



University
of Glasgow

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/>

Theses Digitisation:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/research/enlighten/theses/digitisation/>

This is a digitised version of the original print thesis.

Copyright and moral rights for this work are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study,
without prior permission or charge

This work cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first
obtaining permission in writing from the author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any
format or medium without the formal permission of the author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author,
title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Enlighten: Theses

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/>
research-enlighten@glasgow.ac.uk

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**

March, 1989

© Edward S. Franchuk 1989

Volume II

ProQuest Number: 10983481

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10983481

Published by ProQuest LLC (2018). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Chapter 37

I havsbandet

*I havsbandet*¹ (*In the Outer Archipelago*) was begun in 1889 and finished in 1890. Strindberg had planned that it should complete a trilogy begun with *Hemsöborna* (1887) and continued with *Skärkarlsliv* (1888). It developed into something quite different, however: a novel inspired not so much by the objective reality of the Stockholm archipelago as by the philosophical concept of the superman. Strindberg was very attracted to the ideas of Nietzsche at the time and indeed had corresponded with him for awhile, beginning in 1888.² The idea of the *Übermensch*³ fascinated him: in *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, he proposes a secular monastery for the formation and nourishing of this ideal, and in *Till Damaskus III* (1901) such a monastery is realized. It is in *I*

¹ *Samlade verk*, XXXI.

² This correspondence is reprinted in the first issue of the French magazine *Obliques* (see bibliography, under Nietzsche).

³ It should be noted that Strindberg is on record as never having read Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spake Zarathustra), in which the concept of the *Übermensch* is elaborated: see the essay "Mitt förhållande till Nietzsche" in *Samlade skrifter*, LIV (323-24). How much his own development of the concept was influenced by the writings of Nietzsche he did read is difficult to say, but the word *Übermensch* in the present study is intended to indicate a similarity, not necessarily an influence.

havsbandet, however, that the concept of *Übermensch* gets its fullest treatment.

The novel's hero, Axel Borg, is, in fact, an *Übermensch*, and as such similar to the heroes of Goethe, Byron, Wagner, and others. The novel examines the problems and eventual fate of such a character, were he to exist in an ordinary world: a freak in a hostile environment. He can try to rise above and dominate that environment, with every indication of success, but he cannot control it (Axel's control of nature in arranging for an Italian villa to appear as if from nowhere in the middle of the Stockholm archipelago is, after all, nothing but an optical illusion) and eventually it will stifle and destroy him.

The plot which conveys this theme is simple enough: the government sends Axel Borg to an island in the outer archipelago in order that he might teach the inhabitants more efficient methods of fishing, enabling them to improve their standard of living. From the beginning, he meets opposition from the fisherfolk, but he knows himself to be a superior human being, and determines to persevere in his efforts. Maria and her mother arrive on the island, and he succumbs to Maria's charms, determined to win her without demeaning himself. She further undermines his authority, seduces him, and finally runs off with his assistant. Faced with both his failure to persuade the islanders to

adopt his methods and his failure to win Maria, he nevertheless decides to spend the winter on the island. This proves too much for him: he eventually loses his sanity, and can look forward to nothing but death and reabsorption into the primordial chaos from which all men have sprung.

Very early in the novel, Borg is identified as an *Übermensch* by means of a symbol: the bracelet he wears:

... hans händer voro väl skyddade av ett par laxfärgade glacé-handskar-med-tre-knappar och av vilka den högras skaft var omslutet av ett tjockt guldarmband, ciselerat i form av en orm som bet sig i stjärten.⁴

This is the Gnostic symbol of the ouroboros, generally symbolic of time and the continuity of life but also, as is evidently intended here, of self-fecundation, or the self-sufficient nature: a nature which nourishes itself on its own resources and continually returns, in a cyclic pattern, to its own beginning (Cirlot, 235 et passim).

This explains why Borg wears the bracelet when he goes to visit Maria in her sick-room. He knows she is feigning illness to win his sympathy, to make him feel guilty towards her (as the cause of the ailment), and

⁴ Samlade verk, XXXI, 7 (Ch. 1):

... his hands were well protected by a pair of salmon-coloured three-buttoned kid-gloves, and the wrist of the right-hand one was encircled by a thick gold bracelet, chased in the shape of a snake biting its own tail.

to bring them into closer contact through the doctor-patient relationship (although Borg is not a doctor, he is the only person on the island in any way equipped to deal with illness): she has failed to seduce him by making him dependent on her because he has refused to play that game; now she is trying to accomplish the same end by forcing him not only to realize but to accept her dependence on him. All this he knows, and he therefore arms himself with the talisman of the ouroboros, to remind himself of his self-sufficiency and to protect himself from outside influences:

Efter att ha klätt sig ... påtog han för första gången sedan damernas ankomst sitt armband. Varför ... kunde han icke säga, men han gjorde det under inflytandet av en stämning hämtad från sjukbädden han skulle besöka och som han framkallat inom sig.⁵

It explains too why the sight of this symbol has such a powerful effect on Maria: she realizes that he belongs to another order of being, independent and beyond her reach. This both awes and frightens her:

... i detsamma föll armbandets ner i undermanschetten och den inbillningssjukens motstånd upphörde.

-- Gör mig vad ni vill, svarade hon undergivet under det hon höll ögonen fästade på den gyllene ormen, vilken fascinerade

⁵ Samlade verk, XXXI, 103 (Ch. 7):

After dressing ... he put on his bracelet, for the first time since the ladies had arrived. He could not say why ... but he did it at the prompting of a feeling derived from the sick-bed which he was about to visit, and which he had evoked before himself.

henne och väckte hennes fruktan för något okänt.⁶

Borg also arms himself with this talisman on the night of the ball, when he thinks that Maria's affections have been transferred to his assistant: again to remind himself of his self-sufficiency, and to protect himself both from jealousy and from the derision of others who know of his loss. Ironically, he must still be wearing it later that night, when Maria gives herself to him physically and he passionately declares his love for her.

When we first see Borg, he assumes command of the vessel in which he is travelling and steers her safely through a dangerous sea. This demonstrates his natural superiority (over the crew of the boat -- especially its captain -- and over the elements) -- but it brings to his own mind thoughts of death:

Åsynen av brottsjön hade verkat på intendenten som anblicken av den kista i vilken den dödsdömdes delade kropp skall ligga, och han

⁶ Samlade verk, XXXI, 104 (Ch. 7):

... with that, the bracelet fell down below his cuff, and the resistance of the imaginary invalid disappeared.

"Do with me what you will," she answered submissively, keeping her eyes fixed on the golden snake, which both fascinated her and awoke her fear of the unknown.

kände i föreställningens ögonblick den dubbla dödsfasan av köld och kvävning....⁷

The experience leaves him physically exhausted, and he is brought ashore looking more dead than alive.

This incident stresses the negative aspects of the sea symbol: that is, its destructive, hostile aspects, in which it symbolizes death. We see the sea under its other aspect, as the source of life, as Borg goes about his research into the properties of the sea around the island and its possibilities for fishing. His examinations give rise to a series of reflections on evolution, a process in which the inhabitants of the sea seem to have been left behind:

... havsbottnens innevånare släpade sig på sina bukar, sökte mörkret och kölden, döljande sin skam över att ha blivit efter på den långa vandringen mot solen och luften.⁸

In passages of startling beauty we see the inhabitants of the sea not only ashamed of their primordial

⁷ Samlade verk, XXXI, 13 (Ch. 1):

The sight of the stormy sea had produced an effect on the Inspector [Borg] like that produced in a condemned man by the sight of the coffin in which his broken body is to lie, and for the brief moment that the impression lasted he felt the double horror of death by cold and death by drowning....

⁸ Ibid., 31 (Ch. 3):

... the denizens of the sea-bottom dragged themselves along on their bellies, seeking darkness and cold, hiding their shame over having been left behind in the long migration towards the sun and the air.

state, but yearning for a higher stage of development, as Strindberg describes the levels of sea life from the bottom to the surface, ending with the pike:

... gäddan ... står med näsan i vattenytan och sover med solen i ögonen, drömmande om blomster-ängarne och björkhagarne därovan dit han aldrig kan komma, om den tunna blå kupan som välver sig över hans våta värld, där han skulle kvävas och där fåglarne dock simma så lätt med sina håriga bröstfenor.⁹

The sea, then, is not only the mother of life and the nourisher of its most primitive forms, it is also the element which holds back those forms from a higher existence.

Both aspects of the sea (as a symbol of death and as a symbol of life's origins) are referred to in the last sentence of the novel, which characterizes the sea as "livets ursprung och livets fiende" ("life's source and its enemy").

Borg, of course, is at the opposite end of the evolutionary scale, as demonstrated by numerous comparisons of those around him to animals and insects. The fact that he has not completely eradicated the beast

⁹ Samlade verk, XXXI, 32 (Ch. 3):

... the pike ... lies with his nose at the surface of the water and sleeps with the sun in his eyes, dreaming of flowery meadows and groves of birches up there, where he can never go, of the thin blue canopy which arches over his wet world, where he would smother, but where the birds nevertheless swim so easily with their hairy breast-fins.

within himself, succumbing to his animal desires and weaknesses, leads to his downfall and to his return, like the ouroboros, to the point of origin: the sea.

As he goes through this cycle, Borg's attitude to the sea changes. After the initial episode, in which he struggles with the sea and is delivered from it to dry land, he sees it almost as an extension of himself, a confirmation of his belief that the universe revolves about his own person:

Detta var ... det ödsliga havet.... Det ... verkade lungt som ett öppet stort blått trofast öga. Allt kunde överses på en gång, inga bakhåll, inga skrymslor! Det smickrade åskådaren när han såg denna cirkel omkring sig i vilken han själv alltid förblev medelpunkten, vilken plats han än antog. Den stora vattenytan var såsom en förkropppsligad utstrålning från betraktaren, existerade endast i och med betraktaren, vilken så länge han stod på land kände sig intim med denna nu ofarliga makt, överlägsen över dess ofantliga kraftmedel....¹⁰

After Maria has left, he feels his resources depleted, and seeks to retire into himself in order to

¹⁰ Samlade verk, XXXI, 21-22 (Ch. 2):

This was ... the desolate sea.... It ... seemed calm, like a large blue faithful open eye. Everything could be seen at a glance; there were no hiding-places, no corners! It flattered the beholder to see this circle around him, in which he himself was always the middle point, no matter where he stood. The great surface of the sea seemed to embody an emanation from the observer, it existed only in and with the observer who, as long as he stood on land, felt on intimate terms with this now harmless power, superior to this immense force....

replenish them. This desire expresses itself in a wish to swim in the sea, here seen as the source of life. There are similar references in *Le plaidoyer d'un fou* and in "Karantänmästarns andra berättelse" ("The Quarantine Officer's Second Tale") in *Fagervik och Skamsund* (*Fagervik and Skamsund*):

Ville han undvika att sjunka, måste han isolera sig, och ensamheten som han nu återfunnit verkade på hans ande som ett ångbad, eller en simning i havet, där frihet från allt tryck, all beröring med fastare materie upphört....¹¹

It is with this desire to return to the well-springs of his own inner resources, symbolized by the sea, that he makes his fatal decision to remain on the island for the winter: fatal because his return to the sea will be to its negative rather than to its positive aspect: he will be going to his death. The cycle (Wheel of Fortune) is on its downward swing.

As winter draws near and the colour of the sea changes from blue to green to grey, his attitude to it changes as well, and he begins to see it as something confining, something which prevents him, as it does the pike, from developing:

¹¹ *Samlade verk*, XXXI, 161 (Ch. 13):

If he wanted to avoid sinking, he had to isolate himself, and the solitude which he now rediscovered acted on his spirit like a steam-bath, or a swim in the sea, where there was freedom from all pressure, and all contact with more solid matter ceased....

Havet som han dyrkat, och vilket han sökte såsom det enda storslagna i hans tarvliga land ... började förefalla honom trångt, alltefter som hans jag svällde ut. Denna blåa, terpentingröna, gråa ring stängde honom som en fängelsegård....¹²

As his physical and mental health deteriorates, he becomes delirious, and in this state he often dreams of being tossed on the sea, either as a buoy or as a wrecked ship, longing to come ashore. Significantly, these dreams are coupled with dreams of his mother, now dead, who is given attributes which are properly those of the sea:

Nu började minnet av hans avlidna mor att dyka upp. Och han vaknade numera ofta efter att ha drömt att han låg som ett barn vid hennes bröst. Själen var tydligen på återgång och minnet av modren-ursprunget, länken mellan omedvetet och medvetet liv, trösterskan, förebedjerskan, steg fram.¹³

At the close of the novel, Borg climbs into a boat and sails out to sea, presumably never to be seen

¹² Samlade verk, XXXI, 168 (Ch. 14):

The sea which he had worshipped, and which he sought as the only magnificent feature in his austere surroundings ... began to appear confining to him, at the same rate as his ego grew. This blue, turpentine-green, grey ring enclosed him like a prison-yard....

¹³ Ibid., 173 (Ch. 14):

Now the memory of his deceased mother began to emerge. Lately he had often awoken after having dreamt that he lay at her breast like a child. His soul was obviously regressing, and the memory of the mother-source, the link between unconscious and conscious life, the comforter, the intercessor, came to the surface.

again. This is the end of the cycle: the return of the hero to the point from which he came. In the passage describing it, a strong link is established once again between the symbols of the mother and the sea:

Ut mot den nya julstjärnan gick färden,
ut över havet, allmodren, ur vars sköte
livets första gnista tändes, fruktsamhetens,
kärlekens outtömliga brunn, livets ursprung
och livets fiende.¹⁴

The use of animal symbolism to show Borg's superiority over those who surround him has been mentioned. His most important personal contact is with Maria, whose natural inferiority (as a woman) is obvious to Strindberg's *Übermensch* and strongly emphasized by animal symbolism. The antithesis of Borg's cold intellectual nature is the life of the senses, here identified with the bestial. That Maria's nature is of the latter type there can be no doubt; even her physical appearance gives her away:

Hennes haka var ... några linjer för stor och
antydde en underkäke som var onödigt mycket
utbildad för en som upphört gripa, fasthålla

¹⁴ Samlade verk, XXXI, 183 (Ch. 14):

Out towards the new Christmas star he
sailed, out over the sea, the mother of all,
from whose womb the first spark of life was
ignited, the inexhaustible well of fertility
and love, the source and enemy of life.

This is the last paragraph in the novel.

och sönderslita olagat kött.... Men han måste övervinna denna påminnelse om rovdjur....¹⁵

Borg's tendency is to avoid entanglement with inferiors, particularly women: "Han förstod tidigt att ordna sitt liv, undertrycka växt- och djurdrifterna...."¹⁶ Maria is different, however, and when he begins to woo her, he puts himself in the position of an animal, even below her: a stance which must prove disastrous because it is contrary to natural law (as expounded by Gustaf in *Fordringsägare*):

... han ... bröt en gren från oxeln, virade en krans och lämnade åt flickan....

-- Nu ska ni bekransa offerdjuret, fröken Maria! kastade intendenten åt sidan. Jag skulle önska jag vore hundra och fick som en hekatomb gå till slaktarbänken för er.¹⁷

¹⁵ Samlade verk, XXXI, 69-70 (Ch. 5):

Her chin was ... a few shades too large, indicating a jaw that was unnecessarily well-developed in one who no longer captured, held on to, and tore apart uncooked flesh.... But he must overcome this impression of a beast of prey....

¹⁶ Ibid., 40 (Ch. 2): "He understood at an early age how to order his life, to suppress his vegetable and animal tendencies...."

¹⁷ Ibid., 85 (Ch. 6):

... he ... broke a branch from the whitebeam tree, wove it into a wreath, and handed it to the girl....

"Now you must crown the sacrificial beast, Miss Maria!" said the Inspector in an aside. "I wish there were a hundred of me, chosen to go like a hecatomb to the slaughter for you."

He soon tires of this game, however, and wishes to withdraw from it, to preserve his dignity and integrity. It is, however, too late, and his realization of this is conveyed in a symbol Strindberg uses frequently in this kind of situation. Elsewhere it is closely linked to the vampire and cannibal symbols, a connection vaguely suggested here by the reference to the suitability of Maria's jaws for the tearing of raw flesh. The symbol is the spider and its web, both linked to fate and destruction: "Spindelvävarna hade fäst sig i hans ansikte, silkeslena, slemmiga, osynliga och omöjliga att avlägsna."¹⁸ It is after this realization that Borg first wears the ouroboros in Maria's presence, for reasons and with the effect outlined above. The mystic symbol does not protect him, and he begins his return to the sea. He surrenders to his animal passions and allows himself to be seduced:

Djuret hade vaknat och de vilda instinkterna som dolde sig under kärlekens stora namn rasade som lössläppta naturmakter.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Samlade verk*, XXXI, 91 (Ch. 6): "Spiderwebs had attached themselves to his face: silky, slimy, invisible, and impossible to remove."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150 (Ch. 11):

The beast had awakened and the wild instincts which hid under the great name of love raged like unbridled natural forces.

With this victory of his lower nature over the higher, the animal over the spiritual, the feminine over the masculine, Borg's fate is sealed.

Traditionally, the desert is a symbol of the spiritual life and divine revelation (Cirlot, 76); it is not surprising therefore that Borg often wishes to withdraw to a desert in order to recoup his spiritual resources:

Det var icke heller för ro skull som anakoreten sökte ensamheten, ty liksom det på en slump på trådan fallna ensamma vetekornet kunde sätta sextio ax, under det åkerns endast gav två där det trängdes bland miljoner på gödslad mark, så kunde den individ, vilken strävade till rikare utveckling över de andra, endast växa i ödemarken.²⁰

This is why the island appeals to Borg: while not a desert, its desolate aspect makes it seem ideal for spiritual development: "Där är världens ända; tyst, stilla, övergiven....";²¹ and a bit farther on:

... nu tog straxt den bebodda delen slut och det nakna skäret låg där öde, utan ett

²⁰ Samlade verk, XXXI, 160 (Ch. 13):

Nor was it for the sake of tranquillity that the anchorite sought solitude, for just as a single grain of wheat which falls by chance on fallow ground can produce sixty stalks, while that which falls on arable land, where it is cramped by millions of others in fertilized soil, only produces two, so also the individual who strove for a richer development than others could only grow in desert soil.

²¹ Ibid., 23 (Ch. 2): "It is the end of the world: silent, calm, deserted...."

träd, utan en buske, ty allt vad av eld förtäras kunde var uppbränt.²²

As Borg regresses along the downward sweep of his cycle, his desert seems less and less attractive to him, and the sea a wall which he must scale in order to attain his freedom; his return from the desert to the sea in the latter part of the novel balances the emergence of life from the sea so vividly described in the evolutionary passages of Chapter 3:

Men naturen, hos vilken han förr sökt umgänge, blev nu död för honom, ty mellanledet, människan, saknades. det enformiga lilla landskapet medförde samma pina som lär var straffcellens: bristen på intryck.²³

Indeed, even as the island-desert becomes a torture rather than a refuge, the symbol itself becomes in his mind no longer one of spiritual regeneration, but rather one of suffering and torment; the desert is no longer a place to which he voluntarily repairs, but one to which he is driven by pitiless enemies:

²² Samlade verk, XXXI, 24-25 (Ch. 2):

... now the inhabited area ceased abruptly and the naked skerry lay there deserted, without a tree, without a bush, for whatever could be consumed by fire had been burnt.

²³ Ibid., 168-69 (Ch. 14):

But nature, to which he had previously turned for company, now became as if dead to him, for the connecting link, man, was missing. the monotonous little landscape produced the same torment as a prison cell is said to do: the lack of new impressions.

Utan att äga det minsta spår av illusion om tacksamhet, kunde intendenten icke underlåta att erfara ett obehag vid att vara omgiven i ödemarken av idel fiender, och så farliga som de farligaste, vilka trodde sig i honom se en däre eller en brottsling.²⁴

The antithesis between desert and sea, spiritual and animal, masculine and feminine is supported and paralleled by that between light and darkness; an example of this has been seen in the darkness in which the deep-sea creatures hide their shame, while the land is bathed in sunlight. Borg sees himself as a bringer of light (like Prometheus) to the island community, a light he is prevented from spreading by the forces of darkness, principal among which is a woman:

... han själv erfarit hurusom närvaron av en kvinna på detta lilla jordstycke ute i havet redan gjort skymning där han velat sprida ljus....²⁵

Significantly, the scene in which he drops his defences, surrendering to his animal nature, takes place at dusk.

²⁴ Samlade verk, XXXI, 164 (Ch. 13):

Although he had not the slightest trace of illusion concerning gratitude, the Inspector could not help feeling uneasy over being abandoned in the wasteland by absolute enemies of the most dangerous sort, who thought they saw in him either a madman or a criminal.

²⁵ Ibid., 132 (Ch. 9):

... he had himself experienced how the presence of a woman on this little piece of land out in the sea had already brought dusk where he had wished to spread light....

As in other works, Strindberg here makes fairly extensive use of classical mythology. As elsewhere too, the main myths he uses are the Hercules-Omphale myth so prominent in *Fadren*, and the Pandora-Prometheus myth, which receives its fullest treatment in *Kristina*. Strindberg connects the Pandora myth to that of Eve, and both represent the quintessential female: the cause of all suffering in the lives of individual men and in the history of mankind. The myth surfaces in *I havsbandet* when Borg realizes that Maria is the cause of many, if not all, of his failures. The passage contains what are for Strindberg the essential elements of the myth. After an argument with Maria, Borg has fallen asleep with his pen resting on a piece of paper. He awakens to discover that he has produced automatic writing:

När han så vaknade och läste på papperet, över vilket hans penna flugit, såg han att där var skrivet ordet Pandora så många gånger att han kunde anse en mycket lång stund ha förflutit sedan uppträdet slöts.

Men så slog honom ordet, och som hans nyfikenhet väckts över dess betydelse vilken han glömt under årens lopp, ehuru han hade ett svagt minne därom från mytologien, tog han sitt handlexikon från bordet, öppnade och läste.

"Pandora, antikens Eva, jordens första kvinna. Skickades av gudarne såsom hämnd för att Prometheus stal elden, ner till människorna med alla olyckor som sedan dess befolkade världen. Framställes i poesien under skepnad av ett gott som är ett bländande ont, en skapelse anlagd på bedrägeri och överrumpning."

Detta var mytologi.... Men när sagan bekräftade sig från tidevarv till tidevarv,

... så måste det dock ha legat en tanke under den helleniske och judiske poetens bildtal.²⁶

If Pandora is Strindberg's most frequent mythological symbol for womankind, her male counterpart is Hercules. Indeed, Hercules is a most appropriate symbol for Borg (as he was for the Captain in *Fadren*), as Hercules too was a superman, defeated finally by a woman:

Herkules! Hellas sedliga ideal, styrkans och klokhetens gud, som dödade den Lerneiska Hydran med hundra huvuden, som rensade Augias stall, fångade Diomedes' mänskoätande stutar, rev gördeln av amasondrottningen, tog Cerberus upp ur helvetet, för att slutligen falla för en kvinnas dumhet, som förgiftade honom

²⁶ Samlade verk, XXXI, 132 (Ch. 9):

When he eventually awoke and read the paper over which his pen had been moving, he saw the word Pandora written there so many times that he concluded that a long time had passed since the scene had ended.

But the word made such an impression on him, and his curiosity was so aroused over its meaning, which he had forgotten over the course of the years, although he had a vague memory that it had something to do with mythology, that he took his pocket dictionary from the table, opened it, and read:

"Pandora: the Eve of classical antiquity, the world's first woman. Sent down to men by the gods as revenge for Prometheus' stealing of fire, bearing with her all manner of miseries, which since have spread throughout the world. Represented in poetry as an apparent good which is a glaring evil, a creature formed of deceit and surprise attack."

