead,  
the stupid devil!

flies do die as winter approaches), to fit in with the poet's mood, is a master-stroke!

Of the poems grouped under the title "Ungdom och ideal, 1869-1872",<sup>41</sup> Strindberg says in his preface that he considers their interest to be chiefly autobiographical rather than literary, and that he has had them published himself because he lacked the patience to wait for his death, when such juvenilia are usually collected together and published. He is being more modest than necessary, probably anticipating and thus forestalling adverse reviews, but in general these poems do lack the force and vibrancy of the others in the collection. Biographically, he was right: the period during which they were written saw Strindberg's attempted suicide (1869), and the writing of his first play,<sup>42</sup> followed quickly by two others, both of which received early productions: "I Rom" (1870), and "Den fredlöse" (1871). Much of 1872 was spent in researching and writing the first version of *Mäster Olof*, which was rejected by the Royal Theatre<sup>43</sup> that fall as an "omoget stycke" ("immature piece") (Levander, 185).

<sup>41</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 71-85.

<sup>42</sup> *En namnsdagsgåva* (A Nameday Present), 1869; now lost (an indication of the wisdom Strindberg showed in not allowing the early poems to share the same fate).

<sup>43</sup> Kungliga teatern, i.e., the Opera.

Only one of these poems need concern us here, the longish piece, "Kärleksjukan"<sup>44</sup> ("Love-sickness"), which opens the section. In content it is the sort of poem any twenty-year old might write: the poet has fallen in love with a young lady who is visiting her family in his neighbourhood, but she loves another, and he is tormented. The form is highly original: unrhymed hexameter lines in stanzas of varying length. There is perhaps a hint of self-mockery here: the form is usually considered more suitable to heroic subject matter! While the symbolism is fairly conventional, there are nevertheless a few passages worth noting as early examples of symbols which Strindberg retained throughout his writing career.

One such example is the handling of cyclical symbolism in the first two stanzas. The poem is set in early May, which, in Stockholm, can often seem closer to winter than to summer. The promise of spring is thwarted by signs of winter and the poet is thrown into an autumn mood: a feeling that the bleakness of winter is approaching rather than retreating. The mood changes again with the arrival of the young lady, and once again the world is full of promise:

Tidigt en morgon i maj jag satt vid mitt  
fönster bedrövad,  
såg hur på blommorna små snöflingor föllo  
så tätt.

\* \* \* \* \*

Då blev i hjärtat det höst och jag höjde mot  
himlen min suckan:

"Herre, din vår till oss sänd -- visa ditt  
anlet igen!

Då upp i skyn bland de skingrande moln en  
lärka sig svingar,  
höjer sin klingande sång, sjunger om sol  
och om vår.

Och på en gång blir det liv i trädgård, i  
parken, på berget,  
uti mitt hjärta på nytt vaknade vårfröjd  
och hopp. --

Lärkan som kom, det var du, min förtrollande  
flicka,  
våren du förde till mig -- ack! det var  
kärlekens vår.

Söderifrån till den älskade kretsen av syskon  
du vände;  
glädjen du förde till dem -- smärtan blott  
gav du åt mig.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Skrifter, XIII, 71:

Early one morning in May I sat by my window  
distressed  
and watched the little flowers being covered  
by falling snowflakes,

\* \* \* \* \*

Then in my heart it was fall and I raised  
toward heaven my sigh:

"Lord, send your springtime to us show  
us your face once again!"

Then up in the sky midst the vanishing clouds  
a lark arises,  
lifts up his resounding song, singing of  
sunshine and spring.

And all at once there is life in the garden,  
the park, and the mountain,  
and in my heart the joy of spring and hope  
reawaken --

The lark that arrived was you, my enchanting  
young girl;

springtime you brought to me -- Oh! 'twas  
the spring of love.

You returned from the south to the cherished  
circle of brothers and sisters;  
you brought happiness to them -- to me you  
gave only pain.



The young lady is apparently a student, home for the summer from Lund. The tortures of unrequited love plague the poet all summer, until she returns to the south in the autumn: "Lärkan har flyttat sin kos; hösten har kommit igen."<sup>46</sup> And the love-sick poet is faced with another winter of desolation.

Meanwhile, during the summer, his passion has raged. He burns with the flames of love, the earthly fire which both burns and consumes:

Grymma, du tände en eld i mitt hjärta där  
friden nyss bodde;  
släck den! O, släck den helt snart, eljes  
av den jag förbränns!

\*

Ut på det stormande hav vill jag söka få  
svalka åt hjärtat,  
känslornas eld släcka ut, dränka i djupet  
min sorg.  
Skaka din vinge, du stormvind, och tysta med  
dånet min klagan,  
skumma, du bölja, mot sky, stänk på min  
brännheta kind!<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Skrifter, XIII, 73: "The lark has gone his way; autumn is with us again."

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 71:

Cruel one, you lit a fire in my heart, where  
once there dwelt peace;  
quench it! O, quench it right soon, before  
it consumes me!

\*

Out on the storming sea will I try to refresh  
my heart,  
extinguish the fire of emotion, drown in  
the deep my sorrow.  
Brandish your wings, you storm wind, and  
quiet with thunder my plaint,  
foam up, you waves, to the sky, and splash  
on my scorching cheek!





## Chapter 18

*Sömngångarnätter*

*Sömngångarnätter på vakna dagar: en dikt på fria vers*<sup>1</sup> (*Sleepwalking Nights on Wakeful Days: A Poem in Free Verse*), Strindberg's second volume of poetry, was written in three stages: "Första natten" ("The First Night") was written in 1883, and appeared at the end of *Dikter*;<sup>2</sup> the next three "Nights" were written the following year, when the first four parts of the poem were also published as an independent volume; "Femte Natten" ("The Fifth Night") and, after the rest of the poem was completed, the short introductory poem, were written in 1889 and published the following year. In its final form, *Sömngångarnätter* is the equivalent in poetry of the pilgrimage plays: the poet, searching for truth and meaning in his life and in existence in general, visits several "stations": places which have been important in his development. In each, he reflects on an area of human endeavour (and of his own development), weighs it in the balance, and finds it wanting. The great pilgrimage plays -- the *Till Damaskus* trilogy and *Stora*

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 87-135.

<sup>2</sup> It is clear, however, that even at this stage a much longer poem was contemplated: the title of the fragment published in *Dikter* was "*Sömngångarnätter: första natten*."

landsvägen -- are still in the future; this poem maps out the concept in another genre.

The stations (in Stockholm) presented in the first four nights are, respectively: Adolf Fredriks kyrka, the church in which Strindberg was confirmed in 1865; Nationalmuseum (the National Museum [of Art]); Kungliga biblioteket (the Royal Library), where Strindberg had both worked and done much of his own research; and Observatoriet (the Observatory) in the grounds of which he had played as a boy.<sup>3</sup> Each is presented within a frame of foreign travels: on the first night, he is leaving Sweden, speeding southward on a train, while his spirit leaves his body (in a somnolent state) and flies northward to revisit the city (Stockholm) he has just left; on night two, he is living in the artists' colony of Grèz-par-Nemours,<sup>4</sup> and the company, which is

<sup>3</sup> Adolf Fredriks kyrka and Observatoriet are both accessible from Drottninggatan: "stora landsvägen"; from the observatory dome, which Strindberg visits in imagination on the Fourth Night, can be seen the cemetery where his parents were buried (his mother in 1862, his father in 1883: the year before this section of the poem was written) (Lagerkranz, 130), and where, coincidentally, he was himself buried in 1912.

<sup>4</sup> At Grèz-par-Nemours (also known as Grèz-sur-Loing), sixty kilometers south of Paris, there was an colony of Scandinavian artists. Strindberg and his family went to live there, at the suggestion of Carl Larsson, in September 1883. They stayed only a month before moving to Paris, where they lived from October to December, first in Passy, then on Avenue de Neuilly, before moving to Switzerland (Levander, 186). A second stay in Grèz lasted from July, 1885 to May, 1886. The village is the setting of "Bondeliv i en fransk by", the first part of *Bland franska bönder*.

both Scandinavian and artistic, sends his thoughts back to the Scandinavian temple of the arts he knows best; similarly, places which he visits in Paris on the third and fourth nights, principally the Musée des arts et métiers (night three), the Bois de Boulogne, and the Jardin zoologique d'acclimation, trigger thoughts which send his mind racing back to Stockholm. The pattern, in which a voluntary exile nevertheless finds himself continually thinking of his homeland, had already been used by Strindberg in the poem "Landsflykt" from the "Sårfeber" section of *Dikter*; here it is used to far greater artistic effect. That pattern is evident in the short poem which serves as an introduction to *Sömngångarnätter*; with its extraordinarily vivid and poignant central symbol, the poem could also serve as an introduction to all of Strindberg's confessional writings:

Vid avenue de Neuilly  
där ligger ett slakteri,  
och när jag går till staden,  
jag går där alltid förbi.

Det stora öppna fönstret  
det lyser av blod så rött,  
på vita marmorskivor  
där ryker nyslaktat kött.

I dag där hängde på glasdörren  
ett hjärta, jag tror av kalv,  
som svept i gauffrerat papper  
jag tyckte i kölden skalv.

Då gingo hastiga tankar  
till gamla Norrbro-Bazarn,  
där lysande fönsterraden  
beskådas av kvinnor och barn.

Där hänger på boklädsfönstret  
en tunnklädd liten bok.  
Det är ett urtaget hjärta  
som dinglar där på sin krok.<sup>5</sup>

In the Fifth Night of the poem, the poet has returned to Stockholm physically as well as in his thoughts,<sup>6</sup> and he comments on how both he and the city

<sup>5</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 89:

When I go to the city,  
A butcher shop close by  
The avenue de Neuilly  
Never fails to catch my eye.

The large and open window  
With blood so red is gleaming,  
From slabs of whitest marble  
Where new-slain meat is steaming.

Today, in the doorway, the heart  
Of a calf, I think, hangs there;  
I thought, in its crimped-paper wrapping  
It shivered in the chilly air.

Then back my thoughts went racing  
To the gleaming window displays  
Of the old Norrbro Bazaar,\*  
At which women and children gaze.

There hangs in the bookshop window  
A thin-bound little book.  
It is an extracted heart  
Which dangles there on its hook.

\* Norrbro is the area of Stockholm where the Royal Dramatic Theatre (built 1907) now stands; towards the end of the last century, it was a busy shopping district.

<sup>6</sup> Strindberg returned to Sweden in 1889 and remained there until September 1892, when he returned to the continent. During the next six years he lived in Berlin, Austria, and Paris, before returning to Sweden for good in the summer of 1898.

have changed since he was last there. This section of the poem bears many resemblances to the Tophet scene in *Stora landsvägen*, where the Hunter undergoes a similar experience. As we shall see, the end of that play also echoes the end of the poem.

The poem gets its title, then, from the phenomenon which occurs in all but the last section: the poet is physically in one place, while his spirit, or imagination, is in another. The physical body, which remains behind while the thoughts are elsewhere, is like a sleepwalker, moving through a landscape it neither sees nor comprehends. But there is more to it than that. Throughout his work (Den Besatta in *Folkungasagan* and Mette Dyre in *Siste riddaren: The Last Knight*, 1908 spring to mind), Strindberg uses sleepwalking as a sign of a troubled spirit. Often the phenomenon is produced by guilt or great sorrow; here it is an indication of the poet's dissatisfaction with all of the answers which have presented themselves throughout his life, to the great existential questions: what is the purpose of life? what does it all mean? can we learn from our experiences, and if so, what?

The areas of human experience Strindberg rejects as futile are religion, art, the mechanical sciences, theology, philosophy, history, and the natural sciences. None of them has been able to answer life's great questions or improve the lot of humanity in any



significant way. If they contain truths, and some of them do, those truths are sterile, since they do not result in greater human happiness. The solution offered by the first four books is that man must live as close as possible to nature, cooperating with her rather than exploiting and destroying her, and, with the quiet dignity of the peasant, must work diligently for his own happiness and that of others. Here is the reason John Stuart Mill was included in the list of honoured Englishmen in "Landsflykt"! Indeed, Mill's famous prescription is paraphrased toward the end of the fourth night: "de flestes bästa är det högsta väl."<sup>7</sup>

Along the way, we come across several symbols that are important in all of Strindberg's work, particularly in the pilgrimage plays to which this poem is related. On the first night, for instance, as the poet's spirit approaches Stockholm while his body speeds south on the train, three symbols which recur in *Stora landsvägen* are closely linked: the Wandering Jew, the cradle, and idolatry; the attitude of the Swedish establishment to the poet himself is symbolized by the scaffold they have erected for his execution. The han (he) of the passage is the poet's spirit:

Han smyger i natten som vandrande juden  
tillbaka till platsen, där hans vagga stått  
och där man sedan reste hans schavott

<sup>7</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 127: "what's best for most is the greatest good."

för att ej han trodde på den nationelle  
guden.<sup>8</sup>

On the third night, the questions which torment the poet seem like flames which burn but do not consume. His spirit wanders in order to seek water that might extinguish those flames. Although he has rejected religion, he nevertheless gives the water symbol heavy religious connotations:

Tvivlande ande, evigt frågande,  
sjudande tanke, känsla lågande,  
dagens arbete ej er stäcker  
sömnens täcken ej er släcker.  
Åter, ande, är du ute i natten,  
törstande ande, att söka vatten,  
levande vatten ur tvivlets källa;  
vart vill du nu färden ställa?<sup>9</sup>

The fountain of living waters, referred to in the penultimate line of this extract, is one of the biblical titles of God;<sup>10</sup> here that title is given to doubt.

<sup>8</sup> Skrifter, XIII, 91:

Like the Wandering Jew in the night he creeps  
back to the place where his cradle stood,  
where they later built him a scaffold of wood  
because his faith from the national god he  
keeps.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 109:

Doubting spirit, with unceasing inquiry,  
seething thought, emotion fiery,  
the work of the day does not hamper you,  
the blanket of sleep does not damper you.  
Once more, spirit, into the night you slink,  
thirsting spirit, to look for drink,  
living water from the fountain of doubting;  
what is the destination of tonight's outing?

<sup>10</sup> Vide Jeremiah 2:13, where God applies the title to Himself, and Apocalypse 7:17, where it is applied to Christ.

Strindberg seems to be asserting that man can only attain truth by doubting all man-made systems.

The spirit's goal that night is the Royal Library, where he examines and ultimately rejects all traditional areas of learning. There is much in these areas of human inquiry that is true, he finds, but that truth is so well buried in half-truths, lies, and contradictions, that it offers no guidance whatsoever along life's thorny path. His symbol for knowledge is also biblical, and singularly apt: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The passage is from the spirit's rejection of the fruits of knowledge:

Farväl då, böcker! Du kunskapsträd!  
 På gott och ont har du varit!  
 Skall väl du därför huggas ned  
 för att med lögner du farit?  
 Nej, en gång kommer en yttersta dom,  
 då getterna skiljas från fåren!<sup>11</sup>

The libraries of the future, the poem goes on to speculate, will hold nothing but newspapers (factual accounts of the truth) and all speculative knowledge will be accorded the neglect it deserves! Meanwhile, man must either be content with half-truths and seductive falsehoods, or search for truth on his own!

<sup>11</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 113:

Then, tree of knowledge, books, farewell!  
 Both good and evil are your fruits!  
 Should we you then with axes fell  
 because you bore both lies and truths?  
 No, the last judgement will come one day;  
 then goats will be parted from the sheep!

When he turns to nature (as transformed and arranged by man) and to the discoveries of the natural sciences, he finds no truth worth possessing there either. The natural scientists have discovered many interesting things, to be sure; he does not deny their truth, but he finds them of questionable value. Not one of them has asked, let alone attempted to answer, the essential question: why? Interestingly enough, the example he gives of knowledge which is probably true but which is nevertheless utterly useless is Darwin's theory of evolution (by 1909 he was to reject its validity as well as its value):

Jag vill ej faktum om apan förneka  
 ty det har nog sin giltiga grund,  
 och det kan också vår högfärd spåka  
 och väcka oss ur vår gudablund;  
 men ha vi därföre kommit längre  
 till frågans lösning och till dess knut?  
 Mig tycks att vägen blivit allt trängre,  
 vi stå där dumma just som förut.  
 Men bakåt, bakåt går nya vägen,  
 och nedåt, nedåt till trädets rot,  
 och när man tagit de sista stegen,  
 så står man ändå på samma fot.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Skrifter, XIII, 120:

The fact of the ape can't be denied,  
 for it's based on good evidence, it seems,  
 and it can mortify our pride  
 and wake us from our god-like dreams;  
 but are we therefore any closer today  
 to having the problem and its weak point  
 expounded?

It seems that narrower has become the way:  
 we stand there, just as before, confounded.  
 But backwards, backwards is the new trend,  
 and downwards, down to the very root,  
 and when the last step is taken, in the end  
 one is standing still on the same foot.

The problem referred to in the above passage is that posed by Darwin: what is the origin of the species? Its weak point is the weakness of Darwin's theory of evolution: where did the first cell come from? The inability of the natural sciences to answer the ultimate questions leads the poet back to an essentially religious position, a reversal for which much of the symbolism in this section of the poem (the fountain of living waters, the tree of knowledge, and the day of judgement, with its separation of the sheep from the goats) has prepared the way:

"I begynnelsen var cellen", så lyder ordet!  
Men före cellen? En annan cell!  
Man ser på ämnet; men den som gjorde't,  
om han var mästare eller gesäll,  
han finns ej till för vedersakarn,  
som tror på skon, men förnekar skomakarn.  
Men nog därom, jag är kullvoterad,  
och cellen är redan installerad  
som högsta väsen i den nya tron,  
och tron, som bekant, tar aldrig reson.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 120-121:

"In the beginning was the cell,"\* is the modern notion!  
But before the cell? Another cell!  
Man looks at creation, but who set it in motion,  
whether journeyman or master, fashioning well,  
the adversary does reject:  
he believes in the shoe, but can no shoemaker detect.  
But enough of that, I am outvoted,  
and the cell has already been promoted  
to supreme being in the new creed,  
and faith, as we know, pays reason no heed.

\* This is a deliberate parody of the opening of the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word!"

On the first night, the poet rejected religion, but it now seems clear that he has not thereby rejected belief in God. Most of the areas of human endeavour in the poem are rejected on utilitarian grounds: they do not improve the human condition. While this is also one basis for the rejection of the natural sciences, they are also condemned for not taking the Creator into account. Strindberg seems to want it both ways: religion is futile because it does not contribute to the physical well-being of mankind, and the sciences are futile because they do not take account of religion! This is part of the tension which the Swedish scholar Henry Olsson has observed in the poem, which he sees as "... a monument to the two fundamental, inborn opposites in Strindberg's psyche: the need to doubt, and the need to have faith."<sup>14</sup>

As a result of the Inferno crisis of the mid-1890s, Strindberg was to move ever closer to a religious solution to the great questions in life. Meanwhile, the above passage already foreshadows the Tophet scene in *Stora landsvägen*, where the Darwinists are

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Arvid Paulson's introduction to his English translation of the poem (6), and in Steene, 142. Although I have consulted Paulson's (unrhymed) translation, the translations which are included here are my own.

lampooned as highly dogmatic adherents of a faith which has become the new orthodoxy!

Strindberg moves even closer to *Stora landsvägen* on the fifth and final night. Here the poet is a sleep-walker in another sense than on the first four nights. He finds himself in the city to which his spirit has been returning every night in his dreams, but he finds it so changed that while his body walks its almost foreign streets his mind travels those same streets as they were in the past. By most he is forgotten, and those who do recognize him avoid him. He has become the Stranger, and the city which he had thought his spirit's goal, but another station on his pilgrimage.

Stockholm has changed and, inevitably it seems, for the worse: "Ja, barbaren har åter segrat, / baltiskt Hellas har sett sin grav / ...."<sup>15</sup> The final stanza of the poem prefigures the final scene of *Stora landsvägen*; like the Hunter in that play, the poet leaves the city of his past behind him, and continues his search for the truth in higher regions. He rises while his city sinks, like the lost Atlantis, the glory of what was but is no more:

Hemsjuk pilgrim börjar att vakna  
och för längtan han funnit bot.  
Vad ej finnes han ej kan sakna,  
skuddar stoftet utav sin fot.

<sup>15</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 134: "Yes, the barbarian has conquered again, / Baltic Hellas has gone to its grave / ...."

Lik den vise, som sökte arken  
undan flodens våta blockad  
uppåt bergen i ödemarken,  
flyr han ut från den sjunkande stad.<sup>16</sup>

More immediately, this second departure from his native city foreshadows Strindberg's own second departure from Sweden in 1892. The symbolic act of shaking its dust from his feet is another biblical allusion which seems singularly appropriate to the circumstances of Strindberg's life. It is an injunction of Christ to his disciples:

And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Skrifter*, XIII, 135:

Home-sick pilgrim begins to awake  
and for his yearning has found a cure:  
for what was not there his heart cannot ache;  
the city's dust on his feet he cannot endure.  
Like the wise man who for the ark searched  
not in the river's wet retreat  
but atop the desert mountain perched,  
from the sinking city he turns his feet.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 10:13 (Jerusalem Bible translation).  
Cf. Mark 6:11, Luke 9:5.



## Chapter 19

*Likt och olik*

*Likt och olik* (Like and Unlike) was the title of a collection of four Strindberg essays published in 1884. To these John Landqvist, the editor of *Samlade skrifter*, has added other essays of the same period, which deal with the same topics or are written from the same attitudes, often following suggestions in Strindberg's correspondence about essays which he himself thought should be part of *Likt och olik*, and has published them under the title *Likt och olik: sociala och kulturkritiska uppsatser från 1880-talet*<sup>1</sup> (Like and Unlike: Critical Essays on Society and Culture from the 1880s). Except for the following exceptions, the essays which Landqvist groups under the title will be discussed here: the two travel pieces, "Från Italien (Sommarbrev i mars)" ("From Italy (A Summer Letter in March)") and "Rom på en dag" ("Rome in a Day") have been regrouped by the editors of *Samlade verk*, and are discussed elsewhere under the title *Resor* (Travels); and the essay on the poet Carl Snoilsky is treated in its original context, in the work *I Bernadottes land* (In the Land of Bernadotte). Of the remaining twenty-six essays in *Likt och olik* as it now stands, only

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI and XVII.

fourteen have any relevance to the present study: they are here discussed in the order in which they appear in *Samlade skrifter*.

These essays are all polemic, although their subject matter varies from purely social and political issues, through pieces on the women's emancipation movement, to literary disputes and assessments (including answers to several attacks by critics and others). The collection reflects Strindberg's continuing desire to play a part in the great controversies of his day, and his belief (stated several times in these essays) that journalism was a more effective way of doing so than *belle lettres*: a belief at least in part determined by the hostile reception many of his more literary works had so far received.

The first essay in both the original and the expanded versions of *Likt och olik* is "Om det allmänna missnöjet, dess orsaker och botmedel"<sup>2</sup> ("On the General Discontent, Its Causes and Cures"). It is an analysis of social unrest in Sweden; Strindberg finds the principal causes to be an unfair distribution of political power and an economic system in which valuable natural resources (which could benefit the entire population) were being exported in order to support the import of luxury items (which benefited nobody). His suggested

<sup>2</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 7-108.

cure is self-sufficiency, not only on a national, but, as much as possible, on an individual scale as well. Not very arable ground in which to sow symbols, surely, but nevertheless a few do occur. As in *Svenska folket*, the nation is seen as the victim of the curse: others shall reap where you have sown:

... alla tyrannier med slaveri uppkommit ...  
genom att låta andra arbeta för sig och äta  
frukten av vad andra sått....<sup>3</sup>

Slavery, which elsewhere in Strindberg's works occurs as a symbol most often in works dealing with marriage, is one of the many links between the pieces included in this collection: it appears again with great frequency in the essays forming the section "Kvinnofrågan" ("The Women's Question"). Of perhaps more interest in this essay is his development of the *Doppelganger* symbol:

Men utom att samhället gjort oss till maskindelar, då var och en kunnat vara åtminstone en hel maskin, till likplundrande hyenor, då vi kunnat jaga åtminstone som vargar, har det också gjort oss till dubbelgångare, och det är där kulturmänniskan lider mest. Genom att bo ihop, har man måst lägga på sig band, som endast längta att få bli brutna; konvensans, artighet, etikett, allt sådant är nödvändigt, men det är en förfärlig nödvändighet, ty det är falskhet. Samhället har icke dödat vilddjuret i oss, endast förnedrat det genom dressyr, en dressyr, som icke är

<sup>3</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVI, 77:

... all tyrannies have been supported by slavery ... through letting others work for them and eating the fruit of what others had sown....

mer att lita på än all annan dressyr, ty glömmen tämjaren sin revolver hemma, så är vilddjuret löst. Den upplysta kulturmänniskan lider av att utanpå sin enkla vardagsmänniska behöva bära en samhällsmänniska; det är den senare som håller festtalen, åt vilka vardagsmänniskan ler, det är den som skriver de stora orden, som predikar stränga moralen, besjunger den fosterländska äran. Det är samhällstvänget, samhällshyckleriet som förnedrar individen och fördubblar honom, så att han lär ett, men lever ett annat. .... Se vilka klyftor mellan Tegnér i hans brev och Tegnér i hans dikter och framför allt i hans tal; mellan den fritänkande Thomander och den stränge biskopen! Vem vill säga att de voro falska! Den som i likhet med mig har tagit dem som exempel på samhällslögnens offer, han har icke kastat sten efter dem, men väl efter samhället!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVI, 90-91:

But not only has society made us into parts of a machine, when each of us could have been at least a whole machine, and into scavenging hyenas, when we could have hunted at least like wolves; it has also made us into Doppelgangers, and it is there that the man of culture suffers most. Through living in society, man has had to assume restraints, which yearn only to be broken; propriety, politeness, etiquette: everything like that is necessary, but it is a dangerous necessity, for it is deceit. Society has not killed the wild animal in us, only suppressed it through training: a training which is no more to be relied upon than all other training, for should the tamer forget his revolver at home, the wild animal is loose. The enlightened man of culture suffers from having to wear a social man on top of the simple everyday man; it is the former who makes after-dinner speeches, at which the everyday man laughs, who preaches strict morality, sings the honour of his native land. It is the constraint of society, the hypocrisy of society, which demeans the individual and doubles him, so that he professes one thing but practises another. .... See what gaps there are between Tegnér\* in his letters and Tegnér in his poetry and above all in his talk; between the free-thinking Thomander and the austere bishop! Who will say that they

The Doppelganger is discussed more fully in the chapter on "Paria" (q.v.); briefly, it is a projection of a person's most primitive and basest qualities. Strindberg here stands the symbol on its head: what is projected (i.e., what the environment perceives) is a composite of only the best, most civilized qualities; what is base and animal constitutes the man's "real" or inner being (i.e., it is the Doppelganger that is real)! Without being aware of it, Strindberg has here approached the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity; it is a stance, however, appropriate to the author of

—  
were deceitful! He who would take them as examples of victims of society's lies, as I have done, has not cast stones at them, but rather at society!

\* Esaias Tegnér (1782-1846): Swedish poet, chief representative of the Swedish Gothic and neoclassical movements in the early nineteenth-century. His most famous poem, *Fritiofs saga* (*Fritiof's Saga*) imposes upon materials drawn from Old Norse sagas, a strong emphasis on the Christian ideals of reconciliation and penance, and yet he confesses in a letter to a friend (at the time of his appointment as Bishop of Växjö!), "A pagan I am and shall remain!" In general, his poetry is full of sweetness, light, and romantic idealism; his letters and speeches reveal a world view that is dark, gloomy, and tragic (Gustafson, 177-87).

the satirical works of the period (*Det nya riket*, 1882; some of the poems in *Dikter*, 1883, and *Sömngångarnätter*, 1883 and 1890; and *Giftas*, 1884 and 1886): the eye of the satirist is necessarily somewhat jaundiced!

The title of *Likt och olik* refers to an unhomogeneous mixture, a hodge-podge. It applies to the contents of the collection, and to Strindberg's conviction that society was composed of mutually antagonistic elements. It appears once, in this first essay:

Är det nu så svårt att styra ett land,  
så att man skall behöva ha en yrkesstyrelse,  
som skall skriva upp allting, likt och  
olik?<sup>5</sup>

The second essay in the original *Likt och olik* is "Livsglädjen"<sup>6</sup> ("Joy of Life"). It is an attack on neo-classicism and romanticism, which Strindberg unites under the term idealism, and an advocacy of realism. Strindberg makes his point by demonstrating that conventional perceptions -- that the old values are "uplifting" and that realism (particularly in its most

<sup>5</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 97:

Is it now so difficult to govern a country that one needs a professional government, whose business it is to keep count of everything, whether relevant or not?

The final four words (in English) illustrate the difficulty of finding a translation which is appropriate in all instances.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-27.

extreme form, naturalism) is depressing, concerned only with the ugly and seamy side of life -- are, in fact, the complete reverse of what is actually the case.

The way in which he brings about this logical tour-de-force is through the use of the concept of illusion: the illusion created by idealism that the world is rational, ordered, and ultimately both understandable and just. By creating such illusions, art does more harm than good, for they can never correspond to reality, the acceptance of which is necessary to true and abiding happiness:

Den världsåskådning, som kallas idealism och som uppfann den lögnen, att allt på jorden var fullkomligt, att tron och hoppet voro nog, men gärningarna överflödiga, som predikade en slapp sybaritism, att det icke var så farligt ställt med våra orättvisor, att vi voro lika goda kålsupare allihop, att man dock måste leva, denna åskådning, som var ett hopkok av glad hedendom och mörk kristendom, av rå egoism och teoretiskt missnöje med att rosen hade fått törnen, att fjäriln bara levde en dag, att solen hade fläckar och att flickan blev gumma, denna världsåskådning har icke givit någon solid livsglädje, som den påstår, ty den har lärt människan att fordra det orimliga, såsom att månen alltid skall vara klar, människan alltid ung, könsdriften alltid vid vigör, magen alltid i skick o.s.v. Alla dessa fordringar äro ju enligt sakens natur illusioner och måste ramla. Alla ramlade illusioner medföra sorg! Därför bort med illusionerna! Utgå ifrån att solen slocknar, och vi skola åldras, och vi skola förvåna oss över att vi äro så unga! Och vi skola glädje oss! Därför, sätt ner fordringarne på allt, på lyx, på ära, på makt, framför allt på

anseende och jag tror livsglädjen skall komma igen.<sup>7</sup>

These observations have a direct application to literature: neoclassical and romantic works serve only to embody and foster the illusions of the idealistic world-view, whereas realistic ones serve to banish them and thus foster a view of life more open to true joy. The essay can be seen, then, as theoretical groundwork for the great naturalistic plays of the late 1880s: *Fadren*, 1887; *Kamraterna* (Comrades), *Fröken Julie*, and

<sup>7</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 126-27:

The view of the world called idealism, which invented the lie that everything on earth was perfect, that faith and hope were enough and good works superfluous, which preached an easy-going sybaritism -- that our injustices were not so serious, that we were all tarred with the same brush, that a man had to live, after all -- that view, which was a mishmash of joyous paganism and gloomy Christianity, of raw egoism and theoretical discontent that the rose bore the thorn, that the butterfly lived only one day, that the sun had spots, and that that the young girl became the old woman; that view of the world has never produced any substantial joy of life, as it claims, for it has taught man to demand the impossible, such as that the moon should always be clear, man always young, the sexual drive always vigorous, the stomach always in good shape, etc. All these demands are by the nature of things surely illusions, and must shatter. All shattered illusions produce grief! Start with the fact that the sun is dying, and you will be happy that it still shines; start with the fact that we shall all grow old, and we shall surprise ourselves that we are so young! And we shall be joyful! Therefore, away with all demands -- for luxury, for honour, for power, above all, for prestige -- and I believe that joy of life will return.



*Fordringsägare* (*Creditors*), 1888; and the one-act plays "Den starkare", "Paria", and "Samum" ("Simoom"), 1890. Strindberg eventually abandoned naturalism in favour increasingly of expressionism (which seeks to express psychological rather than literal reality), but these observations about the relationship between illusion, grief, and lasting joy remain. Indeed, he comes to see all earthly experience as illusion, the shattering of which brings great grief but opens the way to true and eternal happiness.

Earlier in the essay, Strindberg illustrates his point with an example from the Théâtre Français, where, the previous autumn, he had seen, to his astonishment, *Le monde où on s'ennuie* by Edouard Pailleron (1834-99): not only a farce in the very home of classical drama, but one which ridiculed the conventions of tragedy:

... när [Pailleron] på ... Théâtre Français gör ett stort narr av tragedien, då var jag med och jag såg, att tiden har vunnit en stor seger! Tragedin är död! Gudarne äro döda, men Pan lever! Naturen firar sin återuppståndelse -- och realismen, den fulingen, går till himlen!<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 114:

... when [Pailleron], at the ... Théâtre Français, made a great fool of tragedy, I was there, and I saw that time has won a great victory! Tragedy is dead! The gods are dead, but Pan lives! Nature celebrates its resurrection -- and realism, the rascal, goes to heaven!

By the time Strindberg writes *Advent* (1898), his opinion of Pan has changed: there he still represents the forces of nature, but nature is no longer sufficient to produce happiness, and Pan is identified with Satan! Indeed, he struck the penultimate sentence of this extract from the essay when he read proofs for the second edition of the work (1911), no doubt because of his altered religious beliefs.<sup>9</sup>


The last essay in the original *Likt och olik* was "Nationalitet och svenskhet"<sup>10</sup> ("Nationality and Swedishness"), a brief attempt to trace some of the characteristics of the Swedish nation to their roots; Strindberg's point is that Swedes share a common culture with all Europeans. Of interest to *Ett drömspel* (1906), in which Indra's daughter figures, is Strindberg's theory, disclosed here, that the Norse god Thor is a Scandinavian version of the Indian god Indra: "Thorsdyrkan synes vara äldre än Odinskulten och Thor var ingen annan än Indra, himmelens herre...."<sup>11</sup> The connection seems supported by the symbol of the swastika, Indian in origin but in Sweden known (at least

<sup>9</sup> Landqvist's note in *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 367.