This was mythology.... But when the tale was confirmed from age to age, ... there must nevertheless have been some truth in the imagery of the Greek and Jewish poets.

av idel kärlek, sedan han i vanvett tjänat
nymfen Omfale i tre år ...²⁷

Indeed, Hercules is seen as the ideal for humanity, and represents the state Borg is striving to attain. That his failure comes about in the same way as that of Hercules, at the hands of a woman, is one of the book's ironies.

The Hercules and Pandora myths unite with the figure of Prometheus. The gods, angry that Prometheus has obtained for men the gift of fire, chain him to a rock to be tortured for thirty thousand years, and they punish mankind by sending Pandora with her casket of dis-

²⁷ Samlade verk, XXXI, 182 (Ch. 14):

Hercules! the ethical hero of Hellas, the god of strength and cleverness, who killed the hundred-headed Lernean Hydra, who cleaned the stables of Augeas, captured Diomedes' man-eating bullocks,* wrested the girdle from the queen of the Amazons, and brought Cerberus up from hell, finally to yield to the stupidity of a woman,** who poisoned him out of pure love, after he in his madness had served the nymph*** Omphale for three years....

* According to the myth, the eighth of the Twelve Labours of Hercules was the capture of Diomedes' man-eating mares; Strindberg's memory of mythology seems to have been a bit rusty as well!

** Hercules' wife, Deianira, poisoned him with the shirt of Nessus, which she had been told would preserve his love for her.

*** Omphale was not a nymph, but Queen of Lydia.

asters. It is Hercules who eventually releases Prometheus from his tortures. The son of Zeus and a human mother, Hercules is compared to Christ (son of God and a human mother) and deemed a much more virile figure, more worthy of admiration and emulation by the Übermensch, if not by humanity as a whole. The passage is the novel's penultimate paragraph: Borg is sailing from the island and notices a star which seems brighter than the rest. It is the star Beta in the constellation Hercules, the "new Christmas star" of the final paragraph:

Ut mot den åtminstone på himmelen upptagne, som aldrig lät piska sig eller spotta sig i ansiktet utan att som en man slå och spotta tillbaka, ut mot självförbrännaren som endast kunde falla för sin egen starka hand utan att tigga om nåd från kalken, mot Herakles, som befriade Prometheus, ljusbringaren, själv son av en gud och en kvinnomoder, som sedan vildarne förfälskade till en jungfrupilt, vars födelse hälsades av mjölkdrickande herdar och skriande åsnor.²⁸

This attitude to Christ is representative of Borg's general attitude to Him: he is not opposed to

²⁸ *Samlade verk*, XXXI, 182-83 (Ch. 14):

Out towards him who at least was taken up into heaven, towards him who never allowed himself to be whipped or spat at in the face without fighting and spitting back like a man, out towards the self-immolator who could only go down under his own strong hand, without begging for an anodyne, towards Hercules, who freed Prometheus, the light-bringer; he was himself the son of a god and a mortal mother, and was afterwards debased by the savages into the brat of a virgin, whose birth was acclaimed by milk-drinking shepherds and braying asses.

Christ, but feels no need of Him in his own life; on the contrary, he feels that reliance on Christ is a sign of weakness. This is a position he shares with many Strindberg heroes: the central figure in *Inferno*, Elis in *Påsk*, and the Stranger in *Till Damaskus I*, to name only three. His stance is stated succinctly, in words closely paralleling statements in other works:

... han ... icke sköt skulden ifrån sig på en oskyldigt lidande Kristus, utan i medveten självansvarighet icke begick några handlingar som kunde väcka hans behov av en syndabock.²⁹

The post-*Inferno* Strindberg was to regret such an outlook and to rebut it in several of his later works, notably in *Till Damaskus I* and in *Advent*, in both of which the point is explicitly made that he who does not allow Christ to suffer for him must suffer himself. Interestingly enough, that observation applies particularly well to Axel Borg: his rejection of Christ can be seen as the cause of his defeat, of which Maria is merely the instrument!

Although Borg sees no need for Christianity in his own life, he nevertheless views it as a necessary stage in the evolution of the human spirit, and a civilizing

²⁹ Samlade verk, XXXI, 44 (Ch. 3):

... he ... did not thrust guilt away from himself onto an innocently suffering Christ, but, consciously taking responsibility for himself, committed no deeds which could awaken his need for a scapegoat.

influence. It is definitely superior to the superstitions and barbarities of the past, but it is just as definitely inferior to the enlightened freedom of spirit enjoyed by superior beings like himself:

... med ett vaknade hos honom igen begäret att få se dessa vildar tama, att se dessa Torsdyrkare böja knä för vite Krist, jättarne gå under för de ljuse Asar. Barbaren måste passera kristendomen såsom en skärseld, lära sig vördnad för andens makt i de svaga muskelknippena, folkvandringensresterna ha sin medeltid innan de kunde komma fram till tänkandets renässans och handlingens revolution.³⁰

In order to accomplish this, Borg arranges to bring a pastor to the island. This new leader of the flock compares very unfavourably to Borg himself. He has turned to faith more by default than conviction: he has been rejected by those whose company he values, and has turned to Christ for solace in his loneliness:

-- jag måste söka min enda bekantskap i Gud och de vanlottades, de skab-

³⁰ Samlade verk, XXXI, 79 (Ch. 5):

... at once there again awoke within him the desire to see these savages tamed, these worshippers of Thor bend their knees before the white Christ, the giants perishing before the fair Aesir. The barbarians must pass through Christianity as through a purgatory, to learn respect for the power of the spirit within a weak bundle of muscles; those left behind in the great migration must have their middle ages before they could come to the renaissance of thought and the revolution of action.

biges, de prickades Frälsare Vår Herra Jesum
Kristum.³¹

Perhaps because of the pastor's ineffectuality, Borg's view of Christianity remains unchanged even in the face of his own failures; it is, as he sees it, not a religion for spiritual giants, but for pygmies:

... när han letade i minnet skymtade något om
julstjärnan, ledstjärnan till Betlehem, dit
tre avsatta konungar vallfärdade för att som
fallna storheter tillbedja sin litenhet i den
minsta av mänskors barn och som sedan blev
alla smås förklarade gud ...³²

Despite these views of Christ and Christianity, the Blessed Virgin Mary maintains her position as consoler, intercessor, and the symbolic antithesis of Pandora-Eve. She shares in and colours the references to mother figures, particularly where the reference is to Borg's own mother, and, as on one level she is allmoderen (the mother of all), she can also be seen in the final paragraph: what is seen first as the Star of

³¹ Samlade verk, XXXI, 128 (Ch. 9):

".... . I had to seek my only acquaintance in God and in the Saviour of the ill-treated, the mangy, and the outcast, Our Lord Jesus Christ."

³² Ibid., 182 (Ch. 14):

... when he searched his memory, he dimly recalled something about the Christmas star, the star that led the way to Bethlehem, to which three dethroned kings had made a pilgrimage in order that they, as fallen powers, might worship their own smallness in the least of the children of men, who later became the declared god of all the small ...

Bethlehem and then as the star Beta in the constellation Hercules, becomes, finally, Stella Maris (Star of the Sea, one of the traditional titles of the Blessed Virgin), leading Borg out towards the sea, and peace.

The symbolism drawn from the Bible in this work plays mainly a subsidiary rôle, reinforcing that drawn from other sources. All of it is used to illustrate the perfidy of woman; thus the principal biblical allusions are to Eve. Apart from passages specifically linking her to Pandora, noted above, she appears (in modern dress, as it were) hovering over the scene in which Borg succumbs to Maria's charms, as if giving her blessing to the seduction:

Genom det öppna fönstret trängde dämpade toner från första valsen, Balens drottning, som ... en hälsning från det förlorade paradiset....³³

Other biblical figures used symbolically are Samson, the biblical equivalent to Hercules, and the Old Testament paradigm of male chastity, Joseph, here contrasted to his would-be seducer, Potiphar's wife (see Genesis 39:7-20):

... på väggarne hängde kolorerade litografier ur Gamla testamentet, varibland ett par över sängen syntes tillkomma i mindre vacker avsikt, då den ena föreställde Samson och

³³ Samlade verk, XXXI, 159 (Ch. 12):

Through the open window came muffled tones from the first waltz, "Queen of the Ball", like ... a greeting from the lost paradise....

Delila i en mycket ohöljd skildring, den andra Josef och Potifars hustru.³⁴

These two lithographs over Maria's bed ought to have served as a warning to Borg of her intentions!

Rising and falling (Wheel of Fortune) symbolism is particularly strong in this novel. It receives its clearest expression in two passages near the middle, the first of which also draws on the Samson-Delilah myth:

-- Jag lägger mitt huvud i dina knän, fortfor han, men klipp icke mitt hår medan jag sover vid din barm, låt mig lyfta dig, men drag icke ner mig....³⁵

The second occurs while Borg is still on the ascendant, but not long before his begins his downward plunge:

-- Axel är så fasligt djupsinnig, och om en stackars flicka inte kan alltid följa med, så är det ju inte något att undra på.

-- Jaja, men om hon inte kan följa med mig oppåt, så kan jag å andra sidan icke

³⁴ Samlade verk, XXXI, 68 (Ch. 5):

... on the walls hung tinted lithographs of Old Testament scenes, among which a couple over the bed seemed to have a less seemly intention than the rest: the one showed Samson and Delilah in a very compromising situation, the other Joseph and Potiphar's wife.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 111 (Ch. 7):

"I lay my head in your lap," he continued, "but don't cut off my hair while I sleep on your breast; let me lift you up, but don't drag me down...."

följa med henne neråt, men det senare tycks vara hennes bestämda vilja....³⁶

Immediately after their sexual union, the cycle begins its second half and Borg, suffering from feelings of sinking, seeks solitude to replenish his resources. But it is too late: from this point on his path is downwards to the sea.

That their relationship is doomed is made explicit early in their courtship, when Borg's wishes are set forth: what he wants is clearly impossible in terms of the wheel symbol:

... han ville höja [henne] högt över sig på samma gång hon skulle se upp till honom såsom den där förlänat henne makten över sig.³⁷

Maria is not Borg's only enemy; there are also the fisherfolk on the island, who resent his interference. They too are seen in terms of the rising and falling symbolism:

Han erfor det som om dessa mångas tankar riktade på honom skulle äga förmågan att så små-

³⁶ Samlade verk, XXXI, 135 (Ch. 9):

"You're so terribly profound, Axel, it's little wonder a poor girl can't always follow you."

"Yes, yes, but if she can't follow me upwards, I, on the other hand, can't follow her downwards, although that seems her express wish...."

³⁷ Ibid., 92 (Ch. 6):

... he wanted to raise [her] high above himself while at the same time she should look up to him for having conferred on her this power over him.

ningom draga ner honom, trycka på hans opinion om sitt eget värde, så att den stund skulle komma, då han icke längre kunde tro på sig själv och sin andliga överlägsenhet....³⁸

Borg's fall is not necessarily evil, however; the symbols of the sea and of the Blessed Virgin Mary seem to contradict this, and the ouroboros symbol indicates that it is a natural process, and therefore neither good nor evil. What would be evil would be an interruption of the cycle, in which the wheel would cease to turn and those on it would neither rise nor fall: "Ibland drömde han att han svävade i luften och varken kunde komma upp eller ner...."³⁹ This is perhaps the expression of an unconscious desire to escape the cycle in which he is caught.

Threats to Borg's survival as an *Übermensch* are presented under another symbol: the storm. He arrives on the island after battling a storm at sea, and during it he has seen what the sea has in store for him: death. Later, he sees the threat from the islanders in terms of an electrical storm:

³⁸ Samlade verk, XXXI, 55 (Ch. 4):

It seemed to him that the thoughts directed towards him by all these people would gradually be able to drag him down, deflate his opinion of his own worth, so that the time would come when he could no longer believe in himself and his spiritual superiority....

³⁹ Ibid., 173 (Ch. 14): "Sometimes he dreamt he was suspended in the air and could move neither up nor down...."

Det var som om ett åskmoln av oliknämning elektricitet låg över honom och irriterade hans nervfluidum, ville förintä detsamma genom att neutralisera det.⁴⁰

He begins to doubt his ability to cope with the hostility of the islanders, and to question his background and his powers; again the forces opposed to him assume the character of a storm: "Gamla tvivel ... började väckas, ... farhågor om möjligheten att hålla sig torr i detta slamregn...."⁴¹

This is not the storm which destroys him, however, although it no doubt contributes; that storm rages within him: sexual passion. It is Maria who first equates love to a storm, and, ironically, Borg is quick to condemn this conception, or at least to dissociate himself from it:

-- kärleken ... har jag föreställt mig som det högsta, som en storm, ett åskslag, ett vattenfall!

-- Som en rå, ohejdad naturkraft? -- Så uppenbarar den sig hos djuren och lägre

⁴⁰ Samlade verk, XXXI, 55 (Ch. 4):

It was as if a thunder-cloud of oppositely-charged electricity lay above him and worked on his nervous fluid, seeking to destroy it by neutralizing it.

⁴¹ Ibid., 57 (Ch. 4):

Old doubts ... began to reawaken, ... apprehensions about the possibility of keeping himself dry in this downpour....

varieteteter människa ...⁴²

These words condemn him when the raw forces of nature are unleashed within him!

After he has succumbed to that storm, his return to the sea begins; this time the sea is calm, as he returns to the mother and nourisher of all things. One of his delirious dreams depicts his longing for deliverance from the storm his life has become; he sees himself tossed on a stormy sea (again, suspended in the air: neither up nor down) and longs for an anchor-hold. In the dream he does not return to land, but rather establishes a link with the sea-bottom, where life originated:

... han erinrade sig ha drömt huru han varit ett strandat fartyg som kastats på vågorna mellan luft och vatten, tills han slutligen kände ankarkättingens ryckning och erfor ett lugn som om förbindelsen med fasta jorden återknutits.⁴³

⁴² Samlade verk, XXXI, 107 (Ch. 7):

".... I've imagined love ... as the highest good, like a storm, a thunderclap, a waterfall!"

"As a raw, unrestrained force of nature? That's how it manifests itself among animals and the lower varieties of man ..."

⁴³ Ibid., 177 (Ch. 14):

... he remembered having dreamt he was a foundering ship, tossed on the waves between air and water, until finally he felt a tug on the anchor chain and was overcome with calm, as if his connection with terra firma had been re-established.

Several symbols of less importance are nevertheless interesting for the light they throw on the meaning of the work, and because they reappear in other Strindberg works. One of these is the witch, a symbol which appears again in "En häxa", *Svanevit*, *Till Damaskus*, *En blå bok*, and elsewhere. In *I havsbandet*, the probability that Maria will eventually look like a witch reveals her true nature:

Hennes haka var ... några linjer för stor ... och när han såg den i profil, kunde han utkonstruera en blivande häxfysionomi, då en gång gummans tänder skulle lossna, läpparne falla in, bilda en trubbig vinkel och näsan sjunka ner över den framträdande hakan.⁴⁴

There are only two instances of alchemical symbolism. The first is in Borg's conception of love: a very cold and clinical business indeed when compared to Maria's storms, thunderclaps, and waterfalls!

Han åtrådde en intim fullständig förening till kropp och själ, där han som den starkare syran skulle neutralisera den passiva basen, men utan att som i kemien bilda en ny indifferent kropp, utan tvärtom lämna ett överskott av fri syra som alltid skulle ge föreningen dess karaktär och ligga i beredskap att neutralisera varje frigöringsförsök av underlaget, ty den mänskliga kärleken var icke någon kemisk förening, utan en psykisk,

⁴⁴ *Samlade verk*, XXXI, 69 (Ch. 5):

Her chin was ... a few shades too large ... and when he saw it in profile, he could foresee the latent physiognomy of a witch, which would appear once the old woman lost her teeth, the lips fell in, and the nose sank to meet the prominent chin in an obtuse angle.

organisk som liknade den förra i vissa avseenden utan att vara densamma.⁴⁵

The other instance occurs when Borg burns a letter from Maria without reading it; the reference points out the similarity in the basic constituents of all matter (whence the alchemical belief in transmutation):

Han hade satt sig ner vid sitt laborationsbord och nästan utan att tänka på vad han gjorde, öppnade han en järnretort, stoppade in brevet och tände blästerlampan inunder. Om en stund pustade röken ut ur retortens hals och när röken upphört, tände han gasen med en sticka. En liten blågul låga brann några minuter med ett vinande ljud som en läderlapps pipande.

Brevets Ande, som en alkemist skulle sagt! En pappersmassa som förtärdes och gav samma förbränningsprodukter av kol och väte, som en brinnande själ i en levande kropp. Kol och väte! Det var allt och det enahanda!⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Samlade verk, XXXI, 73-74 (Ch. 5):

He desired an intimate and complete union of body and soul, in which he, the stronger acid, would neutralize the passive base, but without forming a new neutral body, as in chemistry, but, on the contrary, leaving an excess of free acid which would always give the compound its character and lie in readiness to neutralize every attempt on the part of the base to liberate itself. For human love was not a chemical reaction, but a psychic and organic one, which resembled the former in certain respects but was not the same thing.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 163 (Ch. 13):

He had sat down at his work-table, and almost without thinking what he was doing, he opened an iron retort, stuffed the letter into it, and lit the blast-lamp under it. In a moment smoke puffed from the neck of the retort and when the smoke disappeared, he lit the gas with a splinter. A little bluish-yellow flame burned for a few minutes with a whistling noise like the chirping of a bat.

The Soul of the letter, an alchemist

Difficulty in breathing is Strindberg's symbol for the stifling of the personality by that of another. In the passage below Borg feels his integrity threatened by Maria, and experiences difficulty in breathing:

När intendenten kom ut, skakade han på sig som om han ville befria sig från något damm, kände samma som han erfarit vid besök i en kvarn, ett visst välbehag att se alla föremål överdragna med en mjuk halvvit mjölkton som stämde järn, trä, lärft, glas i ett ackord, samma känsla av dunkel vällust att vidröra lås, ledstänger, säckar bepudrade med halt mjöldamm, men på samma gång ha svårt att andas, behöva hosta, ta fram näsduken.⁴⁷

—
would have said! A mass of paper which burned, yielding the same products of combustion, carbon and hydrogen, as a burning soul in a living body. Carbon and hydrogen! That was all and it was all one!

⁴⁷ Samlade verk, XXXI, 78 (Ch. 5):

When the Inspector came out, he shook himself off as if he wanted to rid himself of dust, feeling the same as he had on a visit to a mill: a certain pleasure in seeing things coated in a soft off-white flour colour which blended iron, wood, cloth, and glass into one; the same feeling of vague sensual pleasure at touching locks, handrails, and sacks powdered with smooth flour dust; but at the same time having difficulty in breathing, needing to cough, to take out his handkerchief.

Chapter 38

Himmelrikets nycklar

Himmelrikets nycklar, eller Sankte Per vandrar på jorden: sagospel i fem akter¹ (*The Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, or Saint Peter Walks the Earth: Fantasy Play in Five Acts*, 1892) was written during the final disintegration of Strindberg's marriage to Siri von Essen, and expresses his sense of loss over his children (he had not lived with his family since the autumn of 1890, and the separation had become legal in the spring of 1891). Like the Smith in the play, he sought consolation in other areas -- the search for a new kingdom of heaven -- but, as the close of the play indicates, he did not find it, at least not among the pleasures of this life.

From the point of view of Strindberg's development as a dramatist, *Himmelrikets nycklar* is interesting as a pre-Inferno pilgrimage play and for its use of the dream technique: the final scene reveals that the play has been the Smith's dream and he must now return to where he began: his empty house. This technique is also used in *Till Damaskus I*: the Stranger's return to the street corner where he began signifies, among other things, his return to consciousness from the dream in

¹ Samlade verk, XXXII, 125-239.

which he has been immersed. *Himmelrikets nycklar* has many similarities as well to the earlier *Lycko-Pers resa* (1882), and indeed represents an intermediate stage in the development of the pilgrimage theme begun in that play and continued in the *Till Damaskus* trilogy (1898-1904) and *Stora landsvägen* (1909).

It is appropriate that at this stage in his life, newly returned to Sweden after an exile of almost six years -- tired, discouraged, and poor, with his marriage collapsing -- Strindberg should choose as his central figure a blacksmith, the alchemical symbol of the accursed poet or despised prophet (Cirlot, 28).

The colours of the play are mainly black and white: the Doctor and the Smith are both dressed in black, the Doctor is referred to as "svarte lärde" ("black scholar") and "svarta doktor" ("black doctor"), and there are references to the Black Death; the departed children (particularly the little boy, who is described as a white lamb) are associated with white, the Mistress has white cheeks, the people in the valley worship "vite Balder" ("the white Balder"), and the familiar of the Old Man of Ho Mountain is an owl whose onomatopoetic cry emphasizes the essential opposition between the two colours:

HOBERGSGUBBEN:
 Sjung liten fågel på goda viset ditt,
 I svart du skådar världen, men sjunger jämt
 --
 UGGLAN: Klä vitt!
 HOBERGSGUBBEN: Och viskar visdom i mitt

djupa öra.²

This black and white symbolism underlines the struggle between positive and negative values in the search for the earthly paradise, with black generally corresponding to death, and white to life and activity. Green is generally associated with vegetation (and hence with resurrection, hope), but also with death (lividness), making green a connecting link between life and death (Cirlot, 51). It is significant, then, that St. Peter, who gives a purpose to the Smith's journey (proposed as a means of taking his mind off his sorrow), appears as if from out of the green tile stove.

Biblical references are numerous, as might be expected in a play featuring St. Peter. Mainly, these references make a comic character of St. Peter, and show the inability of Pietism to comfort the bereaved Smith. More important are the explicit references to Christ. In the opening scene, for instance, the room in the Smith's house is decorated with painted hangings, two of which depict Christ: the Way of the Cross, and the Descent into Hell. That showing the Way of the

² Samlade verk, XXXII, 182 (III, i):

THE OLD MAN OF HO MOUNTAIN:
 Sing, little bird, in your good way;
 In black you survey the world, but still you
 sing --
 THE OWL: Wear white!
 THE OLD MAN OF HO MOUNTAIN: And whisper
 wisdom deep into my ear.

Cross is particularly important, as it reappears, in a speech central to the drama:

SANKT PER: Vet du vad som fattas oss, efter som vi aldrig hinna fram?

SMEDEN: Nej!

SANKT PER: Det är tron! Ty, nu minns jag det, vägen till himlen heter korsets väg! Låt oss söka korset!

SMEDEN: Du menar lidandet?

SANKT PER: Jag menar lidandet!

SMEDEN: Ja då tror jag ingen lider mer än den som på ingenting tror, och ändå är han längst från korset!

SANKT PER: Kryp till korset, Smed, och vi få väl se!³

Heaven, in other words, is not to be gained through vain earthly pursuits, but through suffering, a message central to most of Strindberg's work, particularly after the Inferno crisis.

Another of St. Peter's recollections presents Christ in terms of the übermensch, one of whose characteristics, as seen in the character Borg in *I havsbandet* is a quest for solitude:

Mitt gamla minne sviker mig --

³ Samlade verk, XXXII, 230-31 (V, iii):

ST. PETER: Do you know what we lack, preventing us from ever reaching our destination?

THE SMITH: No!

ST. PETER: Faith! For -- it comes back to me now -- the way to heaven is called the Way of the Cross! Let's seek the Cross!

THE SMITH: Do you mean suffering?

ST. PETER: I mean suffering!

THE SMITH: Well, I think nobody suffers more than he who believes in nothing, and yet he is farthest from the Cross!

ST. PETER: Crawl to the Cross, Smith, and we'll see!

Men än jag ser som i ett moln
En man, så ljus, så mild
Med sår i händerna och bröstet --
Han läste aldrig böcker, endast vandrade
I skogens ensamhet, på berget också;
....⁴

The play introduces the Wandering Jew into Strindberg's works (he is to appear again in the world historical plays and in *Stora landsvägen*). He appears twice in *Himmelrikets nycklar*, first as St. Peter himself, whose Jewishness is emphasized when he first appears:

LÄKAREN: ... ni minns väl ändå hur gammal ni är.
SANKT PER: Låt mig tänka, när jag döptes?
LÄKAREN: Är ni döpt också?
SANKT PER (indignerad): Om -- jag -- är -- döpt!
LÄKAREN: Jag tyckte eljes på näsan att ni såg omskuren ut.⁵

⁴ Samlade verk, XXXII, 154 (I, iv):

My old memory lets me down --
But still I see, as in a cloud,
A man, so fair, so mild,
With wounded hands and wounded breast --
He never read books, but simply wandered
In solitary woods, and on the mountain too;
....

⁵ Ibid., 141-42 (I, ii):

THE DOCTOR: ... surely you still remember how old you are.
ST. PETER: Let me think, when was I baptized?
THE DOCTOR: So, you've been baptized?
ST. PETER (indignantlly): Have -- I -- been -- baptized!
THE DOCTOR: Otherwise, I should have said from your nose that you look as if you'd been circumcised.

Later, St. Peter specifically identifies himself as the Wandering Jew:

Jag var icke något hälleberg, endast ett svagt rö, som i den natten du minns, skrämdes att förneka min mästare, och det är till straff därför jag vandrar på jorden utan att finna ro.⁶

Later in the same act, however, when the Wandering Jew appears as a character in his own right, it is not St. Peter who represents him, but the Doctor in disguise. In this scene it is suggested that the Wandering Jew is in fact another disciple, Judas Iscariot:

JUDEN: Köp något av den Vandrande juden, stränge riddare!

DON QUIXOTE: Vad har du mer att sälja sen du sålde din mästare?⁷

The implication is that anyone who denies or betrays Christ (or, like many Strindberg heroes, finds it impossible to accept His sacrifice) is condemned to wander perpetually, never reaching his goal, never achieving rest. After absolving himself of blame for the death of Christ (that, he says, was the fault of

⁶ Samlade verk, XXXII, 228 (V, ii):

I was no rock, only a weak reed, who, on the night you remember, was frightened into denying my master, and it is in punishment for that that I wander the earth without finding peace.

⁷ Ibid., 231 (V, iv):

THE JEW: Buy something from the Wandering Jew, stern knight!

DON QUIXOTE: What more have you to sell, after selling your master?

Pilate and his soldiers), the Wandering Jew suggests it was not only Judas who betrayed Christ, but also others who lived long after the event:

DON QUIXOTE: Vad kostar den?
 JUDEN: En mark!
 DON QUIXOTE: Kan du ge tillbaks på trettio silverpengar?
 JUDEN: Ja, jag kan!
 DON QUIXOTE: Du förstår inte satir, jude?
 JUDEN: Jo, jag gör! Men gör riddaren?⁸

There is very little animal or plant symbolism in *Himmelrikets nycklar*. Indeed, the only animal of any significance is the owl which is the familiar of the Old Man of Ho Mountain (really the Smith). As a bird of night, it represents darkness and death, thoughts of which comfort the Smith in his desolation:

HOBERGSGUBBEN:
 (En uggla kommer flygande och sätter sig på hans axel.)
 Där är min egen fågel, min vän i mörkan natt
 Två ögon på två vingar, och klor som av en katt
 Den tros stå i förbund med Styggen.⁹

⁸ Samlade verk, XXXII, 232 (V, iv):

DON QUIXOTE: What does it cost?
 THE JEW: One mark!
 DON QUIXOTE: Can you give change from thirty pieces of silver?
 THE JEW: Yes, I can!
 DON QUIXOTE: Don't you understand satire, Jew?
 THE JEW: Yes, I do! But do you, knight?

⁹ Ibid., 182 (III, i):

THE OLD MAN OF HO MOUNTAIN:
 (An owl flies in and perches on his shoulder.)
 There's my own familiar bird, my friend in the dark night,
 With two eyes and two wings and with claws.

This is why the Fiancée's reaction to the shriek of the owl is so different from that of the Old Man of Ho Mountain: her life is one of innocence and happiness, and thoughts of death repel rather than attract her:

UGGLAN (skriker).

FÄSTMÖN: Åh den ryssliga ugglan!¹⁰

Just previous to this, the Fiancé has used animal symbolism to express a sentiment which appears again in *Dödsdansen*: "För varg jag föredrar att vara lamm /"¹¹

The most significant use of plant symbolism is the use of flowers in general to represent transience and roses in particular to represent inner beauty, when the Smith discovers that the Mistress is a leper:

Jag sörjer som i snöig vinter
Man sörjer sommarns vissna blommor!
Men sorg är kärleks snö,
Och under snön det driver rosor!¹²

Believed an ally of the Devil.

¹⁰ Samlade verk, XXXII, 195 (III, v):

THE OWL (screeches).

THE FIANCEE: Oh! that horrible owl!

¹¹ Idem.: "I'd rather be a lamb than a wolf /"

¹² Ibid., 63-64 (II, ii):

I mourn as in the snowy winter
One mourns the summer's withered flowers!
But sorrow is love's snow,
And under the snow grow roses!

In common with *Ett drömspel* and the other dream plays, *Himmelrikets nycklar* asks important questions about reality and illusion. These questions are focused in the scene which treats of the Mistress' beauty, the quality for which the Smith fell in love with her. She tells him that physical beauty is only an illusion, but he refuses to believe her:

ÄLSKARINNAN:
 Det sköna är blott sken.
 SMEDEN: Ett härligt sken som värmer och som lyser!
 ÄLSKARINNAN: Likt trolleld över sumpig mo.
 SMEDEN: Det är ej sant, så kan det icke vara,
 Ty skönhet blott av godhet är ett sken
¹³

The mask is an appropriate symbol for illusion, and in this scene we have a mask covering a mask: immediately upon concluding the above speech, the Mistress lifts the mask she is wearing (her beautiful, white-cheeked face) and reveals herself to be a leper, whereupon the Smith makes his comparison of her beauty to roses growing beneath the snow.

¹³ *Samlade verk*, XXXII, 162 (II, ii):

THE MISTRESS:
 Beauty is but illusion.
 THE SMITH: That's some illusion, which gives warmth and light!
 THE MISTRESS: Like troll-fire on a marshy heath.
 THE SMITH: That is not true, and so it cannot be,
 For beauty's but of goodness a reflection

Don Quixote is the symbol of romantic idealism, the chaser after illusions. When he enters, however, he is far from the idealistic knight of Cervantes: he has lost his illusions and become a hardened cynic:

Jag har visserligen lämnat alla illusioner om en himmel här på jorden, sedan jag insett att det är ett helvete att leva....¹⁴

This cynicism and pragmatism do not last, however: towards the end of the following act he is again planning a quest into the heights of the ideal (and illusory): this time in search of ideal love. When Sancho Panza chides him for the inconsistency of seeking first the depths (cynicism) and then the heights (idealism) again, he uses Eastern philosophy to demonstrate that his inconsistency is itself an illusion:

All rörelse framåt går såsom vågen, först upp och så ner! Och det är genom förändringar som vi uppnå den säkra stadgan, säger den vise Confucius!¹⁵

Don Quixote thinks his ideals realized in the utopia of Schlaraffenland, and indeed it would seem this is so. But problems are stirred up by Sancho, who

¹⁴ Samlade verk, XXXII, 176 (II, viii):

Indeed, I have lost all my illusions about a heaven here on earth, since realizing life is hell....

¹⁵ Ibid., 200 (III, vii):

All forward motion advances like a wave, first up and then down! And it is through change that we reach true stability, as the wise Confucius says!

wishes to succeed Don Quixote as Prime Minister of that land, and by Tom Thumb, who introduces party politics into the peaceable kingdom; Don Quixote realizes that the happiness of this apparently ideal state is also an illusion, and sets off again in search of his ideal love, Dulcinea, a creature more of his own imagination than of flesh and blood: "Jag börjar tro att det som aldrig varit är bäst. -- Dulcinea! -- Dulcinea!"¹⁶ In this pursuit of illusion (the illusion of earthly happiness), Don Quixote dies. But first he meets the Wandering Jew, who implies that Don Quixote is akin to Judas (and therefore to the Wandering Jew himself), which explains the ceaseless journeys and pilgrimages of the knight: to search for perfection on earth is not only a vain pastime, but is also a denial of the Saviour.

In contrast, the Smith, rather than escaping into the world of illusion, finds himself drawn to something beyond it. He has this to say of what he has learned during his period as the Old Man of Ho Mountain:

... när jag skådat människor och liv
Inunder ögonen, mig allting kväljer!
Det stora var ej stort tillräckligt
Det lilla var mig alldeles för smått,
Och när man gjort bankrutt här nere,

¹⁶ Samlade verk, XXXII, 219 (IV, vii): "I'm beginning to believe that what has never been is best. -- Dulcinea! -- Dulcinea!"

Så längtar man till det som ovan är.¹⁷

The master of illusion is the Doctor, who makes things appear and disappear, arranges transformations, and steps in where necessary to play a part. He is the dreamer's subconscious mind, which orders and structures the contents of the dream, providing links between seemingly disparate elements. The most effective use of his power is when he banishes the apparitions which have attended the silver wedding anniversary celebrations of Romeo and Juliet (themselves apparitions) back to the well (literally) of the subconscious whence they came:

I skuggor som jag manat upp ur jorden,
Att kläda tankar uti synlig bild,
Tillbaks dit ner därifrån I kommit!
Och blin till irrbloss som I varit
Av sumpluft ur en sinad brunn.
Marsch! alla marsch på stund! ¹⁸

¹⁷ Samlade verk, XXXII, 220 (IV, viii):

... when I have passed mankind and life
Under my scrutiny, all of it sickens me!
The great were far from great enough,
The small, I thought, were far too petty,
And when you've lost it all down here,
It's then one longs for that which is above.

¹⁸ Ibid., 177 (II, viii):

You shadows whom I called up from the earth,
To dress out thoughts in forms perceptible,
Go back down there, from whence ye came!
Be will-o'-the-wisps, as you were before,
And swampy air from a dried-up well.
Off! all of you off at once!

Cf. Prospero's speech ("Our revels now are ended....")
in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (IV, i, 148 ff.).

It is the Doctor who eventually gives the rationale for continuing the search for heaven; it has by this point become obvious that it is not to be found on earth, but that does not mean the search should be abandoned, for earth is not hell either (as Don Quixote in his cynical phase would have us believe): it is, rather, the intermediate phase of purgatory (heaven is gained through suffering):

SANKT PER: ... jag ... fruktar ... att vi glömma det stora målet ...

LÄKAREN: Målet? Ja, det var ju himmelriket! Vi ska nog komma dit, men först måste vi genom skärselden.¹⁹

The play contains a rejection of the concept of the *Übermensch*, as symbolized (as in *I havsbandet*) by the Hercules myth. Although he does not refer to Hercules by name, the Smith refers to two incidents in the legend of the Greek hero: his temporary assumption of the burden of Atlas, and his lighting of his own funeral pyre:

Ah! vore jag en jätte, bure alperna
På mina breda skulderblad,
Jag kutade och släppte hela lasset
På jorden ner så att den gick i kras!
Jag vill bli stor, bli stark, den starkaste
Och trampa hela universum sönder
Att när förgängelsen går fram

¹⁹ Samlade verk, XXXII, 220 (IV, viii):

ST. PETER: ... I'm afraid we're forgetting our great goal ...

THE DOCTOR: Goal? Oh yes, that was heaven, wasn't it? Don't worry, we'll get there, but first we have to pass through purgatory.

Jag skulle ensam kunna njuta
 Vid tanken att jag föll för egen hand
 När alla andra föllo för en annans!²⁰

The Smith attains his wish for greatness and strength (as the Old Man of Ho Mountain), but finds the experience not quite as he had imagined it would be; it too is an illusion.

In the final scene, the Smith is shown his spiritual ancestors: Icarus, Prometheus, and Jacob (seen wrestling with God). All these heroes defied God (or the gods) and all were punished (Icarus with death, Prometheus with anguish and suffering, and Jacob with lameness), and yet Jacob eventually attained heaven. The Smith is in the Tower of Babel (another symbol of defiance of God, and of attempting to reach heaven through one's own resources), and is tempted to climb to heaven, but is warned that if the ladder leading upwards (Jacob's ladder) does not bring him to heaven it will bring him back to earth. The return of his children's possessions and playthings (their books have

²⁰ Samlade verk, XXXII, 178 (II, viii):

Ah! were I but I giant, and bore the alps
 Upon my sturdy shoulderblades,
 I'd bend down and let the whole lot fall
 Down to the earth, so that it burst in
 pieces!
 I long for greatness, strength, to be the
 strongest
 And trample the whole universe to bits
 That, when corruption runs its course,
 I only might have reason to rejoice
 In knowledge that I fell by my own hand
 When everybody else fell by another's!

furnished the settings and characters for the scenes of the dream play) indicates that it is to earth he will return, and indeed he wakes up in the room in which the play opened. He sees the faces of his children appear above the ladder, receiving some comfort in the knowledge that they are in heaven, but he knows now that for him heaven is not on earth, but must be attained through suffering: his grief and the pangs of life without his children!

Strindberg never saw *Himmelrikets nycklar* performed: its world première was in Germany in 1927, and its Swedish première not until 1967, although it had been performed twice previously (1929 and 1945) on Swedish radio (Ollén, 199-200)! Film and television techniques ought to make the play's many scene changes and special effects much less formidable obstacles than they have proved to be on the stage.

Chapter 39

"Första varningen"

"Första varningen: komedi i en akt"¹ ("The First Warning: Comedy in One Act") is one of six one-act plays written in 1892 (it is impossible to say whether it or "Debet och kredit": "Debit and Credit" was written first), after *Himmelrikets nycklar* proved unattractive to theatres. Representing a transition between Strindberg's early naturalism and his later expressionism, they are naturalistic in form but border on surrealism, and are early examples of what was to become the chamber plays. In the foreword to the final section ("Författaren": "The Author") of *Tjänstekvinnans son*, Strindberg gives them the title collective "Ur det cyniska livet" ("From the Cynical Life").²

"Första varningen" is about jealousy. A man who is jealous of his wife is loved by both a fifteen-year old girl and her mother, a baroness. After fifteen years of marriage, he resolves (for the seventh time), to leave his wife, who seems to have no affection or consideration for him. As he prepares to leave, the Wife first hears that he has kissed the baroness and then sees him kiss the daughter (both innocent kisses, at least on

¹ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 114-47.

² Skrifter, VII, 350.

his part), and discovers she has become jealous of him. With this reversal, the marriage is saved, at least for the time being: one cannot help feeling that this is the couple we meet later in *Dödsdansen*!

The principal symbol in the play is that of toothache. Traditionally, teeth are the battlements of the body, the border fortress between the inner (spiritual) and outer (material) worlds; a toothache therefore symbolizes an assault on this bastion, as the material seeks to intrude on the spiritual. The loss or breaking of a tooth indicates failure of the body's defences, and consequently personal defeat. Rosa's toothache in the play is clearly associated with the awakening of sexual passion, and when the Wife breaks a tooth at the end of the play, the event is just as clearly associated with sexual defeat: her days of conquest are coming to an end: "Med smärta kom den första tanden och med sorg gick den första tanden!"³ Rosa's toothache is caused by an emerging new tooth, presumably a wisdom tooth, symbolizing the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is borne out when the Wife looks into her mouth and can see no obvious cause for a toothache: "Får jag se om det är någon karierad tand -- gapa! --

³ *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 146 (sc. vii): "With pain the first tooth came, and with sorrow the first tooth went!"

Ah sådana tänder! Pärlor, käraste barn!"⁴ Symbolically, the Wife's admiration of Rosa's teeth is also an expression of jealousy on the part of one whose sexual attractiveness is on the decline toward one who is just entering her prime.

Jealousy is the invisible bond which ties the people of the play together, similar to the love-hate relationship explored in later works; as the Baroness puts it "... min svartsjuka var det osynliga band som ännu höll mig fast vid denna gyckelbild...."⁵ The jealousy of both main characters is represented symbolically by the rejection of flowers. The Husband first rejects a bouquet sent to the Wife by another man:

HERRN (slänger ifrån sig buketten): Det är ett vackert bruk här i orten att sända blom-mor till andras fruar!⁶

Later, Rosa brings a basket of roses to be woven into garlands for the Corpus Christi procession, a task in which the Husband has agreed to help. The Wife, whose jealousy has now awoken, sarcastically sends her from the room, telling her to change her clothes in order to

⁴ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 127 (sc. ii): "Let me see if there's a decayed tooth -- open wide! -- Oh, such teeth! Like pearls, dearest child!"

⁵ Ibid., 135 (sc. iv): "... my jealousy was the unseen tie which kept me bound to that illusion...."

⁶ Ibid., 122 (sc. i):

THE HUSBAND (thrusts the bouquet away):
It's a fine custom in these parts, sending flowers to other men's wives!

see the Husband off at the train station. She adds that Rosa had best take her flowers with her: "Och ta sina blommor med sig, i fall det skulle bli frågan om blomsterkastning ..."⁷

The play is set on the day before Corpus Christi (i.e., late May to mid-June): spring is drawing into summer, just as Rosa is passing from childhood into adulthood. She is to walk in the procession, dressed in a white dress (the garment of chastity) adorned with red roses (the flowers of passion). Her name means rose: either the flower or the colour, which is a mixture of white and red (purity and sensuality).

The rose is used in another way: the contrast between its fragile, luxurious flower and its thorns makes it a symbol of life (and of love): some grasp the bud, others the thorns. The symbol (particularly as a path strewn with thorns) is used frequently by Strindberg (in *Dödsdansen I*, for example) in much the same form as here:

HERRN: ... jag är förälskad i min hustru
efter femton års äktenskap ...

FRUN: Femton år! Går du med stegräknare på
dig?

⁷ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 142 (sc. vi): "And take your flowers with you, in case there's occasion for throwing flowers ..."

HERRN: På min törnströdda stig? Nej! Men du som dansar fram på rosor borde kanske snart räkna stegen ...⁸

What is the first warning of the title? There are three: Rosa receives a first warning of the dolours of adult life; the Wife receives a first warning of her approaching physical and sexual decline; and the whole incident is perhaps a first warning to the couple of much more serious marital problems to come!

⁸ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 122-23 (sc. i):

THE HUSBAND: ... I'm in love with my wife after fifteen years of marriage ...

THE WIFE: Fifteen years! Do you go about wearing a pedometer?

THE HUSBAND (...): On my thorny path? No! But you, who dance along on roses, should perhaps soon begin counting your steps ...

Chapter 40

"Debet och kredit"

"Debet och kredit: en akt"¹ ("Debit and Credit: One Act") written at about the same time in 1892 as "Första varningen", is more an anecdote than a play. A recently created doctor (of philosophy) returns triumphantly to Stockholm after a three-year scientific expedition in Africa. He is to be honoured at the Royal Palace, but first he is visited by several people seeking favours: his brother and sister-in-law, who mortgaged their land to finance his studies, have lost everything, and ask him to find them a farm; his former mentor and colleague, who paid to have his thesis published, is now an alcoholic and seeks money; the former lover of his new fiancée seeks to get her back; she demands that he forsake the palace dinner in order to take her out; and his own former fiancée arrives to compound the confusion. Then a series of disasters is announced: newspaper articles attacking him and his work have appeared; both his present and his former fiancées have been prostitutes; and he is reminded that he stood security for his brother's defaulted mortgage. His rise to fame is about to become an abrupt fall to ignominy. He takes the only way out: he disappears out

¹ *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 73-114.

the back door! Well, almost the only way out: it is briefly thought that he has taken poison.

The debit and credit symbolism of the title figures in other plays written about the same time (notably *Fordringsägare* and "*Bandet*": "*The Bond*"), and recurs frequently in Strindberg's work. It gets its strongest and most concise statement in a remark of the hero, Axel, to his old friend and colleague, Lindgren:

Man ska icke göra bokslut med sina vänner,
eller personer med vilka man levat intimt, ty
man vet icke vem som har de flesta siffrorna
på debet!²

The play is an examination of this maxim.

Another recurring symbol which is also particularly exploited in plays of the same period (*Fröken Julie*, "*Bandet*") is that of rising and falling, or the mediaeval Wheel of Fortune symbol. Axel rises at the expense of others, and those same people benefit from his fall: "Den ena varder upptagen, den andra varder kvarlåten!"³ This symbol too receives its strongest statement in Axel's interchange with Lindgren when, with great insight, he points out: "... du i denna stund icke så mycket önskar dig opp till mig, utan mig

² Samlade verk, XXXIII, 94 (sc. iv):

You should never close accounts with your friends, or with people with whom you've lived intimately, for you never know who has the more figures in the debit column!

³ Ibid., 91 (sc. iv): "When one is taken up, the other is left behind!"

ner till dig!"⁴ Finally, when all the tables are turned, Axel again uses rising and falling symbolism to explain his flight: "... om vi stanna blir jag så neddragen att jag aldrig kommer upp mer!"⁵

Associated with this symbolism is that involving animals: the man who has risen to the top is seen as a beast of prey, who has survived at the expense of the lambs who remain below. Axel exults in Lindgren's metaphor, and taunts him for not having risen (in the evolutionary scale) to the same level:

LINDGREN: Rovdjur!

AXEL: Gnagare, som inte kunde höja dig till rovdjur! -- som du så gärna önskade.⁶

Lindgren is therefore both surprised and amused when Axel later runs away from his problems instead of staying behind to face them: "Jaså du var intet rovdjur, min kära Axel!"⁷

⁴ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 95 (sc. iv): "... at this moment you don't so much wish yourself up at my level, as me down at yours!"

⁵ Ibid., 105 (sc. viii): "... if we stay I'll be dragged down so far I'll never rise again!"

⁶ Ibid., 95 (sc. iv):

LINDGREN: Predator!

AXEL: Rodent, who couldn't lift yourself high enough to become a beast of prey! -- as you so earnestly wished.

⁷ Ibid., 113 (sc. xiii): "So you were no beast of prey after all, my dear Axel!"

The symbol of the lamb for those trodden on by the successful man is introduced by the (former) Fiancé, who makes his plea to Axel in the form of a fable:

Två män voro uti samma stad, den ene rik, den andre fattig. Den rike hade får och kreatur i stor myckenhet; och den fattige ägde alls intet utom ett litet lamm ...

....
... ett litet lamm, som han köpt och som han uppfödde ...

....
Det var mitt enda lamm som jag fruktade att ni skulle ta ifrån mig, men det vill ni inte, ni som har så många ...⁸

This symbol is connected in turn with the symbolism of sacrifice, which is central to the play. The first three scenes present the sacrifices made by Axel's brother and his family for the sake of his advancement, and his ingratitude to them. In the fourth scene Lindgren also represents himself as a sacrifice to Axel's career: "Jag erinrar endast, att jag är ett av dina offer!"⁹ When the Fiancé's plea is rejected, he

⁸ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 98, 100 (sc. vi):

There were two men from the same city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had sheep and cattle in great abundance; and the poor one owned nothing at all except a little lamb ...

....
... a little lamb, which he had bought and had raised ...

....
It was my only lamb, and I was afraid you'd take it away from me, but you won't do that, you who have so many ...

⁹ Ibid., 91: "I remember only that I'm one of your sacrifices!"

appends this maxim to his fable: "... vi småfolk äro gjorda att offras opp!"¹⁰ Axel's former fiancée, Mari, sees herself as a sacrifice (at least temporarily) to Cecilia, the new fiancée: "Då är jag ert offer -- tills vidare!"¹¹ Ironically, however, the biggest sacrifice of all is made by Axel, as he allows his career to be destroyed to satisfy the claims of his creditors.