<sup>10</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 143-71.


<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 160: "The worship of Thor seems older than the cult of Odin, and Thor is none other than Indra, the lord of heaven...."

before WWII, which has destroyed all previous meanings of the symbol) as the mark of Thor's hammer:

Ett annat minnesmärke från gemensamt indiskt ursprung är det bekanta tecknet hak-korset, vilket träffas på smycken och vapen över hela Europa. Det kallas ... i kinesiska lexikonet Swastika och tecknas där än i dag precis som jag nyligen sett det på ett spänne i Lausannes museum på många föremål, ja till och med träffas som bomärke i häradstingshandlingar. Det tecknas så ; har i Indiskan flera betydelser, men i kinesiska lexikon (där det angives såsom lånat från Indien) betyder det endast ett lyckligt förebud.... I Sverige kallas det stundom Thors hammarmärke och kristendomen behövde bara ta bort hakarne för att av det samma få ett kors.<sup>12</sup>

The essays in the section "Över- och underklass" ("Over- and Underclass") are much more political. The section opens with "August Strindbergs Lilla katekes för Underklassen"<sup>13</sup> ("August Strindberg's Little Catechism for the Underclass"), which was written in 1884-

<sup>12</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVI, 161:

Another relic of common Indian origin is the well-known sign of the hooked cross, which can be found on jewelry and weapons all over Europe. In the Chinese lexicon it is called ... Swastika, and is drawn there exactly as I recently saw it on many objects during a jaunt to the museum in Lausanne; yes, it is even encountered as a mark of ownership in the [Swedish] district government records. It is drawn like this: ; it has several meanings in Indian [presumably Sanskrit], but in the Chinese lexicon (where it is given as a word borrowed from India) it means only a good omen.... In Sweden it is sometimes called the mark of Thor's hammer, and Christianity needed only remove the hooks in order to turn it into a cross.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 175-98.

85, but not published during the author's lifetime; it first saw print in *Samlade skrifter*. From the point of view of Strindberg's symbolism, only one section of it is relevant: that dealing with marriage. While not symbolic in itself, it nevertheless helps define the symbolic rôle(s) women played in Strindberg's works. The three questions and answers cited below are extracted from Article Five: "Moralen" ("Morality"). The first, which deals with the purposes of marriage, is remarkable for its use of the slavery symbol (a married man is a slave to his wife, and servants are slaves to their employers), as well as for the strict (nineteenth-century) Christian orthodoxy of the young atheist's views on procreation!

Vad är äktenskapet?

En ekonomisk inrättning varigenom mannen tvingas arbeta för kvinnan, vars slav han blivit.

Inom de lägre klasserna arbeta man och hustru med kroppen, men mannen mest; inom medelklassen arbetar mannen och kvinnan administrerar; inom de högsta har mannen en sysla och kvinnan roar sig.

De emanciperade säga att kvinnan ej är född att föda barn?

Vem skall då göra det?

De emanciperade säga sig vilja bli nyttiga. Detta är lögn. De överge hushåll och barn för att måla oljefärgstavlor och klinka piano. Är det nyttigt! Är det icke nyttigare att vårda barnen, som nu lämnas åt slavinerna (pigorna).

Vad är äktenskapets uppgift: att föda fram barn och uppfostra dem. Allt tal om

makarnes nöje i umgänge är bara prat.<sup>14</sup>

This passage throws light on the relationships in *Fröken Julie* and the marriage dramas, particularly, perhaps, in *Fordringsägare*. It is also worth mentioning that although Strindberg was a member of the middle class, as *Tjänstekvinnans son* (The Son of the Bondswoman) he identified strongly with the lower classes. All of his wives were professional women (two actresses and a journalist) and all were "liberated". Siri von Essen, moreover, was a former countess by marriage and a member of an aristocratic family. Strindberg's theories did not always work out in practice!

<sup>14</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 189-90:

What is marriage?

An economic institution whereby man is forced to work for woman, whose slave he has become.

With the lower classes, man and wife both do physical work, but the man does more; with the middle class, the man works and the wife administers; with the highest, the man has an occupation and the wife amuses herself.

Those who are liberated say that woman was not born to give birth to children?

Who, then, will do it?

Liberated women say that they want to be useful. That is a lie. They abandon house and child in order to do oil-painting or tinkle the piano. Is that useful! Is it not more useful to look after the children, who are now relegated to the slave-women (maids)?

What is the purpose of marriage? To produce children and raise them. All talk of the the couple's pleasure in the relationship is just prattle.

Perhaps the most significant insight for Strindberg's work in the above passage is that marriage is primarily an economic arrangement, in which the husband has an obligation to support the wife through his labour. The masculine principle, symbolic of strength, action, and intellect, becomes enslaved thereby to the feminine, symbolic of gentleness, passivity, and emotion; the higher the social standing, the greater this enslavement! When the purpose of marriage is ignored, this slavery serves no end. The consequences are examined in the next two questions. Fröken Julie and Tekla in *Fordringsägare* can be seen as examples of the asexual women described here. The two questions follow immediately on the one cited above:

Vad har följden blivit?

Att männen icke vilja gifta sig?

Mankönet är utsläpat genom överansträngning på att skaffa kvinnan lyx och nöjen. Därför minskas deras antal. Krigen, i vilka kvinnorna aktat sig deltaga, har även ödelagt mankönet.

Därav kvinnornas överlägsenhet i antal och de ogiftas skrik.

Och följden därav?

Prostitution. I Orienten polygami, i Västerlandet asexuering (könlöshet).

Mormonerna hava försökt lösa frågan med polygami.

Det är de asexuerade, som uppträda i mödrarnes namn och vilja utplåna könsskillnaden, som naturen utstakat. Därför klä de sig som karlar och vilja bli karlar. Detta är emancipationens hemlighet.

Därför de könlöses skrik, när man vill tala om hanar och honor. De äro ingendera!<sup>15</sup>

Further consequences are the distress of unmarried women and their competition for jobs in an already overcrowded market. But woman is nevertheless not so oppressed as man, who, in addition to his obligation to nourish and support woman and children, is subject to military service, civil obligations, and ... Strindberg trails off with "o.s.v." ("etc.").

Without going into the question of Strindberg's misogyny, one can at least credit him with the recognition that the emancipation of women involved (and con-

<sup>15</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVI, 190:

What has been the result?

That men do not want to marry?

The male sex is worn out through over-exertion in providing woman with luxuries and pleasures. That is why their number is declining. Wars, in which woman has taken care not to participate, have also laid waste the male sex.

Hence the numerical superiority of women and the distress of the unmarried.

And the result of that?

Prostitution. In the Orient, polygamy; in the West, asexualisation (sexlessness).

The Mormons have tried to solve the problem with polygamy.

It is the asexual who rise up in the name of motherhood and want to obliterate sexual differences, which nature has determined. That is why they dress as men and want to be men. This is the secret of emancipation.

Hence the distress of the asexual, when one speaks of males and females. They are neither!

tinues to involve) problems on the levels of the individual (male or female), the couple, the family, and society. It is these problems, particularly on the first three levels, which engaged his artistic imagination in *Fröken Julie* and the marriage plays, and which haunted his personal life.

"Underklassens svar på de viktigaste av Överklassens fraser"<sup>16</sup> ("The Response of the Underclass to the Most Important Clichés of the Overclass", 1884) is a companion piece to "Lilla katekes", written in a slightly different format: a dialogue in which the representative of the overclass trots out all the old clichés about social organization, and the representative of the underclass demolishes them one by one. I cite only one example, the symbolism of which has been used earlier in the poem "Esplanadsystemet" in *Dikter*:

Fras 7.

Att riva ner, ja, det kan man nog, men  
vad bygger ni upp?

Svar.

.... ... [det] finns ... trångbyggda  
samhällen, som bara behöva rivas för att  
invånarna skola "få luft och ljus". ....<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 208-16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-13:

Cliché 7.

Tear down: yes, you can do that all  
right, but what do you put up?

Response.



The second volume of the expanded *Likt och olik* opens with "Kvarstadsresan"<sup>18</sup> ("Journey in Bond", 1885), Strindberg's account of his trial for blasphemy in the autumn of 1884. It is told through a series of letters written to "en landsman i utlandet" ("a countryman living abroad"), a device which allows him to tell the story as it seemed to him while it was happening, rather than in retrospect.

He opens with a letter dated April, 1884, from Ouchy,<sup>19</sup> which details his preoccupations before the charge was laid. Among these is *kvinnofrågan*, the women's question. From the vantage point of Switzerland, it seems that the whole question is particularly Scandinavian, and he looks for reasons this should be so. These reflections later find dramatic expression in *Fadren* and especially in *Dödsdansen* (*The Dance of*

.... ... there are tightly built communities that need to be torn down just so the inhabitants can "get air and light".

<sup>18</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 7-77.

<sup>19</sup> Ouchy is near Lausanne, Switzerland: Strindberg and his family lived there from January to June, 1884, when they moved to Chexbres (also in Switzerland) for the summer months; they lived in Geneva for the rest of that year (with the exception of Strindberg himself, who spent the period October 10 - November 17 in Stockholm for the blasphemy trial). *Giftas I*, which occasioned the trial, was seized in Stockholm on October 3. Other important events in Strindberg's life that year were the birth of his son, Hans (d. 1917), on April 3, and a two-week holiday in Italy, which is described in "*Från Italien (Sommarbrev i mars)*".

Death), with their isolated settings and characters who, largely deprived of other human contact, take out their frustrations on each other:

Kvinnofrågan förefaller mig vara något specifikt nordiskt, eller specifikt norskt! Norge är ett land med hård jord. Människorna ha brett ut sig på stora ytor. Vintern har drivit dem in i kvava rum. Och där sitta de två och två, och ruva sina svarta tankar i mörker och ensamhet, och som de ej ha någon förseglad röstsedel kunna de ej få några beslut. Människorna bli i norden mindre associabla. Självet utvecklar sig till en onaturlig storlek, och när nu två sådana där "själv" kedja ihop sig på tu man hand, utan några avledare, då blir hemmet en lejonbur. I södern lever man i byalag, ute på gatan, på krogen, i sällskap, med ett ord ute, och inte i bur, därför blir konflikten mindre där; elektriciteten fördelas och slår inte ner i blixtar. Kedjan är lång och fångarne kunna löpa med den utan att rycka omkull varandra. Associabiliteten är större, ty samlivet har uppfostrat. Icke så i norden, minst i Norge. Läs om de förfärliga kvinnorna i Islands sagor. Hämndgiriga, härsklystna, dämoniskt elaka; pinande sina män med äregirighet, avundsjuka. Ibsen har några praktexemplar i Härmännen. Det är ett slags könlösa djävlar i människohamn.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 10-11:

The women's question seems to me something specifically Scandinavian, or specifically Norwegian! Norway is a country with hard soil. People have spread out over large areas. Winter has driven them into stuffy rooms. And there they sit, two by two, and brood over their black thoughts in darkness and solitude, and since they have no secret ballot, they can reach no decisions. People in Scandinavia become less sociable. The self expands to an unnatural size, and when two such "selves" are confined alone together, with nothing to serve as a lightning rod, the home becomes a lion cage. In the south, one lives in village communities, out on the street, in taverns, in company: in a word, outside, and not in a cage, and so the conflict is less there: the electricity is dis-

As an aside, any consideration of Strindberg's misogyny, then, should take into account the extent to which misogyny is an integral part of the Scandinavian literary and cultural tradition!

A further reference to Ibsen comes in the letter dated from Chexbres in June. Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* had served as an inspiration to Strindberg as recently as the preface to *Herr Bengts hustru* (1882); now, however, his opinion of the Norwegian master has changed (he was subsequently to refer contemptuously to Ibsen as a bluestocking!) and he lumps him with the idealists (see the passage from "Livsglädjen", above), with the implication that the demands inspired by Ibsen's works are nothing but illusions, destined to be shattered by the realities of nature:

Vet du! Jag skulle i dag läsa om Ibsens Dockhem för att ur detsamma hämta motiv för mina förslag till äktenskapets ombildande. Döm om min häpnad, då jag finner stycket vara ett äkta idealiststycke utsprunget ur den naturvidriga kvinnoemancipationens skola. "De ideala fordringarne", så skulle stycket heta.

—

sipated and does not strike as lightning. The chain [i.e., the bond of marriage] is long and the prisoners can move about while wearing it without falling over each other. Sociability is greater, for community life has developed. Not so in Scandinavia, least of all in Norway. Read of the dreadful women in the Icelandic sagas. Vindictive, domineering, fiendishly evil; tormenting their husbands with ambition, jealousy. Ibsen has a few fine specimens in *The Vikings of Helgeland* [1858]. They are a sort of sexless devil in human form.

Och detta såg jag icke för fem år sen, då jag först läste det, utan då slök jag det som ett upprop till frigörelse! Så där kunde man läsa -- för fem år sedan!<sup>21</sup>

A letter dated from Chexbres in July anticipates the opening and closing scenes of *Stora landsvägen* (1909), where, however, the difficulty in breathing and the resultant mountain-climb are the consequences of the author's return to his homeland:

Haft besök av svenskar! Alla voro sån nöjda och belättna med att ha fosterlandet på vederbörligt avstånd. Vi talade så litet som möjligt om det kära smörgåslandet. Emellertid dröp ett och annat fram, som gjorde att jag så fort som möjligt företog en alpfärd 7,000 fot upp i luften för att andas -- och glömma.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 23:

Guess what! Today I was to have reread Ibsen's *Doll's House*, in order to collect ideas from it for my proposal for the reform of marriage. Imagine my astonishment, when I now find the play to be a piece of unadulterated idealism, sprung from the unnatural school of women's emancipation. *The Demands of Idealism*: that is what the piece should be called. And I did not see that five years ago, when I first read it: I swallowed it then as a cry for freedom! That is how one could read things -- five years ago!

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 27:

Have been visited by Swedes! Everyone was so pleased and relieved to have the homeland at a safe distance. We spoke as little as possible about the dear land of open-faced sandwiches. Nevertheless, a few things crept in, which resulted in my undertaking, as soon as possible, a walk in the Alps, 7,000 feet up in the air, in order to breathe -- and forget.

A nice ironic touch: he was soon to be forced to return to his homeland -- and to have many more associations with that country he would prefer to forget!

During the trial, Strindberg seems most impressed by the physical appearance of the courtroom: his dramatist's eye was quick to note the theatrical possibilities of the place, which he was to exploit in *Brott och brott* (*Crimes and Crimes*) and *Advent* (both 1899). The symbols of justice make a strong impression:

Rådhusrätten! .... Domstolens mise-en-scène är icke dålig. Det stora bordet. Bibeln. Entréerna och sortierna. Folket och allmänna opinionen bakom skrank. Cellfängelssets flank med de där små vältaliga fönsterna. Det är verkligen stämning i det där. Och det är sådant som verkar.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, Strindberg has become a *cause célèbre*. Public opinion, here symbolically separated from the courtroom proceedings, is overwhelmingly in his favour, and letters of support flood in. Not even the letters of the pious are vindictive; later, when he has undergone a religious conversion and sets about dramatizing that experience in the *Till Damaskus* plays, the title

<sup>23</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 43:

The municipal court! .... The court's mise-en-scène is not bad. The large table. The Bible. Entrances and exits. The people and public opinion behind barriers. The side of the jail, with those small eloquent windows. There is a real atmosphere in all this. And that is what acts on one.

is suggested to him by these letters; meanwhile, his atheism, though impressed, remains unshaken:

Ett hundra brev på åtta dagar! Men, märkvärdigt nog, bara ett ovettigt. .... De fromme, verkligt fromme, som skulle vara mest sårade, de skrevo snällt och vackert. "Saul, Saul, vi förföljer du mig!" börja de flesta. Stackars människor, som taga på allvar det där jokset överklassen kastat åt dem under namn av kristendom! Varför läsa de ej sina evangelier själva och se vilken överklassens fiende Jesus var!<sup>24</sup>

He is visited by a women's emancipationist, and explains to her his belief that, compared to the inequities between classes, those between the sexes are relatively trivial. He has identified the women's question with idealism; here he identifies it with the overclass (the three "likes" in the book are the overclass, women's emancipation, and idealism, each with its corresponding "unlike": the underclass, the natural superiority of the male, and realism):

-- Jag vill inte bli köksa åt en karl! -- Men om han blev slav åt er, arbetade hem maten i huset? Skulle ni icke vilja, icke bli hans köksa, men se efter at köksan (den verkliga slavinnan) tillredde denna av slaven hoparbe-

<sup>24</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 47-48:

A hundred letters in a week! But, remarkably enough, only one abusive one. .... The pious, the really pious, who should be most offended, wrote kindly and beautifully. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me!" most of them begin. Poor people, who take seriously the joke the overclass has foisted on them under the name of Christianity! Why do they not read their gospels themselves, and see what an enemy of the overclass Jesus was!

tade maten, medan ni sysselsatte er med bildande nöjen?<sup>25</sup>

The irony of being tried for blasphemy in a country he perceives as scarcely Christian in anything but name, does not escape him. As he reflects on the identity of "the people" whom the prosecution supposedly represents (when in fact the people -- Strindberg's underclass -- has sided with the defendant), he speaks of the supernatural forces in which he does believe, and which play a rôle in his religious experience throughout his life, even after his embracing of Christianity: the powers. Here they appear to be quite simply the impersonal (and morally neutral) forces of nature and natural law (hence the element of fate or destiny which they eventually acquire):

Hur stor procent av befolkningen är verkligt kristen? Ett obetydligt antal. Största delen är ännu på den naturliga ståndpunkten att dyrka naturmakterna, att se goda och onda krafter i rörelse, vilka skola tackas och mutas. När fiskaren i Stockholms skärgård fruktar dåligt fiske, så ber han icke till Jesum eller Gud, ännu mindre till Den Heliga Andan, utan han går och lägger en slant under en viss sten; han säger aldrig farväl, när han skjuter ut båten, åt dem som skola ut på sjön, ty då går det illa för dem; han svär

<sup>25</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 56:

"I don't want to be a man's cook!"

"But if he became a slave for you, working to put food on the table? Wouldn't you wish, not to be his cook, but to make sure that the cook (the true slave-woman) prepared this food which the slave has gathered, while you occupied yourself with instructive pleasures?"

aldrig i båt av samma anledning. Vad Virdarne göra i Varend, när åskan går, när kreaturen äro sjuka, när barnen födas, det har Hyltén-Cavallius omständigt berättat; att de icke ropa på Jesus, det är säkert, snarare på Oden, Tor och en hop andra okända makter. De dyrka sålunda än i dag av en naturlig instinkt de okända makter, som dölja sig bakom naturkrafterna; äro alltså hedningar.<sup>26</sup>

On November 17 the verdict comes down: not guilty. He prepares to leave at once for Switzerland, where his wife and son are both in poor health. A letter dated the same day expresses the many (often contradictory) emotions rushing through him now that his ordeal is

<sup>26</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 62-63:

How great a percentage of the population is really Christian? An insignificant number. The greater part are still at the natural stage of worshipping the powers of nature, of seeing good and evil forces in motion, which must be thanked and appeased. When the fisherman in Stockholm's archipelago is afraid the fishing will be bad, he does not pray to Jesus or God, much less to the Holy Spirit: he goes and places a coin under a certain stone; when he is launching his boat, he never says good-bye to those who are going out to sea, for then it would not go well for them; he never swears in the boat, for the same reason. What the people of Varend\* do during a thunderstorm, when livestock is sick, when a child is born, has been related in detail by Hyltén-Cavallius; that they do not call on Jesus is certain: sooner on Odin, Thor, and a host of other unknown powers. Thus, even today, they still worship, through a natural instinct, the unknown powers which hide themselves behind the forces of nature; and so they are pagans.

\* Varend was an older name for Småland, a province of southern Sweden.



over. Most interesting from the point of view of symbolism is his identification with Hercules, and his conviction that in the history of Swedish civil liberties his trial and acquittal are comparable to Ragnarök, the twilight of the gods ("The gods are dead! Pan lives!"), the cataclysm which will destroy the visible and invisible universes in order that man might be reborn peaceful, free, and happy:

I morgon lämnar jag Sverige, igen! Underligt: utan bitterhet. Och ändock fånge i fem veckor! Utryckt ur min omgivning, mina tankar, mina studier. Sittande i en varm cirkeldusch av gödselvatten från Augiasstallet. Utan att kunna arbeta, utan att kunna tänka; dömd att diskutera antikvariska frågor, som äro avgjorda ute i världen; dömd till en roll, som inte passar mig; dömd att höra lögn och vidskepelse försvaras av så kallade upplysta. Men varför utan bitterhet resa hem, hem från Sverige? Jo, jag såg så mycket gott och så mycket vackert! Ovänner försonades, fiender lade bort sitt agg, avunden teg för en stund, småsinnet blygdes, alla förenades i ett enda stort allmänt intresse: hatet mot den offentliga lögnen. Har Sverige varit morförgiftat av brännvin, ämbetsmän och präster, så har det vaknat äntligen. Men det är yrvaket. Många, som skulle vara vänner, hugga in på varandra. Den ena är framstriden i ett stycke, men efter i ett annat, och tvärtom. Kaos! Men det skall nog klarna, bara Ragnarök gått över allt det gamla eländet.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 76-77:

Tomorrow I leave Sweden, again! Curiously without bitterness. Despite having been a prisoner for five weeks! Torn from my environment, my thoughts, my studies. Sitting in a warm local shower of manure-water from the Augean stable. Unable to work, unable to think; condemned to discuss antiquarian questions which have been settled in the rest of the world; condemned to a rôle that does not suit me; condemned to hear lies and superstition defended by the so-called enlightened.

Indeed, Strindberg returns to a symbol first used in *Den fredlöse*: the earthquake as a sign that one age is coming to an end and another being born:

Och nu farväl, Sverige! Det skall blåsa hårt ute i Europa för att vågorna skola röras upp i Norden. Men nu är det också storm! Barometern står på jordbävning!<sup>28</sup>

These are the last lines of "Kvarstadsresan". Strindberg perhaps overstates the significance of his trial and acquittal, but his assessment is accurate: the Giftas trial is still regarded as a major landmark in the history of Swedish freedom of expression.

But why return home, home from Sweden, without bitterness? Well, I have seen, after all, so much that was good and so much that was beautiful! Enemies were reconciled, foes laid aside their grudges, jealousy kept silent for awhile, pettiness was shamed, all were united in one great question of public interest: hate for the open lie. If Sweden has been anaesthetised by schnapps, civil servants, and the clergy, now, at last, it has awakened. But it is still drowsy. Many, who should have been friends, are taking stabs at each other. At one moment one of them is ahead, but behind the next, and vice-versa. Chaos! But it is sure to clear, once Ragnarök has swept over all the old misery.

For a fuller description of Ragnarök, see the chapter dealing with *Siste riddaren*.

<sup>28</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 77:

And now farewell, Sweden! There has to be a strong wind in Europe to make waves up in Scandinavia. But now there is a real storm! The barometer indicates an earthquake!

In the expanded *Likt och olikt*, "Kvarstadsresan" serves as a transition between essays dealing with social and political questions in a general sense to more particularized matters; the section which follows it is "Kvinnofrågan" ("The Women's Question"). The first essay in this section is "Likställighet och tyranni. (Strödda anmärkningar till "Giftas")"<sup>29</sup> ("Equality and Tyranny: Miscellaneous Notes on Giftas", 1885). Strindberg contends here that marriage imposes constraints on both partners, and that the wife is therefore not tyrannized by the husband; the conclusion follows that those who would reform the institution of marriage should treat both partners equally, rather than letting feminist demands eclipse those of the husband. Again, the symbol of slavery is used. Those who view the married woman as a slave see only half the problem: both, in fact, are slaves (ideally, voluntarily and happily), either of each other or of the institution of marriage:

När människan, genom utflyttning till länder med för kallt klimat för frukters frambringande hela året om, nödgades söka sin bärgning genom jakt, är det icke osannolikt, att de havande kvinnorna, som icke kunde jaga, ställde sig under mannens beskydd. Därav hennes "underordnade" ställning, om det är underordnat att vara herre i huset, under det mannen är herre utom huset, och knappt det! Eller för att begagna nya ord: hon blev slavinna inne i huset, därför att hon skulle amma, vagga och laga mat, under det han blev

<sup>29</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 81-117.

slav utom hus, där han skulle arbeta i skogen och på åkern, ty det var icke något nöje precis att jaga då, som det sedan blivit.<sup>30</sup>

In the ensuing arguments that women exercise much more power and influence within marriage than the feminists are willing to admit, he contends that all men have great respect for women. This is an astonishing passage, for in it Strindberg seems to anticipate Freud (who had received his M.D. only four years earlier), and we know that the mother archetype complicated his own relationships with women:

Mannen har av naturen vördnad för kvinnan. Jag tror icke en ung flicka kan så dyrka en gosse, som en ung gosse kan tillbedja en ung flicka. I mannens känsla för den kvinna, han älskar, ligger något av den vördnad han kände för modren en gång, och därför har kvinnan ett inflyttande och en makt över mannen, som är underskattad, och en far behandlar sin dotter på ett helt annat sätt, än han

<sup>30</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 81-82:

When, through migration to lands with climates too cold for the year-round production of fruit, man was forced to seek his livelihood from hunting, it is not improbable that the pregnant women, who could not hunt, placed themselves under the protection of men. Hence their "subordinate" position, if it is subordinate to be master in the house while the man is master outside the house (and hardly that)! Or, in modern terms: she became a slave inside the house because she had to give suck, rock the cradle, and prepare food, while he became a slave outside the house, where he had to labour in the forests and on the plains, for hunting was not exactly a pleasure then, as it has since become.

behandlar sin son.<sup>31</sup>

Despite this, there remains a conviction that women are deceitful. The barb in the following extract is aimed at Sweden's Queen Sofia (wife of Oskar II), whom he suspected of being behind the Giftas trial:

Vi ha mycket talat om kvinnans underordnade ställning. Om vi skulle tala om hennes falska ställning något litet! Jag tror, har alltid trott, att kvinnan var världens behärskare. Jag har styrkts i min tro efter de sista dagars händelser. Men vad som är tråkigt, är att kvinnan strider bakom mannens rygg.<sup>32</sup>

Not only, then, are the demands of the women's movement based on idealistic illusions, not only does woman in fact already enjoy influence, power, and at least equality within marriage, but she has attained this position in spite of obvious moral inferiority! To

<sup>31</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 86:

Man by nature has respect for woman. I do not think a young girl can worship a boy to the same extent as a young boy can adore a young girl. In a man's feeling for the woman he loves there remains something of the respect he once felt for his mother, and that is why woman has an influence and a power over man which are underestimated, and a father treats his daughter in an entirely different way than he treats his son.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 110:

We have spoken much about woman's subordinate position. If we were to speak a little bit about her false position! I believe, have always believed, that woman is the ruler of the world. I have been strengthened in my belief by the events of recent days. But the annoying thing is that woman battles behind man's back.

demonstrate that this inferiority is also physiological is the aim of the following essay, "Kvinnosaken enligt Evolutionsteorin"<sup>33</sup> ("The Women's Question in the Light of the Theory of Evolution", 1888). Here, Strindberg marshals physiological evidence to demonstrate that from an evolutionary point of view woman is incontestably inferior to man: physically she most resembles such undeveloped examples of humanity as the child and the criminal. The arguments are specious and just a bit tedious, and will not be rehearsed here. Of interest in its own right (i.e., quite apart from the context), however, is a short passage describing the characteristics of the criminal; these observations are applied in works such as "Tschandala" (also 1888), "Paria" (1889), and *I havsbandet* (1889-90):

Hur beskrives nu förbrytartypen fysiologiskt?

Mikrocefali, eller för litet kranium; lätt eller svår skelögdhet; asymetri i ansiktet; lågt utvecklade sinnen; enkelt förstånd; oförmåga at överlägga och besinna en handling's följder. ... en högre [utvecklad organism] är den, som kan behärska eller inordna sin vilja, sina passioner vid sidan av andras; sålunda villkoret för civiliserat samliv. ....

Förbrytaren är icke någon särskild art människa, den är endast en relativ lägre grad av civiliserad mänska, och den europeiska

<sup>33</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 118-44.

förbrytaren blir ändå en högre, när han kommer till Nya Caledoniens mänskoätare.<sup>34</sup>

Cannibalism as a symbol also occurs with frequency in Strindberg's work dealing with psychological struggles between more and less evolved humans (including marriage struggles!).

The section "Lärda saker" ("Learned Matters") consists of only one essay, "På vandring efter spåren till en svensk kulturhistoria"<sup>35</sup> ("In Search of Evidence for a Cultural History of Sweden", 1881), an account of some of Strindberg's adventures while doing research for *Svenska folket*. In the attic room which served as the archive of Stockholm's cathedral, he came across a large disused crucifix. His apostrophe to this relic of former days emphasizes a point he makes elsewhere, that

<sup>34</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 129-30:

What, now, are the physiological characteristics of the criminal type ?

Microcephalism, or too small a cranium; a slight or pronounced squint; asymmetry of the face; poorly developed senses; simple understanding; inability to consider and grasp the consequences of an action. ... a more highly [evolved being] can control or adapt its will, its desires, in accordance with those of others, which is a condition of civilized community life. ....

The criminal is not a separate species of mankind; he is only a relatively lower grade of civilized man, and the European criminal is still superior to the New Caledonian cannibal.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 171-87.

Christianity is a creation of the overclass, but that Christ Himself was one of the underclass:

Mot väggen står ett svartmålat kors; han går närmare och ryggar; det hänger en människa på korset med dödsångesten i sina förvridna anletsdrag och ett gapande sår i sidan. "Har du kommit så undan, gamle blodige vän? Skäms man för dig, eller passar du icke mera där nere bland de stora männen, vilkas marmorvårdar tala om stora bedrifter, sådana du aldrig haft i din biografi?"<sup>36</sup>

There is an echo here, as well, of a biblical passage traditionally interpreted as a prophecy of Christ's agony on the Cross:

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me.... (Lamentations 1:12. King James translation.)

The black cross is a constant feature in Strindberg's writing, and indeed such a cross (without, however, a corpus) marks his grave, at his own behest. In his atheistic period, Strindberg denied Christ's divinity, but maintained a great respect for Jesus, the man.

The final section of the expanded *Likt och olik* is entitled "Estetiskt" ("Aesthetic Matters"), a col-

<sup>36</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 173:

Against the wall stands a black-painted cross; he goes nearer and shudders: there is a man hanging on the cross, with the agony of death on his contorted features and a gaping wound in his side. "Have you fallen so low, old bloody friend? Are they ashamed of you, or don't you fit in anymore down there among the great men, whose marble monuments speak of great exploits, such as never formed part of your life story?"



lection of essays on literary and artistic topics, which share the polemic and dialectic tone of the other sections in the book. An earlier version of the second essay in this section, "Den litterära reaktionen i Sverige"<sup>37</sup> ("Literary Reactionism in Sweden", 1886 in its present form), had been intended as the lead essay in the original edition of *Likt och olikt*, with the title "Vad gäller striden? och Vad har hänt" ("What is the Dispute About? and What Has Happened"). Besides the title, the difference between the two versions is that the later one is much shorter. The excisions were Strindberg's own, made because he later considered the deleted passages either too vitriolic or too personal, and have been preserved in the commentary to *Samlade skrifter*, XVII. Similar considerations led to the decision not to include the essay, in its original form, in *Likt och olikt*. For the modern reader, the deleted passages are often most interesting!

Both versions contain a passage implicitly comparing Karl XV (reigned 1859-72) to Gustav III, through Strindberg's use of a phrase which was the title of his short story about the latter ("En kunglig revolution", 1904). The passage is notable for its application of the word *illusion* to Swedish political life:

I Sverige är det endast kungliga revolutioner som komma till stånd. En sådan var

<sup>37</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 201-217.

1865 års! Kungen var den liberalaste man i Sverige och befann sig i oppositionen; regeringen befann sig också vara i opposition med folket mot adeln. Det var en vacker illusion! Att vara liberal och vara rojalist var ungefär detsamma, och det var därför hela republikfrågan undansköts -- då man faktiskt sett att man kunde göra revolution med en kung i spetsen.<sup>38</sup>

After the words "komma till stånd" ("come to pass") in the above extract, Strindberg has deleted a rather lengthy passage dealing with his usually bitter (on both sides) battles with his critics, which raged especially fiercely after the publication of the satirical *Det nya riket* (1882): like Gustav III, Strindberg is prey to assassins, but he is no illusion, and cannot be shattered so easily; he keeps coming back. The deleted passage reads in part:

<sup>38</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 203:

In Sweden, only royal revolutions come to pass. Such was that of 1865!\* The king was the most liberal man in Sweden, and found himself in the opposition; that is, the government found itself in opposition with the people against the aristocracy. That was a lovely illusion! To be a liberal and to be a royalist were more or less the same thing, and that is why the whole issue of republicanism was brushed aside -- for it had actually been demonstrated that one could make a revolution with a king at the helm.

\* In 1865, despite long and forceful opposition, the King's campaign for the introduction of a bicameral parliamentary system was realized (thus abolishing the estates).

Om mina skott gå längre och träffa bättre, så är väl icke jag brottsligare för det, och när man helt oförskämt fordrar att jag skall lämna ut vapnen (och hur ofta får jag icke bestå vapnen åt mina fiender!) och jag vägrar, så kallar man det förräderi.