The other symbol which merits attention is cannibalism, particularly associated elsewhere in Strindberg's works with marriage. Here, Axel uses it to defend his actions to Lindgren:

Jag kan ... gratuleras att du icke åt upp mig, och jag kan ursäktas att jag åt dig, då jag icke hade annat val än ätas eller äta!¹²

¹⁰ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 101 (sc. vi): "... we little people were created to be sacrificed!"

¹¹ Ibid., 106 (sc. ix): "Then I'm your sacrifice -- for the time being!"

¹² Ibid., 95 (sc. iv):

I can be congratulated ... that you didn't eat me up, and I can be forgiven for eating you, since I had no choice but to eat or be eaten!

Chapter 41

"Inför döden"

The third of the 1892 one-acters, "Inför döden: sorgespel i nio scener"¹ ("In the Face of Death: Tragedy in Nine Scenes"), is a chamber play before its time: the father who commits suicide in order that his daughters might be provided for by the insurance money is a direct ancestor of the father in *Pelikanen* (*The Pelican*, 1907), in that he willingly and silently bears the blame for his wife's shortcomings while alone caring for and nourishing his family; the fire in which he dies is not unlike that in which the two children die in the later play.

The theme of the play is ingratitude. Durand, like Lear, has three ungrateful daughters (there is no Cordelia, however: the joy of his life, a son, has been dead for several years), who plague him with two lies instigated by their mother: that he deserted from the army, and that he frittered away the family resources, reducing them to poverty. He nevertheless continues to have a keen sense of his moral and financial responsibility towards them, and preserves their idealized memories of their mother as long as he can. Finally, he

¹ *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 149-80.

meets his obligations and finds peace in the same act: self-immolation.

Durand is a Christ-figure, suffering and dying for the sins of others (the mother) in order that they (the daughters) might live. The symbol is ironic, however: the "salvation" Durand obtains for his daughters is material, not spiritual, and it is he himself who is delivered from Hell (his home). Nevertheless, the identification is clearly made, particularly in terms of bearing the sins of others. Speaking of his wife not long before his own death, Durand says:

Jag hade varit hennes korsdragare ett helt äkta samliv; bar alla hennes fel på min rygg, tog alla följderna av hennes misstag på mig, tills jag slutligen trodde mig vara den skyldige. "Skyll på mig", brukade jag säga.... Och hon skyllde! Och jag bar!²

He seems, then, to have chosen his own fate, for he could have freed himself from his burden of guilt and suffering at any time, by exposing her for what she was -- a liar and a spendthrift, among other things -- yet he refuses to do so until it is too late. But it is not that simple: the wife, a Strindbergian vampire, had, and continues to have, an indomitable power over

² Samlade verk, XXXIII, 178 (sc. ix):

I'd borne her cross all our married life; bore all her faults on my back, took all the consequences of her mistakes on myself, until finally I believed myself the guilty one. "Blame me," I used to say.... And she blamed! And I bore it!

him. He refers throughout the play to her continued presence in the house: a malevolent spirit that brooks no contradiction. The most succinct expression of this symbol (the ghost) is in his explanation of why he has never shown the daughters her portrait:

... aldrig ett ont ord om deras mor! Hennes porträtt ligger också i chiffonjén -- det fick ni aldrig veta, emedan jag fann det nog med hennes osynliga ande som gick igen i hemmet!³

Under the power of this evil spirit, and plagued by the lies she has told about him, Durand sees himself as cursed:

Då ljög din mor på dödsbädden, som hon gjorde i hela sitt liv ... Och det är den förbannelsen som följt mig likt ett spöke!⁴

The curse is that under which so many Strindberg heroes suffer: the curse of Deuteronomy. This is established in the briefest of references, as Durand babbles to

³ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 179 (sc. ix):

... never say a bad word about their mother! Her portrait is in the writing-desk also; I never let you know about it, as I found it enough that her unseen spirit haunted our home!

⁴ Ibid., 178 (sc. ix):

Then your mother lied from her deathbed, as she had done all her life ... And that's the curse which has followed me like a ghost!

himself: "På ont och gott, på stort och smått, Och där du sått, få andra skörda."⁵

Another characteristic Durand shares with other Strindberg heroes is difficulty in breathing: the world and its problems stifle him. Again, the reference is very brief: "Mitt bröst är så dåligt de sista dagarne att jag inte kan gå uppför den branta backen."⁶

Similarly, as in "Paria" and "Oväder", a crisis is signalled by bad weather:

DURAND: Gå nu, så skall jag möta stormen som vanligt!

ADELE: Som vanligt! Hm!⁷

Durand's usual way of meeting storms is to sacrifice himself. But since his sacrifices have always been secret, Adèle thinks that his usual method of dealing with storms is to do nothing!

To aid him in his plan he has a wind, the Föhn: a warm dry south wind which blows down the valleys on the north side of the Alps, usually in spring or early summer (perhaps the Swiss equivalent of the simoom). This

⁵ *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 176 (sc. ix): "In evil and in good, in great things and in small; and where you have sown shall others reap." The words gott (good), smått (small), and sått (sown) rhyme.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 155 (sc. i): "My chest has been so bad these past few days, I can't walk up the steep hill."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 159 (sc. ii):

DURAND: Go now, and I'll meet the storm as usual!

ADELE: As usual! Hmm!

wind fans the flames that destroy Durand and his house, just as the simoom brings about both Guimard's destruction and his deliverance in "Samum", and just as the winds which embody the dead father fan the flames which destroy the two children in Pelikanen. Durand almost wills the Föhn into existence; it is so much a part of his plan that it can be seen as a symbol of his will to self-immolation: his spirit fanning the flames that destroy the house inhabited by the mother's ghost.

The ghost of the mother is present not only as an unseen spirit, but also in the tangible form of a rat (or mouse: Swedish does not always distinguish) which manages to elude both a baited trap and the family cat. The rat, traditional symbol of evil, destruction, and death, is an apt symbol for the mother, who has brought ruin on the family, destroyed her husband's reputation, and is about to cause his sacrificial death. Jung associates the rat with the archetype of the Terrible Mother (Chetwynd, 26). The ineffective cat, whose sole practical purpose as a domestic animal is the capture of vermin, is a perfect symbol of the three daughters: like the cat, they do nothing to earn their keep, but are content to laze around looking decorative and still feel entitled to the cream from the top of the bottle. Thérèse, the youngest (and laziest), comes very close to the truth in the following exchange with the young lieutenant who is wooing her:

THERESE: -- Har du sett till Mimmi då?

ANTONIO: Kattfan? Den brukar då synas här i tid och otid! Men i dag har jag verkligen varit skonad!

THERESE: Du skall tala vackert om de frånvarande, och kom ihåg att den som älskar mig älskar min katt!⁸

On another level, the animals emphasize the ingratitude of Durand's daughters: they more willingly provide food for the rat and the cat than for their father, who is reduced to eating the cheese off the rat trap and drinking the cat's milk.

"Inför döden" presents the Strindbergian father-martyr, the male partner in the love-hate relationship of marriage; his mate is the mother-vampire, who is fully drawn in the next of the "cynical life" plays, "Moderkärlek".

⁸ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 162-63 (sc. iv):

THERESE: -- But have you seem Mimi?

ANTONIO: The damned cat? Usually it's around here day in and day out! But today I've really been spared!

THERESE: You should speak nicely of those who aren't present, and remember: love me, love my cat!

Chapter 42

"Moderkärlek"

If a mother-complex in a woman does not produce an overdeveloped Eros, it leads to identification with the mother and to paralysis of the daughter's feminine initiative. A complete projection of her personality on to the mother then takes place.... Everything which reminds her of motherhood, responsibility, personal relationships, and erotic demands arouses feelings of inferiority and compels her to run away -- to her mother, naturally, who lives to perfection everything that seems unattainable to her daughter. ... the mother lives out for her beforehand all that the girl might have lived for herself. She is content to cling to the mother in selfless devotion, while at the same time unconsciously striving, almost against her will, to tyrannize over her.... The daughter leads a shadow-existence, often visibly sucked dry by her mother, and she prolongs her mother's life by a sort of continuous blood transfusion. (Jung, *Four Archetypes*, 23)

C.G. Jung wrote this description of a female mother-complex in 1934. Forty-two years earlier, everything it contains had been anticipated in Strindberg's "Moderkärlek: en akt"¹ ("Mother Love: One Act", 1892): Jung's description exactly fits Hélène, the twenty-year old actress, and her mother. Also remarkable is the use of the vampire symbol by both authors.

The Mother in "Moderkärlek" was once a prostitute, and seeks not only life from her daughter, but respect-

¹ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 181-210.

ability as well. The situation is the reverse of that in "Inför döden", where the mother has died and the children have been raised by the father; here, as in *Pelikanen*, the father is absent, and the mother has no opponent. It is typical of Strindberg that in all three plays the father is the innocent victim!

The play opens at a moment of crisis: Hélène has met her half-sister, has begun to suspect something of her mother's past, is invited to meet her father, learns that a young man is in love with her, and discovers the truth about how the family has survived (not, as she has been told, on the earnings of her Aunt Augusta, a theatre dresser, but on money provided by her father for her education). If she is ever to break away from her mother's spell, now is the time! Unfortunately, she proves not strong enough to do it.

The whole situation -- Hélène's domination by her mother, her desire to break away, and her failure to do so -- can be seen in miniature in the card games at the beginning and end of the play. At the beginning, the Mother and the Dresser invite Hélène to join them in a game of cards, but she begs off, saying that the day is too beautiful. The older women do not seem to mind, but when Hélène asks permission to go swimming, the Mother's technique of controlling her through guilt is revealed:

... när man icke vill glädja sina närmaste
med att deltaga i deras enkla nöjen, så före-

faller det minst sagt sårande att man kommer
och ber få roa sig i andras sällskap!²

At the end of the play, having missed her chance at freedom, Hélène signals that she is now resigned to the life of a shadow by showing a willingness to resume the game of cards:

Kom nu och låt oss spela kort! Jag kan ju inte ta ner murarne som ni behövt så många år att bygga! -- Kom! (Hon sätter sig vid bordet och börjar blanda korten.)³

The play is set in the Stockholm archipelago on the last day of summer. In cyclical symbolism, summer corresponds to the bride-groom relationship: the mother-child relationship of spring should give way to love between man and woman. Hélène, however, has prolonged the spring (mother-child) cycle of her life throughout the summer, and the fact that summer is now at an end indicates that her time to break free and live her own life is now also at an end; the next cycle

² Samlade verk, XXXIII, 188 (sc. i):

... when you don't want to please your nearest and dearest by sharing in their simple pleasures, it seems insulting, to say the least, that you should come and ask permission to amuse yourself in the company of others!

³ Ibid., 210 (sc. vi):

Come now, let's play cards! I don't think I can tear down the walls it has taken you so many years to build! -- Come on! (She sits down at the table and begins to shuffle the cards.)

is autumn and old age: she will die without ever really having lived.

Hélène exhibits two characteristics common to Strindberg victims: she feels herself in prison, and she has difficulty in breathing:

Tänk dig hur det skall kännas för mig, some
levat upp i en håla, där luften är unken ...
och där min själ varit bevakad som en straff-
fånge -- -- -- 4

The crisis in her life is triggered by a chance meeting with her half-sister, Lisen, who is two years younger, but is full of life and wisdom. She tries to get Hélène to meet others on her own: her father, who loves her selflessly; a theatre director who might help her career; and a young man who has fallen in love with her. She is trying, in other words, to save Hélène from the stifling love of her Mother, and from the lies and deceptions foisted on her by the Mother and Dresser: "Om du visste hur full världen är av lögner och inbillningar! Och misstag, och missförstånd!"⁵

Since Lisen's mission is redemptive, it is appropriate that she should be clad in white (she is going to play tennis). Indeed, her personality and her white

⁴ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 193 (sc. iii):

Imagine how I feel, who have lived up in a cave, where the air is dank ... and where my soul has been watched like a convict -- -- --

⁵ Ibid., 200 (sc. iii): "If only you knew how full the world is of lies and deceptions! And mistakes and misunderstandings!"

clothing suggest to Hélène that she is nothing less than an angel: "Du kom så ljus, så vit som en ängel i min väg...."⁶ But Lisen is more than an angel: she represents what Hélène could become were she to free herself from her mother: a self-possessed young woman, loving and loved, with a sense of responsibility towards others and the ability to face life squarely. Having the same father, the two girls resemble each other physically, and the very resemblance points out the difference between Hélène (as she is) and Lisen (Hélène as she could become). Hélène uses a botanical simile to point out the resemblance: "Jag lär likna dig något, som en blåsippa liknar en anemon...."⁷ The liverwort (or hepatica) and the white anemone are members of the same family, but the red-blue flowers of the one contrast strongly to the pure white blooms of the other. Of course a liverwort can never become a white anemone; Hélène's simile seems to indicate that she knows her own evolution is just as impossible.

Although the Mother views Lisen as a devil rather than an angel, Hélène continues to view her as a higher being and, an inhabitant of the dark and dank, expresses her fear of making a break for freedom in

⁶ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 199 (sc. iii): "You came like an angel into my life: so bright, so white...."

⁷ Idem.: "They say I resemble you somewhat, as a liverwort resembles an anemone...."

terms of the rising and falling symbolism of Fröken Julie: "Du kan aldrig lyfta mig, men jag kan draga ner dig, och det vill jag inte!"⁸

The cynicism of the plays "from the cynical life" is perhaps strongest in "Moderkärlek": Hélène lets the call to freedom go unanswered and is no doubt condemned to become a dried-up and bitter old maid. The Mother's curtain line, as Hélène shuffles the cards, serves only to rub it in: "Nå, se det var då äntligen en förständig flicka!"⁹

⁸ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 199 (sc. iii): "You can never lift me up, but I can pull you down, and I don't want to do that!"

⁹ Ibid., 210 (sc. vi): "Well, see what a considerate girl she is, after all!"

Chapter 43

"Leka med elden"

"Leka med elden: komedi i en akt"¹ ("Playing with Fire: Comedy in One Act") belongs to the group of one-act plays Strindberg wrote in 1892 and to which he gave the collective title "Ur det cyniska livet". It is perhaps his most successful comedy: despite serious undertones, it is one of the few Strindberg plays which, if well acted, can provide audiences with laughter all the way through.

The play concerns a family on holiday in the Stockholm archipelago: an old couple, their son, his wife, and an attractive young female cousin. They are visited by a friend, and the fireworks begin. The Friend, who is presented as a sophisticated young man-about-town, finds himself physically attracted to the Daughter-in-Law, who quickly becomes infatuated with him. When they reveal the state of their feelings to the Son, he is not in the least fazed (he is in love with the Cousin, at any rate), and agrees to give the Daughter-in-Law her freedom if the Friend will promise to marry her. Now love is one thing but marriage quite another, and the Friend wants nothing to do with the latter; like the young doctor in "Debet och kredit", he

¹ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 211-73.

decides to save his skin by fleeing the field of battle, taking off "som om han haft eld i bakfickorna"!² All this happens on one sweltering morning: after the departure of the unheroic romantic, the five members of the household calmly sit down to lunch, as if nothing at all out of the ordinary has happened!

The play's dominant symbol is the fire referred to in the title: the earthly fire of sexual passion. Once the spark is ignited in one of the young people, it quickly spreads, and indeed is in danger of consuming them all, until the Son extinguishes it with a good dousing of cold water (his insistence on marriage): "Känslor ha den egenskap att meddelas, och eld sprider sig."³ The high level of erotic tension is reflected and emphasized by the sweltering, suffocating weather (making it difficult for the characters to breathe: they are so caught up in the sexual atmosphere, they are in danger of losing their own individualities). Indeed, the only person who seems unaffected by the heat is the Friend, who, in fact, is cold and has to borrow the Daughter-in-Law's shawl to keep warm; this prepares us for his "cold feet" at the close of the play -- or perhaps the cold clear light of reason --

² Samlade verk, XXXIII, 272 (sc. xx): "... as if his back pockets were on fire."

³ Ibid., 238 (sc. vii): "Feelings have the ability to communicate themselves, and fire spreads."

and his wearing of the shawl foreshadows what he might become should he not take the course of action he does: Hercules, in woman's clothing, at the feet of Omphale!

The Friend recalls a previous meeting with the Daughter-in-Law, in which she appeared dressed in yellow: the colour of the sun. She is the source of the all-enveloping heat!

... [ni] inträdde ... i salen iförd en penséfärgad kjol, med ljust blommigt liv; ni hade en med gult linong överklädd schäferhatt som kastade ner ett solsken av guld över er hela gestalt.⁴

In contrast, the Friend's own blue tie (a copy of which the Daughter-in-Law tries to persuade the Son to wear) is perhaps another token of the cooling of his passions or cool, level-headed reason, which eventually allows him to see the danger of the over-heated situation.

There are many other indications that this fire will not be allowed to rage uncontrolled, for the setting in which it is ignited is surrounded by water, and the play is full of references to water, swimming, bathing, watering plants, etc. The aspects of water most emphasized are its cleansing and especially its cooling properties: water, the source of wisdom (in

⁴ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 262 (sc. xv):

... you entered the room in a pansy-coloured skirt with a bright flowered bodice; you were wearing an Alsatian hat covered in yellow linen, which threw golden sunshine down over your entire form.

baptism, the old man dies in order that the new, spiritual, man might be born), is the antithesis of the raging fire of the passions. Thus, the Father's sense of foreboding when he learns that his daughter-in-law has not been for her morning swim:

FADREN: Ämnar du inte bada före frukosten?

SONHUSTRUN: Nej! Inte i dag!

FADREN: Det är orätt av dig att försumma baden då din hälsa är så klen.⁵

After the Friend has run off in a panic, the family sits down to their meal of fish from the sea, the source and destiny of all life: life goes on!

"Leka med elden" is a sophisticated and highly amusing comedy, but it is not a farce. The serious current which underlies its sparkling surface is an atmosphere of moral decay. That decay indeed gives rise to the comic situation, but on the surface of the play it is neither condemned nor condoned. On the level of symbols, however, the moral corruption is seen for what it is; as in *Dödsdansen I*, there is a corpse mouldering beneath the floorboards, and the all-pervasive heat makes its presence especially repugnant. It is the Friend who draws attention to this, as he begins to

⁵ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 266 (sc. xvi):

THE FATHER: Don't you intend to go for a swim before breakfast?

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW: No! Not today!

THE FATHER: It's not wise for you to forego bathing, since your health is so delicate.

suspect that his flirtation with the Daughter-in-Law can open up a particularly nasty can of worms:

Det är så mycket här i huset som oroar mig i år! Vet ni vad? Det är bestämt något som ruttnar här under trossbottnarne!⁶

At first the Daughter-in-Law does not notice this, or pretends not to, but later she throws it back at the Friend:

VÄNNEN: Och jag tycker mig finna att all denna lukt av ruttet som jag märkte här i huset kommer från er!

SONHUSTRUN: Eller från er! -- Det var ni som förförde mig med era blygsamma blickar, med er spelade köld, med era brutaliteter som retade upp mig likt en piska!⁷

The hint of perverse sexuality is not surprising in the hothouse, childish atmosphere of the play. For these characters are children playing at games, albeit savage and dangerous ones:

SONHUSTRUN: Det är bara lek....

⁶ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 249 (sc. ix):

There's so much in this house that unsettles me this year! Do you know what? There's definitely something rotting under the floorboards!

⁷ Ibid., 270-71 (sc. xix):

THE FRIEND: And it seems to me that all that smell of rotting which I noticed in this house comes from you!

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW: Or from you! It was you who seduced me with your modest glances, with your pretended coldness, with your brutalities, which inflamed me like a whip!

knivar och dynamitpatroner! Jag tycker det är
hemskt.⁸

Strindberg wrote two variants of the ending of the play,⁹ both attempts to provide a motivation for the Friend's departure. In one, which the author cancelled in manuscript, the Cousin informs him (falsely) that the Daughter-in-Law is two months pregnant; in the other, which was used at the first performance of the play (Berlin, 1893), he opens a letter he had received earlier and learns that his wife will not grant him a divorce, and he and the Daughter-in-Law part as friends after their romantic interlude. Neither variant appeared in the first Swedish printing of the play (1897), and it is better off without them: the Friend's realization that if romantic dalliance is a game, it is a very dangerous game indeed, is motivation enough for his hasty retreat!

⁸ *Samlade verk*, XXXIII, 249 (sc. ix):

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW: It's only a
game....

THE FRIEND: Yes. It's played with matches,
hunting knives, and sticks of dynamite. I
think it's horrible.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 369-79.

Chapter 44

"Bandet"

The sixth and last of the plays "Ur det cyniska livet" was "Bandet: sorgespel i en akt"¹ ("The Bond: Tragedy in One Act"). Written in 1892 (i.e., the year following Strindberg's divorce from Siri von Essen), it deals with a divorce (ironically, it was first published in 1897, the year of Strindberg's divorce from Frida Uhl). It is a powerful play, presenting a naturalistic account of the courtroom proceedings during a divorce trial between a Baron and a Baroness. They have agreed to be civilized about the matter and not expose their private lives to the prying eyes of the public, but when the question of custody of the child arises, raw animal emotion erupts into the court-room. The tragedy occurs when the child is awarded to neither of them, but made a ward of the court.

The bond of the title is at the same time the love which once drew the couple together and united their destinies; the marriage contract which bound them together; and the child, who kept the marriage together long after the bond of love had disintegrated, and whose fate, at the play's end, once again draws them together in shared sorrow and a sense of futility.

¹ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 275-326.

There is perhaps yet a fourth significance to the title, for marriage itself is seen as a kind of bondage in which, according to the Constable, the husband is enslaved to the wife:

Och så får jag långa historier om ... att hon inte har lust att vara min piga, fastän jag egentligen är hennes dräng.²

The Constable, one suspects, has been reading Strindberg!

There is a great deal in the play about the reversal of sexual rôles and stereotypes. In Strindberg, this can lead only to disaster, as the sexual ambiguity in *Kamraterna*, the Omphale symbolism of *Fadren*, and the reversal of sexual rôles in *Fröken Julie* (*Fröken Julie* was raised as if she were a boy) have all demonstrated. In "Bandet", it is the threat of this kind of sexual reversal that leads to the tragedy: the Baron cannot consent to allowing the Baroness to raise the child because of her unorthodox ideas in this area:

... [hon] har ... velat utbilda gossen till kvinna i stället för till man; sålunda lät hon honom gå i flickkläder tills han var fyra år; och än i dag vid åtta års ålder går han med långt hår som en flicka, tvingas att sy och virka, samt leker med dockor, vilket allt jag anser skadligt för barnets normala utveckling till man. Under det att hon å andra sidan roade sig med att kläda folkets döttrar som gossar, klippa håret av dem och

² Samlade verk, XXXIII, 282 (sc. i):

And then I get long stories about ... how she has no desire to be my maid, while actually I'm her hired hand.

sätta dem till sådant arbete som gossar pläga sköta.³

Indeed, the sexual ambiguity carries over to the Baroness herself, as revealed in an exchange while the couple awaits the court's deliberations:

BARONEN: Uppriktigt sagt tror jag det mera är min vanära än det är dig jag hatar, ehuru jag nog gör det också. Och varför detta hiskliga hat? Kanske jag glömt att du nalkas dina fyrtio år, och att det börjar gro en man hos dig. Kanske det är denna man som jag märkt i dina kyssar, i dina omfamningar, och som är mig så vedervärdig!

FRIHERRINNAN: Kanske det! Ty mitt livs stora sorg var, som du icke vet, att jag ej blev född till man.

BARONEN: Kanske det blev mitt livs sorg! Och nu hämnas du på naturens lek och vill uppfostra din son till kvinna!⁴

³ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 299 (sc. ix):

... she wanted to turn the boy into a woman instead of a man, and so let him go about in girls' clothing until he was four; and even today, when he is eight, he goes about with long hair like a girl, is forced to sew and do needlework, and plays with dolls: all of which I regard as harmful to the child's normal development into a man. On the other hand, she amused herself by dressing the farmers' daughters as boys, cutting their hair short, and setting them to the kind of work boys usually tend to.

⁴ Ibid., 317 (sc. xiii):

THE BARON: To tell you the truth, I think it's more my own dishonour than you I hate, although I also do that, well enough. And why this awful hate? Perhaps I forgot that you're almost forty, and that a man is beginning to take shape within your body. Perhaps that's the man I sensed in your kisses, in your embraces, and who is so repulsive to me.

THE BARONESS: Perhaps you're right! For the great tragedy of my life was -- something you don't know -- that I wasn't born a man.

THE BARON: Perhaps it became the tragedy of my life! And now you revenge yourself on the

The Baron and Baroness are judged, and both are found guilty. Furthermore, they have made spectacles of themselves, exposing the sordid details of their lives before a scandal-loving public. They are left without protection and without dignity, and, like Adam and Eve, they are aware of their nakedness and feel ashamed:

FRIHERRINNAN: Tänk vad de ska njuta alla dessa som nu se baron och friherrinnan avklädda, spöande varandra -- Åh! -- Jag tycker jag står naken här. (Hon knäpper igen sin kappa.)⁵

What has exposed their nakedness is the mill of justice, which grinds slowly but exceedingly fine: "Det är som om vi blivit indragna i kvarnverket och fått kläderna mellan hjulen!"⁶

As with any Strindberg play dealing with strife and marriage, there is animal symbolism, reflecting the raw emotions exposed during the conflict: "Vi ha rivit

—
whim of nature and want to raise your son as a woman!

⁵ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 307-08 (sc. x):

THE BARONESS: Imagine how they'll enjoy themselves, all these people who now see the baron and the baroness stripped, whipping each other -- Oh! -- I feel as if I were standing here naked. (She buttons up her coat.)

⁶ Ibid., 307 (sc. x): "It's as if we'd been drawn into the mill works and got our clothes caught between the wheels!"

varandra blodiga som vilda djur...."⁷ The debit and credit symbolism of guilt and punishment also occurs briefly, in the words of the Judge: "Vi kvitta inte brott mot brott! utan vars och ens räkning uppgöres särskilt."⁸ Finally, as Ollén (228) points out, there is a hint of the world view ("Det är synd om människor": "Mankind is to be pitied") that becomes fully realized in *Ett drömspel*, in the Baron's remark of compassion (in its literal sense: i.e., shared suffering): "Det är synd om oss båda!"⁹

⁷ Samlade verk, XXXIII, 306 (sc. x): "We have clawed each other bloody, like wild beasts...."

⁸ Ibid., 313 (sc. xii): "We don't write off one crime against another! but each and every person must settle his account separately!"

⁹ Ibid., 325 (sc. xvi): "We are both to be pitied!"

Chapter 45

Hortus Merlini

Hortus Merlini was the collective name given to Strindberg's two major alchemical works, *Antibarbarus*¹ (written 1893, revised and expanded 1905) and *Jardin des Plantes*² (1896) when they were published (in French) in the journal *l'Hyperchimie* 1896-97. It is a convenient title under which to discuss Strindberg's alchemical studies of the 1890s, which included, as well as the these two works, *Introduction à une chimie unitaire* (Introduction to a Unitary Chemistry, 1895); *Nutidens guldmakeri* (Modern Alchemy, 1896); *Guldets syntes* (The Synthesis of Gold, 1896); a series of articles which appeared in the mystical and alchemical journals *l'Initiation* and *l'Hyperchimie* (1896-98); and *Typer och prototyper inom mineralkemien* (Types and Prototypes in Inorganic Chemistry, 1898). Indeed, there is evidence that at one time Strindberg contemplated amalgamating and expanding these writings into a comprehensive work which would set forth and illustrate his view of the cosmos: two letters to Gustaf av Geijerstam written from Paris in December 1897, the second of which (December 23) reads in part:

¹ *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 115-203.

² *Ibid.*, 205-99. The French and German versions of *Jardin des Plantes* were given the title *Sylva sylvarum*.

Att skriva pjäser och romaner kan jag ej, har förlorat intresset och därför förmågan. Har endast en bok oskriven och det är min ockulta Naturfilosofi.³

As this passage also indicates, the alchemical and mystical writings are closely connected to the Inferno crisis. For years Strindberg had been having serious doubts about his career as an author: he never doubted his ability, but he increasingly felt that his dramatic and other literary works did not contribute to society, to improving the lot of his fellow man. He wanted to be "nyttig" (useful). In the 1880s this resulted in a flurry of non-fiction works of cultural history, and the contributions to the social, political, and literary debates of his time which make up *Likt och olikt*. A decade later, this feeling of uselessness combined with problems in his personal life (divorce from Siri von Essen in 1891; separation from Frida Uhl -- whom he had married in 1893 -- in 1894, with divorce in 1897; and the mental, emotional, and spiritual collapse known as the Inferno crisis, 1894-96), leading him away from literature and the theatre altogether, and causing him to seek a reputation as a scientist. Strindberg tells the story himself in the preface ("Inledning") to *Jar-*

³ *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 640:

I cannot write plays and novels: have lost the interest and therefore the ability. I have only one book left to write, and that is my occult Natural Philosophy.

din des Plantes; he uses the pilgrimage symbol which shapes his first play after the Inferno crisis (Till Damaskus I, 1898):

Kommen till mitten av min levnads väg satte jag mig ned att vila och eftertänka. Allt jag hittills drisigt drömt och eftertänkt hade jag nått. Mätt på skam och ära, njutning och lidande, frågade jag mig: vad skall nu komma?

Allt upprepades med dödande enformighet, allt var sig likt, allt gick igen. De gamla hade sagt: Universum har inga hemligheter; vi ha tytt alla gåtor, vi ha löst alla problem.
....

....
En generation, som haft mod at avskaffa Gud, att krossa stat och kyrka, samhälle och seder, böjde sig ännu för vetenskapen. Och i vetenskapen, där friheten borde härska, gällde lösen: tro på auktoriteten eller dö! Ingen Bastillepelare hade ännu rests på det gamla Sorbonnes plats, och korset behärskade ännu Panthéon och Institutets kupol.

Det fanns sålunda intet vidare att göra i denna värld, och kännande mig onyttig, beslöt jag att försvinna.⁴

⁴ Samlade skrifter, XXVII, 207-08:

Having arrived at the middle of the road of my life, I sat down to rest and reflect. Everything of which I had boldly dreamed and to which I had aspired so far, I had attained. Sated with shame and honour, pleasure and suffering, I asked myself: "What now?"

Everything repeated itself with deadening monotony, everything resembled everything else, everything happened again. The ancients had said: "The universe has no secrets; we have interpreted all riddles, we have solved all problems.

....
A generation which had had the courage to do away with God, to demolish state and church, society and morality, still bowed down before science. And in science, where freedom should have reigned, the watchword was: believe in authority or die! No Place de la Bastille had yet been laid out in the

"Allt går igen" (everything happens again) was to become the underlying principle of Strindberg's great cycle of Swedish history plays (begun in 1899 with *Folkungasagan*), after the crisis had passed.

The words are written in retrospect: it was the atheist who had been struck by the incongruity of the cross atop the Panthéon (cf. the previous occurrence of this symbol in the opening pages of *Bland franska bönder*,⁵ 1889). When Strindberg writes *Jardin des Plantes*, however, he is in the midst of the Inferno crisis, and his atheism is being replaced by religious faith; in a letter⁶ to the eventual French publisher of the work, he indicates that he planned a much larger work: beginning with the points of origin of inorganic and organic matter -- volcanoes, the sea, and the air -- he intended to progress through an examination of mineral, plant, animal, and human life, to a revelation of God: "Om jag slutligen träffar Gud, kanske ni som panteist

—

still surmounted the domes of the Panthéon and the Institute [i.e., l'Institut Pasteur, founded 1888].

And so there was nothing left to do in this world and, feeling myself to be useless, I decided to disappear.

⁵ *Samlade verk*, XXIII, 12.

⁶ Paris, 1895. Quoted in *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 634-35.

ej vill vara med längre, men det må vi se då."⁷ This grand scheme was never realized in the alchemical writings themselves, which are more in the nature of notes for the work he mentioned to Gustaf av Geijerstam.

We left Strindberg at the crossroads of his life. His decision is to end that life, and he sets about this by preparing a compound of cyanide. As he goes on to relate, he decides not to take that road, however, but to proceed instead along the path of science:

Jag avbröt experimentet, när lukten av bittermandel började frigöra sig; utan att veta varför, tyckte jag mig se ett blommande mandelträd i en trädgårdsgång och jag hörde en gammal kvinnoröst som sade: Nej, barn, tro ej därpå!

Och jag har inte längre trott att Universums hemlighet var avslöjad, och jag har gått, än ensam, än i sällskap, att tänka över den stora ordningen, i vilken jag likväl slutligen upptäckte ett oändligt sammanhang.

Denna bok handlar om den stora ordningen och om det oändliga sammanhanget.

Se här mitt Universum, sådant jag skapat det, sådant det uppenbarat sig för mig.

Pilgrim, som vandrar förbi, om du vill följa mig, skall du andas friare, ty i mitt Universum härskar ordningen, och det är friheten.⁸

⁷ Samlade skrifter, XXVII, 635: "If finally I encounter God, perhaps you, as a pantheist, will not want to accompany me, but we'll see."

⁸ Ibid., 208-09:

I broke off the experiment when the smell of bitter almonds began to be released; without knowing why, I imagined I saw a flowering almond tree in a garden path, and I heard the voice of an old woman, who said: "No, child, do not put your faith in that!"

And I have no longer believed that the secrets of the Universe have been revealed, and I have gone on, now alone, now in com-

The old woman whose voice he hears is perhaps his mother, who died when he was thirteen. One is reminded of the White Lady in Advent, who, though dead, continues to watch over her children, and of the woman's voice in the Dark Forest scene of *Stora landsvägen*. The pilgrim as an emblem of the quester after truth, and difficulty in breathing as a sign of psychological pressures (with its converse: ease of breathing as a sign of relief of those pressures) become increasingly important in Strindberg's works, culminating also in *Stora landsvägen*.

The road Strindberg chooses is not one along which many will choose to follow. The works which describe his progress are dull, tedious, often incomprehensible, at times little more than strings of chemical formulae connected with scant (and equally baffling) commentary. As the above passages have indicated, Strindberg begins his quest by rejecting as untrue all scientific theories (except the Theory of Evolution) and systems, and goes on to approach science from the point of view of the alchemical doctrine of monism: that all matter,

nevertheless I finally discovered an infinite coherence.

This book is about the great disorder and the infinite coherence.

Behold my Universe, such as I created it, such as it revealed itself to me.

Pilgrim wandering by, if you follow me you will breathe more freely, for in my Universe disorder rules, and that is freedom.

inorganic and organic, is composed of one substance, the *prima materia*, of which all other substances are either concentrations (i.e., the molecules of the *prima materia* grow closer to each other) or expansions (i.e., the molecules grow farther apart). It follows that all things are connected to all other things, since all are formed of the same substance (a view supported by the Swedenborgian doctrine of correspondences, which sees connections between all things). It follows also that any form of matter can be transformed into any other, by provoking the required concentration or expansion. This makes it possible to continue the theory of evolution beyond Darwin, for not only has man evolved from the animals, but the animals have evolved from plants, and plants from minerals. Since there is no such thing as an element, any metal can be transformed into any other; hence, the possibility of the synthesis of gold.

That is the theory in a nutshell. The works under discussion are "proofs" of various parts of the theory or challenges (usually -- but not always -- based on the theory) to traditional scientific views. *Antibarbarus*, for example, is mainly concerned with "proving" that sulphur is not a simple element, but a compound of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen⁹; he demonstrates the

⁹ The presence of carbon and hydrogen in all of Strindberg's chemical formulae -- hydrogen is, in fact, his candidate for *prima materia* -- is essential to the demonstration, in *Jardin des Plantes*, that plant life could have evolved from minerals.

synthesis of iodine and gold; and he even goes so far as to question whether the earth is indeed a sphere.¹⁰ None of this is very scientific. Kaufman summarizes (586) Strindberg's shortcomings as a scientist:

Most of his experiments were crude, nonquantitative, and lacking in objectivity; as an impatient and amateur scientist, he worked impulsively and obsessively with a selective approach which seized upon "evidence" apparently favoring his *idéés fixes* of transmutation and the unity of matter yet which disregarded whatever observations did not support his hypothesis.

About three-quarters through *Antibarbarus*, Strindberg seems to acknowledge that at least that work is, to say the least, rather obscure. The symbol he uses is again that of a pilgrim, searching for truth, but this particular pilgrim is going where no man has ever been before. If in *Antibarbarus* he has not arrived at his goal (the truth), he has, he says, at least indicated in what direction it lies:

Jag sätter mig vid vägkanten ett ögonblick att vila, ty jag har vandrat i mörkret, trevat mig fram, stött mig på självmotsägelser och slagit omkull på uppstickande nya sannolikheter. Ibland har jag sett ett ljus längst inne i berget, trodde mig hinna det, men så slocknade det; en tanke flög förbi mig, jag skulle gripa den, men det var en läderlapp, som fladdrade bort och försvann i mörkret.

Jag är så djupt inne i berget at jag icke kan vända om, ty ingen Ariadne har givit mig tråden jag skulle binda vid ingången. Jag

¹⁰ "La terre, sa forme, ses mouvements" ("The Earth, Its Shape and Movements"), *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 374-81.

vilar mig sålunda ett ögonblick och går sedan vidare, med hoppet att någon längre fram skall leta upp mig, levande eller död.¹¹

There is in these last words perhaps a carry-over of the messianic complex of the 1880s: the prophet willing to lay down his life in order that others might know the truth.

One of Strindberg's purposes in the alchemical works, is to demonstrate order in apparent disorder: to show that there are very real connections between phenomena which appear arbitrary, capricious, and meaningless. Looking for resemblances, parallels, and/or correspondences is one of the chief methods by which he arrives at his conclusions; if he perceives one (or more), he takes that as proof that the phenomena are intimately related. He was aided by his discovery of Swedenborg during the same period: a discovery which

¹¹ Samlade skrifter, XXVII, 179:

I sit down by the side of the road to rest a moment, for I have wandered in the darkness, groping my way along, bumping against self-contradictions and stumbling over emergent new probabilities. Sometimes I have seen a light deep within the mountain, have thought that I had reached it, but then it went out; a thought flew past me, but when I tried to grasp it, it was a bat, which flapped away and disappeared into the darkness.

I have gone so far into the mountain that I cannot turn back, for no Ariadne has given me a thread to tie at the entrance. And so I rest for a moment and then continue, in the hope that one day somebody will come across me, dead or alive.

taught him to look for mystical meanings and connections in all of experience, no matter how trivial it might appear. He seems aware that this propensity to endow anything and everything with significance is not normal, but he is convinced it is the instrument by which he will discover the truth: the way through the desert which leads to the Promised Land. Thus, in *Jardin des Plantes*, he comments on the apparent psychotic nature of his observations:

Jag vet mycket väl att psykologister uppfunnit ett grekiskt ord på benägenheten att se likheter överallt, men det skrämmer mig inte, ty jag vet att det finns likheter överallt, därför att allt är i allt, överallt!¹²

In the article "Solrosen" ("The Sunflower") from *l'Initiation*, he as much as admits that this method is more literary than scientific (and again states his awareness that it might seem psychotic):

Den psykiska förmågan att "se likheter överallt" var förlåtlig blott hos skalderna, dessa oskadliga bildmakare, oförlåtlig hos

¹² Samlade skrifter, XXVII, 262 (from the chapter "Alpviolen": "The Mountain Violet"):

I am very much aware that the psychologists have concocted a Greek word for the tendency to see similarities everywhere, but that does not frighten me, for I know that there are similarities everywhere, because everything is in everything, everywhere!

andra -- man kallade dem sinnessjuka.¹³

But, he goes on to say, it is just that ability which will lead man to an understanding of the universe and, eventually, of God:

Vi ha sett likheter överallt, av det skäl att likheter och överensstämmelser finnas överallt, och de som säga sig tro på materiens -- och andens -- enhet, äro ense med oss! Icke sant?¹⁴

The direction in which Strindberg's arguments is tending is toward a recognition of God, in Whose Being all things are contained, and Who is Himself in all things: in other words, he is working towards nothing less than a scientific proof of the existence of God. Thus the two quotations which he chooses as epigraphs to *Typer och prototyper inom mineralkemien*:

"Litet filosofi leder från religion; mycket filosofi förer tillbaka till religion."

Bacon.

"Une fausse science fait les athées; une vraie science prosterne l'homme devant Dieu."

¹³ Ibid., 358:

The psychic ability to "see similarities everywhere" was excusable only in the skalds, those harmless spinners of images, inexcusable in others -- they were called deranged.

¹⁴ *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 361:

We have seen similarities everywhere, for the reason that similarities and correspondences exist everywhere, and those who say they believe in the uniformity of matter -- and of spirit -- agree with us! Is it not so?

Voltaire.¹⁵

Strindberg apparently convinced himself, but unfortunately he never pulled these writings together in an organized, persuasive way. He hints at where his investigations lead, but he never draws the conclusions explicitly: the lab reports are there, but their significance is never more than barely suggested.

The groundwork is laid here for Strindberg's eventual persuasion that all earthly experience is an illusion: a logical conclusion of the belief that nothing is what it seems to be and of the conviction towards which Strindberg seems to be progressing, that the universe exists in the mind of God. Hints of a realization that the world and experience are illusions appear in two of the articles from *l'Initiation*. In the first, "En blick mot rymden" ("A Glance Towards Space"), Strindberg cites a philosophical source for the idea:

Schopenhauer säger: "Världen med den
oändliga rymden, i vilken allt är inneslutet,
med tidens oändlighet, i vilken allt rör sig,
med den underbara mångfalden av ting, som

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 441:

"A little philosophy inclineth man's
mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy
bringeth men's minds about to religion."

Bacon.*

"A false science produces atheists; a
true science prostrates man before God."

Voltaire.

* from Francis Bacon's *Essays*, 16: "Atheism".

uppfylla båda, äro endast cerebrala fenomen."¹⁶

The idea is made Strindberg's own and further developed in the article "La terre, sa forme, ses mouvements":

Il semble donc que je m'approche de l'étoile polaire en allant au pôle nord, et que je m'en éloigne en voyageant vers l'équateur.

Il semble, mais ce n'est pas sûr, puisque tout ce monde semble illusoire.¹⁷

The main contribution of the alchemical writings to the symbolism of Strindberg's other works, then, is to be found not so much in what they contain as in what they imply, and in the experiences through which the

¹⁶ *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 354-55:

Schopenhauer says: "The world and infinite space in which all things are contained, the eternity of time in which all things move, and the wonderful multiplicity of things which fill both, are only cerebral phenomena."

¹⁷ *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 381:

It seems, then, that I get closer to the pole star as I move towards the North Pole, and that I get farther from it as I travel towards the equator.

It seems, but it is not certain, for this whole world seems illusory.

Strindberg wrote many of these works in French, and in cases where there was no Swedish edition, *Samlade skrifter* has published them in their original versions (from Strindberg's manuscripts, if available, for the "improvements" made by French-speakers before publication often misrepresented the author's meaning).

author lived while producing them. There are, however, several individual symbols worth recording.

Such is the reference to Pan in the opening chapter of *Jardin des Plantes*, "Stenarnes suckan" ("The Sighing of the Stones"). This chapter contends that so-called inanimate nature is not, in fact, dead, but full of life and the possibility of life. The premise is summed up in an affirmation that Pan (the god of nature) lives. The proclamation has been made before, in *Likt och olik*t, but there is a difference here: Pan is a symbol of nature itself rather than being forced to represent an idea (realism or naturalism) which the author finds "natural" (as opposed to artificial). The identity of Orpheus, whose music made the very stones dance, is not revealed; the idea, however, is that minerals contain the potential of life, and will produce it under the right circumstances:

Den store Pan är visst ej död fastän han varit sjuk, men en Orfeus måste en gång ner i underjorden att sjunga liv i stenarne som icke äro döda, endast sova!¹⁸

In the same chapter, Strindberg remarks on the ability of minerals to react with other chemicals (a

¹⁸ *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 234-35:

The great Pan is certainly not dead, although he has been sick, but one day an Orpheus must descend to the underworld to sing life into the stones, which are not dead, but only sleep!

process he calls fermentation), and is led to a consideration of death and resurrection:

Att jäsa är ju tämligen analogt med att ruttna, det är upplösas, men ur förruttnelsen kommer liv, vadan skillnaden mellan liv och död icke synes vara så stor.¹⁹

A short passage in the chapter "Järnecken" ("The Holly") throws light on the symbol of the linden tree in *Herr Bengts hustru* (play and short story). In the language of flowers, the linden is an emblem of conjugal love, a meaning which fits well with the plot of that story, for Margit's love for Bengt disappears when he cuts down her lindens. Strindberg gives additional associations of the linden in this passage, which expand that symbolism without contradicting it:

Men märkligare än alla är linden, som väl icke för ro skull är germanernas heliga träd, prästgårdslinden, som skall fodra bina till kyrkvaxet, trädet som skyddar för åskan.²⁰

Finally, in the article "La synthèse de l'iode" ("The Synthesis of Iodine") from *l'Hyperchimie*, there

¹⁹ Samlade skrifter, XXVII, 335:

Fermentation is rather analogous to corruption, that is, to decomposition, but out of corruption comes life; hence, the difference between life and death does not seem so great.

²⁰ Ibid., 278:

But more remarkable than all these is the linden, which, surely for reasons other than caprice, is the holy tree of the Teutons: the church-yard linden, which nourishes bees for the provision of church wax, the tree which shelters from storms.

is a reference to the sea as the mother of all life, one of the important symbols in *I havsbandet*:

L'eau, de mer ou d'autre, est censée être composée d'hydrogène ou d'oxygène. Les sels qui y prennent naissance y sont donc engendrés, par l'eau elle-même, la mère qui a enfanté la terre avec les 64 corps dits simples.²¹

Mention should be made of the work dealing with the synthesis of gold, *Guldets syntes*. In traditional alchemy, the transmutation of other metals into gold was regarded as a symbol of the illumination and salvation of the soul (Cirlot, 6). Although *Guldets syntes* does not mention that symbolism, Strindberg, as a student of the alchemists, would have been well aware of it. It is important to know that Strindberg was convinced he really had made gold, and *Guldets syntes* describes the process. When he submitted the manuscript for publication, an accompanying letter (August 18, 1896), which mainly announces his intention to abandon science and return to literature, nevertheless attests to this conviction, which remained with him to his death. The letter concludes:

Jag lämnar därför, på försök, naturvetenskaperna, men som ett minne ber jag Er

²¹ *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 398:

Water, whether from the sea or elsewhere, is supposed to be composed of hydrogen and oxygen. The salts which are created in it are, then, engendered there by the water itself, the mother who has given birth to the 64 so-called pure elements found on earth.

trycka dessa tre blad jag sänder, i 100 exemplar, så att jag slipper skriva 100 brev om samma sak, vid förfrågningar, och därför att jag vill ha ett bevis på att jag ej varit tokig då jag trott mig göra guld.²²

Specimens of Strindberg's gold-making still exist: pieces of paper which he had dipped in his chemical compounds, and which, indeed, show gold-coloured metallic specks. Although he was never able to obtain confirmation from a reputable chemist that these specks were indeed gold (they are, in fact, hydrated iron oxide), he attributed that failure to the prejudice of the conventional scientific world. At least in the sense of the symbolism of traditional alchemy, perhaps he was successful in making gold after all, for the period of the *Inferno* crisis and of these curious endeavours, did result in his religious conversion: his soul received illumination and salvation.