Man har sedan jag började min egentliga författareverksamhet, som man trott, dödat mig, begravt mig och till och med knåpat ihop dåliga gravvers över mig en gång om året, men jag har stått upp igen ifrån de döda. Det visar väl att min sak ändock har sin livskraft, när den överlever min person, men huru länge tror man att jag skall hålla ut att spela lik?<sup>39</sup>

The allusion to rising from the dead reveals a not altogether unconscious messianic complex, evident also in the proselytizing tone of many of these pieces.

The same symbolic assassination is rehearsed in the long passage which follows the point where Strindberg determined that "Den litterära reaktionen" should end, and again there is a verbal connection between himself and Christ:

Hösten 1883 [felskrivning för 1882] kom Det Nya Riket ut. Jag skakade hårt den gången och nu föllo äpplena ner, så att det smattrade i

<sup>39</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 318:

If my shots go farther and hit the mark better, I am not more at fault because of that, and when it is quite shamelessly demanded that I hand over my weapons (and how often must I not provide weapons to my enemies!) and I refuse, it is called treachery!

Once a year since I began my real work as a writer, it has been believed that I have been killed and buried, and bad verse has even been read over my grave; but I have risen again from the dead. Does that not show that my case still has vigour, when it can survive my person? but how long do people think I can continue playing a corpse?

backen; maskätna, fullmogna, ja somliga alldeles ruttna! Och att många slog mig i huvet, behöver jag icke tillägga.

Det var satir! Personlig? Ja! Och Nej! Institutionerna voro så skyddade av personers kroppar att jag icke kunde komma åt de förra utan att drabba de senare, och jag hade kommit till den övertygelsen att situationen var så ytterlig att här måste en dö för folket, dö med författarrykte, socialt anseende, ställning, framtid! Och jag dog! Det var ett glädjelig! Bäckström skrev i glädjen begravningsvers och dramatiska teaterns artister spelade minnespjäs och farbror Jolin spelade den botfärdige rövaren och Hedberg ångrade sina gamla synder och begick en ny, och ovännerna kondolerade och vännerna désavouerade. Och så kröp en skara likplundrare fram, och begravningsentreprenörer sedan! Och liket interviewades av en adjungerad medlem av den lägre hovbetjäningen, och besiktigades, och se, det befanns dött -- och så hojtade man: Alls todt.\*

Men ändå lever jag! ....

\*Man tog också in en tacksägelse i nästa års bönedagsplakat! Vad säges om det.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 326:

In the autumn of 1883 [a slip of the pen for 1882 (Landqvist)] Det nya riket came out. I shook hard that time, and now the apples fell down, smashing into the ground: worm-eaten, over-ripe, yes, some of them completely rotten! And I need hardly add that many of them struck me on the head.

That was satire! Personal? Yes! and No! Institutions were so shielded by the bodies of persons that I could not get at the former without coming to blows with the latter, and I had reached the conviction that the situation was so extreme that here one man must die for the people: die together with his reputation as an author, his social respect, his position, his future! And die I did! It was a joyous corpse!\*\* Bäckström\*\*\* wrote the funeral verse; the artists of Dramatiska teatern gave a memorial performance\*\*\*\*; Uncle Jolin\*\*\*\*\* played the repentant thief; Hedberg\*\*\*\*\* regretted his old sins and committed a new one; enemies condoled; and friends disowned. And then a gang of corpse-plunderers crept forth, and after them the

In sharp contrast to this invective against his

funeral entrepreneurs! The corpse was interviewed by a co-opted junior court functionary, examined, and lo, it was pronounced dead -- and they shouted: "Alls todt."\*

But nevertheless, I live! ....

\* A prayer of thanksgiving was even included in the order of service for the day of intercession the following year! How about that. [Strindberg's note.]

\*\* It is difficult to say whether Strindberg means that he died willingly, as the preceding sentence suggests, or that his death was an occasion of rejoicing for others, as is indicated by what follows; perhaps the ambiguity is intentional.

\*\*\* Edvard Bäckström (1841-86), poet whose lightweight historic play Dagvard Frey had been preferred to Strindberg's Mäster Olof in the 1870s (Gustafson, 237).

\*\*\*\* Mäster Olof was performed there three times in the 1882-83 season (Ollén, 42).

\*\*\*\*\* Johan Jolin (1818-84), actor and author of comedies. Farbror (uncle) is a term for old men in general.

\*\*\*\*\* Tor Hedberg (1862-1931): a former member of the "Young Sweden" group, which championed social realism in literature, he gradually drifted away from its ideals and began to write works dealing with purely psychological conflicts (Gustafson, 252-53, 278). Hedberg eventually (1910) became the director of Dramatiska teatern.

literary enemies, are the appreciations Strindberg wrote of literary and artistic allies, whether contemporary (Björnstjerne Björnson, 1832-1910; Carl Snoilsky, 1841-1903; and Carl Larsson, 1853-1919), or in the past (Voltaire, 1694-1778). The oldest of the contemporaries, Björnson, was a Norwegian realist whose folktales occupy a central place in Norwegian literature and who was one of the principal inspirations of the young Swedish realists, Strindberg among them ("Den fredlöse", for instance, owes much to Björnson's lead in exploiting Old Norse themes). "Björnstjerne Björnson"<sup>41</sup> (1884) takes as its point of departure Strindberg's first meeting with the Norwegian, when they both lived in the Scandinavian artistic colony in Grèz-par-Nemours, the previous year. This leads to reflections on the rôle of the artist in society and the difficulty of being taken seriously when the public regards artists as entertainers. An image Strindberg uses several times in these essays is perhaps best formulated here:

Det är faran med konstverket, att det aldrig tages på allvar. En omtyckt poet, som har rätt att säga vad som helst, förutsatt att han säger det fint, påminner icke han om en aktör, vilken i polichinellkostym kommer fram och med all möjlig försiktighet berättar för publiken, att elden är lös i kulisserna? Publiken tror, att det hör till hans roll,

<sup>41</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 234-45.

och mottar honom med applåder och skrattsalvor.<sup>42</sup>

Pulcinella is a stock character of the commedia dell'arte and of marionette theatres (where he evolved into the British Punch), but there is a possible reference as well to Christ -- the Lord of the Dance, the Clown of God, the Cosmic Fool -- Whose message was similarly ignored by the world at large.

The essay ends with a lyrical celebration of Björnson as an artist and an indication of how he (and now Strindberg) has tried to solve the above quandary. It is also an effective example of Strindberg's use of musical analogies:

Hans instrument är icke en tresträngad lyra, utan ett konsertpiano med åtta oktaver och tre pedaler. Än låter han dess toner ljuda i rondon, än i menuetter av naiv enkelhet; än låter han det dåna i sonater, Con brio ända till furioso; alltid rycker han med sig sin publik, som ännu ej tröttnat på dessa så ofantligt varierande prestationer. Trots sin politiska roll har han alltid förblivit en

<sup>42</sup> Samlade skrifter, XVII, 242:

That is the danger with art: that it is never taken seriously. Does not a popular poet, who has the right to say anything at all provided he says it well, remind one of an actor who, dressed in a Pulcinella costume, steps forward and with all possible discretion informs the public that fire has broken out in the wings? The public thinks it part of his rôle, and greets him with applause and volleys of laughter.

konstnär, som betjänar sig av tidningen för det, som icke har med poesin att göra.<sup>43</sup>

In a passage from "Utveckling"<sup>44</sup> ("Progress") (1887), the thirty-five-year old Strindberg speaks of growing old, and of the changes this is producing in his preferences. After describing such a change in literary tastes, he goes on to more general matters:

... nu, sedan jag själv blivit gammal (och konservativ).... ... älskar [jag] Venus mer än Minerva, den starke Zeus mer än den svaghetsdyrkande Kristus....<sup>45</sup>

This is a very ironic observation, for when Strindberg really does get old, he is still not conservative. Abandoned three times by Venus, he once more embraces Minerva (if indeed he had ever left her), and in his last play the Christian Strindberg has his hero iden-

<sup>43</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 245:

His instrument is not a three-stringed lyre, but a concert piano with eight octaves and three pedals. Now he makes its tones sound in rondos, now in minuets of naive simplicity; now he makes it thunder in sonatas, *con brio* even up to *furioso*; always he carries with him his public, who have not yet tired of his infinitely varied performances. Despite his political rôle, he has always continued to be an artist, who avails himself of the newspapers for that which has nothing to do with poetry.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-62.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 260:

... now that I have become old (and conservative) myself.... ... I love Venus more than Minerva, the strong Zeus more than the weakness-adoring Christ....



tify Zeus with Satan! Progress, it seems, can lead one in unexpected directions (which, to be fair, is one of the points of the essay).

That point is demonstrated, as well, in the last essay in the collection, "Om modernt drama och modern teater"<sup>46</sup> ("On Modern Drama and Modern Theatre", 1889). It is mainly a discussion of naturalism, of André Antoine's experimental Théâtre Libre, in Paris (which was to mount a French production of *Fröken Julie* in 1893, as well as serving as a model for his own Scandinavian *försöksteater*), and of the concise dramatic form, the *quart d'heure*, developed there. All were temporary passions of Strindberg; all were eventually superseded in his drama.

Although the essay has nothing particularly new or original to say about the nature of drama -- one would be hard pressed to find anyone who disagreed that the essence of drama is conflict -- it was nevertheless important to restate this principle for a public that expected and demanded of the theatre only escapist entertainment. Of particular interest is Strindberg's linking of naturalism with another passing infatuation, the theory of evolution, and its doctrine of the survival of the fittest:

I det nya naturalistdramat märktes strax  
en strävan till det betydelsefulla motivets

<sup>46</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVI, 281-303.

uppsökande. Därför rörde det sig helst om livets två poler, liv och död, födelseakten och dödakten, kampen om makan, om existensmedlen, om äran, alla dessa strider, med deras slagfält, jammerskri, sårade och döde, varunder man hörde den nya världsåskådningen om livet såsom kamp blåsa sina befruktande sunnanvindar.<sup>47</sup>

The essays in *Likt och olik* are not, nor were they intended to be, works of literature. They are, rather, contributions to the social, political and literary disputes of the 1880's by a man who relished (and excelled at) the rôle of agent provocateur. From the hand of a lesser figure they would indeed have little more than purely historic interest; since the ideas here expressed and the symbolism which is sometimes used to convey them often find their ways into Strindberg's literary works, however, they have more than a passing interest to those who would understand those works. If these ideas were later rejected by the author, as many of them were, they were nevertheless passionately held at the time, and were applied to poetry, short stories, novels, and plays written during

<sup>47</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XVII, 298:

In the new naturalist drama one noticed at once an effort to seek out the significant motive. It therefore chiefly revolved around the two poles of existence: life and death, the act of being born and the act of dying: the struggle for a mate, for the means of survival, for honour; through all these battles, with their battlefields, cries of distress, wounded, and dying, one discerned a fructifying south wind blowing: the new global view of life as a struggle.

the period, and even when ideas are discarded, the passion remains. Much of what Strindberg says here is distasteful to the modern reader; Strindberg often reached the same conclusion in his later years. *Stora landsvägen* makes clear, however, that he regretted nothing: all were essential stages on the road to Damascus, which is the great highway of life.

## Chapter 20

## Resor

Under the title *Resor* (Travels), Brandell has grouped<sup>1</sup> four short pieces of factual prose written between 1884 and 1896: "Från Italien (Sommarbrev i mars)"<sup>2</sup>, "Rom på en dag", "Bondeliv i en fransk by", and "Svensk natur" (Respectively: "From Italy (A Summer Letter in March)", "Rome in a Day", "Peasant Life in a French Village", and "Swedish Nature"). Of these, "Bondeliv i en fransk by" is the first section of *Bland franska bönder* and will be discussed under that title, and "Svensk natur" is without interest in the present context.

The two Italian travel pieces are accounts of two trips Strindberg made in 1884 from Switzerland, where he was living at the time (in Ouchy). The first trip, with his family, was to Pegli, near Genoa; the second was made in the company of the Swedish poet, Verner von Heidenstam (1859-1940; he later appears as the Blacksmith in *Stora Landsvägen*), and its object was to "do" Rome in as short a time as possible: he claims to have had no interest in seeing Rome, but felt that his family, his friends, his honour, and his reputation all

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, XIV, 203-316.

<sup>2</sup> First published serially in the Stockholm newspaper, *Dagens nyheter*, during the month of April, 1884.

demanded that he do so. He fulfills the obligation in as perfunctory a manner as possible: highly entertaining reading, if rather limited in its usefulness as a travel guide!

As might be expected from their nature, these pieces are not rich in symbolism; only one passage in the two essays has any symbolic content at all, and that minimal. At the beginning of "Från Italien",<sup>3</sup> emergence from the Mont Cenis tunnel through the Alps into Italy is described in terms of the illumination said to accompany induction into a mystic order:

Det är en god effekt denna tunnel, uppfunnen för dem som för första gången skola bländas av söderns härlighet. Den påminner om en reception i den orden, där offret först ledes in i ett mörkt rum och sedan med förbundna ögon släppes ut att få skåda ljuset med bländade blickar.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Skrifter*, XIV, 205-32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 205:

It is a good effect, this tunnel: devised for those who for the first time are about to be blinded by the glory of the south. It reminds me of an induction into that order, where the victim is first led into a dark room and then, his eyes bound, is let out to behold the light with dazzled eyes.

## Chapter 21

## Giftas

The two-part collection of short stories, *Giftas: äktenskapshistorier*<sup>1</sup> (*Married: Stories of Married Life*, 1884, 1886) is, like the novel *Röda rummet*, much less symbolic than the plays, using imagery more to create a visual impression than to deepen meaning. The stories are very important, however, as expositions of Strindberg's ideas on women, marriage, *kvinnofrågan* (the women's question), sex, and related areas. As such, they throw considerable light on relations between the sexes in his other works, particularly on the archetypal figures of mother, wife, and mistress.

There are, of course, other important and interesting symbols in the stories. The story "Fågel Fenix"<sup>2</sup> ("The Phoenix") in *Giftas I*, for instance, contains the symbol of the phoenix to which its title refers:

Två gånger hade han trott sig se fågel Fenix flyga upp ur den fjortonårigas aska, först i dottern, sedan i den andra hustrun, men i hans minne levde nu bara den första, den lilla i prästgården, ... henne som han aldrig fick; men nu när det led mot hans sols nedgång och dagarna blevo korta, nu såg han aldrig i sina mörka stunder annat än bilden av "gamla mamma", ... och när hans segerrus var över och hans öga såg klart, så undrade han om icke "gamla mamman" ändock var den rätta Fågel Fenix som steg så vacker och så

<sup>1</sup> Samlade verk, XVI.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-66.

lugn ur den fjortonåriga guldfågeln's aska,  
sedan hon lagt sina ägg och plockat dunet ur  
brösten åt ungarne och närt dem med sitt  
blod, tills hon dog!<sup>3</sup>

The story also contains references to sulphur, gold, and silver, very important from *Inferno* onwards, when Strindberg uses alchemical symbolism extensively in his works.

As might be expected from the title, the story "Höst"<sup>4</sup> ("Autumn") in *Giftas II* is a good example of Strindberg's use of seasonal symbolism: an aging couple try to rediscover their early love for each other, but find they cannot recapture what once was: spring has gone forever and it is now autumn. Eventually they realize that their early love has not died, but has rather been transformed into something else, different but no

<sup>3</sup> *Samlade verk*, XVI, 166:

Twice he thought he had seen the Phoenix fly up out of the fourteen-year old's ashes, first in the person of his daughter, then in that of his second wife; but only the first one still lived in his memory, the little one in the vicarage, ... she whom he never attained; but now, when the setting of his sun was approaching and the days were growing shorter, now in his dark moments he only ever saw the image of "Old Mama", ... and when the intoxication of his victory had passed and his eye saw clearly, he wondered if "Old Mama" were not after all the true Phoenix, which arose so beautiful and calm from the ashes of the fourteen-year old golden bird, having laid her eggs and plucked the down from her breast for her young and nourished them with her blood until she died!

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-97.

less meaningful. They are thankful that at least winter has not yet come, and look forward to a second spring: not in this life, but in the next, after they have suffered the sorrows and the deprivation of winter. From the point of view of colour symbolism, it is significant that the first spring of their love is referred to as "den gyllene, rosenröda tiden",<sup>5</sup> an instance of the black-red-white-gold colour pattern predominant in all of Strindberg's writings.

The story "Brödet"<sup>6</sup> ("Bread") makes particularly effective use of animal imagery to contrast the care-free abundance of nature with the troubled plight of its hopeless hero, who is ruined as a consequence of his natural passions:

Myggorna svävade fram och åter i sin bröllopsdans ovanom björken, utan bekymmer för de tusentals små, som deras tilllåtna nöjen skulle kasta in i tillvaron; gäddorna lekte i vassen, vårdslöst avlämnande miljoner av sitt yngel; svalorna kysstes i flykten mitt på ljusa dagen, allt annat än änsliga för följderna av slika oregelbundna älskogsförbindelser.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, XVI, 191: "the golden, rose-red time".

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 198-207.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 201:

The mosquitos swarmed hither and thither in their wedding dance above the birch, without a thought for the thousands of young their lawful pleasures would bring into existence; the pike frolicked in the reeds, heedlessly releasing millions of their spawn; the swallows kissed in flight in broad daylight, anything but concerned over the consequences of such irregular love liaisons.



"Tvekamp"<sup>8</sup> ("Duel") introduces a symbol which is to be important in all of Strindberg's works dealing with marriage, that of cannibalism: "'.... Äktenskapet är ett mänskoäteri. Äter inte jag dig, så äter du mig. Du åt mig. Jag kan inte älska dig mer.'"<sup>9</sup>

"Övertro"<sup>10</sup> ("Blind Faith") adds three more symbols to those which are to become inseparable from the works dealing with marriage: warfare, theatre (rôle-playing), and slavery:

Att kvinnan är djärvare i dagliga livet, det beror på mannens underdånighet. Det hjälper ej att kvinnan skyller på att hon ej fått gå i krig; hon har fått allt vad hon velat. Hon lämnade åt mannen att föra krig med den "råa" styrkan; hon behöll för sig att föra det med förståndet, listen och slutligen som nu, med osanning, då hon spelar slavinna och högre väsen på en gång.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Samlade verk, XVI, 265-79.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 278-79: "'.... Marriage is cannibalism. If I don't eat you, you'll eat me. You've eaten me. I can no longer love you.'"

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 301-05.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 302:

That woman is more intrepid in day-to-day life is a consequence of man's subservience. It is no use for woman to blame it on the fact that she has not been permitted to go to war; she has been permitted to do everything she wanted. She left it to man to wage war with "brute" force; she reserved to herself the making of war with intelligence, cunning, and finally, as now, with falsehood, playing the slave and the superior being at the same time.

One cannot leave Giftas without mentioning the controversy which surrounded the publication of Part I, namely the charge of blasphemy laid against Strindberg and the ensuing trial. The passage on which the charge was based is from the story "Dygdens lön"<sup>12</sup> ("The Reward of Virtue"), a largely autobiographical piece dealing with the crisis of puberty:

Så blev han konfirmerad på våren. Det uppskakande uppträdet, då överklassen tog ed av underklassen på Kristi Lekamen och Blod att den senare aldrig skulle befatta sig med vad den förra gjorde, satt länge i honom. Det oförskämda bedrägeriet som spelades med Högstedts Piccadon à 65 öre kannan och Lettströms majsoblater à 1 krona [skålpundet], vilka av prästen utgavos för att vara den för över 1800 år sedan avrättade folkuppvigglaren Jesus av Nasarets kött och blod föll icke under hans reflexion, ty man reflekterade icke den tiden, utan man fick "stämningar".<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Samlade verk, XVI, 31-61.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 50-51:

And so he was confirmed in the spring. The shocking theatrics, in which the upper class made the lower class swear on Christ's Body and Blood\* never to concern themselves with what the upper class did, troubled him for a long time. The shameless imposture which was perpetrated with Högstedt's Piccadon\*\* (which cost 65 öre\*\*\* a magnum) and Lettman's corn wafers (at 1 crown a pound), which the priest gave out to be the flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth, the popular agitator who was put to death over 1800 years ago, did not pass under his reflection, for one did not reflect at that time, one received "impressions".

\* The word *Blod* (Blood) appears in the published text for the first time in *Samlade verk*, XVI (1982); previous editions (including that used for the preparation of the charge against Strindberg) read "Kristi lekamen

Confirmation was (and still is) regarded in Sweden as a rite of passage: the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood, the passing from the world of innocence (symbolically identified with white, the body) to the world of experience (symbolically identified with red, blood). The presentation of Christ in the eucharist under two separate species, the body and the blood, is, therefore, in a curious way symbolic of the nature of the problem with which the story deals: the conflict, always present but perhaps strongest during puberty, between the demands of the spirit or conscience and the demands of the flesh. The burden of the present extract would seem to be that this conflict is unnecessary: man is but dust (just as the species of Communion are but bread and wine) and ought not to give himself airs!

The charge brought against Strindberg was "Hädelse emot Gud eller gäckeri av Guds ord eller sakramen-

och ord" (Christ's body and word)!

\*\* Högstedt's Piccadon: a brand of sacramental wine. Piccardon is a sweet muscatel wine from the region of Montpellier in France.

\*\*\* an öre is the hundredth part of a crown (krona).

ten."<sup>14</sup> If found guilty, he could have been sentenced to up to two years of forced labour. He was eventually found not guilty, however, and returned to Geneva, where he was living at the time. He has described the psychological stresses of the trial in the short story "Genvägar" (in *Vivisektioner*) and in "Kvarstadsresan". It widened the gulf between him and the social, political, and literary establishments in Sweden, but won him great popular acclaim. The Giftas trial is still considered a landmark in the history of freedom of expression in Sweden.

<sup>14</sup> Modéer, 44: "Blasphemy against God or mockery of God's Word or the Sacraments." Modéer discusses the Giftas trial in ch. 5 (41-55) of his book.

## Chapter 22

*Utopier i verkligheten*

*Utopier i verkligheten: fyra berättelser*<sup>1</sup> (Realized Utopias: Four Stories) was published in 1885, between the two parts of *Giftas*. In his foreword, Strindberg calls the stories descriptions of successful attempts to reform society, which he saw as having degenerated through an over-refinement of culture.<sup>2</sup> They were his answer to the charge that he wished to pull down old structures without suggesting anything to replace them! The four stories are set in Switzerland (where the Strindbergs lived in 1884 and early 1885), and extend Strindberg's interest in evolution (best exemplified in the novel *I havsbandet*, 1892) to the social plane, where, he remarks, its operation does not always result in improvement.

The first story, "Nybyggnad"<sup>3</sup> ("Under Construction") is the story of Blanche, from her youth, raised by two strongly feminist aunts who wish to make of her a "new woman", through her days as a medical student, an inconclusive love affair with Emile, a fellow student, and her unsuccessful attempts to establish a

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 247-372.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-297.

profitable medical practice, to her final fulfillment as doctor to a foundry which has been established on socialist principles, and her reunion and reconciliation there with Emile.

As a young girl, Blanche is not permitted an independent existence: her aunts want to realize through her their own ambition of proving that woman is not only equal, but superior, to man. These two sisters stand in a relationship to Blanche which is central to Strindberg's works: living through her, they are as parasites on a healthy plant; drawing nourishment and sustenance from her hard-won achievements and denying her the healthy life of a young girl, they are vampires. Blanche's spinster Aunt Bertha is Emile's particular bane. Trying to wrench Blanche from her grasp, he in fact calls her a vampire: "Ni äter denna vampyrens bröd...."<sup>4</sup> Although this is the only occurrence of the word in the story, the symbol is strong throughout. Using the symbol of murder and poison, for instance, Emile further inveighs against Aunt Bertha. The first speaker in the extract is Blanche:

-- Men tant är ingen mördare!  
 -- Nej, men mörderska! Känner ni inte hennes gift som håller på att koagulera ert blod! Hennes hat, hennes hämnd, som ni skall

<sup>4</sup> Skriffter, III, 270: "You eat this vampire's bread...."

tillfredsställa, löper i era ådror, absorberas av edra lungor, paralyserar ert nervsystem!<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, so successful are the vampires, they have appropriated even Blanche's soul: "... ni har sålt er själ som andra kvinnor sälja sin kropp."<sup>6</sup>

Their hold over Blanche is economic: they raise her, finance her education, and support her unsuccessful practice, until their resources are depleted and she becomes responsible for them. So successfully have they curtailed her freedom and will, she becomes completely dependent on them, thus herself sharing in their parasitic nature: "Hon behövde dem, som misteln sin poppel, som parasiten sin skaffare."<sup>7</sup> She, however, is eventually able to shake off her dependency, which is mainly economical; theirs is psychological, morbid, and unshakeable.

As a young girl, Blanche resents the stifling domination of her aunts, but sees no way out. In keeping with the evolutionary concerns of *Utopier i verklighe-*

<sup>5</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 270:

"But Auntie is no murderer!"

"No, but a murderess! Don't you feel her poison at work, coagulating your blood! Her hatred, her vengeance, which you must satisfy, flow in your veins, are absorbed by your lungs, paralyze your nervous system!"

<sup>6</sup> *Idem.*: "... you have sold your soul, as other women sell their bodies."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 271: "She needed them, as the mistletoe needs its poplar, as the parasite its host."

ten, she sees her concerns and aspirations in terms of animal symbolism:

Hon hade nyss läst om de antropomorfa aporna, som tyranniserades av en hane, vilken lät hela den unga truppen leva för honom, tills de unga vuxit upp, då de regelbundet gjorde revolt och frigjorde sig. Naturens ordning tycktes vara olika i naturen.<sup>8</sup>

Blanche is no young ape, who can rebel against the tyranny of her elders; she is rather, like Kurt in *Dödsdansen*, a sheep: a sufferer rather than a doer: "... hennes fastrar hade vallat henne som ett får!"<sup>9</sup>

Blanche is, in fact, in a symbolic prison, and she remains there until the moment of liberation, when she joins the factory commune. This imprisonment is the major stumbling block to a relationship with Emile: he cannot, will not marry her while her soul is in prison, and even she has to admit that to marry him in order to free herself from her aunts would only be exchanging one prison for another:

Hon sprang hemifrån, ut ifrån skolans fängelse, in i universitetets fängelse, ut i praktikens, publikgunstens fängelse. Över allt fängelser. Och kom befriaren, den starke mannen och slet hennes bojar, vore endast för

<sup>8</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 254:

She had recently read of the anthropomorphic apes, tyrannized by a male who allowed the entire band of the young to live only for him until they grew up, when they regularly revolted and freed themselves. The law of nature seemed to be different out in nature.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 256: "... her (paternal) aunts had grazed her like a sheep!"



att föra henne in i ett nytt, välmurat  
fängelse, det sista, som endast döden kunde  
öppna.<sup>10</sup>

There is more than a little similarity here to the situation of Margit in *Herr Bengts hustru*!

Blanche's predicament is itself symbolic of contemporary society, where individual liberty was severely limited, to the point almost of annihilation, by the economic necessities of life and the oppressiveness of the traditional family structure, with its system of emotional debit and credit that Strindberg has explored so well elsewhere. The background is described in detail in order to present the conditions against which the socialist commune stands out as a realized utopia. That utopian vision remains with Strindberg most of his life, later appearing as the non-confessional monastery, and eventually supplanted by the Isle of the Blessed (the afterlife); an early glimpse of the monastery symbol is found in the last of these four stories.

In universalizing Blanche's plight, Strindberg makes use of the symbol of slavery. We have already

<sup>10</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 272:

She fled from her home, out of the prison of school, into the prison of the university, out into the prison of practice, of public favour. Everywhere prisons! And should the deliverer, the strong man, come to sever her bonds, it would only be to entice her into a new strong-walled prison, the last, which only death could open.

seen that for Blanche, marriage under the "old dispensation" would be merely exchanging one prison for another. In a passage of quintessential Strindbergian cynicism, he demonstrates that this is the condition of all marriage, in which a man becomes a slave to a woman with disastrous consequences for both. The passage is related to all of Strindberg's works dealing with marriage, but most closely to *Fadren*:

Faderskapet kan aldrig bevisas; moderskapet är det enda man kan vara viss på. Men kvinnan har icke fått förvärvsmedlen till sin disposition, därför måste hon slå en man i slaveri att arbeta åt sig. Så har hon gjort från urminnes tider; men slaveri har alltid demoraliserat slavägaren, därför är kvinnan urartad, egoistisk, och i det närmaste omöjlig för samhället.<sup>11</sup>

This, Strindberg points out, is a very old story indeed; what is new is that contemporary life has made slaves not only of married men, but of men and women alike, married or single: "... vi äro nu alla slavar,

<sup>11</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 280:

Paternity can never be proved; maternity is the only thing one can be certain of. But woman does not have the right of inheritance at her disposal, and so she must bind a man in slavery to work for her. This she has done from time immemorial. But slavery has always demoralized the slave-owner; that is why woman is degenerate, egoistic, and almost intolerable in society.

och varje försök att fila av kedjan straffar sig med skärpt fängelse."<sup>12</sup>

This, is the symbolic structure of "Nybyggnad", a story that is told again, but without the utopian ending, in the play "Moderkärlek" ("Mother Love", 1892). The most concentrated symbolic passage in the story has yet to be discussed, however. While Blanche is still a young girl, but nevertheless aware of the restraints on her freedom, she has a dream, in which freedom is symbolized by the triumph of pagan deities and rites over Christianity (the gods of nature triumph over the religion of restraint and self-denial):

Nu slöt hon ögonen.... Hon var i katedralen i Fribourg, ... orgeln spelade i halvskymningen; dörren till heliga gravens kapell står öppen; där ligger frälsaren död; bredvid stå kvinnorna sörjande; orgeln dånar och brusar: dies irae, dies illa, dies irae, dies illa; det är människoröster, det är änglaröster, det är titanstämmor som vilja lyfta valven, men utanför mörknar det allt mer och mer, och de målade fönstren med kungar och helgon mista sin färg; ... så höres ett dån ..., en violett blixtn slår mitt igenom valven och lyser upp altartavlan i Sankt Franciscus' kapell; och där blir så klart, att man kan läsa de textade orden: korsfäst köttet! Men orgeln, som överröstas av åskan, börjar sin tvekamp ... och nu storma fram tonmassor som titankörer, som utmaningar mot avundsjuka makter, sönderslitande som osaliga människors jämmer; men åskan ökas och ... så kommer en blixtn åtföljd av en knall, som om all världens stångjärn släppts från himlen.... Då tystnar orgeln av; han kan icke trotsa, men han kan gäcka; och flöjten beledsagar mänsko-

<sup>12</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 281: "... now we are all slaves, and every attempt to file off the chain is punished with severe imprisonment."

mans lekande obligataria, som småningom övergår från romansen till den världsliga visan, från visan till den självsvåldiga dansen; orgelns blanka pipor bliva jättelika syrinx och de förgyllda änglarnes runda kinder falla in, hakan skjuter ner i ett bockskägg och genom lockarne sticka ändar av små horn; de blåsa Pans, skogsgudens, naturens, allbefruktares hymner, pelarskaften slå ut löv och Sankt Franciscus får rosenrött kött ... och vandrar som en lycklig yngling med Maria Magdalena upp till högkorets absid, där de bikta varandra ljuva synder; ur heliga gravens kapell stiger Apollo med svällande skänklar och fylld bröstborg; han ser sig trotsig och glad omkring på de gråtande kvinnorna och med utsträckt hand efter att ha nedlagt döden säger han med segerlöje på läpparne: Kristus är uppstånden. Och ifrån gravarne under golvet höres ett bultande som om instängda vilja ut, och de ropa och svara: Ordet vart kött!

Blanche vaknade upp.... Hon sprang upp ... och föll ner på en stol, gråtande....<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 257-58:

Then she closed her eyes.... She was in Fribourg Cathedral, ... the organ was playing in the half-dusk. The door to the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre stands open; there lies the Saviour, dead; beside him stand the sorrowing women; the organ thunders and roars: "Dies irae, dies illa, dies irae, dies illa", with the sound of human voices, angel voices, titan voices, which seem trying to raise the vault. But outside it gets darker and darker, and the painted windows with their kings and saints lose their colours.... Then a clap of thunder is heard ..., a violet streak of lightning strikes right through the vault and lights up the altarpiece in the Chapel of St. Francis; and it is so light in there, one can read the words: "Crucify the flesh!" But the organ, drowned out by the thunder, joins battle ... and now volleys of notes storm forth, as from choirs of titans, like challenges to jealous powers, piercing as the cries of the damned. But the thunder increases, and ... then comes a flash of lightning, followed by a thunderclap, as if all the iron bars in the world had been dropped from heaven.... Then the organ grows quieter ... and the flute accompanies the playful obbligato of the vox humana, which gradually shifts from romance

In this sequence, the struggle (and victory) of the natural over the rule-bound and oppressed is symbolized by the supplanting of Christ by Apollo, of the angels of Christian piety by Pan and his satyrs, of the disciplined and stylistic architecture of Europe by the random elegance of vegetation, of the stately and lofty tones of the organ by the thunder and lightning of unbridled nature, of quiet, reflective, introspective music by frenetic dance. The serene and happy environment of the commune where Blanche and Emile finally find their fulfillment (and each other) seems very tame in comparison!

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to secular song, from song to frenzied dance. The shiny pipes of the organ become gigantic Pan-pipes, and the round cheeks of the gilded angels cave in, their chins draw down into goat-beards, and through their locks protrude the ends of small horns; grinning, they blow into the ends of the pewter pipes: they play the hymns of Pan, of the wood-god, of nature, of the all-fructifier. The shafts of the pillars burst into leaf, and ... St. Francis takes on rosy flesh ... and wanders like a happy youth with Mary Magdalene up to the apse of the main sanctuary, where they confess sweet sins to each other. Apollo steps from the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre with muscular limbs and expanded chest; he looks defiantly and cheerfully at the weeping women around him, and with outstretched hand, having vanquished death, he says, with the smile of victory on his lips, "Christ is risen!" And from the graves under the floor a banging is heard, as if those enclosed there want out, and they shout in reply, "The word was made flesh!"