His decision to abandon alchemy was motivated by religious considerations. His new-found faith was entirely personal: he remained enough of a rebel to be unable to align himself with any church. Main ingredients in his faith, however, were the teachings of Swe-

²² *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 639:

I am, therefore, abandoning the sciences on a trial basis, but, as a souvenir, I ask you to print 100 copies of these three sheets I am sending, in order that I might avoid having to write 100 letters on the same subject in answer to enquiries, and because I want proof that I was not mad when I believed that I had made gold.

denborg and those of Catholicism. In a letter to the French alchemist, Jollivet-Castelot (December 9, 1898), he seems to refer to the injunctions of the Catholic Church against the occult sciences:

Jag har nämligen återvänt till den dramatiska konsten på allvar, den är mitt yrke och jag bör inte längre sysselsätta mig med magien, förbjuden av min religion.²³

It is a decision to which the theatre owes much!

²³ quoted (presumably translated from French) in *Samlade skrifter*, XXVII, 646:

I have, you see, returned to the dramatic art in earnest; that is my profession, and I must no longer occupy myself with magic, which is forbidden by my religion.

Chapter 46

Uppsatser

Uppsatser¹ (Essays) is a collection of eight short prose pieces, written between 1880 and 1908, which Gunnar Brandell describes as "programmatiska uttryck för Strindbergs skiftande åskådningar, jämte vittnesbörd om intressesfärer som tidigare inte dokumenterats."² Some are extracts from longer works, and are considered elsewhere; of those that remain, only one need concern us here.

This is the essay, "På kyrkogården"³ ("In the Cemetery"), first published in *Revue des revues* in 1896. The cemetery in question is in Paris' Montparnasse, and also figures importantly in the play *Brott och brott* (1899). The essay also looks forward to *Inferno*, as it records Strindberg's abandonment of atheism for agnosticism and hints at a movement beyond that to religious faith. Midway through the first section of the essay the first step is recorded:

Jag blev ateist för en tio år sedan!
Varför? Jag vet inte så noga! Livet tråkade
ut mig, och någonting måste företagas, fram-
för allt någonting nytt. Nu, när det där är

¹ *Skrifter*, XIV, 317-97.

² *Ibid.*, 400: "programmatic expressions of Strindberg's changing opinions, as well as evidence of previously undocumented areas of interest."

³ *Ibid.*, 363-70.

gammalt, är det min åstundan att icke veta någonting, lämna frågorna oavgjorda och avvakta.⁴

The remainder of the essay is a record of what happens. He has developed the habit of taking his morning stroll through the Montparnasse cemetery, and there he experiences a number of events which in themselves are quite insignificant, but which he regards as charged with mystical meaning, nothing less than divine portents guiding him towards faith, until the essay ends with a quotation from Voltaire,

... denne tvivlare, som medgav allt och förnekade allt:

"Återuppståndelsen är en mycket naturlig sak; det är icke mer förvånansvärt att man födes två gånger än en gång."⁵

The description of the cemetery, with its cypress trees, flower-bedecked graves, and crosses bearing the

⁴ Skrifter, XIV, 364:

I became an atheist about ten years ago! Why? I do not know, exactly! Life bored me to death, and I had to take up something, above all something new. Now that that also is old, my desire is to know nothing, to leave questions unresolved and wait to see what happens.

⁵ Ibid., 370:

... that doubter, who conceded everything and denied everything:

"Resurrection is a very natural thing; it is no more surprising that man should be born twice than once."

inscription "O Crux, ave spes unica!",⁶ all reappear in the opening scene of *Brott och brott*. Since their appearance there is in a stage direction, we can learn much of their significance from the essay:

Mellan cypresserna framskynta dessa tusentals gravar, övertäckta av blommor, som skjuta upp invid de hårda stenyterna och få sin näring av de jordade liken samt vattnas av mer eller mindre uppriktiga tårar. I denna ofantliga trädgård stå överallt små kapell, utpyntade som dockhus, och däremellan kors, vilka med armarna lyfta mot himmelen bedyra och ropa med högan röst: O Crux, ave spes unica! Det är den allmänna bekännelsen, tyckes det, från den lidande mänskligheten. Och mitt bland lövverker, här, där, på alla håll, i förkortad form: Spes unica! Det är förgäves som bysterna av små kapatilister, med eller utan hederslegionen, sträcka på sig för att låta märka, att det finnes en annan förhoppning för dem, som gå hädan.⁷

⁶ Strindberg's own grave in Stockholm is, in accordance with his wishes, marked with a simple black wooden cross bearing this inscription.

⁷ *Skrifter*, XIV, 363-64:

From among the cypresses emerge the thousands of graves, covered in flowers, which spring up close beside the hard stone surfaces, getting nutrition from the buried corpses and being watered with more or less heartfelt tears. In this immense garden there are little chapels everywhere, decked out like doll-houses, and among them crosses, which, with arms lifted toward heaven, bear witness and cry out in a loud voice, "O Crux, ave spes unica!": the general confession, it seems, of suffering humanity. And among the foliage here, there, everywhere, in abbreviated form: "Spes unica!" It is in vain that the busts of small capitalists, with or without the Legion of Honour, crane their necks in order to take note that there is another hope for those who have passed on.

In this setting, which the essay and the play share, appears the inspiration of the character Jeanne, unhappy mistress of the play's central character, Maurice. As the play begins, Jeanne has been waiting to meet Maurice in the Montparnasse cemetery for two hours, and she fears that he will not come, that he is in fact going to abandon her and their child. The corresponding passage in the essay is very lyrical: Strindberg only imagines that the unknown woman is waiting for her lover, but the lover never appears, and he sees her being consumed by her love and longsuffering. It is a passage an actress about to play Jeanne would do well to study:

... en vacker julimorgon får jag se en ung kvinna vandra i stora allén. Hon var ej sorgklädd och tycktes vänta på någon, i det hon oroligt blickade mot stora porten, genom vilken så många inträda för att aldrig vända tillbaka igen.

"Hon väntar en försumlig älskare till ett möte, för vilket de valt en väl dyster plats," sade jag till mig själv och lämnade kyrkogården.

Nästa morgon var hon åter igen där och såg bortåt stora gången. Det var hjärtsliktande. Hon gick fram och tillbaka, stannade, lyssnade, spejade. Varje morgon syntes hon där, alltjämt blekare; smärtan har förfinat hennes vardagliga ansiktsdrag. Hon väntar på den eländige!

Jag gjorde en resa på fem veckor till ett avlägset land. Då jag återkommit och hade glömt hela saken, fick jag vid inträdet på min kyrkogård syn på den övergivna kvinnan mitt på stora allén. Hennes avmagrade kropps ytterlinjer avtecknade sig mot ett kors bakom henne, som om hon hade blivit korsfäst, och så den där inskriften ovanför: O Crux, ave spes unica!

Jag går närmare och lägger märke till den ödeläggelse, som inom så kort tid över-

gått hennes ansikte. Det är som att se ett lik i krematoriet under sitt asbesthölje. Allt finns ännu kvar, härmande människoformen, men förbränt till aska, livlöst.

Hon är sublim, och sannerligen, lidandet är då åtminstone inte någonting banalt. Sol och regn ha blekt ur färgerna på hennes kappa, blommorna i hatten ha gulnat som lindarna; till och med hennes hår har blekts ... Hon väntar här, ständigt och jämt, dag efter dag. En sinnesrubbad?

Ja, en som angripits av den stora kärleksgalenskapen! Hon kommer att dö under väntan på den akt, som ger upphov åt livet och bibehåller lidandet!

Där undslapp mig ett medgivande åt bibehållelsen! Varför inte lika gärna åt evigheten? Eftersom ju materien är evig?⁸

⁸ Skrifter, XIV, 365:

... one beautiful July morning I noticed a young woman walking in the main drive. She was not dressed in mourning, but seemed to be waiting for somebody, for she gazed restlessly towards the main entrance, through which so many enter and never return.

"She's waiting for a neglectful lover, and a right dreary place they've chosen for a meeting," I said to myself, and left the cemetery.

The next morning she was there once again, looking out towards the main thoroughfare. It was heartbreaking. She paced back and forth, stopped, listened, looked around. Every morning she was there, growing steadily paler; pain had refined her commonplace features. She was waiting for the wretch!

I made a trip to a distant country for five weeks. On my return I had forgotten the whole affair, when I caught sight of the abandoned woman near the entrance to my cemetery, in the middle of the main drive. Her emaciated body was outlined against a cross which was behind her, as if she had been crucified, and that inscription thus appeared over her head: "O Crux, ave spes unica!"

I drew nearer and noticed the devastation wrought upon her face in such a short time. It was like seeing a corpse that had been transformed in a crematorium. Everything was still there, mimicking the human form, but burnt to ashes, lifeless.

Despite the ironic contrast between the woman, who hopes against all evidence that her lover will eventually show up, and the crosses, with their message that the cross is mankind's only hope, in the author's mind the two merge. He mentions the refining through suffering of the woman's features into something extraordinarily beautiful, her love giving her the strength to persevere in faith that, against all odds, her happiness will come. She becomes a figure of the human soul, purified through suffering, and living in constant expectation of a better existence; the dual nature of the cross, instrument of torture and yet the Christian symbol of faith and salvation, complements and is inseparable from her significance. Perhaps faith, like the woman herself, is foolish, but if so, its folly, like hers, is that of love. Such constancy must surely survive even death, and that points to the hope proclaimed by the crosses.

—
ing really is nothing banal. Sun and rain have bleached the colour from her coat, the flowers in her hat have turned yellow like the lindens; even her hair has faded ... She waits here constantly, day after day. A crackpot?

Yes: one in the grips of the great folly of love! She will die waiting for the act which engenders life and continues in suffering!

There I have let slip an admission of continuity! Why might one not just as well say, of eternity? For surely matter is eternal?

Two Strindberg symbols strongly associated with the continuity of the human soul are closely linked to this passage. The following extract, evoking the verdant isle (Toten Insel, the Isle of the Blessed, den grönskande ön), symbol of the afterlife, and children, symbols of the pre-existence of the soul, occurs immediately before the one quoted above:

Ingenting tilldrager sig i denna dödens inhängnade stad, den ena dagen liknar den andra, och stillheten störes endast av fåglarna, som reda sina bon. En blomsterhöljd holme mitt ute i havet: man hör på avstånd ett brus liksom av vågor. Lycksalighetens ö, en ofantlig äng, där barnen ha fört ihop blommor och leksaker, bundit kransar och bestrött dem med pärlor, som de plockat på stranden, och tänt på ljus, prydda med band och annan grannlåt ... Men barnen ha sprungit sin väg, ängen står öde ... Dock, en vacker julimorgon får jag se en ung kvinna....⁹

Birds are also symbols of the soul, and the sea, source and end of all life, of human existence. In the opening scene of *Brott och brott*, while Jeanne awaits Maurice,

⁹ *Skrifter*, XIV, 365:

Nothing happens in this enclosed city of the dead; one day is like any other, and the quietness is disturbed only by the birds, which are building their nests. A flower-covered islet in the middle of the sea; one hears in the distance a rush, as of waves. The isle of the blessed: an immense meadow, where the children have collected together flowers and playthings, have woven wreathes and sprinkled them with pearls they have picked up on the beach, and have lit candles, decorated with ribbons and other ornaments ... But the children have run away; the meadow stands empty ... However, one beautiful July morning I notice a young woman....

Marion, their five-year old child, plays among the cemetery flowers.

This woman and the significance with which the author invests her nevertheless do not lead him back to belief: for that, he says, he requires a miracle. Perhaps, however, she has put him in a frame of mind receptive to miracles, for there follows an account of miraculous events, all of which seem to point him back to faith. The first of these is a vision seen among cloud formations on a stormy day: the symbolism of the verdant isle and that of clouds usually go hand-in-hand in Strindberg's writings:

Molnen, som till en början sträckte sig horisontellt, reste sig plötsligt och liknade Belfortlejonet som stöder på sina bakben, och höjde sig därefter lodrätt. Jag har aldrig sett sådana, annat än på tavlor, som föreställa yttersta domen. Nu flyta de svarta skepnadernas linjer i sär, och himmelen antar form av Mose lags tavla, omätlig men skarpt uppritad. Och på denna skiffertavla av järnblecksgrå färg skriver i ett nu blixten, som klyver firmamentet, med tydliga, läsliga penndrag: "Jahve", det är uttyt, hämnadens Gud!

*

Lufttrycket kom mig att böja knäveckan; men som jag icke hörde någon annan röst från himmelen än åskans, gick jag hem.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Skrifter*, XIV, 366:

The clouds, which at the beginning stretched out horizontally, suddenly rose, resembling the Belfort lion, which rests on its hind legs, and thereafter raised themselves up vertically. I have never seen their like, except in paintings representing the Last Judgement. Now the outlines of the dark shapes drift apart, and the sky takes on the form of Moses' tablets of the law, vast but sharply drawn. And on this slate, of a grey

This was in late summer. In Part II, autumn has come, and with it come the voices: not words spoken from a rift in the heavens, but signs and portents in the cemetery which seem specifically ordered for his guidance. As if to strengthen the cemetery's equation with the verdant (i.e., becoming green) isle, its linden trees, after being touched by night frost, miraculously begin to bud.

There follows a meditation on plant life, which springs from the earth and returns to it when it dies, enriching the earth and making it possible for new life to continue the process. Then, some reflections which make an interesting contribution to Strindberg's symbolism of flowers:

... varför sätter man så mycket blommor på gravar? Blommorna, dessa levande-döda, som föra ett stillasittande liv, utan att göra motstånd mot några angrepp, som lida hellre än att göra någon illa, som härma den köttslige älskogen, föröka sig utan strid och dö utan klagan, överlägsna varelser, vilka ha förverkligat Buddhas dröm om att icke eftertrakta någonting, fördraga allt, försjunka i sig själva ända till frivillig medvetenlöshet.

Är det av detta skäl som Indiens vise efterhärma växtens passiva tillvaro och avhålla sig från att träda i förhållande till yttervärlden genom vare sig en blick, en åtbörd eller ett enda ord?

sheet-iron colour, all in a moment the lightning, cleaving the firmament, writes in clear, legible strokes: "Yahweh", which being interpreted is, God of Vengeance!

*

The atmospheric pressure made me bend my knees; but as I heard no voice from heaven other than that of the thunder, I went home.

Ett barn frågade mig en gång "Varför kunna inte blommorna, som äro så vackra, sjunga som fåglarna?"

"De sjunga nog," svarade jag, "men vi kunna inte höra det."¹¹

What the flowers sing of is an unbroken cycle of life, death freely accepted and giving place to new birth, the resurrection of the flesh!

A further reflection on great men, who often resemble criminals and the lowest forms of life, rather than having outward countenances which reflect their inner qualities, leads to the conclusion that these are cases where physical appearance has been determined by a previous existence, for which the life of the great man is an expiation:

... Jorden är en straffkoloni, varest vi måste göra bot för brott begångna i en före-

¹¹ Skrifter, XIV, 367:

... why do people put so many flowers on graves? Flowers: those living dead, which lead their sedentary lives, offering no resistance to attacks; which suffer rather than do anyone harm; which mock fleshly love, reproducing themselves without struggle, and dying without complaint; superior beings, which have realized Buddha's dream of not coveting anything, suffering everything, withdrawing into themselves even to the point of voluntary unconsciousness.

Is this the reason India's wise men imitate the passive existence of plants and refrain from forming a relationship with the outside world, whether through sight, gesture, or a single word?

A child once asked me: "Why can't flowers, which are so beautiful, sing like the birds?"

"But they do sing," I replied, "only we aren't able to hear them."

gående tillvaro och av vilka vi bevara en obestämd hågkomst i samvetet, som driver oss fram mot förbättring. Vi äro följaktligen brottslingar allesammans, och han har inte så orätt, pessimisten, som alltid tänker och talar ont om sina medmänniskor.¹²

This short passage speaks volumes when we recall all the Strindberg heroes who feel they are being punished for crimes of which they are not aware!

A bird catches the author's eye and seems to lead him through the grounds, alighting on various objects which it wishes to draw to his attention, the first being a cross on which is written "Den mig följer, han skall icke vandra i mörkret."¹³ There follows another inscription, this one over the doorway of a small chapel: "Eder bedrövelse skall varda vänd i glädje."¹⁴ Next is a mausoleum, on which is carved in high relief a child being borne to heaven by an angel. The child occasions more reflections on the pre-existence of the soul, which seems supported by the fact that the human

¹² Skrifter, 368:

... The earth is a penal colony, wherein we must do penance for crimes committed in a previous existence, of which we retain a vague recollection in our conscience, which drives us on towards improvement. We are consequently all criminals, and the pessimist is not so wrong, who always thinks and speaks ill of his fellow man.

¹³ Ibid., 368: "He who follows me shall not walk in darkness."

¹⁴ Ibid., 368: "Your sorrow shall be turned to joy."

foetus undergoes within the womb all of the stages of evolution. The law of correspondences demands that we who on earth are also undergoing evolution should, at the fruition of the process, also experience a birth.

The last sign is a butterfly pupa, which the bird leaves on the cemetery fence for his examination. It becomes a symbol of human life in general, but especially of those who have died, now encased in the cocoon of the earth, awaiting certain resurrection:

Det är en fjärilspuppa, av denna enastående yttre form, som icke liknar någon annan i djurriket. En skräckbild, ett vidunder, en totemössa, som inte är djur, inte växt, inte sten. En svepning, en grav, en mumie, som icke har blivit till, eftersom den ej äger några förfäder på jorden, utan har gjorts, skapats av någon.

Den store konstnären-skaparen har roat sig med att som en vanlig konstnär bilda utan praktiskt syftemål, det är konsten för dess egen skull, kanske en symbol. Denna mumie, det vet jag väl, innesluter allenast ett djuriskt slem, formlöst, utan någon struktur alls och med färsk liklukt.

Och denna härlighet är begåvad med liv, med självbevarelseinstinkt, eftersom den knastrar på det kalla järnet, och skall fästa sig med trådar, om den känner sig i fara att bli nerskakad.

Ett levande lik, som för visso skall uppstå!

Och de andra, de där nere, ... hålla på att förvandlas i sina puppor och ... undergå samma nekrobios....¹⁵

¹⁵ Skrifter, XIV, 369-70:

It is a butterfly pupa, with its singular outer form, which does not resemble anything else in the animal world. A horrifying picture, a monstrosity, a pixie-cap, which is neither animal, vegetable, nor mineral. A shroud, a grave, a mummy, which has not been born, since it has no ancestors on earth, but

The essay closes, as mentioned, with another affirmation of the afterlife, from another great doubter: Voltaire! There is a tradition that Voltaire received the last rites on his deathbed;¹⁶ Strindberg's conversion, sketchily documented here for the first time (the whole story is not told until *Inferno*), happened at a much earlier stage of his life. It began almost immediately to exert an influence on his dramatic works.

The great artist-creator has amused himself, like an ordinary artist, by shaping with no practical end; it is art for art's sake, perhaps a symbol. This mummy, I well know, contains only an animal slime, formless, with no structure at all, and smelling of a fresh corpse.

And this glorious creature is gifted with life, with the instinct for self-preservation, since it scrunches on the cold iron, and would be able to attach itself with threads if it felt itself in danger of being shaken off.

A living corpse, which assuredly will rise again!

And the others, the ones down there ... in their pupa stage, are at the point of being transformed and ... undergo the same necrobiosis....

¹⁶ Such a tradition does not explain, however, why he was then refused burial in consecrated ground.

Chapter 47

Inferno

*Inferno*¹ was written in 1896-97 and published, both in Strindberg's French and in Swedish translation, in 1897, the year of his divorce from Frida Uhl. It is the key to understanding fully many of Strindberg's other works, particularly the *Till Damaskus* plays, the first two of which were written the following year: they treat essentially the same period of the author's life, the years of his mental and spiritual crisis in Paris, 1894-96. *Inferno* provides explanations and sources for many of the symbols which appear elsewhere in Strindberg's work.

In the autobiographical writings, *Inferno* continues the narrative from the point where *Klostret* (*The Cloister*, which was, however, written later) leaves off. In that work, we see the hero² torn between his duty to his wife and child, and his increasingly consuming passion for scientific and pseudo-scientific (i.e., alchemical) research. At the beginning of *Inferno*, he makes his choice:

¹ The French text (Paris, 1966) is cited.

² Although *Inferno* is undeniably autobiographical and its hero even bears Strindberg's name, it is a novel: the reality it describes has been filtered through the author's imagination. I therefore prefer to refer to the central character as "the hero" rather than as Strindberg.

Ayant à choisir entre l'amour et le savoir, je m'étais décidé pour les connaissances supérieures, et le sacrifice de mes affections me fit oublier la victime immolée sur l'autel de mon ambition, ou de ma vocation.³

Having made this choice, he goes on to achieve success in his project -- to prove that sulphur is an organic compound -- and he decides to use the same method to prove the presence of carbon in other so-called elements. Meanwhile, he continues his efforts to make gold: the Great Work of alchemy, symbolic of the striving of the soul towards perfection. Indeed, all of his research has a significance far beyond the ostensible ends, as a reference to *Antibarbarus* indicates:

... éliminant les frontières qui séparent la matière de ce qu'on appelait l'esprit. C'est ainsi que dans mon volume *Antibarbarus*, en 1894, j'avais traité la psychologie du soufre, en l'interprétant par l'ontogénie, c'est-à-dire par le développement embryonique du soufre.⁴

³ *Inferno*, 32 (I):

Having to choose between love and learning, I opted for the highest knowledge, and the sacrifice of my affections made me forget the innocent victim immolated on the altar of my ambition, or of my calling.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 57 (IV):

... eliminating the frontiers which separate matter from what was called spirit. Thus it was that in my book *Antibarbarus*, in 1894, I had dealt with the psychology of sulphur, interpreting it by means of ontogenesis, that is to say, the embryonic development of sulphur.

This hint is reinforced by reflections on life and death occasioned by experiments with sulphuric acid:

... l'acide sulfurique ... donne la mort lorsqu'il est concentré et crée la vie par fermentation lorsqu'il est dilué. Quelle est la différence? Et quelle superbe contradiction!⁵

The theme of a large section of the work is the interrelation of all aspects of creation. The cry of an insect resembles the cry of Apollo for the slain youth Hyacinth, and the hyacinth resembles in some aspects a certain type of delphinium which, according to Ovid, sprang from soil drenched with the blood of the fallen Ajax, a story confirmed by chemical observation:

... la Dauphinelle cultivée, Delphinium Ajacis, qu'Ovide, le plus avancé des transformationistes, prétend être germée du sol où le sang d'Ajax fut répandu.

Le cyanure de la Dauphinelle bleue produit par le sang et le fer d'Ajax. Ferrocyanure! On dirait qu'Ovide a connu la chimie.⁶

⁵ Inferno, 59 (V):

... sulphuric acid ... produces death when it is concentrated and creates life through fermentation when it is diluted. What is the difference? And what a superb contradiction!

⁶ Ibid., 72 (VI):

... the garden delphinium, Delphinium Ajacis, which Ovid, the most advanced of the transformationists, says was germinated from the soil on which the blood of Ajax spread.

The cyanide of the blue delphinium produced by the blood and iron of Ajax: iron cyanide! One would swear that Ovid knew chemistry!

Perhaps the most specific link between the experiments and the other events in the book is the manner in which they provide omens and portents. Thus, the hero receives a warning about a landscape in which he is to spend several months of intense suffering (Klam near Dornach, in Austria, the home of Frida Uhl's step-mother, where Strindberg spent the autumn of 1896 in the Rose Room), a landscape which, he is to discover, conforms exactly to Swedenborg's description of Hell:

Une cuvette de zinc, dans laquelle je fais des synthèses d'or par voie humide, présente sur ses cotés intérieurs un paysage formé par des sels de fers évaporés. J'interprète cela comme une présage....⁷

Elsewhere, he is reminded of his wife, the innocent victim of his scientific passion:

L'après-midi je broyais du mercure, de l'étain, du soufre et du chlorate d'ammoniaque sur un carton: quand j'enlèvai la masse, le carton garda l'empreinte d'un visage d'une ressemblance parfaite avec celui de ma femme dans le songe de la nuit passée.⁸

⁷ Inferno, 127 (X):

A zinc basin in which I synthesize gold by the damp method reveals on its inner surface a landscape formed by iron salts deposited by evaporation. I interpret this as a portent....