Blanche awoke.... She jumped up ... and collapsed in a chair, weeping....

The second story in *Utopier i verkligheten* is "Återfall"<sup>14</sup> ("Relapse"). It is the story of two Russian emigrés, Paul Petrowitsch and Anna Ivanovna. He had been a doctor and owned land near Moscow, but had to flee Russia because of his political activities. Now he grows flowers in Ouchy and sells them at the market in Lausanne. He and Anna are free spirits and try to live without hypocrisy and in harmony with each other, nature, and reason. Their life together is the utopia which earns them a place in this collection. Although deeply in love, they are not married. The crisis comes when Anna wants their new-born son baptized (her relapse). Paul gives in to her, although it is against his principals, but refuses to attend the ceremony. While the rest of the family is at church, he reflects that his increasing responsibilities are beginning to restrict his freedom and will more and more demand compromises with his conscience. He decides to leave (his relapse), but on his first night away, he realizes that his love for Anna is stronger than his disagreement with her, and the next day he returns to his family. The story ends with a symbolic struggle between winter and spring: a struggle which spring is sure to win.

Paul's past is only hinted at, but he offended the czarist government seriously enough to cause his exile.

<sup>14</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 298-330.

His new life is one of grace, harmony, and peace, symbolized by the idyllic garden he cultivates. One of the flowers there is perhaps a symbol of the man himself:

... så en pluton av vita Boules de Neige, vita som namnet, men med en dröjande rodnad på knopparnes spetsar, ett minne kanske av rasens kraftigare dagar då dess blod rann röd....<sup>15</sup>

At any rate, plant symbolism quite naturally carries some of the meaning in this story. Thus, with reference to the ideals for which he struggled in Russia and to the plants he grew there, a friend's description of Paul's former estate applies to him the curse of Ebal:

"... när jag ... fick se huru framför varje stuga stod en fruktträd i blom, då tänkte jag: Paul har arbetat för andras glädje, och där han sått få de skörda...."<sup>16</sup>

The strongest use of plant symbolism occurs when Paul realizes that his desertion of home and family has been a mistake, that his days of activism are over, and that his rôle now is to support a new generation:

Vingårdarne stodo där med sina döda valnöts-träd uppspikade som hela skogar av Golgata's;

<sup>15</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 301:

... then a platoon of Boules de Neige [literally, Snowballs, a variety of rose], white as their name, but with a lingering redness at the tips of the buds: a reminder, perhaps, of the stock's more powerful days, when its blood ran red....

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 312:

"... when I ... saw how a fruit tree in bloom stood in front of every cottage, I thought: 'Paul has worked for the enjoyment of others, and where he has sown they reap....'"

och med dessa döda trädstammar voro de unga, levnadsfriska vinrankorna "gifta", som romarne kallade det. Och om en månad skulle de svarta hemska uppgillrade trädliken klädas med friskt vinlöv. Han kände sig som en rot-huggen trädstam, på vilken ännu icke grönskan kommit; han kände att han på sin höjd skulle kunna få låna grönska utifrån av andra; ty ifrån sig själv kunde han icke mer skjuta skott, sedan man i hans ungdom slagit svavel-syra på roten. Men han skulle också kunna bli ett sådant där hopspikat spaljé, ett stöd, efter vilket de unga rankorna skulle kunna klänga upp i solen.

Nu hade han, död som han var, velat gå ut på egen hand och agera ungskog, men det dugde han icke till. Men han var dock nödvändig. Fälldes han, så föll hela den härliga vingården ihop och skulle ruttna på marken. Och höllo icke de svaga rankorna uppe honom också? Han kände det nu, att han icke kunde stå för sig själv!<sup>17</sup>

Colours also play an important rôle in these two passages: the white and red of the Boules de Neige,

<sup>17</sup> Skrifter, III, 322-23:

The vineyards lay there with their dead walnut trees staked out like whole forests of Golgathas, and to these dead tree trunks the young, zestful vines were "married", as the Romans said. And in a month the black, ugly, splayed-out corpses of trees would be clothed with fresh vine leaves. He felt like a root-dead tree trunk which no longer produced foliage; he felt that at best he could borrow foliage from others, for he could no longer produce shoots himself, since sulphuric acid had been poured on his roots when he was young. But he could still be like one of these make-shift trellises, a support on which the young vines could climb up to the sun.

Now, dead as he was, he had wished to strike out on his own, but he was not up to it. But he was useful all the same. Should he be felled, the whole glorious vineyard would collapse and rot on the ground. And did the weak vines not also hold him up? He felt it now: he was unable to stand by himself!



symbolizing humanity as it strives towards perfection, and the blackness of the dead tree trunks revived by the greenness of the vines, which bring them new youth, vitality, and purpose. Another passage involving flowers focuses primarily on their colours. Here Strindberg not only uses colour symbolism, but makes his characters aware of that symbolism. Paul is gathering a bouquet for Anna while their son is being born:

Han plockade av de vackraste tazetter och tulpaner och gjorde en kvast i idel ljusa färger, inga blodröda, inga brandgula, bara vita och skära som lugnade ögat.<sup>18</sup>

What more appropriate gift to a woman in the pangs of childbirth than a bouquet of these colours, symbolizing the intermingling of suffering, love, and innocence!

Strong colour symbolism is attached to Paul's flight from his family. The blue of the sea, the sky, and the hazy mountains seems to beckon him onward. Blue, as the passage indicates, is associated with the symbolism of sea and sky. It indicates a movement towards the vast, the all-embracing, heaven, and symbolizes truth or idealism (Cirlot, 50-54). Paul abandons his family in order to pursue his ideals, which he feels would be compromised should he remain:

<sup>18</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 316:

He gathered the most beautiful French daffodils and tulips and made a bouquet of simple light colours: no blood reds, no fire yellows, only whites and pinks, which soothed the eye.

Bryggan skjuter långt ut i sjön, och han tyckte sig vandra ut i det oändliga; utanför brohuvudet den blå sjön och de blå bergen; mellan de glesa plankorna syntes det blå vattnet; det var som en väg vilken icke leder någonstans, en trampolin till evigheten.<sup>19</sup>

As already seen, he is recalled to his family by another colour symbol: the black and green of death and regeneration. As the story closes, Paul and Anna look forward to spring, the return of green to the land. And indeed, the story's colour symbolism is closely linked to seasonal (cyclic) symbolism. It opens on Midsummer Day, with an appropriate atmosphere of domestic tranquillity: the male-female relationship associated with summer is that of the lover and his beloved. The son who provokes the crisis is born in March. In spring the male-female relationship is that of mother and child: the lover-husband is supplanted in the affections of the wife-mother. But March is also the end of winter, the season of the disappeared hero, and appropriately Paul disappears from his family hearth. His decision to return for the sake of his son, the new generation, is a rebirth into the seasonal cycle:

-- ... när avalanchen gått, då, Paul, är det ju vår! .... Må avalanchen gå!

<sup>19</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 320:

The pier stretches far out into the lake, and he imagined himself wandering out into the infinite, beyond the breakwater, the blue lake, and the blue mountains; between the loose planks, the blue water could be seen; it was like a road that leads nowhere, a trampoline to eternity.

-- Den måste gå, ty eljes få vi aldrig  
vår, Anna!<sup>20</sup>

Hoary age must make way for green youth if the universe  
is to unfold as it should!

The seasonal symbolism reinforces a biblical parallel which occurs to Paul just after the epiphany in the vineyard:

-- .... Moses släpade Israels barn i  
öknarne för att de gamla skulle dö ut, men  
under tiden uppfostrade han det nya släktet,  
som skulle få se Kanaan. Låt våra ben vitna i  
ökensanden, det är vår lott, men låt oss  
arbeta för de kommande: det är allt vad vi  
kunna göra. ....<sup>21</sup>

For a freethinker, Paul is uncommonly aware of biblical parallels (both characteristics he shares with Strindberg). During his severest trial, when the injuries he received under torture paralyze him (a physical relapse) on his way to fetch the midwife for the birth of his son, Paul pleads to God in his anguish, using a

<sup>20</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 330:

"... when the avalanche has gone, Paul,  
then it's really spring! .... May the avalanche go!"

"It has to go, or spring will never  
come, Anna!"

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-29:

".... Moses led the children of Israel  
out into the desert to let the old die off,  
but meanwhile he raised up the new generation,  
who would be permitted to see Canaan.  
Let our bones whiten in the desert sand --  
that's our lot -- but let us work for those  
who follow: that's all we can do. ...."

frequent apostrophe of the psalmist: "... ack Herre, huru länge?"<sup>22</sup> And others reap where he has sown.

Paul is a freethinker, not an atheist: "... han trodde på en Gud, om också icke på bönens makt att ändra detaljer i jordelivets lilla styrelse...."<sup>23</sup> The God in whom he believes, however, is bound up with the mysterious "powers". God is superior to these powers, but apparently unable (or unwilling) to control them, and the powers are malevolent. Here, they are at least partially identified with worldly powers, as revealed in Paul's prayer of anguish over the past tortures which now cripple him at a critical moment in his life:

-- Se människan, utbröt han, se människan nedbruten till marken av världens herrar! O, Gud, Deus optimus, maximus, se huru dina ställföreträdare förvandla mänskobarnen till kräldjur och bryta ryggarne av dem när de vilja resa sina sina huven! Se hur du skändat ditt mästerverk, hur de förstått använda tidevarvets, snilletts största uppfinning, som skulle ha begagnats att vara språkrör mellan folken! De ha stulit blixten från himlen, för att slå oss med lamhet, ack Herre, huru länge? --<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 315: "... how long, O Lord?"

<sup>23</sup> *Idem.*: "... he believed in a God, if not also in the power of prayer to alter the details of the short course of earthly life...."

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 315:

"Behold mankind," he erupted, "behold mankind bowed down to the earth by the masters of the world! Oh God, Deus Optimus Maximus, see how your deputies change the children of men into reptiles, breaking their backs when they try to raise their heads! See how they have desecrated your masterwork, the use they have found for the greatest discovery of the age, of genius -- which should have been used as a communication between

The reference to stealing lightning from heaven also links the powers to Prometheus: a benefactor of mankind, or supplier of the means for self-destruction.

Man, then, must make his progress toward the ideal in spite of the powers of darkness (supernatural, natural, and otherwise), and he must not strive to do this alone -- for then he is weak and powerless -- but through the support of one generation for the next. Only in this way, despite relapses (or perhaps aided by them, for they bring revelation in their wake), can he hope to achieve "utopier i verkligheten": realized utopias!

Less important to the central theme of "Återfall", but providing a link between it and Strindberg's drama, is the use of the debit and credit symbolism associated with marriage in such plays as *Fordringsägare*. The passage occurs after Paul has given his permission for the baptism, but before he makes his break for freedom:

Paul hade givit upp sin vilja för Annas önskan, men han kände icke därför underkastelsen. Anna däremot hade tagit en gåva av Paul och hon kände sig stå i skuld. Nästa gång Paul hade en önskan emot hennes, måste hon giva upp sin önskan. Hennes lugn var rub-

—  
peoples!\* They have stolen lightning from heaven in order to inflict us with lameness -- how long, O Lord?"

\* Paul's torture apparently involved the use of electricity.

bat. Hon såg dagligen och stundligen sin fordringsägare inför sig. .... Att dagligen och stundligen se sin fordringsägare och veta att man levde på hans barmhärtighet väckte ett slags kylig känsla, som närmade sig ovilja mot Paul.<sup>25</sup>

The third story in *Utopier i verkligheten*, "Över molnen"<sup>26</sup> ("Above the Clouds") is the simplest in story line. One April morning Aristide, a sick old man, is forced by the weather to stop at a hotel in the Swiss Alps. There he meets Henri, an old and bitter literary enemy. He offers to bury the hatchet, but Henri refuses. They fall to talking, however; recriminations lead to explanations, explanations to understanding, and understanding to forgiveness. They patch up their differences, the weather clears, and Aristide and his family proceed on their journey. The last scene is of the two old enemies waving at each other: Henri from the hotel and Aristide from higher up the mountain.

<sup>25</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 319:

Paul had surrendered his will for the sake of Anna's wish, but he did not therefore feel himself dominated. Anna, on the other hand, had accepted a gift from Paul, and felt herself in his debt. The next time their desires conflicted, she must surrender her own wish. Her tranquillity was disturbed. Day by day and moment by moment she saw her creditor before her. .... To see her creditor day by day and moment by moment and to know that she lived through his generosity awakened a feeling of coolness, which almost approached resentment, towards Paul.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-43.

This is the kind of confrontation exploited in plays such as "Den starkare" and "Paria", but here the focus is on the reconciliation of two enemies rather than on their struggle for dominance. Age has brought both men to the realization that their work has been in vain, that they could not lift themselves out of the morass of the human condition, let alone elevate the rest of humanity, and this realization has made also their enmity meaningless. They realize before they part that hope for humanity lies in quite a different direction to the one they so ruthlessly followed:

Det nyttiga arbetet, som vi skytt likt något orent, går högt nu för tiden; det arbetar i jorden, men det höjer oss över molnen; vi arbetade över molnen och komma lika fullt i jorden.<sup>27</sup>

This realization, that utopia must be realized through physical labour rather than intellectually, in theory and fantasy, is similar to Paul's realization in the previous story that his contribution to the building of utopia will be the support of future generations, not flight from his responsibilities; it corresponds, too, to Strindberg's cry in his social satires of the period: "I want to be useful!"

<sup>27</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 341:

Useful labour, which we avoided as something unclean, is highly valued nowadays; it operates on earth but lifts us over the clouds; we operated above the clouds and fell to earth all the same.

The clouds of the title symbolize all that stands between man and the truth or perfection, which is symbolized by the stars (clouds have not yet become symbols of the afterlife, although, as the barrier between man and perfection, the possibility is inherent). The magnitude of the change in attitude in the two men is revealed by comparing the above passage from the end of the story to one from near the beginning, just after they meet:

"Är du nöjd med din position nu, Aristide? Per nubila ad astra. Vi ha kommit över molnen redan; ha sålunda icke långt till stjärnorna."<sup>28</sup>

The story is interesting for its cynicism towards the literary profession. It is a bloody hunt in which the end is everything, and all obstacles are ruthlessly trampled down until the hunters either slaughter each other or perish from exhaustion:

-- .... .. du dödat mig.  
 -- Du bet mig och jag dödade dig.  
 -- Du trampade mig på bröstet och jag bet dig i hjälen.  
 -- Du lade dig i vägen, där jag måste fram.  
 -- Jag måste fram! Se där vårt livs hemlighet. Det var jaget och ingenting annat. Vi jagade efter lyckan, efter äran; vi slet sönder oss på buskarna; våra fötter blodades på stenarne, och med halvt liv hunno vi dit vi ville för att falla ner utmattade och dö,

<sup>28</sup> Skrifter, III, 333:

"Are you satisfied with you position now, Aristide? Per nubila ad astra. We have already passed above the clouds, so we haven't far to go to reach the stars."



utan blod i ådrorna, utan luft in lungorna.  
....<sup>29</sup>

The animal symbolism with which Strindberg castigates his profession is even stronger, suggesting the vampire. The literary man is compared first to a boa constrictor and then to a spider, endlessly creative (its web), but also endlessly destructive:

Skalden gör som boaormen: han drar sitt slem över bytet och så är det hans. Han spinner vackra nät, ur sig själv heter det, men ingen såg huru många flugor han sög ur först.<sup>30</sup>

The falsity inherent in their profession has prevented Aristide and Henri from seeing that utopia will not be realized by thinking and writing, but by doing. That knowledge is startling, but liberating, as symbolized by the clearing of the weather; and the passing of

<sup>29</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 333:

".... ... you've killed me."  
"You bit me, so I killed you."  
"You trod on my breast, so I bit you in the heel."  
"You were lying in the way, and I had to press on."  
"I had to press on!' There you have the secret of our lives. The ego was everything. We hunted fortune, honour; we tore ourselves on the bushes; the stones made our feet bleed and, half-alive, we arrived at our goal, only to fall down exhausted and die, with no blood in our veins, no air in our lungs. ...."

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 339:

The poet does the same thing as the boa constrictor: he draws his slime over the prey, and it is his. He spins beautiful webs, out of himself they say, but nobody saw how many flies he sucked dry first.

oppression (stifling ambition and overintellectualization) by the Strindberg symbol of relief from difficulty in breathing: "... Henri, åskvädret har gått fram, luften är renad och människorna kunna åter andas; det kunde icke vi."<sup>31</sup>

Before the two reconciled enemies part, the realization of utopia is mapped out in terms of a biblical allusion to the search for the Promised Land:

Vi få icke se det nya, icke mina barn, ty de skola draga genom öknen och lära sig bli nya fäder och nya mödrar, de skola lära sig glömma, de skola lära sig tänka nya friska tankar, och så dö i öknen bland vitnade ben, fallna pelare och grushopar, men deras barn skola kanske se Kanaan, där mjölk och honung skall flyta för alla.<sup>32</sup>

The final story in *Utopier i verkligheten* is "Samvetsqual"<sup>33</sup> ("Pangs of Conscience"), which concerns a Prussian officer ordered to execute three prisoners. Although he does not personally shoot them, he feels

<sup>31</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 338: "... the storm has passed, Henri, the air has been cleansed, and men can breathe again; that's something we couldn't do."

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 339:

We are not permitted to see the new age, nor will my children see it, for they will march through the desert and learn to be new fathers and new mothers, they will learn to forget, they will learn to think new, fresh thoughts, and then they will die in the desert, amid whitened bones, fallen pillars, and heaps of rubble, but their children will perhaps see Canaan, where milk and honey will flow for everyone.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 344-72.

responsible for their deaths, and his conscience drives him mad. He is committed to a Swiss asylum, the "realized utopia" of the story. With its non-denominational chapel, the asylum is a version of the non-confessional monastery that figures in many of Strindberg's later works. He is cured and restored to his family. When war breaks out between Prussia and Russia, he decides to remain in Switzerland, and becomes a Swiss citizen, thereby precluding further pangs of conscience!

The story's main symbol is the *Doppelganger*, which, it is revealed, springs from a troubled conscience, a conflict between the demands society makes on an individual and the demands of his own nature. The phenomenon is, in fact, a psychological disorder not unlike what today would be called schizophrenia.

The *Doppelganger* appears after the three prisoners have been shot. The young lieutenant is unable to sleep and tries to while away the night reading. Suddenly he hears a scream coming from his bed and sees that someone is tossing on it. He soon realizes that he is watching himself, and is dumbfounded:

Det var ju hans egen kropp! Hade han då gått itu, eftersom han såg sig själv, hörde sig själv som en andra person? Skriken fortforo!<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Skrifter*, III, 354:

Surely that was his own body! Had he then split in two, that he could see himself and hear himself as another person? The scream continued!

It is impossible to get medical attention, and his landlady suggests that the parish priest might be able to help. This man, the predecessor of the Dominican in *Till Damaskus* and other spiritual guides in Strindberg, diagnoses the condition:

Ni har gått itu! Ni betraktar er ena part som en andra eller tredje person! Hur kom ni dit? Jo, ser ni, det är samhällslögnen, som gjort oss alla dubbla. När ni skrev till er hustru i dag, då var ni en människa, en sann, enkel, god människa, men när ni talade vid mig, var ni en annan! Liksom skådespelaren förlorar sin människa och blir ett konglomerat av roller, så blir också samhällsmänniskan minst två personer. När nu genom en skakning, en uppröring, en andens jordbävning själen rämnar, då ligga de två naturerna där, sida vid sida, och betrakta varandra.<sup>35</sup>

The cure for this condition, here as elsewhere in Strindberg, is withdrawal from society in order to free oneself of its pressures and illusions and discover one's own inner harmony. This is a religious process, although not necessarily associated with any conven-

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 335:

You've split in two! You regard a part of yourself as a second or third person! How has this happened to you? Well, you see, the falsehood of society has made doubles of us all. When you wrote to your wife today, you were one man -- a true, simple, good man -- but when you talked to me, you were someone else! Just as an actor loses his identity and becomes a conglomerate of rôles, so also man in society becomes at least two persons. When, as the result of a jolt, a shock, a spiritual earthquake, the soul is rent, then the two natures lie there side by side, observing each other.

tional religious system. It is the cloister of so many of Strindberg's works, the place of psychic and spiritual healing, and here it prefigures the author's own religious conversion, his eventual feeling that all of earthly existence is an illusion, and the dominant symbol of his career, the Isle of the Blessed.

## Chapter 23

## I Bernadottes land

In 1885 Strindberg was invited by the Paris-based *La nouvelle revue* to write an article on Stockholm, as part of a series of more or less scandalous descriptions of various European capitals. The result was a French manuscript titled "La société de Stockholm", which he submitted in November of that year. As a result of powerful opposition and intervention, however, *La nouvelle revue* was forced to abandon the series, and Strindberg's contribution was never published. Nearly a century after it was written, the manuscript was translated into Swedish and finally published, in 1981.

In 1886 Strindberg did succeed in finding a publisher for his sardonic depictions of the Swedish capital, but he did not just resubmit the unpublished manuscript; instead, using it as a point of departure, he wrote three new "Lettres de Stockholm" which were published, in French, in the monthly *La revue universelle internationale* in May, June, and July of that year. A short extract dealing with Swedish poet Carl Snoilsky, was subsequently translated into Swedish and published in *Samlade skrifter* (XVII, 246-52), and the French text of the letters (complete except for the Snoilsky extract) was republished in the Swedish journal *Sam-laren* (*The Collector*) in 1928.

The 1981 volume unites both pieces, now complete and translated into Swedish, under the title Strindberg had originally given "La société de Stockholm": *I Bernadottes land*<sup>1</sup> (in the original French *Au pays de Bernadotte: In the Land of Bernadotte*). Finally these two remarkable documents were accessible to the Swedish public whose ancestors they caricature!

Both pieces are satiric portraits of the cultural life of the Swedish capital. The main butts of satirical attack in "La société de Stockholm" are Oskar II and his wife, Sofia of Nassau. Strindberg had previously attacked the King in *Det nya riket* and in *Dikter*, and he suspected that the court, particularly the queen, were behind the charges brought against him in the Giftas trial.<sup>2</sup> "La société de Stockholm" was to have been sweet revenge; unfortunately, it was not published during the lifetime of either combatant. "Lettres de Stockholm" includes attacks on the royal family

<sup>1</sup> Bernadotte is the dynastic name of the present Swedish royal family. The dynasty was founded by a former Napoleonic marshal, Jean Baptiste Bernadotte (1763-1844; son of a French lawyer), who was chosen heir to the throne by the Swedish parliament and adopted by Karl XIII (reigned 1809-18) in 1810. On the death of Karl XIII he became King of Sweden and Norway, under the name Karl XIV Johan. His wife was the famous Désirée (née Clary), from Marseille. In 1885 the king was Oskar II (reigned 1872-1907), Bernadotte's grandson.

<sup>2</sup> His suspicions appear to have been well grounded, if only somewhat misplaced: there is no evidence that the Queen had anything to do with the charges, but the King appears to have played a major rôle (*Bernadottes*, 11-12).

and court, but ranges a bit farther afield as well, to include sketches of Strindberg's principal literary enemies, both institutional -- the literary clubs, the Academy, the theatre managements, and the conservative press: all to some extent under the influence of the King -- and personal, and concludes with an overview of Swedish music, literature, theatre, and art. The bitter, biting, and often extremely amusing satire of the earlier article is toned down considerably in the "Lettres", and the concluding brief essays on the Swedish arts contain many passages complimentary to writers, actors, and artists whom Strindberg admired.

Strindberg the satirist does not make use of symbolism; it would be particularly out of place in these pieces, which make no attempt to conceal the identities of victims under even a veneer of fiction. There are only two exceptions, and those occur only in passing, as it were. Both, however, are examples of major Strindberg symbols, and deserve a brief mention. Both occur in the brief essay on Snoilsky.

The first is from a short discussion of Snoilsky's poem "Savonarola" (published 1883), which includes a scene in which Florence's artists cast their paintings, musical instruments, and books on the fire. Strindberg interprets that episode as having personal significance for the poet, and his comments make use of his symbol of the sleepwalker, who awakens only to find that his



dream had more reality than the world of illusion in which he now finds himself:

Där bränner poeten sin gyllne ungdoms rosor,  
och han begjuter elden med sitt bästa vin,  
sitt blod och sina tårar.

Han har blivit färdig med konsten, och han kastar en tillbakaskådande blick på sitt liv som offrats för fåfängligheter. Och liksom sömngångaren, plötsligt vaknad, kan han inte längre gå med fasta steg, hans verser begynna halta, bilderna stelna, språkets väl-ljud förgrovas, allt brister som en Sèvresvas i en upprorsmans hand, men spillrorna visa ännu betagande fragment, blomverk och förgyllningar.<sup>3</sup>

Strindberg sees Snoilsky as a social poet who, while not political, pointed the way to social reform. As such, he is as important to Swedish literature as Tolstoy to Russian. In his summing up of the poet he again refers to the world of illusion, but this time it is to his own illusions:

Även om man har sett alltför många för-flugna illusioner för att vara optimist, så

<sup>3</sup> Bernadottes, 108-9:

The poet here burns the roses of his golden youth, and he pours out his best wine, his blood and his tears, over the fire.

He has finished with art, and he casts a backward glance over his life, which has been sacrificed for vanities. And, like a sleep-walker who is suddenly awakened, he can no longer walk with certain steps: his verses begin to limp, his images to petrify, the melodiousness of his language to coarsen; everything shatters, like a Sèvres vase in the hand of an insurgent, but the shards show fragments which are still captivating, with their flowers and gilding.

är det lika fullt visst att spådomar som Tolstoy och Snoilskys inte böra ringaktas.<sup>4</sup>

The chief value of *I Bernadottes land* is the portrait it gives of the Sweden Strindberg had felt compelled to leave in 1883. It is a useful companion volume to other works which refer to the literary establishment against which he struggled all his life.

<sup>4</sup> *Bernadottes*, 110:

Even if one has seen far too many wild illusions to be an optimist, it is nevertheless certain that prophecies such as those of Tolstoy and Snoilsky ought not to be disregarded.

## Chapter 24

*Fabler*

In the spring of 1885 Strindberg wrote eight short fables (*Fabler*)<sup>1</sup> in French<sup>2</sup>; they were first published in Swedish (translated by Eugène Fahlstedt, but the translation was polished and approved by Strindberg) in 1891. Two other fables ("*Två fabler*")<sup>3</sup> were first published in Danish in 1886, and appeared in Swedish in 1919.

The symbolism of most of the fables is conventional, transparent, and not terribly significant to Strindberg's writing as a whole, even though the issues treated are typical of Strindberg. This is appropriate to the fable form. The exception is "*Måsarna*",<sup>4</sup> which provides some interesting variations on symbols used in the marriage plays and other works dealing with relations between the sexes.

In "*Måsarna*", *kvinnofrågan* (the women's question) breaks out among a colony of seagulls. As a result, an aged male gull sets off to examine the rest of nature,

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XXII, 5-55.

<sup>2</sup> Only one of the fables was actually published in French: "*Måsarne*" ("The Seagulls") appeared in *Revue universelle* under the (original) title "*La Mouette*" ("The Seagull").

<sup>3</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, LIV, 119-23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, XXII, 7-25.

in an effort to determine what positions males and females occupy in the ideal society. His cicerone is a male sea duck who, after showing him basic forms of life, in which the male is either unnecessary to reproduction or a parasitic appendage of the female, or in which all individuals are hermaphroditic, then reveals the wonders of the insect world. Among the spiders we recognize Strindberg's vampire/cannibal:

-- .... Ser du, man måste vänja sig vid den tanken, att kvinnan är den första och att vi alla utgått ur en moders sköte, innan någon far fanns till. Spindlarne skall i det fallet ge dig nya bevis. Den här stora besten, som hänger i nätet mitt, är honan. Och den här lilla beskedliga prissen, som ser så rädd ut, är friaren eller snarare supplikanten. Stackars skapelsens herre, vad han ser dum ut! Tyst, han närmar sig. Kvinnan ger honom en sidoblick. Hon tar inte gärna emot besök av den där anemiske kautschuksfiguren. Se nu bara, hur hon störtar sig över honom, genomborrar honom, rullar in honom i nätet och suger hans blod!

-- O ve, en sådan megära! Sådan Blåskägg i kvinnohamn! ....<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Samlade skrifter, XXII, 17:

".... You see, one must get used to the idea that woman comes first, and that we've all issued from a mother's womb, before any father existed. The spiders will provide you with new proof of that circumstance. This large beast poised in the middle of the web is the female. And this little mild-mannered fellow with the frightened look is the suitor, or rather suppliant. Poor lord of creation, how foolish he looks! Shh! he draws near. The woman gives him a side-long glance. She does not willingly receive the visit of this anaemic rubber dummy. Just look now, how she pounces on him, stabs him, rolls him up in the web, and sucks his blood!"

"Alas! what a virago! What a Bluebeard in female form! ...."

Next, they visit a colony of ants, which, according to tradition, is the perfect society. They witness the mating process, and, in the extract below, its aftermath:

När en timme förflutit och bröllopet var slutat, nedstego honorna och trädde åter in i modershuset, varest arbetskorna ryckte av dem vingarna, som hädenefters voro dem till ingen nytta.

-- De fallna änglarna fälla oskuldens vingar, deklamerade dykanden.

-- Och mordänglarna, vad är det de göra där? frågade måsen förskräckt, då han såg arbetskorna kasta sig över hannarne, som, utmattade, ej ägde mod att nalkas myrstacken, utan stannade hjälplöst i gräset runt omkring.

-- De göra blodbad på hannarne, some nu blivit överflödiga.

-- En sådan oerhörd brutalitet! Komma och säga att kvinnorna äro förslavade! Det skulle behövas en förening för mannens rättigheter. Stackars män! Jag har fått nog av idealstaten.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samlade skrifter, XXII, 21:

When an hour had passed and the nuptials had ended, the females descended and went back into the motherhouse, where the workers\* tore off their wings, which would be of no further use to them.

"The fallen angels doff the wings of innocence," commented the sea duck.

"And the angels of death, what are they doing there?" asked the seagull in alarm, when he saw the workers throw themselves on the males, who, exhausted, did not possess the fortitude to reach the anthill, but remained helpless in the surrounding grass.

"They are massacring the males, who have now become superfluous."

"What unheard-of brutality! Now try to tell me that women are enslaved! There should be an organization for the protection of men's rights. Poor men! I've had enough of the ideal society."

\* The Swedish word *arbeterskorna* is the feminine form

The symbol of the fallen angel shedding the wings of innocence appears elsewhere in Strindberg's works, notably in *Han och Hon*. Although there is no mention of cannibalism, the female ants are obviously a type of vampire, having drained the males of their power to resist the attacks of the murderous workers. The point about slavery -- that, contrary to the opinion of emancipationists, it is the man who is the slave of the woman -- is frequently made elsewhere (most notably in conjunction with the Omphale myth), but seldom so humorously.

Every fable has its moral. The moral of "Måsarna" comes a bit before the end of the tale, when the old seagull decides to abandon his quest for perfect harmony between the sexes:

-- .... Naturen är lika bräcklig  
överallt. Det är lika gott att taga verk-

—

of arbetarne (the workers). Presumably, Strindberg's French text had les ouvrières: Strindberg makes the point in this fable and in "Då myrorna skulle grunda samhälle" ("The Founding of the Society of the Ants", *Samlade skrifter*, LIV, 119-21) that the worker ants are "unsexed" females. Unfortunately, English does not possess a word like (X) workeresses!

ligheten sådan den är som att annanstädes  
söka efter idealet. ....<sup>7</sup>

In keeping with Strindberg's preoccupations during the 1880s, this moral can also be read as an argument for realism rather than idealism.

<sup>7</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, XXII, 22:

".... Nature is equally flawed everywhere. It is as well to accept reality as it is, as to seek elsewhere for the ideal. ...."

## Chapter 25

*Bland franska bönder*

*Bland franska bönder*<sup>1</sup> (Among French Peasants) was written in 1886 and early 1887 and published serially, in whole or in part, in several newspapers outside of Sweden. It did not appear in book form until 1889. Disillusioned with the difficulties into which his earlier works had landed him, Strindberg had formed a scheme to earn his living as a travelling reporter: he had chosen "the peasant question" as his territory, and planned to write similar works, based on personal observations and interviews, on the peasantry of Italy, Germany, Belgium, England, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, etc. Fortunately for the theatre and literature, he found himself continually drawn back to dramatic and other literary forms, and the only similar work he produced was "Svensk natur", which, however, avoided the agricultural question altogether.

In the late Nineteenth Century, most of Europe was undergoing an agricultural crisis, the main characteristics of which were a tendency towards large mechanized farms, a constant loss of manpower from the coun-

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIII. The book's introduction, "Land och stad", and the first of its three sections, "Bondeliv i en fransk by" also appear in *Skrifter*, XIV (239-84) as part of *Resor*. It is, however, *Samlade verk* which is cited.



try into the cities, competition from overseas, an increasing reliance on manufactured goods rather than agricultural products in national economies, and, in France, the destruction of the vineyards by Phylloxera. A commonly predicted result of all this was the disappearance of the European peasant class. Strindberg saw himself in a position to make a unique contribution to the debate: he spoke French, and as a foreigner was free from national prejudice and private interest in the controversy. He proposed to look at the problem from the point of view of those most directly involved: the peasants themselves: how did they live? what were their expectations in life? did they themselves feel threatened? how did they view the future? who did they blame for the crisis, and what remedies did they envision? He would make an extensive study of the information available on the subject, and then travel through the country, department by department, making his own observations, interviewing peasants, studying the provincial newspapers for what they had to say on the subject, and try to draw his own conclusions.

Strindberg's pen is always lively, and *Bland franska bönder* is well worth reading, even by those uninterested in the problem it handles: his faculties of observation and characterization ensure that the book is never dull. "Bondeliv i en fransk by" ("Peasant Life in a French Village") is the most often reprinted sec-

tion of the book, and the most "literary", but the account of the journey through France which makes up the second section, "Autopsier och intervjuer" ("Observations and Interviews"), is also full of interest, not least as the factual basis of the excursion in the story "Hjärnornas kamp" ("The Battle of Brains") in *Vivisektioner*.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Strindberg avoids a literary approach in the book, which he wishes to make as "scientific" and objective as possible. There is, therefore, almost no symbolism in this work, and what little there is, is peripheral to the main body of Strindberg's writing.

Despite that, a few passages are worth noting. Such, for instance, is the paragraph in the introductory essay, in which the radical atheist who had only recently undergone a trial for blasphemy reflects on the secularization of Paris' Panthéon. The conceit, which also appears in the opening act of *Folkungasagan*, is from the grave-digging scene in *Hamlet*; Strindberg uses it here to deny the resurrection of Christ:

Korset på Panthéon, nej det syns icke något kors mer, trikoloren på Panthéon fladdrar för nya friska morgonbrisar som susa om att Kristus är uppstånden och att hans ande gått igen i många andar, såsom hans kropp vandrat liksom Caesars genom tunntappar och många profetkroppar, som alla ändock till sist

<sup>2</sup> The strained relations between Strindberg and his assistant, Gustaf Steffen, however, do not enter into *Bland franska bönder*.

blivit nertagna från korset, tills nu äntligen också korset blivit nertaget. Äntligen!<sup>3</sup>

Strindberg finds himself at home in the secularized and anti-clerical France of the late Nineteenth Century.

Reactions to the industrialization of Europe, such as Tolstoy's back-to-the-land movement and the philosophy of Rousseau, seem to imply a disappearance of civilization, a negation of the idea of progress. As the author reflects on this, he asks a series of rhetorical questions. The biblical illusion turns the desert into a symbol of history, the promised land into the fruits of civilization:

Skulle verkligen Europas kultur, framåt-skridandets trogna tjänarinna, vara hotad av barbariet? Skola vi efter årtusenden av gång framåt, börja krypa baklänges och med blygsel sopa igen spåren av vår långa ökenvandring utan att någonsin få se det förlovade landet här på jorden som prästerna profeterat från katedralerna, vetenskapsmännen från katedralarne, skalderna från vindskammaren och dra-

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, XXIII, 12:

The cross atop the Panthéon -- no, there is no cross there anymore -- the tricolor atop the Panthéon flutters in the brisk new morning breezes, which whisper that Christ is risen and that his spirit has walked again in the spirits of many, just as his body has wandered, like Caesar's, through barrel bungs and the bodies of many prophets, which, however, have all finally been taken down from the cross, until now, at last, the cross also has been taken down. At last!

maturgerna från scenen?<sup>4</sup>

Although these questions are not answered , the implied answer would seem to be yes: *Bland franska bönder* is Strindberg's own return to the land, and he is often heavily under the spell of Rousseau in this book.

At the end of the introduction, by way of presenting his qualifications for the undertaking, the author has himself criticized by an old man he meets for not proceeding from a philosophical stand. He has already admitted that he has no great love for the peasants (and no great dislike of them either, for that matter), to which his critic retorts with a paraphrase of I Corinthians 13:1. In the short story "Genvägar", Tekla also taunts Billgren with this verse: here, as there, Christian love is equated with party interest:

-- Ni är skeptiker, och ni skall aldrig bli annat än en ljudande malm, ty ni har icke kärleken.

-- Jag har icke kärleken, det är sant, men jag har bättre, ty jag har ett förträffligt bibliotek rörande bondeförhållanden och något erfarenhet och insikt. Att jag icke har

<sup>4</sup> Samlade verk, XXIII, 13:

Will Europe's culture, the faithful servant of progress, really be threatened by barbarism? Shall we, after advancing for thousands of years, begin to crawl backwards, covering over the traces of our long desert wandering with shame, without ever seeing the promised land here on earth which the priests have prophesied from the cathedrals, the scientists from the seats of learning, the poets from the attics, and the dramatists from the stages?

några åsikter färdiga, något arcanum, det är min stora förtjänst. ....<sup>5</sup>

In "Autopsier och intervjuer", the author and his assistant, while wandering on foot through part of Provence, come across the ruin of an old monastery. The ruins show signs of several architectural periods, widely separated by time. The ruin becomes a symbol of the history of the region, perhaps even of France, Europe, and the western world:

Vi krypa in i dunklet och se nu oppe på bergknallen en jätteruin. .... här uppe står en renässansfasad med fyrkantiga fönsteröppningar som släppa igenom rutor av den blå luften. Har en eldsvåda gått fram här eller vad? Vi avancera, och fram komma gotiska spetsbågar, romerska rundbågar! Det är en hel historisk saga i kalksten, detta lik av ett kloster som ännu heter Montmajour. Sagan om så många döda kulturperioder, så många illusionssstadier med tro på det tusenåriga riket, tro på Kristi gravs återerövrande, tro på påvarne i Avignon, tro på kvinnan och trubadurerna, tro på albigenserna och reformationen, tro på Franska revolutionen och upplysningen och slutligen allmän otro med svag tro på de laiciserade skolorna och brödbiten. Det är en vacker cirkel man genomlupit, från ateism -- till ateism. Ingenstädes, om ej i Rom, kan man så som i Provence frestas i all sin otro tro på den pessimistiska filosofens läror utan att därför bli hypokonder. Här kan man plocka ben efter Fenicisk kultur, Gre-

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, XXIII, 20:

"You're a skeptic, and you'll never be anything but a sounding brass, for you don't have love."

"I don't have love, it's true, but I have something better, for I have an excellent library dealing with the situation of the peasants, and a bit of experience and insight. That I have no preconceived opinions, no cure-all, is my strong point. ...."

kisk, Romersk, Kristen, Korstågs-, Reformation-, Revolutions-kultur. Provence synes, liksom stamfäderna och orienten inträtt i "illusionens sista stadium", och efter att ha lämnat allt genomskådat slutligen stannat vid att man bör uppehålla livet tills man dör, på det minst obehagliga sätt.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps it is not stretching things too far to see in this passage an early expression of the conviction, expressed more and more frequently in the late plays (from *Ett drömspel* onwards) that existence is nothing

<sup>6</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIII, 149-50 (Part 2, ch. 7):

We creep into the darkness and now see, up on the bare hillock, a gigantic ruin. .... standing here is a renaissance facade, with rectangular window openings, which admit squares of blue sky. Has there been a fire here or what? We move closer, and we notice pointed gothic arches, round Roman arches! It is an entire history in limestone, this corpse of a monastery, which is still called Montmajour: the story of so many dead cultural eras, so many stages of illusion, with faith in the millenium, faith in the recapture of Christ's grave, faith in the Avignon popes, faith in woman and the troubadors, faith in the Albigensians and the Reformation, faith in the French Revolution and the enlightenment, and finally, general lack of faith, with a little faith in secularized schools and crusts of bread. We have traced a perfect circle: from atheism -- to atheism! Nowhere else but in Rome can one, as in Provence, be tempted, in all one's disbelief, to believe in the teachings of the pessimistic philosophy, without becoming a hypochondriac because of it. Here one can pick the bones of the Phoenician culture, the Greek, Roman, Christian, Crusader, Reformation, and Revolution cultures. Provence seems, like our first ancestors and like the Orient, to have entered "the last stage of illusion": having seen through everything, it has finally concluded that man must maintain life until he dies, in the least disagreeable manner.

but a series of illusions; even at this period that philosophy finds expression in plays like *Fadren*, with the Nurse's refrain of "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!"

## Chapter 26

## Vivisektioner

*Vivisektioner*<sup>1</sup> (Vivisections) is a collection of short prose works written, with one exception, in 1887. All of those pieces made their first appearances in Danish and Austrian periodicals. The exception, "Mystik -- tills vidare" ("Mysticism -- for the Time Being"), first appeared in a Strindberg collection published 1890-91 under the title *Tryckt och otryckt* (Published and Unpublished), in which the other pieces in *Vivisektioner* also made their Swedish debuts. To the seven pieces which earlier editors grouped under this title (Strindberg's own: he made several attempts to get *Vivisektioner* published as a separate work), *Samlade verk* has added an eighth, according to Strindberg's expressed intentions: "Genvägar" ("Short-Cuts"), also first published in German in 1887, and sharing a common theme with the other pieces in the collection, which are, to varying degrees, all psychological studies.

Strindberg explained the title in a letter to the Swedish publisher Isidor Bonnier:

Som titeln anger äro lefvande personer föremål för undersökningen. Att några stryka med är ju vanligt vid vivisektioner då man

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 7-163.



lägger an fistelgångar ända in i småtar-marne.<sup>2</sup>

The pieces are, then, psychological dissections of living models. The victims selected for these studies are, for the most part, people guided by feeling rather than intelligence: including, in the view of the anarchist, atheist, and increasingly unhappily married Strindberg, socialists, Christians, and women.

One finds much of interest here. The psychology discussed and/or exemplified is the framework of the naturalistic dramas: how one will gains dominance and ultimately mastery over another through the power of suggestion. This process is effectively dramatised in *Fadren* (1887), *Fröken Julie* (1888), "Den starkare", "Paria", and "Samum" (all 1889); it is also at the heart of the short story "Tschandala" (1888) in *Svenska öden och äventyr*. Like that story, many of these pieces also have strong currents of Nietzscheanism, an influence in Strindberg's writing that reached its peak in

<sup>2</sup> April 25, 1887. Quoted in *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 302:

As the title indicates, living persons are the objects of investigation. That a few die is only normal during vivisections, in which one exposes fistulas deep inside the small intestines.

the novel *I havsbandet* (1892).<sup>3</sup> Several of the pieces also examine religious experiences from a rationalistic point of view: phenomena such as fatalism, divine punishment and reward, the effectiveness of prayer, Swedenborgianism, and spiritualism are all touched upon and dismissed: interesting reading in light of the author's own religious convictions as a result of the *Inferno* crisis!

*Vivisektioner* opens with two companion stories, "De små" ("The Small") and "De stora" ("The Great"):<sup>4</sup> fictionalized sketches of two Swedish painters, Carl Skånberg (1850-83) and Ernst Josephson (1851-1906) respectively.<sup>5</sup> The two heroes, Emil and Peter, are opposites in almost all respects: the one a hunchbacked dwarf and the other almost a giant; the one ill-tempered and ill-mannered, the other well-balanced and amiable; the one a great success despite his limited artistic abilities, the other a colossal failure despite his obvious talent. The essential difference between them, Strindberg suggests, lay in how well each

<sup>3</sup> Strindberg, however, claims not to have been acquainted with Nietzsche's writings until late summer, 1888, after *Vivisektioner*, *Fadren*, and *Fröken Julie* had already been written: see the essay "Mitt förhållande till Nietzsche" ("My Relation to Nietzsche") in *Samlade skrifter*, LIV (323-24).

<sup>4</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 9-16 and 17-23.

<sup>5</sup> Brandell, in his comments on *Skrifter*, XIV (400); Kärnell (73, 125).

was able to dominate and control his environment, call it strength of character, force of will, or psychological superiority. A particularly effective example of how a strong will can hypnotize and enslave others is seen in the "awakening" of Emil's wife when she discovers that he has died during the night:

När hon lyfte upp täcket och såg det lilla monstret, blev hon förfärad. Hon måste fråga sig själv, huru hon egentligen hade kunnat älska detta missfoster. Och nu trodde hon att hon varit offer för en optisk villa. Helt säkert hade hon älskat den stora själ, som bodde i detta fysiologiska preparat; men nu när denna själ hade flyktat bort, ville hon ej mera se dess omhölje.<sup>6</sup>

That story ends with an ironic paraphrase and amplification of one of the Beatitudes: "Saliga äro de små, ty dem hör himlen till, och snart skall även jorden vara deras."<sup>7</sup> Two of the Beatitudes promise proprietary rights in heaven: the first, to the poor in spirit, and the eighth, to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; it is the meek of whom it is said

<sup>6</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 15-16:

When she lifted up the cover and saw the little monster, she was appalled. She had to ask herself how she actually could have loved this abortion. And she supposed now that she had been the victim of an optical illusion. Without a doubt she had loved the great soul which inhabited this physiological specimen; but now, when that soul had departed, she wished to see its mortal shell no more.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 16: "Blessed are the small, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and soon the earth also will be theirs."

that they shall inherit the earth. Strindberg obviously believes that the strong-willed and ruthless, who can push themselves forward and ride rough-shod over all obstacles, will supplant all of these claimants: Emil was small in both stature and talent, but was able to achieve fame, fortune, and success through psychological domination.

The symbolism in the titles of these two stories is amplified in a newspaper article Strindberg wrote the same year:

De små äro farliga. De var de små, som gjorde kristendomen, som predikade de smås evangelium: låt oss alla vara små, eftersom jag nu inte kan bli stor. Det var de som inbillade den starka att han skulle vända andra örat till, när han fick ett slag på det ena; det var de små, som narrade huvudet av de stora genom att tala om människans rättigheter. Det var ofantligt klokt av de små, men förskräckligt, föskräckligt dumt av de stora och starka.<sup>8</sup>

Strindberg's opinion of both Christianity and socialism changed drastically before he died, but he continued to

<sup>8</sup> Samlade skrifter, LIV, 301-02 (from the article "Maktfrågan eller mannens intressen": "The Power Question, or the Interests of Men", first published in the Danish newspaper Politiken, March 7, 1887):

The small are dangerous. It was the small who created Christianity, which preached the gospel of the small: let us all be small, since I cannot now become great. It was they who deluded the strong that he should turn the other ear [!] when he received a blow on one of them; it was the small who pulled a fast one on the great by speaking of human rights. It was awfully clever of the small, but terribly, terribly stupid of the great and strong.

be plagued by small talents who bulldozed their way past genius into official and critical esteem.

The third story, "Hjärnornas kamp"<sup>9</sup> ("The Battle of Brains"), is a vivisection, under a veneer of fiction, of Strindberg's assistant on the trip through France which forms the basis of *Bland franska bönder*, a young man named Gustaf Steffen (Schilf in the story), who later became a professor in Gothenburg<sup>10</sup>. The young Schilf shows up uninvited at the home of a middle-aged professor (i.e., Strindberg) living in Germany. He is young, healthy, a confirmed socialist, and tries to live as a thoroughly modern, realistic, pragmatic, and forward-looking individual. The professor, on the other hand, has been ill for some time, is a married man with responsibilities, has no use for socialism, and is, at least in Schilf's eyes, something of an idealist. In his weakened condition, he finds himself succumbing to Schilf's dominant personality, which horrifies him, and he decides that either he must allow his own personality to be destroyed, or he must destroy that of the other. The story is an account, related in the form of a diary, of how he accomplishes just that, during a

<sup>9</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 24-49, 331-32. Samlade verk publishes for the first time in Swedish a short epilogue to the story which formed part of the German version (*Neue Freie Presse*, July 12-13, 1887).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

research trip through Italy for which he engages the young man as his secretary and assistant.

The passage in which the professor realizes that the young man poses a threat to his integrity draws on two strains of symbolism common in the naturalistic works: Schilf is seen as a snake (i.e., in Darwinian terms, a lower form of life) and as a cannibal:

Som en stor boaorm hade han klängt upp på bersåns räcke och jag såg hans avlånga huvud uppifrån stirra ner på mig. Jag kände hans andes slem lägga sig över min hjärna; mitt förstånd omtöcknades, och det var som om jag väntade få se honom räcka fram sin långa hals, omslingra mig och sluka mig. Allt motstånd från min sida var omöjligt.<sup>11</sup>

At this point the intended victim is pictured as an innocent defenseless child penned in by the side-rails of a cradle, upon which the predator rests.

His impression of Schilf is strengthened that evening, when the professor asks his wife what she thinks of the young man, and she replies that he reminds her of an acquaintance named Meyer. The professor had not noticed the resemblance, but once his attention is drawn to it, it is obvious: the young man is not only

<sup>11</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 28:

Like a huge boa constrictor, he had crept up onto the rail of the cradle, and I saw his rectangular head staring down at me. I felt the slime of his spirit settling over my brain; my reason became groggy, and it was as if I expected to see him stretch forth his long neck, wrap me in his coils, and devour me. All resistance on my part was impossible.

an egomaniac, but a vampire, trying to cultivate the professor's acquaintance only to advance his own reputation and career:

-- Han är så obehagligt lik Meyer....

Detta öppnade mina ögon för några sidor hos Schilf som jag ej bemärkt.... Meyer var ett slags återgång till vilden; givande vika för ögonblickets impuls; full av sig själv till den grad att han aldrig såg andra, aldrig hörde andra, aldrig tilltalade andra än dem han vädrade gagn av. Men dem älskade han, magnetiserade, sög, och utsugna en gång slängde han bort dem!<sup>12</sup>

Determined that this will not happen to him, the professor engages battle with Schilf, mind against mind, will against will, soul against soul. The diary begins, and every day records a new victory in this battle of brains. He begins by attacking the philosophical premises of the young man's socialism, proving them false and divorced from social realities. As day follows day and Schilf's confidence in himself and his beliefs is gradually eroded, the two men become obsessed with each other and with the struggle in which they are engaged. Schilf's growing insecurity is pre-

<sup>12</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 29:

"He is so unpleasantly like Meyer," ....

This opened my eyes to a few sides of Schilf which I had not noticed.... Meyer was a sort of throwback to the savage: giving way to the impulse of the moment; full of himself to the degree that he never saw others, never heard others, never talked to others except those from whom he expected to gain something. Those he loved, magnetized, sucked on, and once they were sucked dry he tossed them aside!

sented in symbolic terms: it is as if he is losing physical substance as his ego is destroyed:

... jag kan icke arbeta mer, ty jag är besatt av honom såsom han av mig. När han är frånvarande och jag söker framkalla hans bild, får jag aldrig någon klar sådan.

Det är antingen Meyer eller Gorillan, men aldrig Schilf. Har jag ätit upp hans jag, och går han som mannen utan skugga?<sup>13</sup>

Again, Schilf is identified with a form of life lower on the evolutionary scale (although the gorilla is higher on that scale than the reptile of the earlier passage; possibly Schilf is becoming more "human" through the destruction of his illusions). The shadow is a primitive symbol for the soul, in this case the ego (Jung was later to identify it with the id: the dark side of human nature).

Not content with merely neutralizing the threat to his integrity, the professor now decides to consolidate his victory by continuing the onslaught, until the other has become completely subjected to his will. He will deal with the gorilla according to the law of the jungle: kill or be killed, eat or be eaten:

Han stärker verkligen mina och filosofens meningar om en tabula rasa, och nu sedan

<sup>13</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 37:

... I can no longer work, for I am possessed by him, as he is by me. When he is not present and I try to call up his image, I never receive a clear one.

It is either Meyer or the Gorilla, but never Schilf. Have I eaten up his ego, and does he go about like the man with no shadow?



han är nytvättad, känner jag en stark lust att skriva med min stil på hans plån. Min själ vill adoptera honom, sluka honom, och han skall bli min vasall.<sup>14</sup>

To this end, he engages the young man to accompany him on a scientific excursion in Italy. His recent illness and his presentation of himself as a hopeless traveller who will suffer from separation from wife and family, initially enable Schilf to both feel and demonstrate superiority over him: he is himself an experienced and competent traveller, retains all of his youthful strength and vitality, and has no emotional ties which could cause him pain. Of course, as he displays his competence and stamina on the journey, the professor finds himself in an enviable position: he need not bother with any of the tiresome details of the trip, and has a willing lackey to do all the meaningless but necessary heavy work:

-- Sitt nu alldeles stilla här, sade han, medan jag är borta, och gråt för all del inte.

Jag skrattade överlägset, emedan jag vet, att det är min stora hjärna, som sätter alla hans rörelsenerver i verksamhet, och det är jag, som hypnotiserat honom så, att han är rov för den hallucinationen, att det är han som sätter mig i rörelse. Han ser icke, att

<sup>14</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 37:

Indeed, he confirms my idea and the philosopher's, of a tabula rasa, and now that he has been wiped clean, I feel a strong desire to set my imprint upon his surface. My soul will adopt him, devour him, and he will become my vassal.

hans nerver och muskler äro kopplade vid mitt stora elektriska batteri.<sup>15</sup>

Now the tables turn completely: if the professor provides the energy to set Schilf in motion, all that activity is nevertheless tiring for the young man. As his vitality deteriorates, the professor's improves; he becomes the vampire, Schilf the victim: "Ny fotvandring i dag. Schilf blev mycket trött; men jag känner mig alltmer upplivad, och dess mer ju tröttare han är."<sup>16</sup>

Strindberg has three symbols whose meaning is identical: the cannibal, the vampire, and the parasite. Schilf has been identified as the first, both men have now been identified as vampires, and now the professor identifies himself as a parasite, loathsome from the victim's point of view, but from the parasite's quite clever and resourceful:

Som bekant finns det steklar, som lägga sina ägg i kroppen på kålfjärilars larver.

<sup>15</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 40-41:

"Now sit here and don't move until I come back," he said, "and whatever you do, don't cry!"

I laughed contemptuously, for I know that it is my great brain which sets all his motory nerves in action, and it is I who have so hypnotized him that he is prey to the hallucination that he is the one who sets me in motion. He does not see that his nerves and muscles are connected to my great electric battery.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 43-44: "Another trip on foot today. Schilf got very tired; but I feel more and more exhilarated, and in inverse proportion to his exhaustion."

Äggen kläckas, förpuppas, och larverna gå där så digra som om de vore i välsignat tillstånd. Men en vacker dag skola de föda, och då kommer det en svärm steklar ut, och larverna ligga där med sina tomma skinn.

Jag känner mig som en sådan stekel gentemot Schilf. Mina ägg ligga i hans hjärna och mina tankar flyga ut, medan han blir allt tommare. Han talar nu som jag; han begagnar min ordrepertoar, mina skämt, mina bevingade ord. Han tror, det är hans fjärilar, men det är bara mina stekelungar.<sup>17</sup>

Finally they arrive in Rome, and the professor confronts Schilf with evidence of incompetence and deceit: the latter had assured him he was conversant with the equipment and techniques for making photographic slides of the specimens they have been studying, but when the plates are developed, they are either overexposed or blank. Convinced that this could not

<sup>17</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 44:

As everyone knows, there are hymenoptera\* which lay their eggs in the bodies of the larvae of the large white [butterfly: *Pieris brassicae*]. The eggs hatch, pupate, and the larvae look just as plump as if they were awaiting a blessed event. But one fine day they must give birth, and then a swarm of hymenoptera emerges, and the larvae lie there, nothing but empty skins.

I feel like such a hymenopteron in respect to Schilf. My eggs fill his brain and my thoughts emerge from it, while he grows emptier and emptier. Now he speaks as I do: he uses my vocabulary, my jokes, my allusions. He believes that these are his butterflies, but they are merely my young hymenoptera.

\* an order of insects to which ants, wasps, and bees belong. If the professor's language is a bit technical, it must be remembered that he is a natural scientist.

have been simply Schilf's way of getting revenge, the professor sends him packing, any hope he may have entertained of advancing his career through association with a prestigious project vanished. The professor continues his journey alone, and manages very well.

In the newly restored epilogue,<sup>18</sup> the professor returns home in triumph, having defended himself from an enemy, and also routed and completely destroyed that enemy. The epilogue also contains a nice ironic touch, which adds to the theme of the power of suggestion: the professor now doubts he was ever ill at all, but concludes that he had become so accustomed to his wife's worries about his health he eventually persuaded himself it was indeed fragile!

"Hallucinationer"<sup>19</sup> ("Hallucinations") seems at first glance not to belong in *Vivisektioner*: it is warm, tender, and both begins and ends with domestic harmony. But it is connected to the other pieces by theme, showing how a simple everyday mistake (Bellini's score to *Romeo and Juliet* is purchased in error for Gounod's, and the mistake is not noticed for some time) can exercise a strong power of suggestion, dramatically

<sup>18</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 331-32. Strindberg's manuscript has disappeared, and in the absence of any Swedish version of the epilogue approved by the author, *Samlade verk* gives both the German version and a translation back into Swedish by Hans Lindström, the editor of vol. XXIX.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-53.

altering the way two people view life, until the error is recognized. As usual, Strindberg's choice of music is particularly apt: his story is essentially a love story, and the two lovers become "star-crossed"; fortunately, unlike Romeo and Juliet, they realize the mistake that has temporarily taken hold of their destinies, and no lasting damage is done.

This is followed by a piece which is an essay rather than a story. "Nemesis divina"<sup>20</sup> ("Divine Nemesis") examines whether there is any evidence for a belief in divine reward and punishment: do present actions determine future consequences? Strindberg's conclusion is that there is no such evidence: we may think we see it operating in our lives, but that is only because we are accustomed to viewing everything that happens to us from the viewpoint of our own egos, which want to believe that we can control or influence what is in fact the dispassionate operation of natural laws. We should do good because it is good and refrain from evil because it is evil, not because we expect our actions to be rewarded or punished: what happens to us as individuals will not be affected one way or the other! In terms of the last story in *Vivisektioner*, belief in divine reward and punishment is a short-cut: those who are not strong enough to face the fact that

<sup>20</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 54-63.

life is indifferent to them discover a path (belief) that will not force them to confront it. It is a problem which continued to haunt Strindberg even after he had himself adopted religious values: he frequently saw evidence that the good often suffer and the evil often prosper; the paradox led to the positing of supernatural powers which guide human destiny: powers which are at best indifferent, at worst malevolent, to mankind. Something of them is present in the statistical mortality rate, in the following passage, which is also notable for the use of the rainbow as a symbol of how we perceive reality:

Varje människa ser blott sin regnbåge och är själv medelpunkten i den. Så även varje individ i sitt liv. Man ser blott den lysande sjufärgade bågen som endast har sin tillvaro genom det betraktande ögats tillvaro; men det bländande färgspelet kan icke heller bli synligt utan ett mörkt moln som bakgrund. Och det svarta molnet, det är "de andras" död och undergång, utan vilkas försvinnande "jag" icke existerat. Hade de icke strukit med i mortalitetsprocenten, så hade jag måst göra det, ty mortalitetsprocentens drake måste årligen ha sitt antal offer, tills en Sankt Göran behagar infinna sig, vilket han ännu ej gjort.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 55:

Each man sees only his own rainbow, and is himself the mid-point of its arch. Just so is each individual in his own life. One sees only the bright seven-coloured arch, which exists solely because the observing eye exists; but the dazzling display of colour still cannot be seen except against a background of dark cloud. And the black cloud is the death and destruction of "the others", without whose disappearance "I" would not exist. If their deaths had not contributed to the mortality rate, mine would have, for the

"Mystik -- tills vidare"<sup>22</sup> ("Mysticism -- for the Time Being") is a lightly fictionalized essay examining the efficacy of prayer. The narrator is a physician whose young daughter is seized by several attacks of epilepsy during the night. Unable to help her medically, he sits with his hands on the child and eventually, at the prompting of his wife, prays. The child recovers. Did the prayer help? If so, whom did it help: the child, his wife, or him? Whatever the case, how did it help (if it did)?

The doctor presents himself as a former believer who has become an atheist. Strindberg has a little sport at the expense of Christian attacks on Darwinism by making Darwin's theories confirm the doctor's faith in God rather than deny it!

Med darwinismen fann jag icke gud upphävd, för mig, ty att skapelsen utvecklat sig efter bestämda lagar och i en klar ordning, stärkte tvärtom mina misstankar om en ordnares och lagstiftares tillvaro.<sup>23</sup>

mortality-rate dragon must have its annual quota of victims until a St. George chooses to present himself, and so far he has not done so.

<sup>22</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 64-72.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 69:

I found that, for me, god\* was not abolished by Darwinism; on the contrary, the fact that creation unfolded according to definite laws and in an intelligible sequence strengthened my suspicions of the existence of an regulator and law-maker.

\* Although it is appropriate to the narrator's charac-

He goes on to relate how he progressed from faith to atheism: he and his family were cast out of society and his health suffered to the extent that he almost died, leaving his children nothing but a despised name.<sup>24</sup> He overcame his difficulties not by imploring divine assistance, but by resisting the forces trying to crush him. Considering that reliance on a belief in divine justice and an afterlife would have led him to resignation and acceptance of his fate, he has, since then, neither sought God's help , nor considered the question of the existence of God of the slightest consequence to mankind:

Nu när jag stod inför döden kände jag att det var förintelsen som nalkades. Men jag måtte ha ägt större kraftfond än jag trodde, ty nu reste sig min motståndslusta, och i stället för att anropa gud, utmanade jag döden till brottning. I stället för att som förut hän-giva mig åt lönlösa grubblerier, stannar jag hastigt vid det resultat: att om gud och liv efter detta finnas, så måste de ignoreras, ty så länge man ställer sitt hopp bortom döden

ter , the fact that Strindberg here spells God without a capital letter aroused the indignation of poet, critic, and secretary of the Swedish Academy, Carl David af Wirsén (1842-1912) (*Samlade verk*, XXIX, 313).

<sup>24</sup> The reference is to Strindberg's trial for blasphemy as a result of the publication of *Giftas I*, in 1884. Strindberg had two daughters and an infant son (born earlier that same year) at the time.



försummar man sitt liv, sitt enda liv  
kanske.<sup>25</sup>

His experience with the seemingly answered prayer does not change his mind: he concludes that the prayer helped, but not because it summoned divine intervention. Rather, it served to concentrate his own will and powers, and through some as yet unexplained process he was then able to apply natural psychic energy to the healing of his daughter. This explains the title of the piece: while rejecting the notion that God had anything to do with the matter, he nevertheless has to admit that the healing was mystical -- for the time being: he has every confidence that one day a natural explanation will be found.

Strindberg here falls easy prey to the criticism levelled against him on the first Swedish publication of *Vivisektioner*, that he gives way to his own bent for mysticism precisely when he is trying to be most clini-

<sup>25</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 69:

Now, when I stood at death's door, I felt that annihilation was approaching. But I must have possessed greater energy resources than I thought, for now my will to resist was aroused, and instead of calling on god,\* I challenged death to a struggle. Instead of giving myself up to fruitless speculation, as before, I quickly arrived at this conclusion: that if god\* and an afterlife exist, they must be ignored, for as long as man places his hope beyond death, he neglects his life, which may be the only life he has.

\* Sic.

cally rational.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in the light of "Genvägar", the doctor's explanation seems nothing less than a short-cut, devised to avoid having to face up to an idea (the existence of a God who answers prayer) with which he is psychologically unprepared to deal. Psychic phenomena may exist, and they may be understood one day, but they cannot be both accepted and rejected by the same criteria, as Strindberg seems trying to do in *Vivisektioner*! The author's own subsequent religious experiences indicate that this is a fair criticism.

Be that as it may, the following piece, "Själamord (Apropos Rosmersholm)"<sup>27</sup> ("Psychological Murder (à propos Rosmersholm)", returns to a more direct treatment of *Vivisektioner*'s central theme: the power of suggestion. As the subtitle indicates, the essay was suggested by Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (1886). In that play, the wife of Johannes Rosmer has committed suicide, and the community is scandalized that her companion, Rebekka West, has remained on at the estate (Rosmersholm) with the widower. As the play progresses, Rebekka reveals that she had manipulated the unfortunate wife, Beata, working upon her psychological instability until she persuaded her to commit suicide. At the play's end, in order to prove to Rosmer that she

<sup>26</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 313.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-82.

loves him as much as Beata had, she joins him in a suicide pact.

As usual, Ibsen's main focus is on social questions: social conventions, political ideology and integrity, the interaction between an individual and the community in which he lives, etc. None of that interests Strindberg; he is attracted not to the action of the play but to its pre-action: the process by which Beata was persuaded to take her own life. "Själamord" gives us a hint of what Rosmersholm might have been like had it been written by Strindberg: it would have ended where Ibsen's play begins! A telling comment is his characterization of Rebekka in terms of his own symbolism: "Rebekka synes vara en omedveten kannibal, som ätit opp den avlidna fruns själ."<sup>28</sup>

Strindberg goes on to regret that Ibsen has not revealed the process by which Rebekka committed her murder, which "... kunde ha utgjort dramatiken i dramat ...."<sup>29</sup> He did not do so, however, so Strindberg illustrates the process with another literary example, a

<sup>28</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 77: "Rebekka seems to be an unconscious cannibal, who has devoured the deceased wife's soul."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 78-79: "... could have made the drama dramatic...."

short story by the French collaborators Émile Erckmann (1822-1899) and Alexandre Chatrian (1826-1890):<sup>30</sup>

Erckmann-Chatrian behandla i en novell ett tema som i våra tider av hypnotism och suggestion icke mera förefaller mystiskt. I en småstad observerar man nämligen tid efter annan att personer påträffas hängda i ett visst värdshus' skyltarm. En psykolog anställer spaningar ifrån värdshusets fönster och upptäcker i huset mitt över gatan en gammal kvinna, som nattetid ställer sig med ett ljus och fascinerar en resande som bor i värdshuset mitt emot, till den ändan kostymerad och maskerad i likhet med den olycklige. Sedan hon ådragit sig offrets blickar, förmår hon honom successivt genom imitations-drift att upprepa hennes rörelser tills den förtrollade går ut genom fönstret och hänger sig på skylten. Psykologen gör sig en kvinnlig mannekäng, och tvingar häxan att genom "suggestion" och imitation störta sig ut genom fönstret (eller hänga sig i fönsterposten).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Lindström identifies the story as "L'oeil invisible, ou l'auberge des trois pendus", included in the collection *Contes et romans populaires* (Paris, 1867) (*Samlade verk*, XXIX, 340).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 78:

A short story by Erckmann and Chatrian takes up a theme which, in our times of hypnotism and suggestion, no longer seems mystical. The story goes that time after time the inhabitants of a small town discover that someone has hanged himself from the signpost of a certain inn. A psychologist makes investigations from the inn window and discovers that at night an old woman in the house directly opposite positions herself with a light and entrances a traveller staying in the inn opposite, to that end having dressed and disguised herself to resemble the unfortunate one. When she has attracted the victim's attention, she gradually induces him, through the mimetic instinct, to repeat her movements, until the bewitched one climbs out the window and hangs himself from the signpost. The psychologist makes a female mannequin and, by "suggestion" and mimicry, forces the witch to throw herself from the window (or hang herself from the mullion).