⁸ Ibid., 128 (X):

In the afternoon, I was crushing mercury, tin, sulphur, and ammonium chlorate on a piece of cardboard; when I removed the mixture, the cardboard retained the impression of a face, which perfectly resembled that of my wife in a dream I had had the previous night.

Another experiment produces an omen of death, which is linked to the hero's suicidal thoughts:

Après avoir refondu la masse trois fois au feu de forge, je regarde l'intérieur du creuset. Le borax a formé une tête de mort, avec deux yeux luisants qui me percent l'âme comme une ironie surnaturelle.⁹

The hero tries to act on his death-wish by sleeping in a room slowly filling with potassium cyanide fumes, but is prevented from dying by an outside interruption. The portent of the death's head is similar to another which shows him the face of the god Pan (a precursor, we are informed, of Satan). That omen is not the result of his experiments, however, but is seen in the grained paneling of a wardrobe.

Much of Strindberg's later drama (most notably, perhaps, *Till Damaskus I* and *Påsk*) is suffused with a feeling that the hero is being punished for a crime of which he is either ignorant or innocent (or both). This feeling gradually comes over the hero of *Inferno* as well. The earth is a prison, where punishment is inflicted on victims who are unaware of the crimes they have committed. That the punishment is real there can be no doubt, but why the unawareness of its cause? One

⁹ *Inferno*, 137 (X):

After having melted the mass three more times in the fire of the forge, I look into the crucible. The borax has formed a death's head with two glowing eyes, which pierce my soul with a supernatural irony.

possible explanation is that the crimes have been committed in a previous existence:

Je suis dans l'enfer et la damnation pèse sur moi. En examinant mon passée, je revois mon enfance déjà organisée comme une maison de détention, une chambre ardente, et pour expliquer les tortures infligées à un enfant innocent, il ne reste qu'à recourir à la supposition d'une préexistence d'où nous sommes rejetés ici-bas, pour expier les conséquences des fautes oubliées.¹⁰

This explanation is favoured by the hero's mother-in-law:

-- Certes, tu expies des péchés commis en un autre monde, avant ta naissance. Tu dois avoir été un grand tueur d'hommes dans une vie antérieure, et c'est pourquoi tu souffriras les transes de la mort mille fois, avant de mourir, jusqu'à ce que l'expiation soit consommée.¹¹

The other possible explanation is that the person being punished is indeed innocent but, like Job, is being tested by God:

¹⁰ Inferno, 179 (XIII):

I am in Hell and damnation weighs me down. On examination of my past, I see my childhood already structured as a house of detention, a torture chamber, and to explain these tortures, inflicted on an innocent child, one need only return to the supposition of a pre-existence from which we have been expelled in order to expiate here below the consequences of forgotten faults.

¹¹ Ibid., 183 (XIII):

".... Indeed, you're expiating sins committed in another world, before your birth. You must have been a great killer of men in a previous life, and that's why you'll suffer the terrors of death a thousand times before you die, until expiation is attained."

Je m'édifiai en lisant le livre du Job, convaincu que l'Éternel m'avait livré à Satan pour m'éprover. Cette idée me consola et la souffrance me rejouit, comme un témoignage de confiance de la part du Tout-Puissant.¹²

Under the influence of Swedenborg, this explanation wins out, although from the viewpoint of the New Testament rather than the Old: the victim is not so much being tested as purified, in a place that resembles Purgatory more than Hell:

Par un mot, un seul, la lumière se fait dans mon âme, et dissipe les doutes, les vaines spéculations ... et ce mot fut: Dévastation (ödeläggelse). Tout ce qui m'était arrivé, je le retrouve dans Swedenborg ... et l'ensemble de ces phénomènes constitue la purification spirituelle connue déjà par saint Paul, et mentionnée dans les épîtres aux Corinthiens et à Timothée: "J'ai ordonné qu'un tel homme fut livré à Satan pour la destruction de la chair, afin que l'esprit soit sauvé au jour du Seigneur Jesus." "Entre lesquels sont Hyménée et Alexandre que j'ai livré à Satan, afin qu'ils apprenent par ce châtiment à ne plus blasphémer."¹³

¹² Inferno, 95 (IX):

I enlightened myself by reading the Book of Job, convinced that the Eternal had delivered me over to Satan to test me. This idea comforted me and I took joy in suffering, as evidence of the Almighty's confidence in me.

¹³ Ibid., 227 (XVIII):

Through a word, one only, light entered my soul and dissipated the doubts, the vain speculations ... and this little word was Devastation (ödeläggelse). Everything that had happened to me I found again in Swedenborg ... and the aggregate of these phenomena constitutes the purification of the spirit already known by St. Paul and mentioned in his epistles to the Corinthians and to Timothy: "I have ordered that a certain man be handed over to Satan so that his sensual body

Inferno reveals more about the mysterious "powers", the behind-the-scenes manipulators in many of Strindberg's works. The hero is unable to believe in God or in Christ, and yet he feels there is a force directing his life:

... je commence à deviner l'existence d'une main invisible qui dirige la logique irrésistible des événements. Je plie sous la tempête....¹⁴

To this force he first gives the name "the Unknown":

Le bonheur d'être aimé malgré tout, suscite en moi le besoin de rendre grâces ... à qui?

A l'inconnu qui s'était caché depuis tant d'années!¹⁵

day of the Lord Jesus." "... I mean men like Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to teach them not to be blasphemous."

The passages cited are 1 Corinthians 5:5 and Timothy 1:20 (Jerusalem Bible translation). The underlined words in the first citation appear to have been supplied by Strindberg.

¹⁴ Inferno, 36 (I):

... I begin to divine the existence of an invisible hand directing the logic of events. I bend under the storm....

¹⁵ Ibid., 39 (I):

The joy of being loved despite everything awakens in me the need to give thanks ... to whom?

To the Unknown, who has hidden himself for so many years!

This name suggests the Christian God, however, and it is perhaps for this reason that it is discarded. It is replaced by the much more abstract concept, Providence:

Réfléchissant sur mon sort, je reconnais la main invisible qui me châtie, me pousse vers un but que je ne devine pas encore....

Alors me revient cette idée que la providence me destine à une mission et que voici l'éducation qui commence.¹⁶

Perhaps this term is too abstract, not sufficiently conveying the sense of conscious, deliberate, and rational action; at any rate, it too is soon discarded. Early in the second chapter, three other terms are tried out in rapid succession (including "the Unknown" again), and the force becomes plural:

... dès que j'ai péché, quelqu'un m'attrape sur-le-champ, et la punition se présente avec une précision et un raffinement qui ne laisse aucun doute sur l'intervention d'une puissance correctrice. L'inconnu m'est devenu une connaissance personnelle, je lui parle et lui rends grâce, je lui demande les conseils. Parfois je me le figure comme mon serviteur, analogue au Daïmon de Socrate, et la conscience d'être appuyé par les inconnus me rend une énergie et une assurance qui me poussent à des efforts dont je ne m'étais jamais cru

¹⁶ Inferno, 43 (I):

Reflecting on my lot, I recognize the invisible hand that chastises me, pushing me towards an end I cannot yet perceive....

Then the idea comes back to me that providence has destined me for a mission and that training for it is now beginning.

capable.¹⁷

Finally, the designation "the powers" is chosen, and that is the name by which the force is known for the rest of Strindberg's career:

Plus d'amour! le mot d'ordre des puissances est donné et je me résigne dans la certitude qu'un motif supérieur se dissimule là comme ailleurs.¹⁸

The powers are omnipresent and omnipotent: "Rien ne se fait dans ce monde sans le consentement des puissances...."¹⁹ Their influence may be for good:

Où Swedenborg a-t-il vu ces enfers et ces cieux? Je ne saurais le dire, mais l'analogie de son enfer avec ceux de Dante et des mythologies grecque, romaine, et germanique, porte à croire que les puissances se sont toujours servies de moyens à peu près analogues pour la réalisation de leurs desseins.

¹⁷ Inferno, 45 (II):

... whenever I sinned, someone caught me red-handed, and punishment presented itself with a precision and a punctiliousness that leaves no doubt of the intervention of a corrective power. The Unknown has become a personal acquaintance; I talk to him and thank him and ask his advice. Sometimes I regard him as my servant, analogous to Socrates' daimon, and the consciousness of being supported by the unknown ones gives me an energy and an assurance which push me on to efforts of which I had never thought myself capable.

¹⁸ Ibid., 52 (III):

No more love! the command of the powers has been given and I resign myself to it, in the certainty that a higher motive is hidden there as elsewhere.

¹⁹ Ibid., 109 (IX): "Nothing is done in this world without the consent of the powers...."

Et ces desseins? La perfection du type humain, la procréation de l'homme supérieur....;²⁰

or, more usually, for evil, at least involving suffering: "Cet orgueil, produit par l'intimité avec les puissances, va toujours croissant...."²¹;

C'était donc cela, l'orgueil, la présomption, hybris (...) puni par mon père et maître. Et je me trouvais dans l'enfer, chassé jusque-là par les puissances.²²

The powers also administer the torments of Hell.

All this is to be found implicitly or explicitly in other Strindberg works; what is unique to *Inferno* is the account of the genesis of the concept, and a fairly concise statement of just what the powers are:

... je voyais les puissances comme une ou plusieurs personnes concrètes, vivantes, individualisées, dirigeant le cours du monde et les carrières des hommes consciemment,

²⁰ *Inferno*, 230 (XVIII):

Where did Swedenborg see these hells and these heavens? I could not say, but the resemblance of his hell to those of Dante and of the Greek, Roman, and Germanic mythologies, leads one to believe that the powers have always availed themselves of similar means to achieve their ends.

And those ends? The perfection of the human race, the creation of the superior man....

²¹ *Ibid.*, 106 (IX): "This pride, produced by intimacy with the powers, increases continuously...."

²² *Ibid.*, 159 (XI):

And so it was pride, presumption, hubris (...) that was punished by my father and master. And I found myself in Hell, driven there specifically by the powers.

hypostatiquement, ainsi que disent les théologiens.²³

Combining the concept of the powers with that of punishment for an unknown crime, the hero hypothesizes that perhaps the powers are punishing him for seeking to discover and reveal their secrets through his occult research and alchemical experiments, and he casts himself in a mythic, heroic rôle which is one of Strindberg's favorite self-projections: "Suis-je ... Prométhée châtié par le vautour parce qu'il avait révélé le secret des Puissances?"²⁴

Despite this emerging theology of the powers, the hero does not fully believe in them, and, upon reflection, can often find a natural explanation for developments he has attributed to them:

Repoussant encore l'idée d'une intervention des puissances spirituelles, je m'imaginais être atteint d'une maladie nerveuse.²⁵

²³ Inferno, 132 (X):

... I saw the powers as one or several persons: concrete, living, and individualized, directing the course of the world and the careers of men consciously and, as the theologians say, hypostatically.

²⁴ Ibid., 202 (XIV): "Am I ... Prometheus, punished by the vulture for having revealed the secret of the Powers?"

²⁵ Ibid., 152 (XI):

Again rejecting the idea of intervention by spiritual powers, I think I must be suffering from a nervous disorder.

The powers are not, however, mentioned in the list of illusions from which the hero is delivered when he reads Swedenborg: "... des ennemis imaginaires, des électriciens, des magistes noirs....,"²⁶ unless they be among the imaginary enemies. At any rate, by the end of the book, when the hero feels himself drawn to Christianity, they are no longer forces to be reckoned with. Or perhaps it is they who lead him in that direction, in the manner of the *esprit correcteur* of Advent.

As in *Till Damaskus*, the hero is led into the depths of Hell, localized in the Rose Room (which is, however, representative of all of earthly experience). Like Dante (the similarity is pointed out several times in the book), however, he does not remain in Hell, but rises out of its pit, through purgatory, and up to the gates of the heavenly city, where the book ends.

Because *Inferno* is almost exclusively concerned with the psyche of the hero, a work of self-discovery rather than self-justification, it is not very concerned with his relationships with other people. His

²⁶ *Inferno*, 227 (XVIII): "... imaginary enemies, electricians,* black magicians...."

* During the crisis, Strindberg suffered frequent attacks of angina pectoris, which he attributed to electric currents being passed through his body, possibly through the psychic intervention of an enemy.

wife, for instance, is absent throughout the narrative, and is mentioned only briefly. Nevertheless, there are several references to the relationship of the hero to Woman. As is appropriate in a work dealing with spiritual regeneration, it is the mother-child relationship of the spring cycle which is central. We first see this in his response to the nun who cares for him at l'Hôpital Saint-Louis (where Strindberg was treated for psoriasis in January, 1895):

On m'habille, on me déshabille, on me soigne comme un enfant, et la religieuse me prend en affection, me traite en bébé, m'appelle "mon enfant" tandis que je la nomme "ma mère".

Que c'est bon de prononcer ce mot mère que je n'ai pas proféré depuis trente ans!²⁷

The image of Christianity which first attracts him is not that of the crucified Christ, to Whom he cannot respond, but that of the Madonna:

La vierge maternelle et l'enfant me saluent d'un doux sourire: le Crucifié me laisse froid, m'apparaît incompréhensible comme toujours.²⁸

²⁷ *Inferno*, 38 (I):

I am dressed, I am undressed, I am cared for like a child, and the nun becomes fond of me, treats me like a baby, and calls me "my child", while I address her as "Mother".

How good it is to say the word mother, which I have not uttered for thirty years!

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48 (II):

The motherly virgin and the child greet me with a tender smile: the Crucified leaves me cold, and appears incomprehensible to me, as always.

When he is suffering most, he remembers his own mother and the small ways in which she shaped his behaviour and attitudes:

Je prends un bain, très soigneux de voir mes pieds blancs, ce à quoi je tiens, parce que ma mère m'enseigne dès mon enfance que les pieds noirs sont un signe de déshonneur.²⁹

His mother, who died when he was quite young, is his only happy childhood memory, and remains a steadying influence on his life, representing order and peace; he continues to crave motherly affection, worshipping at the shrine of the Virgin Mother of God while remaining unable to accept her Son, except as a child in the arms of His Mother.

Far easier for him to identify with is Buddha, whose life in some respects parallels his own:

Bouddha manifeste le courage de renoncer à sa femme et à son enfant, en pleine possession de sa force vitale, et au milieu de bonheur conjugal, tandis que Christ évite tout commerce avec les joies permises de ce monde.³⁰

²⁹ Inferno, 145 (XI):

I take a bath, very careful to see that my feet are white, something I insist upon, since my mother taught me from childhood that black feet are a sign of dishonour.*

* This homely detail of personal hygiene becomes a symbol in the play *Svanevit* (Swanwhite, 1901).

³⁰ Ibid., 56 (IV):

Buddha displays the courage to renounce his wife and child, in full possession of his vital force and in the midst of conjugal happiness, while Christ avoids all commerce with the permissible joys of this world.

The hero also renounces wife and child to pursue what he believes is a higher calling. As in *Till Damas-kus I*, *Advent*, *Brott och brott*, *Påsk*, etc., however, his suffering drives him to the foot of the Cross of the very Christ he cannot accept: he must suffer himself until he learns to allow Christ to suffer for him! Indeed, he begins to refer to his suffering, the way in which it affects him, and the expiatory function he believes it to fulfill, as the Way of the Cross. Appropriately, he learns of such expiatory suffering and how to bear it from the nun who has showered him with motherly affection:

En partant, j'ai voulu baiser la main de la
bonne Mère qui, sans sermons, m'avait appris
le chemin de la croix....³¹

As he progresses along this *via dolorosa*, each stage of his suffering a Station of the Cross, he finds it easier to identify with Christ, although he still regards Him as a fellow-sufferer rather than as One who has suffered in his place: "Le Crucifié à la couronne d'épines me salue à chaque centaine de pas, m'encour-

³¹ *Inferno*, 43 (I):

On leaving, I wanted to kiss the hand of the
good Mother who, without sermons, had taught
me the way of the cross....

age, et m'invite à la croix et aux souffrances."³² The process of identification with Christ increases steadily, to the point where the open sores on his hands (psoriasis aggravated by his chemical experiments) are taken for the Stigmata:

Un jour, on me croit un saint, et les crevasses des mains sont des stigmates. En effet, les marques de la paume ressemblent à des trous de gros clous et pour éloigner toute prétention à la sainteté, je dis être le bon larron, descendu de la croix, et en pèlerinage vers la conquête du paradis.³³

The agony of his suffering is described in terms of Christ's Passion, and climaxes with his descent into Hell. He emerges from this ordeal not yet redeemed, perhaps, but ready at last to accept redemption from the hands of the Saviour: "-- ... il me semble que le chemin de la croix me reconduit vers la foi de mes aïeux."³⁴ In this way, he comes to realize that St. Paul's words are applicable to him: he is the man

³² Inferno, 170 (XII): "The Crucified, crowned with thorns, greets me at every hundred paces, encourages me, and invites me to the Cross and to sufferings."

³³ Ibid., 195 (XIV):

One day, I am taken for a saint, and the cracks on my hands for the Stigmata. Indeed, the marks on my palms do resemble holes made by large nails, and to disown all pretensions to sanctity, I say that I am the Good Thief come down from the cross and on a pilgrimage towards the conquest of paradise.

³⁴ Ibid., 241 (XX): "... it seems to me that the Way of the Cross is leading me back to the faith of my ancestors."

handed over to Satan in order that his body might be destroyed and his spirit saved! The legend he had earlier observed in a cemetery becomes, now that he too has suffered, his own confession: "... O Crux, ave spes unica! C'est la confession générale, il semble, de l'humanité souffrante."³⁵

Proceeding side by side with his growing identification with Christ is identification with various other biblical characters, as in an allusion to God's promise to Noah:

Peintes sur le carreau de la boutique sont
les lettres de mon nom: A.S. flottants sur un
nuage blanc argent et surmontées d'un arc-en-
ciel.

Omen accipio en me souvenant de la
Genèse:

"Je mettrai mon arc dans la nuée, et il
sera pour signe de l'alliance entre moi et la
terre."³⁶

This omen occurs after he has been given permission to conduct his chemical experiments in the laboratories of the Sorbonne, two months after leaving the hospital. It would seem to indicate that his research will be

³⁵ *Inferno*, 75 (VII): "... O Crux, ave spes unica! This, it seems, is the general confession of suffering humanity."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 46 (II):

Painted on the shop sign are my initials,
A.S., floating on a silvery white cloud and
surmounted by a rainbow.

Omen accipio, remembering Genesis: "I
set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a
sign of the Covenant between me and the
earth." [Genesis 9:13. Jerusalem Bible trans-
lation.]

crowned with success: he will synthesize gold (i.e., peace will be made between him and God).

Other biblical allusions compare him to Elijah when he is given food by strangers (Elijah's crows), Adam expelled from Paradise, John the Baptist living in poverty, Job severely tested by God, and Jeremiah: "... Jérémie, en deux mots, exprime l'abîme de ma tristesse: 'J'ai presque oublié ce que c'est que la bonheur!'"³⁷

Consistent with his ambiguous attitude to Christ throughout much of the work, his attitudes to God and Satan are unorthodox and confused. *Inferno* opens with a dramatic fragment, "Coram Populo", which, like the Epilogue to the verse edition of *Mäster Olof*, advances the theory that God is actually the Force of Evil in the world while Lucifer, the Light-Bearer (like Prometheus) is the Force of Good, with a divinity superior to both known as the Eternal. Perhaps it is ambiguities of this kind that lead him ultimately to prefer the neutral term powers. At any rate, his ambivalent attitude toward the divinity carries over into the body of *Inferno*, where God is the Old Testament God of Vengeance, and antipathetic:

Depuis mon enfance, j'ai cherché Dieu,
et j'ai trouvé le démon. Dans mon enfance,

³⁷ *Inferno*, 112-13 (IX): "... Jeremiah, in a couple of words, expresses the depth of my melancholy: 'I have almost forgotten happiness.'" [Jerusalem Bible translation. The underlined word seems to have been supplied by Strindberg.]

j'ai porté la croix de Jésus-Christ, et j'ai renié un Dieu qui se contente de dominer des esclaves humbles devant leurs bourreaux.³⁸

This rejection is consistent with the author's negative response to Christ. But he does not reject the superior God: the force behind creation, unknown and unknowable, the Eternal, who stands above God, Satan, and all the powers. He believes in the existence of this deity, but because He is so abstract and remote a concept, he feels cut off from Him. His journey of synthesis (God ceases to be remote from and uninterested in humanity if one accepts that Christ is God, and through Christ the Old Testament God of Vengeance becomes the New Testament God of Love) begins, as indicated above, with his rediscovery of maternal love in l'Hôpital Saint-Louis (salvation through woman is a theme in Strindberg's writing all too often forgotten by those who see only his misogyny).

During this stage of belief (or unbelief), the name God always carries negative associations with it, whereas the superior deity is known by an abstraction: the Eternal, the Creator, the Almighty, the Unknown. As the author's experiences move him ever more steadily

³⁸ Inferno, 146 (XI):

Since childhood, I have searched for God and have found the devil. When I was a child I wore the cross of Jesus Christ, and I repudiated a God who is content to rule slaves that grovel before their executioners.

towards faith this begins to alter. On the final page of the Chapter (XI) entitled "Inferno", the name God is used for the first time in a positive context: "Oh! le bonheur de l'homme que Dieu châtie!"³⁹ That outburst is elucidated in a passage which also explains the symbolism of the mill in Strindberg's writing:

C'est le moulin du Seigneur, qui est lent à moudre, mais broie fin et noir. Vous êtes réduit en poudre et vous vous croyez fini. Mais non, cela va recommencer et de nouveau on va vous passer au moulin. Soyez heureux! C'est l'enfer ici-bas; il a été reconnu par Luther qui estime comme une grâce particulière d'être pulverisé de ce côté des empyrées.

Soyez heureux et reconnaissante!⁴⁰

The negative aspect of God (He allows suffering) is thus resolved in the positive aspects of the Eternal, for suffering exists only to facilitate ultimate salvation. Satan is no longer the positive deity of the Epilogue to *Mäster Olof* and "Coram Populo", but, as the agent of suffering he is still, ultimately, a force working toward the good, as indeed he is in *Advent*.

³⁹ *Inferno*, 167: "Happy indeed the man whom God corrects!" [Job 5:17. Jerusalem Bible translation.]

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 235 (XIX):

It is the mill of the Lord, which grinds slowly but grinds fine and black. You are reduced to a powder and believe yourself done for. But no; it will begin again, and you will be passed through the mill once more. Rejoice! This is Hell-on-earth; it was recognized by Luther, who deems it a particular grace to be pulverized this side of the empyrean.

Rejoice and be thankful!

Among the supernatural forces (i.e., the powers) at work in the book are all the mysterious manifestations of the occult: black magic, tarot, telekinesis, etc. These are among the illusions from which the hero is delivered when he reads Swedenborg, but works such as *Ockulta dagboken* (*The Occult Diary*, a journal Strindberg kept from February 1896 to July 1908) show that belief in them resurfaced from time to time, at moments of crisis. Strindberg lived in a world of symbols, and saw significance in everything: in a world where everything is contained in everything else, everything has meaning. Even the chance glimpse of a playing card serves as a powerful omen; the incident occurs as he is about to visit a friend identified as "the Danish painter" (in reality, the Norwegian Edvard Munch, 1863-1944):

... sur le seuil de la porte ouverte, un enfant était assis, une carte à jouer à la main. Avec une superstition très lucide, je jetai un coup d'oeil sur la carte. C'était le dix de pique!