A story worthy of the author of "Tschandala" himself! The story has significance for the last story in Vivisektioner, "Genvägar", and for "En häxa" in Svenska öden och äventyr: Tekla, the heroine of those stories, like this "witch", is a victim of auto-suggestion.

Except for alterations necessitated by the difference in historical setting (the former is set in the early 1860's, the latter slightly more than two centuries earlier), "Genvägar"<sup>32</sup> and "En häxa" are identical up to the point of Tekla's marriage. Since that part of the story is treated in the chapter on Svenska öden och äventyr, only the portion of "Genvägar" which did not find its way into "En häxa" will be discussed here.

After finally being released from the prison of her childhood home by her engagement and her mother's death, only to discover that she has entered another prison, marriage, this more modern Tekla finds release first by getting a job and then by becoming a spiritualist medium with very high connections (that Strindberg transformed her into a witch in adapting the tale is itself a telling comment on his opinion of spiritualism!). In this latter connection she tries to enlist the support of Sweden's most popular author, Karl Bill-

<sup>32</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 83-163.

gren, who is currently being tried for blasphemy.<sup>33</sup> Her reasoning is that his sponsorship would greatly extend her influence beyond her small but powerful circle, and in return she might be able to use her influence to obtain his acquittal and to advance his political ambitions (which, in fact, he does not possess). Billgren refuses to cooperate and exposes her as a charlatan, condemning her to the prison of her home, where the story leaves her, a discontent and frustrated wife and mother who has scaled the heights and then had everything taken from her. Billgren is absolved of the blasphemy charge, without her assistance!

Billgren's first appearance is prepared by an account of the events leading up to the charge of blasphemy, and of his subsequent lionization by all manner of causes looking for a champion. As has already been indicated, one of the dominant symbols in the story is the prison. Tekla escapes from two prisons (her childhood home and her marriage) only to have to return to one of them, which now seems worse because even the possibility of escape has been closed. Billgren, if found guilty, faces the possibility of literal imprisonment, but quite apart from that, his fame (or notori-

<sup>33</sup> The self-portrait is idealized, but is not really far-fetched in light of the immense popular support Strindberg eventually attracted.

ety) has been building a prison around his soul, and this is why he resists all urgings to enter politics:

Nu ägde han en makt, som han likväl blott ville begagna till att utöva tryck på domstolen, ty han fruktade partiets fängelse lika mycket som regeringens.<sup>34</sup>

But the factions clamouring for his support are both numerous and insistent. Because of the blasphemy trial, he is seen as a champion of freedom of belief and expression, and all who feel threatened by their opposition to accepted belief rally behind him: together forming quite a sizable constituency, which in turn makes him attractive to the political parties. A rather striking symbol is used to describe his relationship to these groups:

Han var nu åskledaren, som alla ville ha på sitt tak, när ovädret bröt löst, men han var anständig nog att inte förväxla sig själv med blixten.<sup>35</sup>

Like Tekla, he sees the prison walls closing around him, whether of a literal prison, in the event he is found guilty, or of a figurative but perhaps more

<sup>34</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 132:

Now he possessed a power, which he nevertheless only wanted to use to exercise pressure on the court, for he feared the prison of party politics as much as he feared the government's.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 132:

He was now the lightning rod, which everyone wanted to have on his roof when the storm broke loose, but he was modest enough not to mistake himself for the lightning.

tormenting one. His integrity demands that he confront the first possibility if necessary, but he is determined to avoid the second (an additional reason -- besides the fact that he thinks her a charlatan -- for his rejection of Tekla's offer):

Oaktat sin motvilja mot fängelset, som han höll för sin andliga död, längtade han dock dit, emedan han hoppades finna räddning från alla dessa fordringsägare, som bestormade honom med förmaningar och inbillade skulder till dem och samhället, vilket senare blott borde konstitueras av de lägre klasserna. Också blygsel över den falska ställning i vilken man bragt honom, tryckte på hans sinne, och han var fast besluten att om han frikändes fly ur landet och rädda sin själ.<sup>36</sup>

Also noteworthy in this passage is the use of debit and credit symbolism in a social rather than an interpersonal context.

Tekla has had a revelation that Billgren has great psychic powers and could become a powerful medium. Against his judgement, he is persuaded to attend a séance in the presence of Tekla's influential coterie. After a hypnotist has failed to mesmerize him, Tekla

<sup>36</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 132:

Despite his aversion to prison, which he equated with the death of his spirit, he nevertheless longed to go there, in order to rescue himself from all these creditors, who besieged him with admonitions and imagined debts towards themselves and society, which latter must consist only of the lower classes. As well, shame over the false position in which he had been placed weighed on his conscience, and he was determined that, if he were pardoned, he would flee the country to save his soul.



falls into a trance and tries to enlist him in the spiritualist cause with the following prophetic utterance, her attempt at psychological manipulation. Strindberg is satirizing the mystical claptrap dished out by mediums, but there is also a hint in what she says of the Flying Dutchman (in Wagner's version), condemned to a meaningless life until he finds true love:

-- En stark ande är -- hos -- oss -- i  
 afton ... mäktiga gåvor har himlen förlänat  
 dig -- Karl; men din själ har inte fått frid.  
 -- Du har lidit mer än andra; din röst är  
 stark som åskan -- och folket skall -- höra  
 -- på dig med bävan, och ditt tal skall höras  
 -- på taken; men som en vind skall det förgå  
 -- och deras hjärtan -- skola vända bort från  
 dig -- och du skall vara en ljudande malm --  
 och en klingande bjällra -- till det ögon-  
 blick då du älskar.

....  
 -- Var med oss -- lär dig älska det hög-  
 sta -- och du skall se ett nytt ljus uppgå  
 för din själ! -- Gå i frid, men återvänd! --  
 Var god, som du är stark -- from som du är  
 vis -- och kärleksfull som du är sanningsäl-  
 skande!<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 141:

"-- A strong spirit is -- among -- us --  
 this evening ... powerful gifts have been  
 granted you by heaven -- Karl; but your soul  
 has not found peace. -- You have suffered  
 more than others; your voice is strong, like  
 the thunder -- and the people shall -- listen  
 -- to you with awe, and your speech shall be  
 heard -- from the rooftops; but like the wind  
 it will pass -- and they shall turn their  
 hearts -- away from you -- and you shall be a  
 sounding brass -- and a tinkling cymbal --\*  
 until the moment when you love."

....  
 "-- Be one of us -- learn to love the  
 highest -- and you will see a new light arise  
 in your soul! -- Go in peace, but return! --  
 Be good, as you are strong -- pious as you  
 are wise -- and loving as you are forth-  
 right!"

There is a nice bit of irony in Tekla's comparison of Billgren's voice to the thunder (and her positioning of him on the rooftops, like a lightning rod): as we have seen, that is a rôle he has already rejected!

Billgren refuses to cooperate. Tekla has staked her reputation on her prediction that he is a powerful medium, and when he, a poet, fails to produce even a single word when the séance turns to experiments with automatic writing, her faithful followers realize that she has been taking them in. Billgren also has documentary proof that she is a hoax (he had happened to recognize a message from one of her previous séances as a transcription of a document in the national archives, where she works); being a gentleman, he does not expose her publicly, but he indicates that he has seen through her and will expose her if provoked.

Billgren's reflections on the séance form the story's "moral", as well as linking it to the other pieces in *Vivisektioner* and explaining its title. He makes a point of declaring his belief that Tekla is herself a victim of the deception she practises on others: she has convinced herself that she really is a medium. His perception that spiritualism (together with other forms of mysticism) is a short-cut to power is

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\* I Corinthians 13:1.

aroused by his realization that, although the gathering had been composed mainly of learned and eminent men, the two mediums (one of Tekla's rivals was also present) who dominated the proceedings were, in fact, otherwise quite unremarkable women:

Jag tror ... knappast på medvetna charlataner, och så går också min mening om de personer jag träffade i går ut på det, som jag redan på förhand tänkt mig: självbedragare och bedragna. Men i allt detta finns ännu omständigheter, som väcka min misstanke i annan riktning. Jag såg nämligen blott kvinnor dirigera tillställningen, ingen av dessa lärda män var mottaglig för hypnos, ingen kunde skriva. Det var ömkligt och upprörande för min manliga känsla att se dessa i vetenskap och forskning grånade män, hur de omhuldade och som högre väsen tillbådo dessa okunniga, obildade kvinnor, dessa kvinnor, som fingo dem att tro att de besutto ett högre vetande. ... Tror du inte, att dessa ockultister och spiritister, som låta leda sig av kvinnorna, ha samband med könens stundande kamp om makten?<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 148-49:

... I scarcely believe in deliberate charlatans, and the people I met last night confirm the opinion I had formed beforehand: self-deceivers and victims of deception. But in all this there are nevertheless circumstances which arouse my suspicions in another direction. You see, I noticed that only women controlled the affair; none of the learned men there were receptive to hypnotism, none of them could write [automatically]. It was deplorable and upsetting to my feelings as a man to see these men, grown grey in science and research, cherishing these women and addressing them as superior beings: these ignorant, uneducated women, who had convinced them that theirs was a higher learning. .... Do you not think that these occultists and spiritualists who allow themselves to be led by women are connected to that sex's approaching violent struggle for power?

He goes on to explain that woman is kept in an inferior position by society and denied access to the means of improving her lot, so she must look for other means to exert influence and obtain power: "... i den dunkla känslan att vara underlägsen och i medvetande om att icke kunna stiga, vill hon krypa förbi."<sup>39</sup> So it is with all charlatans: they are all basically people who find themselves unequipped to play, let alone win, the game of life according to the established rules, so they try to advance themselves by other means, deceiving themselves as well as others in the process.

The suppressed portion of the forward to *Giftas II*<sup>40</sup> (1886), although it does not use the term "short-cut", provides a definition that is perhaps clearer and more succinct than those offered in the story, as well as emphasizing its misogynistic elements:

Det finns i Europa för närvarande tvenne mystiska rörelser i spiritismen och teosofien. Dessa rörelser ledas och exploateras av kvinnor. Vad kan ligga bakom detta, har jag frågat mig i ett par års tid, som jag observerat dem. Är det männe kvinnan som nu i ett språng söker att gå förbi de århundraden av långsam utveckling mannens tankeförmåga passerat, och genom föregiven högre kunskap inbilla männen att hon är före?

<sup>39</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 150: "... in the vague feeling that she is inferior, and conscious that she cannot climb over obstacles, she seeks to creep around them."

<sup>40</sup> Samlade verk, XVI, 352-66.

Vem vet?<sup>41</sup>

Strindberg makes it clear that he never regretted anything he ever wrote, which is an accurate record of how things appeared to him at the time; still, it is ironic that during the period when the Blue Books were being written (1907-11) he found a great deal of inspiration in theosophy!

Billgren's summing up of the séance not only introduces the term (short-cuts) by which Strindberg identifies the process outlined above, but makes reference to another Strindberg symbol, the sleepwalker. Tekla is a sleepwalker in the sense that once she has succeeded in deluding herself, she is no longer aware of the reality around her:

Det förefaller mig nästan som om denna kvinna ej hade en aning om att hon är en bedrager-ska, att hon inte hade någon klar föreställning om vilket spel hon spelade; så tungt kan självbedrageriet belasta en människosjäl; det var som om jag väckt en sömngångerska på en taktärna, en som ser avgrunden framför sig och inte kan begripa, hur hon kommit till detta farliga ställe. Och som en väckt sömn-

<sup>41</sup> Samlade verk, XVI, 356-57:

There are in Europe at present two mystical movements, spiritualism and theosophy. These movements are led and exploited by women. What can lie behind that? I have asked myself for the couple of years I have observed them. Is it possible that woman now at a single bound seeks to bypass the centuries of slow evolution which man's reasoning power has gone through, and through alleged higher knowledge delude man that she is superior?

Who knows?

gångerska fick hon svindel och föll; och ansåg mig, inte alldeles utan grund, vara orsaken till sitt fall. .... Jag kan visserligen inte skåda in i hennes själ, men jag förmodar att hon i mig trodde sig se sin broder från rännstenen, på vilken hon byggde i sitt hat mot de stora och vilkens tankar hon fruktade en gång skulle kunna läsa hennes. Jag vågar också anta, att hon som kvinna var avundsjuk på mig, mannen, och att, då hon inte kunde komma upp över mig, hon ville smugla sig förbi mig på genvägar!<sup>42</sup>

There can be no doubt that "En häxa" is the better story: it benefits from the suppression of the Billgren (Strindberg) character and the belabouring of the moral, with its misogynistic overtones, as well as from its richer use of symbolism to convey its meaning. But the two versions throw light on each other: through "En häxa" we see Strindberg's short-cuts as examples of modern witchcraft, and "Genvägar" better enables us to

<sup>42</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 154:

It seems to me almost as if this woman had no idea she was an imposter, had no clear understanding of the game she was playing, so heavily can self-deception burden a human soul; it was as if I had awakened a sleepwalker on the eaves, one who sees the abyss before her and cannot understand how she came to such a dangerous place. And like an awakened sleepwalker, she grew dizzy and fell; and she looked on me, not completely without reason, as the cause of her fall. .... I cannot look into her soul, to be sure, but I suspect that in me she thought she saw her brother from the gutter, whom she could enlist in her hatred of the great, and whose thoughts she feared might one day be able to read her own. I also dare to suppose that she, as a woman, was jealous of me, the man, and that when she could not climb over me she tried to sneak past me using short-cuts!

understand the social factors contributing to the witch Tekla's delusion.

As background material to the great naturalistic plays from the same period, Vivisektioner is invaluable.

## Chapter 27

## Kamraterna

Kamraterna: komedi i fyra akter<sup>1</sup> (Comrades: Comedy in Four Acts) was written the year *Le plaidoyer d'un fou* was finished (1888), and indeed springs from the same preoccupations. A passage from the novel might well serve as an introduction to the play:

Elle a haine du mariage et, sous les influences de son odieuse compagne, elle à appris que la femme mariée est une esclave, qui travaille pour son mari, et, comme j'ai grand-peur des esclaves, je lui propose un mariage moderne, conforme à nos goûts.<sup>2</sup>

Kamraterna examines one of these mariages modernes. The painters Axel and Bertha, although married, live together as equal partners and comrades. Given Strindberg's views on marriage, such an arrangement is, of course, doomed from the start.

Kamraterna contains the same types of symbolism as other treatments of marriage from the same period. Appropriate to its principal theme of sexual ambiguity or confusion (the result of reversing or discarding

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXVIII, 7-116.

<sup>2</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 212 (II, vi):

She detests marriage and, under the influence of her odious companion, she has learned that the married woman is a slave who works for her husband, and, since I have a horror of slavery, I propose a modern marriage, adapted to our tastes.



traditional sexual rôles), Omphale symbolism is particularly important, although the myth is not specifically mentioned. Axel and Bertha wished to equalize the rôles of man and woman within their marriage; instead, they have reversed them:

ABEL: Är du en man! Du som arbetar åt en kvinna, och går klädd som en kvinna.

AXEL: Jag, klädd som en kvinna!

ABEL: Du har ju lugg och går barhalsad; medan hon har fadermördare och polkahår; akta dig; hon tar snart byxorna av dig!<sup>3</sup>

As the situation progresses, Bertha pushes Axel farther in this direction: he is to attend a costume party dressed as a Spanish lady (Nora's masquerade costume in Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem*, 1879). The Maid is scandalized by this, but Bertha wishes to make a point:

PIGAN: ... ska nu herrn gå i kjolar också!

BERTHA: Varför inte det, när vi gå i kjolar.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, XXVIII, 51 (II, i):

ABEL: Are you a man! You who work for a woman and go about dressed as a woman.

AXEL: I, dressed as a woman!\*

ABEL: You wear your hair in a fringe, don't you, and go about bare-necked, while she wears a high starched collar and has short page-boy hair; be careful, or she'll be wearing your pants next!

\* An indirect comment on Abel's very mannish appearance.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 64 (II, vii):

THE MAID: ... is the master to go about in skirts now, too?

BERTHA: Why not, since we go about in skirts?

The other side of this coin is Abel, a woman masculine in both name and manner, and a female visitor named Richard Wahlström!<sup>5</sup> The whole atmosphere is epitomized in the symbol of the hermaphrodite:

ABEL: .... Jag är en bastard ...

AXEL: Det är vi väl alla efter som vi äro kroaserade av man och kvinna!<sup>6</sup>

It is Abel who draws the "moral", providing the play with its title, and linking it very specifically to "Leka med elden" ("Playing with Fire", 1892):

ABEL: .... Du har lekt med elden.

BERTHA: Elden! Ser man aldrig en man och en kvinna kunna leva som kamrater utan att det ska bli eld.

ABEL: Nej, vet du, så länge det finns två kön, så lär det allt bli brinna av!<sup>7</sup>

Despite all attempts to alter, blur, or eliminate the distinction, then, there are still two sexes, and they are basically in conflict. Whenever the conflict erupts within marriage, Strindberg's symbols are the same: slavery, as in Axel's words as he flings off his

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, XXVIII, 69: (II, x).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 110 (IV, xvi):

ABEL: .... I'm a hybrid ...

AXEL: Aren't we all, since we're a cross between a man and a woman!

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 68 (II, ix):

ABEL: .... You've been playing with fire.

BERTHA: Fire! Isn't it possible for a man and a woman to live together as comrades without there being a fire!

ABEL: Not really; so long as there are two sexes, there will always be combustion!

wedding ring: "... nu kastar jag min boja!"<sup>8</sup>; cannibalism:

AXEL: Vad menar du med älska! Är det inte som en stilla längtan att få äta mig levande en gång till;<sup>9</sup>

and for the first time in one of his plays, vampirism: "... varför gifte du dig med mig? Därför att du hade ... bleksot!";<sup>10</sup> and "... du sög mitt bästa blod under sömnen -- och ändå räckte det till att kuva dig."<sup>11</sup>

The vampire symbol is linked to a biblical allusion, also used in *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, which is a variation of the Hercules-Omphale myth: "... du klippte min styrkas hår, medan jag lade mitt trötta huvud i ditt knä...."<sup>12</sup> Another biblical allusion, which will eventually supply the name of the daughter in the *Dödsdansen* plays, is a variation on the same theme:

Nu när du står så där med ryggen åt mig och jag ser din nacke med det korta håret, är det -- -- -- ja det är precis som om -- husch!

<sup>8</sup> Samlade verk, XXVIII, 78 (III, ii): "... now I throw off my chain!"

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 81 (III, ii):

AXEL: What do you mean by love! Isn't it like a secret longing to be able to eat me alive yet again?

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 74 (III, ii): "... why did you marry me? Because you had ... anaemia!"

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 80 (III, ii): "... you sucked my best blood from me while I slept -- and yet there was still enough left to overpower you."

<sup>12</sup> Idem.: "... you cut the hair containing my strength while I rested my tired head in your lap...."

som om du var Judith och skänkt mig din kropp  
för att få ta huvudet av mig.<sup>13</sup>

The extent to which Bertha degrades men is evident in the comparison of Willmer, the tame littérateur of her circle, to an animal Strindberg despised. Curiously, the same symbol indicates the possibility of rebellion: dogs can be mindlessly devoted pets, but they can also be vicious:

WILLMER: ... jag har varit en racka och  
legat på ert släp; men jag kan bitas också!

BERTHA: Får jag se på dina tänder!

WILLMER: Nej, du ska få känna på dem!<sup>14</sup>

Axel has been treated similarly, of course, and he also is capable of turning on his erstwhile mistress: "Du har retat Axel; du har trampat honom, men han kan bita dig i hälen ännu."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Samlade verk, XXVIII, 78 (III, ii):

Now, as you stand there with your back to me, I can see the back of your neck because of your short hair, and it's -- -- -- yes, it's just as if -- ugh! as if you were Judith, and had surrendered your body to me in order to get a chance to cut my head off.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 67 (II, viii):

WILLMER: ... I've been a lap-dog and lain on the train of your dress, but I can also bite!

BERTHA: Can I see your teeth?

WILLMER: No, but you'll have the opportunity to feel them!

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 63 (II, vi): "You've provoked Axel; you've trodden on him, but he can still bite you in the heel."

The humiliating atmosphere is stifling Axel, and the dominance of his own personality by that of another is symbolized by difficulty in breathing: one thinks of the stinking corpses buried beneath the floor in "Leka med elden" and Dödsdansen, among other examples of this symbol:

DOKTORN: Här är dålig luft! Kom, låt oss gå!

AXEL: Ja, jag vill ut -- ut härifrån.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, there is a striking use of cyclical symbolism in the final act: the love of Axel and Bertha blossomed in the springtime, flourished in the summer, and now withers and dies. But he suggests that perhaps something will survive the cold and bitter winter, and they may be able to find happiness again:

BERTHA: Du tänker på ... den första supén vi hade som förlovade ... den vårkvällen då du hade friat ...

AXEL: Du hade friat ...

BERTHA: Axel! -- Och nu är det den sista; sista gången. Det var en kort sommar!

AXEL: Vål kort; men solen kommer nog igen.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Samlade verk, XXVIII, 108 (IV, xv):

THE DOCTOR: The air is bad in here! Come, let's go!

AXEL: Yes, I want to go out -- away from here.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 88 (IV, iv):

BERTHA: You're thinking about ... that first supper we had as an engaged couple ... that spring evening after you had proposed ...

AXEL: After you had proposed ...

BERTHA: Axel! -- And now it's the last, last time [we'll eat together]. It was a short summer!

Perhaps; but not for them as a couple. Axel has decided that he wants a wife in his home rather than a comrade, and in a parody of the conventional comic ending, he ejects the comrade (who happens to be his wife) from his home in order to make room for a ("real") wife! As in many of Strindberg's comedies, the humour is bitter, but if one credits Axel (and Strindberg) with self-irony, and if one concentrates on the characters and the witty dialogue rather than the issues, Kamraterna can be a very funny play!

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AXEL: Rather too short; but the sun is sure to return.

## Chapter 28

*Fadren*

In sharp contrast to an earlier play such as *Lycko-Pers resa* and to all of the post-Inferno plays, *Fadren: sorgespell*<sup>1</sup> (*The Father: a Tragedy*, 1887) makes relatively little use of symbolism. Presumably this is because *Fadren* is a naturalistic work, and Strindberg felt that whatever symbolism he introduced into it ought to be accounted for naturalistically: the psychological issues are deduced from the surface action, whereas in the expressionistic plays the action itself is dictated by psychological realities (expressed through symbols). *Fadren*, in other words, is an example, an illustration, a case study of a psychological state; plays like *Till Damaskus*, on the other hand, are themselves manifestations of psychological states, and are thus more symbolic; ordinary life is not symbolic, but dream life is.

These observations notwithstanding, the play does contain a fair amount of animal symbolism. The Captain compares his home to a cage full of tigers who want to claw him to the ground (I, iii), and later (I, vii) says that he feels as if a web were being spun about him. As in *Röda rummet*, the spider is used as a symbol

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXVII, 7-98.

of inexorable destiny. That image is an important one for Strindberg: his conception of the Captain is of an urbane, witty, influential, and essentially strong man who is nevertheless trapped and eventually destroyed by circumstances he cannot control: his military rank and the fact that he is destroyed by the wiles of a woman recall the passage from *Giftas* contrasting the warfare of men and that of women. Strindberg makes these points in a letter to the author Axel Lundegård (who translated *Fadren* into Danish) in October, 1887, referring to the forthcoming première of the play (in Denmark, and in Danish):

Jag föreslår ... att ryttmästarn ges åt en skådespelare med eljest friskt humör som med en överlägsen, självironisk, lätt skeptisk världsmannaton, medveten om sina företräden, går med tämligen glatt mod sitt öde till mötes, svepande sig i döden i dessa spindelnät han ej kan av naturlagsskäl riva sönder.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Brev, 99 (October 17, 1887):

I suggest ... that the rôle of the Captain be given to an actor with generally cheerful spirits, who, with a supercilious, self-mocking, slightly skeptical tone characteristic of a man of the world, conscious of his superiority, goes rather willingly to meet his destiny, wrapping himself in death, in these spider webs which he cannot destroy for reasons determined by nature.

Any actor contemplating the rôle of the Captain and any director contemplating staging the play would do well to read the whole of this letter.



He realizes that he is being emasculated by his wife, and this too he symbolizes in animal terms: "De som gävo hanegället voro icke längre hanar utan kapuner, och poularderna svarade på locket...."<sup>3</sup>

Later (III, ii), the Pastor compares the Captain to a fox in a trap, which would rather bite off its own leg than allow itself to be caught, and the Captain calls Margret, the representative of the positive, warm, maternal aspects of woman in the play, even she, an old crow, croaking for carrion.

In III, vii, the climax of the play, we are reminded of the springtime of this love affair, when thrushes sang in the birch woods. The Captain begins to suffocate under Laura's shawl, which he thinks is a cat trying to draw away his breath, and before he dies he asks that his military tunic be draped over him, his lion's skin as he calls it. This links him to Hercules, and fortifies the play's many references to the relationship of that hero to Omphale.

Indeed, the myth of Hercules and Omphale is a central symbol in the play: the domination of the physically superior and heroic male by the weak but cunning female. Another reference to classical mythology brings

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, XXVII, 71 (II, v): "Those who gave the cock-cry were no longer cocks but capons, and the hens answered the false cry...."

the cannibalism symbol introduced in the short story "Tvekamp" (Giftas II) into the play:

Ser du, jag är en kannibal och jag vill äta dig. Din mor ville äta mig, men det fick hon inte. Jag är Saturnus, som åt sina barn därför, att man hade spått at de skulle äta honom eljes. Äta eller ätas! Det är frågan! Om jag inte äter dig, så äter du mig, och du har redan visat mig tänderna!<sup>4</sup>

Supernatural references depict Laura as an avenging Fury from Hell, sent to the Captain as punishment for his lack of faith. Curiously, Margret, the Captain's only friend and yet, as a woman, a member of the enemy camp, is identified near the end with the Blessed Virgin Mary: "God natt Margret, och välsignad vare du bland kvinnor!"<sup>5</sup> He dies in her arms, leaving us, before the final scene, with a parody of the Pietà (with the Captain in the rôle of the dead Christ). He dies in winter, in cyclical symbolism the season of the disappeared hero and the crone (Margret). The play ends with the word "Amen!"

<sup>4</sup> Samlade verk, XXVII, 89 (III, vi):

You see, I'm a cannibal and I want to eat you. Your mother wanted to eat me, but she wasn't able to. I'm Saturn, who ate his children because it had been foretold that otherwise they'd eat him. To eat or be eaten! That is the question! If I don't eat you, you'll eat me, and you've already shown me your teeth!

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 96 (III, vii): "Good night, Margret, and blessed art thou among women!"

Death plays a major rôle in this play, as it does in all of the works dealing with marriage. As in "Leka med elden" and *Dödsdansen I*, we seem to smell a corpse (symbolically, the love which presumably once existed between the two adversaries, but has long since died) rotting beneath the floor-boards, although it is not mentioned here as in the other two plays.

In an article published in *Aftontidningen* (The Evening Paper) on September 9, 1910<sup>6</sup> (i.e., over twenty years after *Fadren* was written), Strindberg admits that Laura is "av samma tyg" ("cut from the same cloth") as Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, but points out that his play was written three years before Ibsen's (which is dated 1890), absolving himself of influence from his rival.

<sup>6</sup> *Samlade skrifter*, LIII, 467-70. The title of the article is "Mitt och Ditt" ("Mine and Yours").

## Chapter 29

*Hemsöborna*

The novel *Hemsöborna: skärgårdsberättelse*<sup>1</sup> (*The Natives of Hemsö: a Tale of the Archipelago*, 1887) is one of Strindberg's most beloved works, although the author himself did not take it seriously. It is his most good-natured and lighthearted treatment of life in the Stockholm archipelago, the bit of Sweden he loved most, and to which he returned time and again both in his life and in his work.

The nature of the novel, a genial treatment of folk customs combined with an appreciation of nature in the archipelago, preclude an extensive use of symbolism. It is not absent, but is used to comment on and reinforce the action, rather than constituting the means by which the action progresses.

Of particular note is the cyclical nature of the novel's action, particularly as regards the relations of the hero, Carlsson, with the servant-girl Ida and with the widow Flod. He meets and falls in love with Ida in the summer, is rejected, scorned, and ridiculed by her in the autumn, and begins courting the widow Flod (who describes herself as a crone) in the winter. The following summer he is a bridegroom, and in the

<sup>1</sup> *Skrifter*, II, 5-104.

final winter of the book he loses his wife, the farm for which he has schemed, and ultimately his life.

The most important symbol in the novel is the sea. Throughout, it is emphasized that Carlsson is a farmer, knows nothing about the sea, and cannot function in it: "... han var uppe från land och var ingen sjökarl."<sup>2</sup> In this he is sharply contrasted to the widow's son, Gusten, who is very much at home on the sea: his first appearance is in seaboots, and he is last seen being rowed home after both the widow and Carlsson have died:

Och till rors i sin egen eka lät den nye herren till Hemsö sina drängar ro sig hemåt, för att styra egen farkost över det nyckfulla livets blåsiga fjärdar och gröna sund.<sup>3</sup>

Midway between Carlsson and Gusten is the Pastor, "... en korsning av bonde och sjöman."<sup>4</sup> This is perhaps the reason that Carlsson can never trust him, and the reason for the alternating of the Pastor's own sympathies between Carlsson and Gusten.

Of the two farmhands, Norman, as an islander, is associated with the sea, and the lazy Rundqvist with

<sup>2</sup> *Skrifter*, II, 82 (Ch. 6): "... he was from the mainland and was no seaman."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 104 (Ch. 7):

And sitting at the tiller of his own boat, the new master of Hemsö had his farmhands row him homeward, steering his own ship over the windy coves and green inlets of the fickle sea of life.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 51 (Ch. 4): "... a cross between farmer and seaman."

the land: "... inte någon sjökarl, utan oppe ifrån land också...."<sup>5</sup> Rundqvist's connection with the smithy and with spells, incantations, and curses perhaps suggests that the mainlanders are on the wrong side in this struggle between land and sea, and doomed to be swallowed up!

At the height of his ascendancy, Carlsson affects sea dress (the late Mr. Flod's sealskin cap and sea boots) and tries to gain more knowledge and experience of the sea:

... han [syntes] börja lägga sig mer ombord med sjösakerna och visade stor lust för sjön. Skurade upp en bössa och for på jakt; deltog i notdragning och skötsättning, samt vågade på längre segelfärder.<sup>6</sup>

He even goes so far as to espouse the claims of the sea over those of the land -- "Framför allt fisket! Fisket för fiskaren och jorden för jordbrukaren!"<sup>7</sup> -- letting the business of farming Hemsö slide.

<sup>5</sup> *Skrifter*, II, 11 (Ch. 1): "... no seaman, but also from the mainland...."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 82 (Ch. 6):

... it was observed that he began to make himself more acquainted with nautical matters and displayed a great interest in the sea. He cleaned up a shotgun and went out hunting [for sea birds], took part in seine-fishing and in the laying of herring nets, and also ventured out on longer sailing trips.

<sup>7</sup> *Idem.*: "Fishing comes first! Fishing for fishermen and farming for farmers!"

Despite his attempts to become what he is not, however, the sea, source and end of all life but indifferent to human pretensions and ambitions, is intimately linked with his downfall. The first instance of this is symbolic: just as he gains confidence on the sea of life, his ship runs into difficulty: the son whose birth would have consolidated his position and assured his future on Hemsö is stillborn:

Frampå hösten, ett par månader efter bröllopet, inträffade emellertid en händelse, som verkade likt en kastvind på Carlssons farkost, nyss utlupen med fulla segel. Hustrun kom nämligen ner med ett dödfött, alldeles för tidigt fött foster.<sup>8</sup>

Later, the sea swallows up his wife's coffin, bringing home to him the finality of her death (and with it the end to his ambitions: Hemsö will now revert to Gusten). Finally, he is himself the victim of a relentless sea.

As in *Fadren*, there is considerable use of animal imagery, much of it in the form of the familiar simile and metaphor of everyday speech. Perhaps the most notable examples are the references to roosters, which emphasize the elements of sexual comedy and competi-

<sup>8</sup> *Skrifter*, II, 82 (Ch. 6):

Meanwhile, towards autumn, a couple of months after the wedding, an event occurred which acted like a squall on Carlsson's craft, only recently under full sail: his wife was delivered of a stillborn, quite premature child.

tion, as in the title of Chapter 3: "Drängen ... blir herre på täppan och kröker till ungtupparna."<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, sheep imagery emphasizes Carlsson's ambitions and his estimation of his own powers and importance in the humorous passage (Ch. 2, 22-23) in which he leads the widow in her Sunday devotions by reading the parable of the Good Shepherd and a meditation on the text by Luther. In his imagination, he becomes the good shepherd and Gusten and the farmhands the sheep, whom it is his mission to unite and watch over. Sheep and shepherds are, of course, inextricably linked to the land, indicating the nature of the one flock into which Carlsson wants to unite these sheep (in the dramatization of *Hemsöborna* the farmhand Norman is transformed into a navy boatswain home on leave)!

Sheep also appear briefly in the psalm with which Carlsson concludes his final appeal to Ida (a maid who has accompanied one of the island's summer visitors from the city): "... hjordmarken är full med får...."<sup>10</sup> Carlsson finds this passage "... en lycklig anspelning på lantlivets företräden för stads-livet....";<sup>11</sup> sheep

<sup>9</sup> *Skrifter*, II, 26: "The farmhand [Carlsson] ... becomes cock of the walk and subdues the young cockerels."

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 48 (Ch. 4): "... the meadows are dressed in flocks...." Psalm 65:13 (Vulgate 64:14), Jerusalem Bible translation.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*: "... a happy picture of the advantages of country live over city life...."



apparently symbolize not only the advantages of land over sea, but also of country over city! Unfortunately for Carlsson, his sheep all go astray!

In 1889 Strindberg dramatized the novel, under the title *Hemsöborna: folk-komedi*<sup>12</sup> (*The Natives of Hemsö: a Folk Comedy*). Unlike the novel, the play was a failure. This was largely due to the author's lack of commitment to the work, and to his attempt to force a marriage between two mutually exclusive dramatic forms: naturalism and farce. The play introduces characters not in the novel, has three simultaneous love plots, and ends with Carlsson's marriage to the widow Flod. It is an excellent example of what it pretends to be, a farce based on folk customs, but is very minor Strindberg indeed, and is without interest from the point of view of symbolism. Although it has never enjoyed success on the stage (Ollén, 185-88), it is fairly popular in outdoor productions, where its lack of substance is perhaps an advantage.

<sup>12</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXXII, 7-124.

## Chapter 30

*Le plaidoyer d'un fou*

*Le plaidoyer d'un fou*<sup>1</sup> (*A Madman's Defence*, 1888) was written in French. An account of Strindberg's marriage to Siri von Essen (married 1877, divorce petition filed 1887, divorced 1891), it is not absolutely reliable autobiography, but rather a novel based on the relationship: Strindberg's end was to justify his own conduct, and he was willing to sacrifice (or stretch) strict fidelity to the truth to this end, to the demands of his story as a story, and to the mystical, symbolic method he used to tell it. He does not write from emotion recollected in tranquillity, but in the fevered heat of the moment. Siri von Essen was undoubtedly the most important woman in his life, and was perhaps the only woman he ever truly and deeply loved. Unable to write coldly and objectively about her, he gives expression to his feelings through symbols.

As in all of Strindberg's works dealing with marriage, animal symbolism abounds in *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*; already in the introduction Siri (called Maria) is compared to "... la panthère qui joue avec ses

<sup>1</sup> References are to the French edition (Paris, 1964).

enfants."<sup>2</sup> Later, she is a beast hiding behind the statue of the Madonna (his ideal image of her, to which she cannot attain), "... les griffes en avant ...",<sup>3</sup> and again, in reference to her lesbian tendencies, she is "... une sale bête de femme, sans fierté, sans dignité...."<sup>4</sup> Twice she appears as a spider: once when Strindberg refers to "... sa logique d'araignée ...",<sup>5</sup> and once when he explains the reference: "Elle est comme l'araignée femelle qui a dévoré son époux après avoir reçu la conception de lui."<sup>6</sup> On her last appearance, she is the most despised animal in Strindberg's bestiary: "... un chien abandonné, la chienne offreuse...."<sup>7</sup>

The author himself is most often seen as a lion (because of his wild mane of hair: a connection to the Samson-Delilah symbolism), but "... un lion infirme

<sup>2</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 25: "... the panther playing with her children."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 65 (I, iv): "... with her claws extended..."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 170 (I, xxv): "... a filthy beast of a woman, without pride, without dignity...."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 176 (I, xxvi): "... her spider-logic ..."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 271 (IV, i): "She is like the female spider, who devoured her mate after being impregnated by him."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 315 (IV, xi): "... an abandoned dog, the sacrificial bitch...."

...",<sup>8</sup> who is shorn of his mane to provide a wig for the horse!<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere he is

... un loup couché au lit de la mère-grand qu'il avait dévorée alors qu'il se préparait à croquer par surcroît, le Petit Chaperon Rouge.<sup>10</sup>

Usually, however, the animals which represent him are sick, docile, or harmless: "... une bête blessée à mort....";<sup>11</sup> "un agneau que tu conduis....";<sup>12</sup> "Un chien couchant....";<sup>13</sup> the hapless spouse of the black widow spider (see above); and "... une chrysalide de ver à soie, dévidée par la grande machine à vapeur...."<sup>14</sup>

The other main character, the Baron (Maria's first husband), appears only once as an animal: a bear<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 146 (I, xvii): "... a lame lion ..."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 258 (III, viii).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 112 (I, viii):

... a wolf in the bed of the grandmother, whom he has just devoured, preparing to swallow Little Red Riding Hood as well.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 209 (II, v): "... a mortally wounded beast...."

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 258 (III, viii): "A lamb which you lead...."

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, "A sleeping dog...."

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 315 (IV, xi): "... the chrysalis of a silkworm, emptied out by the great steam-machine...."

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 168 (I, xxiv).

A symbol expected in a Strindberg work dealing with marriage is cannibalism, but in fact its use here is very limited indeed. Apart from the reference to the cannibalistic proclivities of the black widow spider, there are but two instances in the novel: Maria and her lesbian companion are each referred to, at different times, as "... une mangeuse d'hommes...."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the vampire appears only once: "Je découvre ... que je fus la dupe d'un vampire...."<sup>17</sup>

Plant symbolism is also used sparingly. There are two references to the plant as an image of the family, each part dependent on and inseparable from the others:

... la famille m'est devenue un organisme  
comme celui de la plante, un tout dont je  
suis partie intégrante....<sup>18</sup>

Otherwise, perhaps the most significant symbol of this type is the information that Maria's favorite colours

<sup>16</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 39 (I, i) and 245 (III, vii): "... a man-eater...."

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 311 (IV, ix): "I find ... that I was the dupe of a vampire...."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 255 (III, viii):

... the family has become for me an organism  
like that of the plant, a whole of which I am  
an integral part....

There is a similar passage in Part IV, Chapter xi (315).

are "... jaune de blé mur and violet de pensée....":<sup>19</sup>  
a combination of colours, representing both sunshine  
and night, which is also favoured by the Daughter-in-  
Law in "Leka med elden".

As in that play, water is significant in all its  
forms, from tears to the great sea. There are several  
references to bathing; for example:

Ce qui le fait naître, ce livre? La juste  
nécessité de laver mon cadavre avant qu'il  
soit enfermé pour jamais dans la bière;<sup>20</sup>

... je prends la résolution de vivre, de me  
laver de cette boue dont la femme m'a  
souillé....<sup>21</sup>

In addition, there are references to Christian baptism,  
to suicide by drowning, to tears ("La Fortune nous sou-  
rit avec une larme dans les yeux."<sup>22</sup>), and, most beau-  
tiful of all, "... je vous aime ainsi que le soleil  
aime la rosée ... pour la boire."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Le plaidoyer d'un fou, 84 (I, vii): "... the  
yellow of ripe wheat and the violet of pansies...."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 11 ("Avant-propos": Foreword):

What brought this book into being? The simple  
necessity of washing my corpse before it is  
shut up forever in the coffin.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 311 (IV, ix):

... I resolve to live, to cleanse myself of  
this mud with which woman has begrimed me....

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 214 (II, vi): "Fortune smiles on us with  
tears in her eyes."

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 145 (I, xvii): "... I love you just as  
the sun loves the dew ... to drink it up."

Here too, water is juxtaposed to its opposite, fire. Twice in the novel we are reminded of Maria's mother's description of her as "... une femme de feu...."<sup>24</sup>

Also as in many other works dealing with marriage, the atmosphere is heavy with the smell of death. Two instances will suffice. The first also appears in *Brott och brott*, *Till Damaskus I*, and *Han och Hon*, but there is a difference here: the proposed suicide pact is born not out of elation but out of despair:

Je lui propose de mourir avec moi....  
-- Mourons, lui dis-je. Ayons honte de nous trainer par les rues, cadavres ambulants, qui gênent la circulation des vivants. Elle refuse.<sup>25</sup>

In the second, Strindberg alludes to the action of *Fadren*:

... la transfusion de mon sang s'opère par des grandes artères, débouchant de mon coeur pour se ramifier dans l'utérus de la mère et se répandre aux petits corps de mes enfants. C'est un système de vaisseaux sanguins qui s'enchevêtrent l'un dans l'autre. Si l'on en coupe un seul, la vie m'échappera avec le sang que le sable boira. C'est pourquoi l'on pourrait avoir des tentations d'obéir un mot d'ordre: "Tue-la" donné par le célèbre écri-

<sup>24</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 11 ("Avant-propos") and 92 (I, v): "... a woman of fire...."

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 205 (II, v):

I suggest that she die with me....  
"Let's die," I say to her, "let's be ashamed to drag ourselves through the streets like walking corpses, impeding the circulation of the living."  
She refuses.

vain, quand le père est blessé à mort par l'incertitude où il est de sa descendance, faussée par une mère sans scrupules.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the yellow and violet mentioned above, the main colour symbolism of the novel is Strindberg's characteristic black, red, and white (gold is missing from the palette: there is no perfection here!). These colours are usually associated with Maria, and whenever she appears in white, the colour is in some way modified by one of the more basic colours: Maria's innocence is at worst feigned, at best fleeting:

Elle était tout de blanc vêtue ... et le vert des larges feuilles jetait en s'y mêlant des teintes de mort dans les éclaircies et les ombres de ce visage pâle, où luisaient les noires pupilles de charbon de terre;<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 255-56 (III, viii):

... the transfusion of my blood takes place through the large arteries, emptying out of my heart in order to branch out in the womb of the mother and expand into the tiny bodies of my children. It is a system of blood vessels which are intertangled the one with the other. If a single one of them is cut, my life will escape with the blood which the sand will soak up. That is why one could be tempted to follow the advice ("Kill her!") given by the famous author when the father is mortally wounded by the incertitude into which he has fallen concerning his paternity, a pit dug for him by an unscrupulous mother.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 (I, ii):

She was dressed all in white ... and the green of the large leaves blended with it, casting hues of death upon the highlights and shadows of her pale face, where her black pupils glowed like charcoal.



-- Ah! C'est trop fort, monsieur!  
s'écria-t-elle, rouge et pâle de surprise  
alternativement;<sup>28</sup>

Ces jambes noires, s'agitant au nuage des  
jupons, sont des jambes de diablesse....<sup>29</sup>

It is, however, Maria who is the Little Red Riding Hood  
for whom the wolf lies in wait: perhaps not quite so  
innocent as the heroine of the fairy tale!

Also important in the novel is the sun (a strain  
of symbolism which reappears in *Advent*, 1898, and *Påsk*,  
1901), which is frequently regarded as an enemy, some-  
thing to be avoided:

Je baisse les stores pour nous défendre con-  
tre la clarté du jour et nous attendons la  
nuit et l'obscurité pour rentrer. Mais le  
soleil se couche tard....;<sup>30</sup>

Il me semble que le soleil n'aurait pas dû  
éclairer cette scène....<sup>31</sup>

But not always; there is also the exquisite image of  
the sun's drinking the morning dew, a symbol of absorb-

<sup>28</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 65 (I, iv):

"Oh, that's really too much, sir!" she  
cried, alternatively red and pale with sur-  
prise.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 208 (II, i):

These black legs, moving in the cloud of  
skirts, are the legs of a she-devil....

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 186 (II, i):

I lower the blinds to protect us from the  
light of day, and we await night and darkness  
before returning. But the sun sets late....

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 312 (IV, x): "It seems to me the sun  
ought not to have illuminated this scene...."

ing love, and the beneficent effects of the sun are recognized as well: "... sous le soleil, en plein été, les ténèbres de l'âme se dissipait plus vite."<sup>32</sup>

Much more important than these are symbols drawn from the supernatural order. Among the most significant are biblical allusions. Before his love for Maria is consummated, for instance, the author compares himself to the Old Testament Joseph:

... elle sentait l'épouvantable puissance d'enchanteresse qu'elle exerçait sur ce Joseph; d'apparence glaciale, d'une chasteté obligatoire.<sup>33</sup>

This Joseph succumbs to the temptations of Potiphar's wife, however, and indeed marries her. Thereafter, he is cast into another rôle: that of Samson, "... qui prétend avoir des facultés à renverser le monde ...",<sup>34</sup> helpless in the hands of a seductive Delilah who has shorn him of his strength:

Ne se pourrait-t-il pas que j'ai été tout simplement la dupe d'une enjoleuse adorée, dont les petits ciseaux à broder coupaient les bouclés de Samson, tandis qu'il reposait sur l'oreiller, son front fatigué de la bes-

<sup>32</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 192 (II, xii): "... in the sunlight, at the height of summer, the shadows of the spirit dissolved more rapidly."

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 49 (I, ii):

... she felt the terrible power of the enchantress which she exercised over this Joseph, who was frigid in appearance, chaste by necessity.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 176 (I, xxvi): "... who claims the ability to turn the world upside down ..."

ogne accomplie et las des lourds soucis qui lui venaient d'elle et de ses enfants! Confiant, sans en rien soupçonner, il aurait, pendant son sommeil décennal, perdu l'honneur aux bras de la charmeuse et sa virilité, sa volonté de vivre, son intelligence, ses cinq sens, et plus encore, hélas.<sup>35</sup>

As mentioned above, the Samson symbolism is related to that of the lion; Maria cuts off the lion's mane and forces him to wear a wig. The Samson-Delilah story is the biblical equivalent of the Hercules-Omphale myth (to which the lion is another link: Hercules traditionally wore a lion skin), which recurs repeatedly in Strindberg's works.

Early in the novel, Maria undergoes an apotheosis, becoming a mother goddess. It is these qualities Strindberg seeks and adores in women: purity and a maternal nature. Their animal nature (physical passion) repels him, while at the same time he is uncontrollably drawn towards it by a desire to possess the goddess. Although his white goddess displaces God ("Dieu était relégué, la Femme prenait sa place, mais la femme

<sup>35</sup> Le plaidoyer d'un fou, 24 (Introduction):

Is it not possible that I was quite simply the dupe of an adored sweet-talker, whose little embroidery scissors severed the locks of Samson while his head rested on the pillow, his brow exhausted by work accomplished and burdened with the heavy cares brought on by her and her children! Trusting, suspecting nothing, he would, during his profound sleep, lose his honour in the arms of the enchantress, as well as his virility, his will to live, his intelligence, his five senses, and much more, alas!

vièrge et mère à la fois."<sup>36</sup>), she is presented in Christian terms, either as a transfigured soul:

De cet instant pour moi, cette femme se présentait comme l'incarnation d'une Ame, pure, inaccessible, investie de ce corps glorieux dont la Sainte Écriture se plaît à revêtir les défunctes âmes;<sup>37</sup>

an angel:

... chaste ... qu'un ange, comme si elle était venue au monde toute vêtue avec des ailes par dessus sa tunique;<sup>38</sup>

the Blessed Virgin Mary ("... la statue de la Madonne était renversée."<sup>39</sup>):

... plus je souffre des perversités de ma Ménade, plus je m'efforce à auréoliser sa tête de sainte Marie!<sup>40</sup>

or even, in one instance, as Christ Himself:

<sup>36</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou* 48 (I, ii): "God was displaced by Woman, but woman who was at the same time virgin and mother."

<sup>37</sup> *Idem.*:

From that instant, this woman appeared to me as the incarnation of a Spirit: pure, inaccessible, invested with that glorious body in which Holy Scripture is pleased to array the souls of the departed.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 149 (I, xviii):

... chaste ... as an angel, as if she had come into the world fully clothed, with wings attached over her tunic.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 65 (I, iv): "... the statue of the Madonna had been overturned."

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 248 (III, vii):

... the more I suffer from the perversities of my Maenad, the more I strive to crown her head, so like St. Mary's, with a halo!

Quand je marchais par les rues, je rêvais que j'étais précédé d'enfants de chœur, dont les clochettes tintinnabulantes avertissaient la foule de l'approche du Saint des Saints enfermé au ciboire de mon coeur....<sup>41</sup>

Classical mythology contributes to this apotheosis, as the author tries to find the classical goddess who most corresponds to his beloved. He settles on Diana (in a passage which also reflects the water and sun symbolism noted above):

La Déesse pâle, la Déesse de la nuit, peureuse devant la clarté du Jour, cruelle avec involontaire chasteté, conséquence d'une constitution vicieuse, trop garçon, trop peu fille, modeste par nécessité, au point de garder rancune à Actéon qui la surprend au bain.<sup>42</sup>

He reaches this conclusion after rejecting Venus, "... la femme normale qui attend son homme, sûre de l'éclatante triomphe de la Beauté;"<sup>43</sup> Juno,

<sup>41</sup> Le plaidoyer d'un fou, 55 (I, iii):

When I walked through the streets, I dreamt that I was preceded by choirboys, whose tinkling bells alerted the populace to the approach of the Holy of Holies encased within the ciborium of my heart....

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 71 (I, v):

The pale Goddess, the Goddess of the Night, afraid of the light of Day, cruel in her involuntary chastity, the consequence of a defective constitution, too much a boy, too little a girl, modest of necessity, to the point of holding a grudge against Actaeon because he surprised her at her bath.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 71 (I, v): "... the normal woman, who awaits her husband, sure of the dazzling victory of Beauty."

... la femme génératrice, étalée sur son lit de couches, faisant ostentation des parties déclarées honteuses de son corps magnifique;<sup>44</sup>

and Minerva, "... la vieille fille, qui dissimule sa poitrine sous une cuirasse d'homme."<sup>45</sup>

Of these classical goddesses, Venus, Juno, and Minerva represent three aspects of woman often encountered in Strindberg: the mistress, the mother, and the "desexed" man-woman. Although the above description of Diana would seem to place her also in the last category, that is but one aspect of Diana: her chastity. She was also goddess of childbirth (thus combining, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, the aspects of chastity and motherhood) and, as the extract points out, of the night (as Hecate). The author apparently begins by worshipping the first two aspects of the goddess, and balks when the third is revealed. The crisis is symbolically portrayed by the overturning of the statue of the Madonna, revealing the beast with predatory claws

<sup>44</sup> *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, 71 (I, v):

... the female progenitor, laid out on her bed of childbirth, displaying those parts of her magnificent body which have been declared shameful.

<sup>45</sup> *Idem.*: "... the spinster, who disguises her breast under a man's cuirass."

crouched behind. His pale goddess then becomes a Maenad or a Fury: "Son regard est celui d'une furie."<sup>46</sup>

The change is also signalled with a biblical allusion to the loss of innocence:

Soudain, une pomme se détache d'une  
branche agitée par le vent. La baronne s'in-  
clina pour la ramasser et d'un geste signifi-  
catif me la tenait.

-- Fruit défendu, murmurai-je, non,  
merci mille fois, madame.<sup>47</sup>

Adam, of course, eventually succumbs and eats of the forbidden fruit, and all the woes of mankind follow. Strindberg regarded his intrusion into and destruction of the marriage between Siri von Essen and her first husband as his great sin, for which he was to suffer most of his life. The tension between the mother goddess and the temptress, between the mother of the spirit and the mistress of the flesh, between the Blessed Virgin Mary and Eve dominates his relations with women, and his portrayal of them.

<sup>46</sup> Le plaidoyer d'un fou, 250 (III, viii): "Her look is that of a Fury."

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 89 (I, vii):

Suddenly, an apple detached itself from a branch that was stirred by the wind. The baroness bent down to pick it up and, with a meaningful gesture, held it out to me.

"Forbidden fruit;" I murmured, "no, thank you very much, madame."

## Chapter 31

*Fröken Julie*

*Fröken Julie*: ett naturalistiskt sorgespel<sup>1</sup> (*Miss Julie: a Naturalistic Tragedy*, 1888), while the most naturalistic of Strindberg's plays, is not devoid of symbolism. The dominant symbolism is that of animals, from *Fröken Julie*'s making her fiancé jump over her riding crop like a trained dog at the beginning of the play<sup>2</sup> to Jean's killing of her pet bird at the end.

A particularly effective example occurs in a passage only recently (1984) restored to the play. As Julie gradually realizes that her affair with Jean can lead nowhere, her class consciousness returns to her and the sexual encounter suddenly appears monstrous to her. Jean's retort to her comments, quoting the law for the punishment for bestiality, indicates that he knows exactly what she is thinking:

FRÖKEN: .... Jag skulle vilja låta döda er som ett djur ...

JEAN: "Den brottslige dömes till två års straffarbete och djuret dödas!" Inte så?

FRÖKEN: Just så!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Samlade verk, XXVII, 99-190.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 164:

MISS JULIE: .... I'd like to have you put to death, like an animal ...

JEAN: "The guilty party is condemned to two years of hard labour and the animal is put to death!" Isn't that it?

MISS JULIE: Precisely!



The stark realism of Jean's retort was too much for the original publisher of the play, Joseph Seligmann, who softened it considerably to the version which then stood for almost a century: "Som man skyndar sig att skjuta en galen hund. Inte så?"<sup>4</sup> Not only is Strindberg's version much stronger, but it places the blame for what has happened squarely on Julie rather than on the ambition of Jean, as the censored version does! Julie's reaction in the restored text is very similar to that of the hero of the novella "Tschandala" after he has consummated his lust for the gypsy's sister.

Particular significance is attached to the fact that the action occurs on Midsummer Eve: there are references to the dancing, to the custom practiced by unmarried girls of putting nine midsummer flowers under their pillows to provoke dreams of their future husbands, and to the early sunrise, the light from which illuminates Jean in the final moments. Midsummer Day is the Feast of St. John the Baptist (June 24), which explains the reference to the lesson to be read in church that day concerning his beheading.

<sup>4</sup> *Skrifter*, XII, 77: "As one hastens to shoot a mad dog. Isn't that it?" Seligmann's version of the play differs from the manuscript in no fewer than 870 places, although most of his amendments were not as significant as this one (*Samlade verk*, XXVII, 307-16).

Strindberg admits that the sunrise at the close of the play is not a naturalistic device (i.e., it has symbolic significance: Jean has reached the place in the sun after which he strives in his recurring dream) when he writes to publisher Karl Otto Bonnier (whose firm eventually refused the play), on August 21, 1888 concerning his next play, *Fordringsägare*:

Om åtta dagar sänder jag Er ett nytt naturalistiskt sorgespel, bättre ändå än Fröken Julie, med tre personer, ett bord och två stolar, och utan soluppgång!<sup>5</sup>

Also to be noted is the richness of the imagery employed by Jean, the instrument through whom Strindberg, the son of the servant, avenged his feelings of inferiority towards (Baroness) Siri von Essen. Flower imagery plays an important part in this. Strindberg's comment in his preface to the play should be looked at in this connection:

Jag tänker det är väl med kärleken som med hyacinten, som skall slå rötter i mörkret innan den kan skjuta en stark blomma. Här

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Samlade verk*, XXVII, 323:

... in a week I shall send you a new naturalistic tragedy, better even than *Miss Julie*, with three characters, a table and two chairs, and no sunrise!

Ollén suggests (*Idem.*) that Strindberg is here referring not only to the sunrise at the end of *Fröken Julie*, but to that at the end of Ibsen's *Gengangere* (*Ghosts*, 1881) as well.

ränner den upp och går i blom och frö med en gång, och därför dör växten så fort.<sup>6</sup>

*Fröken Julie* incorporates a symbolic pattern which runs through all of Strindberg's works, particularly those concerned with a struggle between the sexes or between classes (or, as in the present instance, both): that of rising and falling. This is a variation on the mediaeval Wheel of Fortune motif: we are all situated on the rim of a huge wheel, and as it spins, the fortunes of those on one side rise while the fortunes of those on the other fall: there is no gain except at another's cost, there is no defeat except to the profit of another (this is one reason Strindberg opposed the women's emancipation movement: he believed that woman could raise herself only at the cost of man). As Jean's star rises, *Fröken Julie's* falls. The pattern is first brought out in the recurring dreams Julie and Jean relate to each other; Julie's is:

Jag sitter oppklättrad på en pelare och ser ingen möjlighet att komma ner; jag svindlar när jag ser ner, och ner måste jag, men jag har inte mod att kasta mig ner; jag kan inte hålla mig fast och jag längtar att få falla; men jag faller inte; och ändå får jag ingen ro förr än jag kommer ner! ingen vila förrän

<sup>6</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXVII, 108:

I think it must be the same with love as it is with the hyacinth, which should establish roots in the dark before it can produce a strong flower. Here, it shoots up and produces flower and seed all at once, and that is why the plant dies so quickly.

jag kommer ner, ner på marken, och komme jag  
ner på marken ville jag ner i jorden ...<sup>7</sup>

and Jean's:

... jag ligger under ett högt träd i en mörk skog. Jag vill upp, upp i toppen och se mig omkring över det ljusa landskapet där solen skiner, plundra fågelbot däroppe där guldägg-  
gen ligga. Och jag klättrar och klättrar men stammen är så tjock, och så slät, och det är så långt till första grenen. Men jag vet att nådde jag bara första grenen skulle jag gå i toppen som på en steg. Ännu har jag inte nått den, men jag skall nå den....<sup>8</sup>

As she falls under the spell of Jean, Fröken Julie has a sensation of physically falling<sup>9</sup> (having first let the lilac she holds fall to the table):

<sup>7</sup> Samlade verk, XXVII, 135:

I've climbed a pillar and am sitting on top of it, and I see no way of getting down; I get dizzy when I look down, and I must get down, but I don't have the courage to throw myself down; I can't stay where I am and I yearn to fall; but I don't fall; and still I will have no peace until I come down! no rest until I come down, down to the ground, and were I to come down to the ground, I'd want to go down into the earth ...

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 135:

... I'm lying under a tall tree in a dark forest. I want to climb up, up to the top, to look out over the bright landscape where the sun shines, to rob the bird's nest up there, where the golden eggs lie. And I climb and climb, but the trunk is so thick and so smooth, and it's such a long way to the first branch! But I know that if only I reach the first branch I'll get to the top, as if on a ladder. I haven't reached it yet, but I will reach it....

<sup>9</sup> Freud assures us (*Dreams*, 235) that "if a woman dreams of falling, it almost invariably has a sexual sense: she is imagining herself as a 'fallen woman'".

FRÖKEN: .... Jag faller, jag faller!  
JEAN: Fall ner till mig, så skall jag  
lyfter er sedan!  
FRÖKEN: Vilken förfärlig makt drog mig till  
er? Den svages till den starke? Den fallandes  
till den stigandes!<sup>10</sup>

Strindberg has given a fairly extensive commentary on the play, the characters, and their motivations in his preface. In 1908 he added to these comments in a note to Manda Björling, who was playing Julie on the stage.<sup>11</sup> Another of his symbols comes to bear on the character: the sleepwalker whose world of dream and illusion prevents him from seeing the realities of the world around him and who often dies of shock, so the story goes, when suddenly awakened:

Gör slutscenens sortie som en sömngångerska,  
långsamt, med armarne sträckta framför Er,  
skridande ut, liksom sökande stöd i luften  
att icke falla på stenar eller så; ut oemot-

<sup>10</sup> Samlade verk, XXVII, 153:

MISS JULIE: .... I'm falling, I'm falling!  
JEAN: Fall down to me, and I'll lift you up  
again!  
MISS JULIE: What dreadful power drew me to  
you? The attraction of the weak to the  
strong? Of the falling to the rising!

<sup>11</sup> The performance in question was rather special. The audience at Intima teatern was to consist of only four people: Mr. and Mrs. George Bernard Shaw, Swedish artist Anders Zorn, and Strindberg. Shaw is reported to have been so moved that he wept copiously, despite the fact that he understood not a word of Swedish (Ollén, 135)!

ständligt mot det sista stora mörkret.<sup>12</sup>

The off-stage suicide with which the play ends is, like the death of the hero of *Fadren*, an example of the power of suggestion, whereby an inferior individual can gain ascendancy over a superior one (in this case a member of the lower classes over an aristocrat; in *Fadren* a woman over a man), a theme which had great fascination for Strindberg throughout the naturalistic period.

<sup>12</sup> Brev, 241 (July 16, 1908):

Do the exit in the final scene like a sleep-walker: slowly, with your arms stretched out in front of you, advancing slowly out, as if searching the air for support in order to avoid tripping over stones and so forth; drawn irresistibly out towards the last great darkness.

## Chapter 32

*Fordringsägare*

*Fordringsägare: tragi-komedi*<sup>1</sup> (*Creditors: A Tragi-comedy*) was written soon after *Fröken Julie*, in late August, 1888, but was not published in Swedish until 1890 (Danish and French translations had appeared in the meantime). Ollén has pointed out<sup>2</sup> that the preface to *Fröken Julie* was in fact written between that play and *Fordringsägare*, and serves more as an epilogue to the former and a preface to the latter. Many comments in the preface seem more appropriate to *Gustaf*, for instance, than to *Jean*.

The main symbolism in *Fordringsägare* is indicated by the title: the financial system of debit and credit (related to the rising and falling symbolism of the earlier play). The other dominant strain of symbolism is the animal symbolism so noticeable in all the naturalistic plays and those dealing with marriage.

It is interesting that although Strindberg intended *Fordringsägare* to be even more naturalistic than *Fröken Julie* (see the letter to Bonnier cited in the previous chapter), the atmosphere is surrealistic

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXVII, 191-272.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

to a degree only approached in the final few minutes of that play, after Jean has killed Julie's bird.

As in *Fadren*, it is the wife, Tekla, who dominates the marriage; the husband in this case, Adolf, is in fact very weak. Tekla has her match, however, in Gustaf, her first husband, who is similar in many respects to the Captain in *Dödsdansen I*; it is he, not she, who eventually destroys the feeble Adolf, and in the process he manages to destroy Tekla as well.<sup>3</sup> There are also similarities between the two men in this play and the two women in "Den starkare".

The spring of the symbol from which the play takes its title is the idea that the married couple enjoy their happiness at the expense of the wife's first husband; he, then, is their creditor, and "... fordringsägare inställa sig förr eller senare!"<sup>4</sup> Gustaf comes to collect his debt by destroying the happiness of those who destroyed his.

A symbol Strindberg returns to, notably in *Synda-bocken* (1907) is the scapegoat. It is first mentioned by Gustaf, who, describing the married couple, who are haunted by the deed that has brought them happiness, says: "... de icke ha kraft att bära skulden, så måste

<sup>3</sup> See, however, the comments on the end of the play at the close of this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXVII, 269-70: "... creditors present themselves sooner or later!"



en syndabock hämtas ur marken och slaktas!"<sup>5</sup> Later, Adolf accuses Tekla of making him the scapegoat for her growing lack of artistic inspiration.<sup>6</sup>

Cannibalism is an important symbol here as in other works dealing with marriage:

GUSTAF: ... detta är ju kannibalism! Vet du vad det är! Jo, vildarna äter sina fiender för att få deras framstående egenskaper i sig! -- Hon har ätit din själ, denna kvinna; ditt mod, ditt vetande --

ADOLF: Och min tro!<sup>7</sup>

Adolf must concur in Gustaf's analysis, but if Tekla is a cannibal, Gustaf, who is destroying him through the power of suggestion, is a vampire:

Så länge jag ägde mina hemligheter för mig själv, hade jag ännu inälvor, men nu är jag tom. .... Nu tycker jag du har vuxit sedan du grävde ur mig, och när du går, går du bort med mitt innanmäte och lämnar ett skal kvar.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, XXVII, 212:

"... they don't have the strength to bear the guilt, so a scapegoat must be fetched from the field and slaughtered!"

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 215:

GUSTAF: ... this is cannibalism, don't you see! Do you know what that is? Well, the savages eat their enemies in order to absorb their outstanding characteristics into themselves! -- She has eaten your soul, this woman; your courage, your knowledge --

ADOLF: And my faith!

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 220:

As long as I kept my secrets to myself I still had guts, but now I'm empty. .... Now I believe that you've grown since you disemboweled me, and when you go you'll take my entrails with you, leaving a shell behind.

Tekla's cannibalism has manifested itself through robbing Adolf of his manhood; in her attempts to assert herself as his equal or superior, she has emasculated him, reducing their relationship to a childish (and sexless) parody of marriage. This shows up in the pet names which they have for each other, "lilla bror" ("Little Brother") and "Kurre" ("Chap").<sup>9</sup> In fact, she has reduced him to a child, while herself assuming the rôle of mother. Fadren's Laura has had the same relationship to the Captain: "Minns du att det var som din andra mor jag först inträdde i ditt liv."<sup>10</sup> That relationship turned sour when the Captain began acting not as an overgrown child but as a lover: "Modren var din vän, ser du, men kvinnan var din fiende, och kärleken mellan könen är strid...."<sup>11</sup> In *Fordringsägare* the situation is somewhat different. Adolf and Tekla began as lovers and progressed (if that is the word) to a platonic relationship between equals, or as Gustaf somewhat crudely puts it, "Barn bruka leka pappa och mamma,

<sup>9</sup> Possibly a diminutive of *Ekorre* (Squirrel).

<sup>10</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXVII, 70: "Remember that it was as your second mother that I first came into your life."

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*: "The mother was your friend, you see, but the woman was your enemy, and love between the sexes is strife...."

men när de bli äldre leka de bror och syster...!"<sup>12</sup>  
 Even so, the marriage is not threatened until the rôles change again, and the game becomes first dominant sister and little brother and finally mother and child; which is contrary to nature, which (so reasons Gustaf) intends man to be superior to woman:

... ser du kvinnan är mannens barn, och blir hon icke det så blir han hennes, och då är det upp- och nervända världen!<sup>13</sup>

The rising and falling symbolism of Fröken Julie is evident not only in the debit and credit relationship between the married couple and Gustaf (their happiness rose as his declined and now the process is reversed) but also in the marriage itself: Tekla's ascendancy is at the cost of Adolf's decline. The pattern is seen even in their careers (he is an artist, she a novelist, whose career takes off after she writes a novel exploiting her relationship with Gustaf: another sense in which he is now her creditor), as Adolf himself points out: "... min talang går ner, och din sol går upp."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Samlade verk, XXVII, 212: "Children usually play father and mother, but when they get older they play brother and sister...!"

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 261:

... you see, woman is man's child, and if she isn't, then he becomes hers, and then it's a topsy-turvy world!

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 248: "... my talent is declining, and your sun is rising."

In Strindberg's manuscript, the final line of the play, spoken by Gustaf as Tekla rushes to the aid of the epileptic Adolf, is simply "Hon älskar honom!" ("She loves him!"). This formula, slightly expanded, is maintained in Strindberg's own French translation ("Elle l'aime! Sans aucun doute, elle l'aime!") and in the Danish translation he approved ("Hun elsker ham! Ja -- sandelig -- hun elsker ham!"). In the first Swedish edition, however, Strindberg himself altered the line to read "Sannerligen, hon älskar honom också! -- Staccars människa!" ("Truly, she loves him too! -- Poor man!")<sup>15</sup> The change is important, for the little word *också* (too) turns a scene which could be interpreted as a defeat for Gustaf into a victory for him! *Samlade verk* has chosen to restore the original ending; I prefer the 1890 revision (as Strindberg himself seems to have done).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXVII, 322, 334. Meyer (220) and Johnson (Strindberg, *Pre-Inferno*, 187) both translate the last word of the 1890 version as woman rather than man, certainly a possibility, since the Swedish word means literally person. I modestly suggest, however, that my version is more in keeping not only with the character of Gustaf, but also of the author! Sprigge (52) maintains the ambiguity of the Swedish by translating the word in question as creature.

<sup>16</sup> The problem of how to translate *människa* remains, however. Perhaps performances of the play should alternate between the original final line and the revision, with English-language productions giving Meyer's translation every third night!

## Chapter 33

*Blomstermålningar och djurstycken*

*Blomstermålningar och djurstycken, ungdom tillägnade*<sup>1</sup> (*Flower Paintings and Animal Pieces, Dedicated to Youth*) was written mainly in the summer of 1888 and published in time for Christmas that year: it is a collection of idyllic pieces, suitably illustrated, intended to make an attractive and pleasant Christmas gift. There are two pieces on gardening, one each on fishing and hunting, an essay on nightingales, one on whether plants and animals have reason, and an essay dealing with some of Strindberg's investigations of and speculations about the colours of flowers. The subtitle refers to the readership envisaged for the work:

Härmed sänder jag till påseende en liten julbok blot till Lyst. Det är ju en riktig ungdoms- och familjebok och utstyrd med ett illustrerat omslag och vignetter (...) skulle den väl finna läsare.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 165-225.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Strindberg to his publisher (Albert Bonniers förlag) [September 17, 1888], quoted in the introduction to the Göteborg (1970) edition:\*

Herewith I am sending for your consideration a little Christmas book intended only to give pleasure. It is, as you see, a book suitable for young people and families and, fitted out with an illustrated cover and vignettes (...), it will most certainly find readers.

\* This edition contains only three of the seven essays, but includes six of the original fourteen illustrations

A further explanation of the subtitle is perhaps found in the essay "Blomstrens hemligheter"<sup>3</sup> ("Secrets of the Flowers"), which is written in such a way that it seems to have been inspired by a child's insistent curiosity (Strindberg had three children, aged eight, seven, and four, in 1888).

The book makes pleasant reading, and was well received when it first appeared, although some critics were upset by Strindberg's negative comments on dogs (and their owners) in the essay "Djurens och växternas förstånd"<sup>4</sup> ("The Intelligence of Animals and Plants") and his obvious love of fishing and hunting, particularly the latter, did not sit well with all. The pieces are light and reflect Strindberg's love of nature, particularly that of his beloved Stockholm archipelago.

Only one of the book's essays need concern us here, the aforementioned "Blomstrens hemligheter". It consists mainly of Strindberg's attempt to account for the varying colours of flowers, and is a good example of his customary blending of natural science and mystical speculation. Much of the data is drawn from scientific writers, particularly the Englishman Sir John

(by Gunnar Åberg and Axel Sjöberg).

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 206-218.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 196-205.

Lubbock (1834-1913) and the Swede Carl von Linné (Linnaeus, 1707-78), expanded by Strindberg's own observations and imagination. Unlike the poem "Rosa Mystica", the essay does not attempt to examine the symbolic significance of flowers, but there are nevertheless two passages which have some bearing on Strindberg's symbolism, albeit indirect and peripheral.

The context of the first is a range of arguments Strindberg marshals to deny the theory (advanced by Darwin) that the purpose of colour in flowers is to attract insects, thus assuring cross-pollination. While not denying that insects do in fact aid in this process, he maintains that they are not essential, and he gives as evidence his own observations of a cucumber which he grew entirely under glass and which managed the business of pollination with no assistance. Strindberg's marriage to Siri von Essen was on very shaky ground by this time (they divorced in 1891), and the passage has more to say about his conception of the rôle of the husband and father within marriage, perhaps, than it does about the subject immediately at hand (Fadren had been written the previous year):

Honblomman växer ... dag för dag och utan att dock synas befruktad tyckes hon söka en hanblomma, som satt högre upp. Efter några dagar ha de båda blommorna mötts i en omfamning så valdsam, att jag icke kunde skilja dem åt. Därpå vissnar hanblomman, sedan han uppfyllt sin bestämmelse, uppåten av honblomman, alldeles som spindelhannen vilken ätes varm på bröllopsnatten av den större och starkare spindelhonan.\*

\* Efter säkra källor och eget experiment i glasbur.<sup>5</sup>

The second extract tries to establish a relationship between the colours of plants and their tastes. While not in itself symbolic, the passage nevertheless makes an interesting contribution to Strindberg's colour symbolism (if one associates the observations made here with more conventional and straightforward colour symbolism found elsewhere): it does not change our understanding of that symbolism, but expands it a bit in an unexpected direction. The passage is also useful for associating several plants, flowers, and fruits, with other qualities:

... Linné kunde ... se, där andra intet sågo, och sålunda siade han en gång ett sammanhang mellan växternas färger och smak!

Den vita menas ange sötma såsom hos vita vinbär, plommon; den röda syra såsom hos röda vinbär, berberis; den gröna "råagtighet", såsom blad och omogna frukter; den bleka är osmakelig (utan smak) sallat och sparris (?); den gula besk, såsom hos svalört, renfana,

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 208:

The female flower grows ... day by day, and, appearing still unfertilized, seems to seek a male flower, which grows a bit higher on the vine. After a few days, the two flowers have met, in an embrace so passionate that I could not separate them. Thereupon, the male flower withers, since he has fulfilled his destiny, used up by the female flower: just like the male spider, which is eaten alive on the wedding night by the larger and stronger female spider.\*

\* Based on reliable sources and my own experiments under glass [Strindberg's note].



aloe, gentiana, malört, och maskrosor; den svarta obehaglig och misstänkt, såsom hos paddbär, solanum, häggbär; "även så den mörkaktige (color luridus)"; då örten tillika är stinkande är den giftig och gör folk galne, såsom belladonna, bolmört, spikklubba.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samlade verk, XXIX, 215-16:

... Linnaeus could ... see where others saw nothing, and so was able to divine a connection between the colours of plants and their tastes.

White is meant to indicate sweetness, as with white currants\* and plums; red, acidity, as with red currants and barberries [*Berberis vulgaris*]; green, "rawness", as with leaves and unripe fruit; the pallid is tasteless (having no taste): lettuce and asparagus (?); the yellow bitter, as with pilewort [*Ficaria verna*], tansy, aloe, gentian, wormwood, and dandelions; the black disagreeable and suspect, as with baneberries [*Actaea spicata*], Solanum,\*\* and bird-cherries; "likewise the sallow (color luridus)";\*\*\* when the plant also stinks, it is poisonous and drives people mad, as belladonna, henbane, and thorn apple.

\* according to the OED, a variety of the red currant.

\*\* Samlade verk, XXIX, (352) quite rightly identifies this as the genus to which the potato belongs, the common garden potato being *Solanum tuberosum*, but Strindberg may be thinking of other members of the family, most notably black nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*). Belladonna (also called deadly nightshade) belongs to a different genus (*Atropa*).

\*\*\* The quotation marks (newly restored in Samlade verk, XXIX), indicate that the phrase is Linnaeus'.

Particularly interesting in this extract is the connection Strindberg draws between offensive-smelling plants and poison: the stinking flowers in *Herr Bengts hustru* (bog-myrtle) and in the final scene of *Folkungasagan* (dog fennel) are both mentioned in scenes in which poison also figures! The qualities associated with colours which play frequent symbolic rôles in Strindberg's writing are consistent with the meanings he usually attaches to those colours, and illuminating: white - innocence or purity - sweetness; red - love and suffering - acidity; black - chaos, anarchy, and death - disagreeableness; green - the natural world - rawness. Strindberg's fertile mind is already well prepared to receive the seed of Swedenborg's theory of correspondences!

## Chapter 34

## "Den starkare"

"Den starkare: en scen"<sup>1</sup> ("The Stronger: One Scene", 1888) is a short play written for Strindberg's short-lived Skandinavisk försöksteater (Scandinavian Experimental Theatre) in Denmark, with Siri von Essen in mind for the speaking rôle. Like the other short pieces written for the försöksteater, particularly "Paria", it reflects Strindberg's interest in the theories of Nietzsche<sup>2</sup> and the power of suggestion.

A man's wife, fru X, and his former mistress, Mlle Y,<sup>3</sup> meet, and the wife, who finally won him, tells how she manages to keep him: by turning herself into a copy of the mistress. The audience must decide which of the two is the stronger: the wife, who is the victor in the love triangle, or the mistress, the force of whose personality has transformed the wife into a carbon copy. It can be played either way, depending on the skill of the two actresses (see the brief discussion at the end of this chapter).

<sup>1</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 7-19.

<sup>2</sup> But see the essay "Mitt förhållande till Nietzsche" ("My Relation to Nietzsche") in *Samlade skrifter*, LIV (323-24).

<sup>3</sup> Ollén has pointed out (169) that these are common designations in psychological case studies.

What symbolism there is can be classified under three headings: plant and animal symbolism, and that of drowning (a variation of rising and falling/Wheel of Fortune symbolism).

In the nineteenth-century language of flowers, the significance of tulips depended very much on their colour: red tulips = a declaration of love, variegated tulips = beautiful eyes, and yellow tulips = hopeless love (F.W.L.). Unfortunately, although tulips play a part in this play, Strindberg has neglected to tell us what colour they are; yellow, however, would seem most appropriate to the supplanted mistress, whose favorite flower they are. Be that as it may, the flowers are nevertheless a symbol of the continuing influence of the mistress in the lives of the married couple: the wife cannot stand them, the mistress loved them above all other flowers, and the husband is so enchanted with them that he wishes to have tulips on everything. So the wife embroiders tulips on his slippers. Tulips thus demonstrate the strength of the mistress' hold on the husband, and, at the same time, the strength of the wife's determination to keep him, at all costs.

Every line in the play is spoken by the wife, so animal symbols applied to the mistress have to be taken with a grain of salt. She is seen as someone who has enjoyed all the advantages of a romantic liaison, with none of the responsibilities of married life, and is

therefore depicted as a parasite (a worm which bores its way into an apple, gradually transforming it into an empty shell<sup>4</sup>) or as a scavenger (a rat<sup>5</sup> or, as in the passage cited below, a crab).

The drowning symbol is particularly effective: the wife describes how, as her hold over the husband grew stronger (rising), she found herself more and more restricted to patterns of behaviour established by her predecessor in his affections (falling), until now she is completely in the grip of the other's personality. The drowning symbol is linked as well to that of difficulty in breathing, which Strindberg uses to express the stifling of one personality by another:

... jag låg i vattnet med hoppbundna fötter  
och ju starkare jag tog simtagen med händerna  
dess djupare arbetade jag mig ner, ner, tills  
jag sjönk till botten där du låg som en jät-  
tekrabba för att gripa mig i dina klor -- och  
nu ligger jag där.<sup>6</sup>

Strindberg was very aware that his title is ambiguous. In a note to his wife before the first performance he instructed her to play the part of fru X ...

<sup>4</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>6</sup> Idem.:

... I lay in the water with my feet tied together, and the stronger my efforts to swim with my hands, the deeper I worked myself down, down, until I sank to the bottom, where you were lying like a giant crab, ready to grip me in your claws -- and I lie there still.

Som: Den starkare; dvs den mjukare. Den stelkrampiga brister nämligen, men den smidiga böjer undan -- och reser sig.<sup>7</sup>

That seems clear enough. But at the end of January (i.e., about six weeks previously) Strindberg had contributed an article to the Danish newspaper *Politiken* in which he described the play thus:

"Den stærkaste", en saakaldt quart d'heure fordi den kun spiller i femten Minutter. Deri optræder kun to Damer, af hvilke Heltinden ikke siger et Ord.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the solution lies in the possibility, suggested by Ollén (170) that in fact both rôles were written for Siri von Essen, who would be able to perform the speaking part in Sweden and the non-speaking part (against a local actress) on tour in Europe, with the possibility of being seen as the Stronger in either case! At any rate, the completely balanced ambiguity is one of the play's great strengths, and has made it a

<sup>7</sup> March 6, 1889. Quoted in Ollén, 171:

As The Stronger, i.e., the more flexible. For what is rigid breaks, but what is pliable bends under pressure -- and springs back.

<sup>8</sup> January 26, 1889. Quoted in Ollén, 170:

"The Strongest":\* a so-called quart d'heure, because it can be played in fifteen minutes. Its characters consist of only two ladies, of which the heroine does not speak a word.

\* The play is so called in Danish: ungrammatically, unless one entertains the tantalizing consideration that perhaps the strongest is the unseen husband!

perennial favorite on international as well as Swedish stages. The Russians give graphic recognition to the ambiguity of the title by including a question mark in their translation ("Kto Silneje?", *Ibid.*, 176)!

## Chapter 35

## "Paria"

"Paria: en akt: fritt efter en novell av Ola Hansson"<sup>1</sup> ("Pariah: One Act: Freely Adapted from a Short Story by Ola Hansson") was written in early 1889, immediately after "Den starkare" and in the same burst of creative energy. It was also written specifically for Strindberg's Skandinavisk försöksteater. Based on a short story by Strindberg's friend, Swedish author Ola Hansson (1860-1925), "Paria" is nevertheless completely a Strindbergian play. It is, in fact, a companion piece to "Den starkare": both plays involve a psychological battle between two anonymous characters, female in one case, male in the other. The difference is that "Paria" lacks the ambiguity of "Den starkare"; here, it is obvious who is psychologically stronger, and he is the victor in the struggle.

Perhaps the most important symbols in the play have to do with evolution, and serve to point the moral, intellectual, and psychological superiority of Herr X. As an archeologist, Herr X is, of course, conversant with human evolution, a topic with which Herr Y, apparently an entomologist, would not be unfamiliar. But already, by association with their disciplines, the

<sup>1</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 21-50.



two men are unfavourably compared: humans are immeasurably further up the evolutionary scale than insects. Herr X first refers to Herr Y's inferiority by making use of the "science" of phrenology, in which we know Strindberg to have been interested:<sup>2</sup> "Du är så förfärligt smal mellan öronen så att jag undrar ibland vad du tillhör för en ras!"<sup>3</sup>

Most of the other associations of Herr Y with primitive, uncivilized man come, however, from himself. An example is the manufactured explanation, borrowed from a book from Herr X's library, of how he came to commit the crime (forgery) for which he had gone to prison. He explains that he did it on awakening from an unremembered dream, then asks:

Kunde det vara mitt ociviliserade jag, vilden som icke erkänner fördrag vilken under det mitt medvetande sov, trädde fram med sin brottsliga vilja och sin oförmåga att beräkna en handlings följder?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In November, 1880 Strindberg presented Nordiska museet (the Scandinavian Museum) with twenty-one miniature busts from a phrenological collection (Lundwall, 4-5).

<sup>3</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 32: "You are so terribly narrow between the ears, that I sometimes wonder what race you belong to!"

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 39:

Could it have been the uncivilized part of me, the savage who recognizes no laws, who emerged while my consciousness slept, with his criminal will and his inability to consider the consequences of an action?

It could indeed, apparently, for although his story has no basis in fact, Herr Y's description of the savage is an ironically apt description of himself as he really is: a person who has not evolved with civilization. In terms of civilization, in other words, he is like a child, as Herr X points out in a passage not without parallels to the one just quoted:

Ha vi inte stulit och ljugit som barn allesamman? Jo, säkert. Nå, nu finns det människor som förbli barn hela sitt liv, så att de icke kunna styra sina lagstridiga begär. Kommer nu bara tillfället, så är brottslingen färdig!<sup>5</sup>

The fullest reference to human evolution is in Herr Y's description of prison life, and is brought home when Herr X points out that in prison he had been treated, after all, no worse than he deserved:

HERR Y: .... .. din själ som skulle botas här, förbättras, sättes på svältkur, pressas tillbaka till tusen år i förfluten tid; du får bara läsa skrifter som äro författade för folkvandringstidens vildar, du får bara höra om vad som aldrig skall komma att passera i himlen, men vad som händer på jorden förblir en hemlighet; du ... får visioner av att leva i bronsåldern, känner dig som om du ginge i djurhud, bodde i håla och åt ur en ho! O!

HERR X: Ja, men det är ju förnuft i det, ty den som uppför sig såsom han vore från

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 40:

Haven't we all stolen and lied as children? Of course we have. Well now, there are men who remain children all their lives, unable to control their unlawful desires. Should but the opportunity arise, the criminal is ready!

bronsåldern skall väl leva i sin historiska kostym.<sup>6</sup>

But Herr X has also committed a crime, and one (manslaughter) which would seem much more serious than that to which Herr Y has confessed. Furthermore, Herr Y has served time for his crime, whereas Herr X's remains undiscovered. This is why, in the brief exchange which follows the passage just quoted, Herr Y tries to assert his evolutionary superiority over Herr X:

HERR Y (ilsket): Du hånar du! Du som farit fram som en stenåldersmänniska! och ändå får leva i guldåldern.

HERR X (forskande, skarpt): Vad menar du med det sista ordet -- guldåldern?<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 42:

HERR Y: .... ... your soul, which should have been set right and improved in this place, is put on a hunger cure, pressed back in time a thousand years; you are only allowed to read things written for savages from the times of the Great Migration, you are only allowed to hear about what will never come to pass in heaven, but what is happening on earth remains a secret; you imagine yourself living in the Bronze Age, feel as if you went about in animal skins, lived in a cave, and ate from a trough! O!

HERR X: Yes, but there's sense in that, isn't there, for I suppose that if one behaves as if one were from the Bronze Age, one ought to live in one's historical costume.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 42-43:

HERR Y (angrily): You dare to mock me! You who have behaved like a man from the Stone Age! and are nevertheless permitted to live in the Golden Age!.

HERR X (inquiringly, emphatically): What do you mean by your last words -- "the Golden Age"?

Herr Y is implying that he wishes to use his knowledge of Herr X's crime to blackmail him out of the gold he has found in his archeological digs (the opportunity presents itself, and the criminal is ready!). His plan does not work, however, for Herr X proves himself beyond the law: his crime would probably not be considered such by a court and could not be proved in any case, since there were no witnesses. He cannot be blackmailed even against disclosure to his wife, for she has known of the incident ever since their engagement. Herr X is, in fact, a Nietzschean *Übermensch*,<sup>8</sup> untouched by considerations of right or wrong: truly a citizen of the Golden Age! The evolutionary symbolism closes with Herr X's summary of this fact, in which he seals his victory over Herr Y:

Du är en annan slags människa än jag -- om starkare eller svagare -- det vet jag inte -- brottsligare eller icke -- rör mig inte! men att du är dummare, det är avgjort....<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I do not intend to imply that Nietzsche was a direct influence on the play; it is in many ways similar to the stories in *Vivisektioner*, which were written before Strindberg had read Nietzsche (see "Mitt förhållande till Nietzsche", *Samlade skrifter*, LIV, 323-24).

<sup>9</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 50:

You're a different kind of man than I am -- whether stronger or weaker -- I don't know -- more or less criminal -- I don't care! but that you are stupider, that is indisputable....

If Herr X is undecided who is the stronger, there is no doubt in the minds of the audience: he is. In "Den starkare", neither combatant is a clear winner: a victory can be made out for each of them, but in each case the victory seems hollow. In "Paria", however, the inferior character does not even acquire what he set out to attain: Herr X's gold. In evolutionary terms, "Den starkare" demonstrates that it is not always the superior of the species that survives, but the most adaptable; "Paria" assures us that this does not mean, however, that the superior will not survive sometimes.

The symbolism of *Oväder* (Storm, 1907) is anticipated in this play. It opens with a scene of beautiful weather: "... landskapet och stugan äro starkt solbelysta."<sup>10</sup> Almost at once Herr X announces that a crisis is approaching: "Vilken tryckande värme! Jag tror bestämt vi få åska!"<sup>11</sup> The external storm is presaged by the dry sound of the churchbells and the behaviour of insects and birds; the internal storm, the crisis between the two characters, by the behaviour of Herr Y, whom Herr X has been observing for some time): "Du ser ... alltid ut som om du väntade åskväder..."<sup>12</sup> Soon

<sup>10</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 27: "... bright sunlight shines on the countryside and the cottage."

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*: "What oppressive heat! I think we're definitely in for a thunderstorm!"

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 28: "... you always look as if you were expecting a thunderstorm!"

the storm begins to gather: clouds appear and it gets darker. Herr Y closes the doors and windows. He is afraid of the storm, for he has much to hide: the crime for which he has served time in prison and, as we learn later, another as yet unpunished crime. A crisis (storm) could provoke revelation (symbolized by lightning flashes):

HERR X: Är du rädd för åskan?

HERR Y: Man ska vara försiktig!<sup>13</sup>

Herr X, on the other hand, has nothing to hide: he has learned to live with his past and has ensured that it can no longer affect him. The approaching crisis therefore does not bother him: "... det där åskvädret få vi ingenting med av!"<sup>14</sup>

The ensuing conversation demonstrates Herr X's superiority over Herr Y. He analyses the latter's character, comparing him to a former acquaintance significantly named Stråman (literally, Strawman, i.e., a sham), reveals that he has deduced the facts of Herr Y's forgery and imprisonment, and that he suspects him of another, unpunished, crime. He persuades Herr Y to tell him about it (a narration which leads to his downfall). Presumably the storm has been taking its course

<sup>13</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 31:

HERR X: Are you afraid of the thunder?

HERR Y: A man has to be careful!

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 32: "... we won't get any of that thunderstorm!"

during this conversation, for before Herr Y begins his fraudulent explanation, he indicates that the storm has passed (and, simultaneously, that he is having difficulty breathing: an indication of the pressure of the other's personality upon his own): "Får jag öppna dörren lite, jag tror att åskvädret har gått över!"<sup>15</sup> The crisis too has passed. From now on Herr X is firmly in control, and the play proceeds to its inevitable conclusion: his victory over the man who now stands with his secrets exposed.

"Paria" also makes use of the occult concept of the *Doppelgänger*, a concept which seemed to fascinate Strindberg; he used it in many of his major works, notably *Inferno* and *Till Damaskus*. The *Doppelgänger*, or astral body, is an apparition of an actual person, living or recently dead, but, as distinct from the soul of the same person, is composed of his lower instincts, animal lusts, and desires: all that is base in his character. The astral bodies of living persons are usually visible only to those who possess astral vision, but occasionally they appear to those not so gifted (and without the necessity of the presence of the "owner" of the astral body); in this case they are

<sup>15</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 37: "Do you mind if I open the door a bit; I think the storm has passed over!"

endeavouring to influence the person to whom they appear, to lead him into degradation and debauchery.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, when Herr Y cites his "uncivilized self" in justification of his crime, he is describing his astral body, and when Herr X tells him that he looks more like a *Doppelgänger* than a real person, it is with the realization that Herr Y is seeking to pull him down to his own degraded level:

... det ser ut som om du vore en dubbelgångare. Vet du av att när jag sitter här framför spegeln och ser din rygg -- så är det som om jag såg en annan människa!<sup>17</sup>

This symbolism makes more significant Herr X's comparison of Herr Y to *Stråman*: a *Doppelgänger*, like a man of straw, has no substance! The symbol works together with those drawn from the theory of evolution to establish Herr Y's evil, and his inferiority in every respect to Herr X.

In the above passage, Herr X has noted Herr Y's resemblance to a *Doppelgänger* by contemplating the reflection of his back in a mirror. Throughout the play the mirror is used as a symbol of the hidden truth: what is normally not apparent can be seen by gazing

<sup>16</sup> Condensed from Blavatsky, 168-76; Franklyn, 217-18; and Zolar, 128-54.

<sup>17</sup> *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 32:

... it looks as if you were a *Doppelgänger*. Do you know, when I sit here in front of the mirror and look at your back -- it's as if I were looking at another person!



into the mirror of reason (reflection), feeling, or spirit. Herr X continues to describe the appearance of Herr Y's back in the mirror:

... när jag ser dina röda hängslen korsas sig  
på den vita skjortan -- -- -- så ser det ut  
som ett stort märke, ett varumärke på en  
packlår -- -- --<sup>18</sup>

Most important, however, the mirror reveals to Herr X where Herr Y has stolen the story he puts forward to explain his crime; he is not only a forger, but a plagiarist:

Jag ser i spegeln att du är en tjuv...! --  
Nyss ... märkte jag bara att det var något i  
olag på min bokhylla.... Nu sedan du ... fick  
din svarta rock på dig som färgmotsättning  
mot den röda bokryggen som förr inte syntes  
mot dina röda hängslen, så ser jag att du  
varit och läst över din förfalskningshistoria  
i Bernheims avhandling om ingivelser och  
ställt tillbaks boken opp och ner. Du stal  
alltså den historien också!<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 32:

... when I see your red braces crossed over  
the back of your white shirt, it looks like a  
huge mark: a trademark on a packing case --  
-- --

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 47:

I see in the mirror that you're a thief...!  
-- Just now ... I noticed only that something  
was amiss in my bookcase.... Now that you ...  
have put on your black coat, as a contrast to  
the red spine of the book, a colour which  
didn't stand out against the red of your  
braces, I see that you read your forgery  
story in Bernheim's treatise on impulses,\*  
and that you've replaced the book upside-  
down. So you stole that story too!

\* Hippolyte Bernheim's *De la suggestion et de ses applications à thérapeutique* (1884) contains nothing

That he is a thief is a revelation that another mirror had revealed to Herr Y himself, when he was in prison:

Först vanställer man ditt yttre genom att klippa av dig håret ... och när du tittar dig i en spegel så blir du övertygad om att du är en bandit!<sup>20</sup>

The colour symbolism in the above passages is that which is dominant in all of Strindberg's works: Herr Y's white shirt should be the garment of purity (or innocence), but it is cancelled (literally crossed out) by the suffering and passion represented by the red braces. Over all of this is thrown the pall of chaos and anarchy, the black coat.

Two other symbols are familiar features of the Strindberg landscape: the prison, which stands for punishment of crimes, and the mill, which grinds away at crimes still unpunished. Every day Herr Y goes to a nearby hill in order to glimpse Malmö. On this hill there is a (wind)mill: "... du går varje morgon en halv mil söderut till kvarnbacken för att få se taken i

—  
corresponding to Herr Y's forgery story (Samlade verk, XXXIII, 381).

<sup>20</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 42:

First they change your appearance by cutting off your hair ... and when you look at yourself in a mirror, you're convinced you're a bandit!

Malmö!"<sup>21</sup> Among these roofs, and of prime significance and interest to Herr Y, are those of the castle and the prison where he was incarcerated. The conjunction of the mill and the prison is an indication that Herr Y has expiated one of his crimes, but not all:

... när en person suttit i ett fängelse, vill han aldrig gå till en kvarnbacke var dag och titta på det ... --

Med ett ord: du är både en straffad och en ostraffad!<sup>22</sup>

The last symbol, of interest chiefly for developments of it in later plays (particularly the historical plays), is that of games, particularly the game of chess. If "Paria", like "Den starkare", is a struggle between two individuals for intellectual, moral, and spiritual dominance, it can also be seen as a game of chess. One is obviously a superior player. Herr X is "in check" when Herr Y discovers that he too has committed a crime, but he is not "mated", for the disclosure of his past cannot harm him. Instead, the game goes to Herr X, whose defences are inviolable and whose

<sup>21</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 36: "... every morning you walk five kilometers south to the mill hill in order to catch sight of the roofs of Malmö!"

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 48:

... when a person has been in a prison, he never wants to go every day to a mill hill to look at it ... --

In a word: you both have and have not been punished!

attacks are superb. Herr Y's boast near the end of the play is an empty one, as suggested by Herr X's reply:

HERR Y: .... Jag står själv i schack, men i nästa drag kan du vara matt -- likafullt.

HERR X (fixerar Y): Ska vi brytas ett tag till?<sup>23</sup>

"Paria", then, is interesting not only in its own right, as a microcosmic working out of one of Strindberg's favorite themes, but also for its use of symbols which play a major rôle in much of his later work.

<sup>23</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 49:

HERR Y: .... Now I myself am in check, but at the next move you could be mated -- just as easily.

HERR X (looks fixedly at Herr Y): Shall we give it another try?

## Chapter 36

## "Samum"

"Samum"<sup>1</sup> ("Simoom") was written the same year (1889) as "Paria", and also shows Strindberg's fascination with psychological processes, especially with the domination of a weaker mind by one that is stronger. In this play an Arab girl, Biskra, destroys the mind and eventually the life of Guimard, a lieutenant in the French Zouaves, using the power of suggestion (i.e., Strindberg's soul-murder). She is aided in this project by her Arab lover, Youssef.

The simoom is a hot, dry, suffocating sand wind which sweeps across the African and Asian deserts at intervals during the spring and summer, and is the shaping symbol of the play. Guimard's brain is already addled by exposure to the simoom before Biskra begins work on him. Indeed, the action of the simoom on his mind and body suggests to her how she can destroy him using only the power of suggestion:

... Samum torkar de vites hjärnor som dadlar  
och ... de få skräcksyner som göra dem livet  
så vidrigt att de fly ut i det stora okända.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 51-71.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 57 (sc. i):

... the simoom dries out the white men's  
brains like dates, and ... they see horrible  
visions, which make life so hateful to them  
that they rush out into the vast unknown.

Thus inspired, she adopts the methods of the simoom, which becomes a symbol for psychological domination through the power of suggestion. Thus, the simoom affects the Frenchman, Guimard, but does not harm Biskra or her lover: "Samum kröker icke ett hår på mig, men dig otrogne dödar han!"<sup>3</sup> As Youssef realizes at the end of the play, Biskra both is the simoom and is greater than it:

BISKRA: Är franken död?

YOUSSEF: Om han icke är skall han bli!

Samum! Samum!

BISKRA: Då lever jag! Men giv mig vatten!

....

YOUSSEF: Starka Biskra! Starkare än Samum!<sup>4</sup>

Biskra destroys Guimard by creating illusions and making him believe they are reality. She makes him believe that thorns are a pillow, that sand is water, that he has been bitten by a rabid dog, that his child is dead and his wife unfaithful, and finally, that he has already died and is being tortured in Hell, a conviction which causes him literally to die of fright:

<sup>3</sup> Smalade verk, XXXIII, 65 (sc. ii): "The simoom doesn't harm a hair on my head, but you, infidel, it kills!"

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 71 (sc. iii):

BISKRA: Is the Frenchman dead?

YOUSSEF: If he isn't, he will be! Simoom!  
Simoom!

BISKRA: Then I live! But give me some water!

....

YOUSSEF: Biskra the strong! Stronger than the simoom!

BISKRA: Ser du ej ... hur gamarne ätit dina  
ögon -- ... ser du inte var bilan tog här i  
nacken -- när bödeln avlivade desertören! --  
-- --

GUIMARD (som med fasa sett och hört på,  
faller ner död).<sup>5</sup>

The three scenes take place, appropriately, in a mausoleum, which contains a sarcophagus, a bone charnel house, and a pile of plants: aloes, palm leaves, and alfalfa. Aloes, noted for their spiky flowers, symbolize bitterness; small wonder, then, that they do not make a comfortable pillow for Guimard, or that he pricks himself on them. The palm is the traditional symbol of victory; when Biskra puts a palm frond between her teeth in order to create the illusion she is singing (in a man's voice) without opening her mouth, she is already proclaiming her victory over Guimard. The third plant, alfalfa, is apparently chosen because it withers in the autumn, as Youssef's hatred for Guimard has been withering away before Biskra begins the process of delusion and destruction: "Mitt hat har vissnat som alfagräset om hösten...."<sup>6</sup> It can

<sup>5</sup> Samlade verk, XXXIII, 70-71 (sc. ii):

BISKRA: Don't you see ... how the vultures  
have eaten your eyes -- ... -- don't you see  
where the axe bit here at the back of your  
neck -- when the executioner took the life of  
a deserter! -- -- --

GUIMARD (who has watched and listened in  
horror, falls down dead).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 58 (sc. i): "My hate has withered like  
alfalfa in the autumn...."

Guimard's Christian faith to sustain him, for alfalfa is a trefoil, symbol of the Triune God.

Biskra is an early manifestation of Strindberg's vampire symbol: she destroys another through sapping his energy, robbing him of his will to live. She foreshadows other Strindberg vampires in her reaction to Guimard's actual or imminent death: "Då lever jag!" (see above).