-- Vilain jeu! dans cette maison!
Et je me retirai, sans entrer.⁴¹

The ten of spades corresponds to the ten of swords in the Tarot deck, which augurs sudden misfortune and

⁴¹ Inferno, 115 (IX):

... seated on the threshold of the open door was a child with a playing card in his hand. With the lucidity of superstition, I cast a glance at the card. It was the ten of spades! "A dirty trick! in this house!" And I went away without entering.

labour under a heavy burden: ruin, pain, affliction, and tears (Gray, 52). Years earlier, in Berlin, Strindberg had stolen Munch's mistress, Dagny Juel (1867-1901), so it is likely he had reason (like Henriette in *Brott och brott*) to heed the warning of the card!

At one point, the hero suspects he has unwittingly become a sorcerer. The passage illustrates the obscurity of some of Strindberg's biblical allusions, indicating a very thorough knowledge of the Bible indeed, and adds a layer of occult meaning to the symbol of the shirt of Nessus; he has met "the Danish painter", who is ill, at a café, and has loaned him his overcoat:

Tout d'un coup, il devient nerveux, tremble comme un médium sous l'influence de l'hypnotiseur: il se remue en secouant le pardessus; il cesse de manger, jette sa fourchette, se lève et, m'ayant rendu mon pardessus, me dit adieu.

Qu'était-ce? La tunique de Nessus? Mon fluide nerveux emmagasiné dans l'habit, et dont la polarité étrangère le subjuguait? Ce doit-être là ce que veut dire Ézechiel chapitre 13, vers 18:

"Ainsi a dit le Seigneur Éternel: malheur à celles qui cousent des coussins pour s'accouder le long du bras jusqu'aux mains, et qui font des voiles pour mettre sur la tête de personnes de toute taille, pour séduire les âmes ... Je déchirai ce coussin de vos bras, je ferai échapper les âmes que vous avez attirés afin qu'elles volent vers vous!"

Suis-je devenu sorcier sans le savoir?⁴²

⁴² Inferno, 123 (X):

All of a sudden he becomes nervous, trembles like a medium under the influence of the hypnotist, and shakes off the overcoat; he stops eating, throws down his fork, and, having returned my overcoat, bids me farewell.

The fear that he may have become a sorcerer (black magician) against his will is accompanied by fear that the evil spirits of the occult world are arrayed against him, seeking to prevent him from achieving spiritual perfection; he accordingly arms himself against them:

... après la lecture de certains ouvrages occultistes, je m'imagine être persécuté par des élémentats, des élémentaires, des incubes, des lamies, qui veulent m'empêcher de venir à bout du grand oeuvre alchimique. Instruit par les initiés, je me procure un poignard de Dalmatie, et je me figure être bien armé contre les mauvais esprits.⁴³

He eventually discovers that these fears are illusions, part of the suffering that will prepare him for salvation, and they disappear when he reads Swedenborg.

nervous fluid accumulated in the garment, the unaccustomed polarity of which overwhelmed him? That must be the meaning of Ezechiel 13:18 [and 20]:

"[...] Thus saith the Lord God: Woe to them that sew cushions under every elbow and make pillows for the head of persons of every age to catch souls [Strindberg's italics].... Behold [...] your cushions [...] I will tear [...] off from your arms: and I will let go the souls that you catch, the souls that should fly." [Douay-Rheims translation.]

Have I become a sorcerer without knowing it?

⁴³ Inferno, 196 (XIV):

... after reading certain occult works, I imagine myself persecuted by elemental and elementary spirits, incubi, and lamias, who wish to prevent me from succeeding in the Great Work of alchemy. On the advice of initiates, I obtain a Dalmatian dagger, and consider myself well armed against evil spirits.

From the traditional Hell of Christianity there is no deliverance, but in Swedenborg's system God rules in Hell as well as in Heaven, and a soul purified of evil can be delivered from it (it resembles, then, the Catholic concept of Purgatory). *Inferno* is Strindberg's account of the particular Hell in which he found himself, and his delivery from it.

Inferno contains several other symbols which recur in other Strindberg works. They are worth looking at in the context of *Inferno*, for generally they are more developed and their meaning more explicit here. If it is in the *Till Damaskus* trilogy that one finds most parallels, it is because those plays deal with the same material as *Inferno*, and hold an equally important place in the corpus of Strindberg's work.

One thinks, for instance, of the scenes in *Till Damaskus I* which are set in a mountain landscape punctuated by two symbolic establishments, the white mill and the black smithy. Here is the much fuller description of the same scene in *Inferno*:

Le chemin se retrécit, s'étrangle en forme de couloir entre la montagne et la maison du meunier, juste au-dessous de la tête du Turc.

J'avance, mais au fond je découvre un énorme chien danois, avec une robe de loup, et tout semblable au monstre qui gardait l'atelier de la rue de la Santé, à Paris.

... je pénètre dans le gouffre. Le cerbère fait semblant de ne pas m'apercevoir, et je continue à m'avancer, maintenant entre deux rangées basses et sombres. C'est une poule noire sans queue et avec une crête de coq; puis, une femme, belle, de loin, et mar-

quée au front d'un croissant rouge sang; mais vue de près, elle n'a plus de dents et elle est laide.

La chute d'eau et le moulin font un bruit qui ressemblent au bourdonnement d'oreilles qui me poursuit depuis mes premières inquiétudes à Paris. Les garçons meuniers, blancs comme de faux anges, dirigent les rouages de la machine, comme des bourreaux, et la grande roue à aubes exécute son travail de Sisiphe, en faisant ruisseler l'eau indéfiniment.

Puis, c'est la forge, avec les forgerons nus et noirs, armés de tenailles, de griffes, de machoires, de marteaux, parmi le feu et les étincelles, le fer rouge et le plomb fondu: tout un vacarme qui secoue le cerveau sur son piédestal, et fait sauter le coeur dans sa carcasse.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Inferno, 180 (XIII):

The road narrows, compressing itself into a corridor between the mountain and the miller's house, which is right below the Turk's head.

I proceed, but at the foot of the mountain I come across an enormous Great Dane with the coat of a wolf, just like the monster that guarded the studio on the rue de la Santé in Paris.

... I penetrate the abyss. The Cerberus pretends not to see me, and I continue to advance, now between two dark rows of low houses. I come upon a black hen with no tail and the crest of a rooster; then upon a woman, beautiful at a distance, with a blood-red crescent-shaped mark on her forehead, but at close quarters I see she has lost all her teeth, and is ugly.

The waterfall and the mill make a noise which resembles the humming in the ears which has pursued me since my first troubles in Paris. The mill hands, white, like plaster angels, direct the cogwheels of the machine like slave drivers, and the great paddle-wheel performs its labour of Sisyphus, ceaselessly making the water stream down.

Then I come to the smithy, with the naked black smiths armed with tongs, clamps, pincers, and hammers amidst the fire and sparks, the red flame, and the molten lead: creating a din that rocks the brain on its

This is a very vivid description of what is at once an actual landscape and symbolically the very depths of Hell itself: a highly skillful application of Swedenborg's doctrine that Hell is here on earth!

Inferno also prepares for and gives deeper meaning to the scene in *Till Damaskus* (and a similar scene in *Ett drömspel*) in which the Stranger is honoured at a banquet for his scientific discoveries, only to have all the honours disappear and turn to nought:

Le feu de l'enfer, c'est le désir de parvenir; les puissances éveillent le désir et permettent aux damnés d'obtenir l'objet de leurs vœux. Mais dès que le but est atteint, et que les souhaits sont remplis, tout apparaît comme sans valeur, et la victoire est nulle! vanité des vanités, tout n'est que vanité. Alors, après la première désillusion, les puissances soufflent le feu du désir, et de l'ambition, et ce n'est pas l'appétit inassouvi qui tourmente le plus, c'est la convoitise repue qui inspire le dégoût de tout.⁴⁵

cage.

⁴⁵ Inferno, 178-79 (XIII):

The fire of Hell is the desire to succeed; the powers awaken the desire and permit the damned to obtain the objects of their wishes. But as soon as the end is attained and ambitions are fulfilled, everything seems of no value, and the victory counts for nothing! Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! Then, after the first disillusionment, the powers fan the fire of desire and ambition, and it is not unsatisfied craving which torments the most, but satisfied cupidity, which inspires disgust for everything.

The same scene is further anticipated in another passage later in the same chapter:

Voici comment Swedenborg dépeint l'enfer. Le damné est logé dans un palais ravissant, trouve la vie douce et croit être du nombre des élus. Peu à peu des délices commencent à s'évaporer, puis disparaissent et le malheureux s'aperçoit qu'il est enfermé dans une misérable bicoque entourée d'excréments (...).⁴⁶

There is a brief reference, as well, to the Isle of the Blessed, which becomes the dominant symbol of Strindberg's post-Inferno period, as the hero rejects the possibility that his attempts to make gold have been folly. The Great Work of alchemy is thus associated specifically with a symbol of the afterlife:

Égaré dans une forêt noire? Non, le porte-lumière m'a guidé sur la bonne voie, vers l'île des Fortunés, et c'est le démon qui me tente, ou me punit!⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Inferno, 186 (XIII):

This is how Swedenborg depicts Hell. The damned is lodged in a delightful palace, finds life easy, and believes himself numbered among the elect. Little by little, the pleasures begin to evaporate, then they disappear completely, and the unfortunate soul perceives that he is shut up in a miserable hovel, surrounded by excrement (...).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 139 (X):

Lead astray in a dark forest? No, the lantern* has guided me along the right path, towards the Isle of the Blessed, and it is the demon who tempts me, or punishes me!

* Porte-lumière (literally, light-carrier), which Strindberg uses here, is not a common French word, and may have been chosen for its ambiguity: the familiar

In Till Damaskus reference is made to Dante's Beatrice, the Christ-bearing image through whom he came to God. In Inferno there is also a reference to Beatrice, but this time she brings her poet back down to earth, carrying with him the treasure of his regenerated soul to lay at her feet:

Et, à regret, à pas lents, je redescends
dans la vallée de douleurs et de la mort, des
insomnies et des démons, car ma petite Béa-
trice m'attend là-bas, et je lui apporte le
gui que je lui a promis, la branche verte au
milieu des neiges, que l'on devrait cueiller
avec une faucille d'or.⁴⁸

Whether the Beatrice of this passage and of Chapter XI ("Béatrice") is his wife or their daughter (Kerstin, b. 1894), the hero evidently looks forward to a reconciliation: mistletoe symbolizes not only regeneration,

—

picture of Christ, the Light of the World, carrying a lantern, or light-carrier = Lucifer (i.e., the temptations and punishments of "the demon" have nevertheless, in accepted Swedenborgian fashion, guided him along the path to salvation).

⁴⁸ Inferno, 218 (XVI):

And with regret, with slow steps, I go
down again into the valley of sorrows and of
death, of sleepless nights and of demons, for
my little Beatrice waits for me down there,
and I am bringing her the mistletoe I prom-
ised her, green in the midst of snows, which
must be culled with a golden sickle.

but the restoration of family life (Cirlot, 202). This was not to be.

Inferno marks a turning-point in Strindberg's life and in his career as an author. Although the psyche of the central character has always been of primary importance in his writing, and although that character has usually been patterned on himself, the emphasis shifts from self-justification to self-examination, an attempt to discover and come to grips with himself and his destiny. The plays become more introspective, more abstract and expressionistic, take on an aspect of psychodrama. This is a generalization, of course: plays like *Lycko-Pers resa* anticipate the post-Inferno works, and many of Strindberg's characteristic early concerns continue into the later works. But now religious questions will be his main preoccupation.

Chapter 48

Till Damaskus I

*Till Damaskus I*¹ (*To Damascus I*, 1898), which inaugurates Strindberg's post-Inferno period, is symmetrically constructed: the Stranger progresses from a street corner in the first scene to a convent in the middle of the play,, and then retraces his footsteps until he arrives back at the same street corner at the end. The return to the point of beginning emphasizes the cyclical nature of life, as do the seven stages below the convent: the street corner, the Doctor's house, the hotel room, the seaside, the highway, the kitchen in the Lady's home, and the Rose Room (the number seven parallels the seven days of the week, the seven fat years and seven lean years, and the seven planetary spheres). In addition, these seven stages suggest the Seven Deadly Sins and their corresponding virtues, and, more particularly, the first seven Stations of the Cross:

MODREN: Min son! Du har lämnat Jerusalem, och du är på väg till Damaskus. Gå dit! samma väg du befarit hit; och plantera ett kors på varje station, men stanna på den sjunde; du

¹ *Skrifter*, XI, 137-72.

har icke fjorton du, som Han!²

Fourteen scenes later, in the hotel room, the Lady exhorts the Stranger to finish what he has begun: "Ja, sagan är snart slut! Gå och gör sista kapitlet!" and he replies: "Så råkas vi vid sjunde stationen! Där vi började!"³ The pattern of Part I, then, is a starting out and a return, an ascent in the world of experience towards a world of innocence, which is glimpsed as it were from across a wall, and a turning back at the half-way point.

When the play opens, the Stranger has been waiting forty years for the end of unhappiness (an echo of the forty penitential days of Lent, the forty days of Christ's temptation in the desert, and the forty years the Children of Israel spent wandering in the desert). The Lady is identified with Eve, the eternal female, and the Stranger, who bears the mark of Cain on his forehead, with fallen mankind: he feels as if he lay

² *Skrifter*, XI, 165 (III, iv):

THE MOTHER: My son! You have left Jerusalem, and are now on the way to Damascus. Go there! the same road as you travelled here; and plant a cross at every station, but stop at the seventh; you don't have fourteen, as He did!

³ *Ibid.*, 169 (IV, viii):

THE LADY: Yes, the story soon will be finished! Go and write the last chapter!

THE STRANGER: Then we'll meet again at the seventh station! Where we started!

"... sönderhackad i Medeas kittel och kokade långkok...."⁴ Medea's cauldron can lead either to death or rejuvenation (damnation or salvation), a symbol associated with this world, where man's fate is determined.

The relationship of the Stranger to the Lady is important throughout the trilogy. In this scene it is the mother-child relationship of the spring cycle: she is identified with Eve, the mother of mankind, her voice embodies his idea of a mother, and she appears to him as if in answer to a need. She is conscious of the rôle she has been given, for at the close of the scene she tells him: "Som en barnunge skall ni hänga en fru i kjolarne!"⁵ Biblical allusion strengthens this relationship, for Cain is Eve's son.

The opening scene corresponds to the first Station of the Cross: the condemnation or sentence. The Stranger feels he is already condemned, and this feeling is confirmed by the mark of Cain on his forehead and the fact that his name is on the police wanted list. The Lady, however, does not become aware of the sentence until the end of the scene: "... i denna stund känner jag som om högre makter hållit rådslag över oss

⁴ *Skrifter*, XI, 143 (I, i): "... chopped up in Medea's cauldron, being slowly boiled...."

⁵ *Ibid.*, 144: "Like a young child, you have to hang on to a woman's skirts!"

och fattat ett beslut."⁶ Like the Magistrate and his Wife in Advent, she is no longer able to pray. The sentence is that of Cain: "Now be accursed and driven from the ground.... You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer over the earth." (Genesis 4:11-12). It is reinforced by funeral music and by the mourners of the death-watch beetle, who surround the Stranger, then reject him.

The second Station of the Cross is the assumption of the burden of the cross. The corresponding scenes (I, ii and V, i) in the play occur in the Doctor's house, which is haunted. The burden the Stranger must bear on his way to Cavalry-Damascus is the ghost which haunts the house: guilt for the past, as symbolized by the madman Caesar (whose story is told in Part III), by the corpses of the Stranger's victims (for such we assume they are), by the wrong which the Stranger committed against the Doctor in their childhood, and by the love the Stranger conceives for the Doctor's wife. Strains of Mendelssohn's *Funeral March* are heard throughout the scene, reminding the Stranger of the sentence which has been passed on him: the wanderings he must undertake, bearing his guilt.

⁶ *Skrifter*, XI, 145: "... at this moment I feel as if higher powers were sitting in judgment over us and had reached a decision."

The season is changing to summer, and at the end of the scene the relationship between the Stranger and the Lady begins to change accordingly: the mother-child relationship becomes that of the bridegroom and his bride, the lover and his beloved.

In the third scene (II, i) the Stranger and the Lady begin their pilgrimage, to the sonorous tones of the funeral march: the object of this pilgrimage is a symbolic death -- death to the world and its sorrows. The first Station of the Cross once the journey is actually under way is a fall under the weight of the burden: it is in the hotel room that the Doctor's sensed presence becomes most oppressive.

The Stranger's struggle is between body and soul, and in this scene the red and white symbolism traditionally associated with this conflict (or opposition within unity) first appears: the Stranger describes himself and the Lady as coloured with "... skammens rodnad och vredens blekhet...."⁷ Red and white form the dominant colour symbolism of the play, followed closely by the black-white opposition. White and red have their common associations: body and blood, bread and wine, soul and body, reason and imagination or passion, and also draw associations from alchemy, where white symbolizes purity and spiritual striving, and red suffer-

⁷ Skrifter, XI, 150: "... the red of shame and the paleness of anger...."

ing and love. When red and white appear together, then, or mixed, as in rose, they signify spiritual purification through suffering and love. Similarly, black and white signify spiritual purification through penance. Both are necessary before the pilgrim can attain pardon: the pure white of the monastery.

The fourth scene (II, ii) is one of comparative happiness on the journey, containing the Stranger's only exultant speech in the whole trilogy:

Nu drog molnet bort! Nu är det hög himmel, vinden är ljum, känn hur den smeks! Detta är att leva; ja, nu lever jag, just nu! och jag känner mitt jag svälla, sträcka ut sig, förtunnas, bli oändligt: jag är över allt, i havet som är mitt blod, i fjällen som äro mitt skelett, i träden, i blommorna; och mitt huvud räcker upp i himlen, jag ser ut över universum som är jag, och jag känner skaparens hela kraft i mig, ty det är jag. Eva! vill du dö med mig, nu, i detta nu, ty i nästa ögonblick är smärtan åter över oss?⁸

The Stranger, Cain, here identifies with God, and it is only natural that the Lady, Eve, should be iden-

⁸ *Skrifter*, XI, 151:

Now the cloud has disappeared! Now the sky is clear and the wind is mild: feel how it caresses! This is life, yes, now I am living, right now! and I feel my ego expand, extend itself, become rarefied and infinite; I am everywhere: in the sea, which is my blood; in the mountain range, which is my skeleton; in the trees; in the flowers; and my head reaches up to the sky, I look out over the universe, which is I, and I can feel in myself the full power of the Creator, for I am He. Eve! will you die with me, now, at his moment, for in the next instant affliction will be upon us again?

tified with Mary, the Mother of God. The fourth Station of the Cross is the meeting of Christ with His Mother. Just as Christ's feelings must have been a mixture of anguish over what lay ahead and love on meeting His Mother for the last time, so too the Stranger combines both despair ("... jag är fördömd...."⁹), exultation (see above), and loving adulation ("... jag finner dig fullkomlig, så, att jag icke mer kan tänka mig tillvaron utan dig!"¹⁰). The dramatic juxtaposition of exultation and the death-wish is typical of Strindberg (see *Han och Hon*).

In this scene the son and the bridegroom, the mother and the bride, are fused: Christ the Son of Mary and mystical bridegroom of the Church, and Mary, the Mother of Christ and bride of God. The cyclical symbolism of the first three scenes is reinforced, but does not progress; we are mid-way between the spring equinox and the summer solstice.

The fifth and sixth scenes (II, iii and iv) deal with the journey itself, and correspond to the fifth Station of the Cross: Christ helped with His burden by Simon the Cyrene. The Cyrene is notably absent in these two scenes (although he is present in the corresponding scenes -- IV, i and ii -- in the second half of the

⁹ *Skrifter*, XI, 152: "... I am doomed...."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 151: "... I find you so perfect, I can no longer imagine life without you!"

play, in the person of the Beggar), but the Stranger's burden seems eased, or temporarily lifted from him. He is, however, not allowed to forget it or that he must once again shoulder it: a huge rock formation in the ravine reminds him of the Doctor. During his brief respite, however, he reflects on the journey: the first of the two short scenes portrays the world of innocence both he and Eve have lost, the world of the Lady's childhood, when the road was shorter, the hills lower, the trees smaller, and the birds sang. The second scene reveals the path by which this lost world is to be regained: through the black and red of the smithy and the white of the mill: purification through penitence, suffering, and love.

This is the entrance to the infernal regions. The fact was signalled in *Inferno* by the presence of Cerberus; here there is a river to be crossed on a ferry.

The seventh scene (II, v) transpires in a place of putrefaction. The colours are black and white, and the inhabitants seek peace. It is a place of waiting and penance, Swedenborg's Hell, just as tormenting as the traditional Hell, but not necessarily eternal. The sentences from the Latin Mass and from the *Judica me* (Psalm 42: "Deus, Deus meus; quare tristis es anima mea, et quare conturbas me?") and the attitude of the Old Man towards a distasteful duty ("... jag skall taga

det som en penitens."¹¹) emphasize this, but most forceful by far is the Mother's suggestion that the Stranger and the Lady have been sent there for a purpose: "Kanske de skola plåga varandra fram till försoningen ..."¹² This is the process which Advent calls being whipped forth to the foot of the Cross.

Autumn is drawing near, although it has not yet arrived, and the Lady is already beginning to change from her rôle as bride to that of siren, temptress, or torturer, and the Stranger, the happy bride-groom of Act II, scene i, is increasingly becoming the victim: as is appropriate to the autumn cycle. The Lady has no shame and never suffers when rebuffed, she is like two persons, "... den ena gör idel ont, och den andra ger absolutionen...."¹³, and the Stranger is warned that if he does not stay with her he risks unhappiness.

Most of the warnings the Stranger receives about her come from the Mother, who is the St. Veronica of this sixth Station of the Cross, not easing the Stranger's burden, but comforting him (by offering him food and lodging) and better preparing him for what is to come (i.e., her warnings of what the Lady is really

¹¹ Skrifter, XI, 155: "I shall take it as a penance."

¹² Idem.: "Perhaps they must hound each other forth to salvation ..."

¹³ Idem.: "... the one does nothing but evil, and the other gives absolution...."

like help to prepare him for the time when they will be forced to reject each other).

The Rose Room is the very depth of Strindberg's Hell. Apart from the significance of the colour, there are two other relevant associations. Strindberg notes in *Svenska folket* and in *Inferno* that the torture chamber in mediaeval Stockholm was called the Rose Room (Rosen-Kammaren)! Add to this the symbolism of the rose: perfection, completion, consummate achievement, and love. All these associations taken together point in one direction: perfection through suffering.

In the Rose Room, the Lady becomes wholly transformed from Eve, the mother of Cain and wife of Adam, to Eve the seductress, the temptress: she is the demented woman standing before the door of the poor-house, beckoning to the Stranger, tormenting him. She has eaten of the forbidden fruit by reading the Stranger's book, and in doing so has brought down a curse on his head. The Stranger is now a victim, and feels the hostile forces of evil, black magic, and Satan all around him. This is the seventh Station of the Cross: the second fall under the burden (mankind's Fall from grace, and the cascading of the Stranger's life around him). The Stranger cannot continue his

journey; he is crushed, and rushes out, "... för att reda alla dessa affärer."¹⁴

The central scene (III, ii) is an epiphany. Until now, the Stranger has felt himself the innocent victim of malevolent powers, but in this scene he comes to realize the justice of all that has happened to him, and begins to value living.

The content of this scene is a tantalizing vision of the world of innocence, the City of God, by which the Stranger learns what he still has to undergo in order to attain peace. He still must carry his burden of guilt, but now he acquires a realization of sin and a hope of forgiveness.

The main hindrance to his progressing to the peace he earnestly desires has been his opposition to God. Because of this, he cannot be forgiven his sins, he cannot be relieved of the burden he has been carrying, and indeed, that burden is increased by having the curse of Deuteronomy added to the curse of Cain. The significance of this is explained by the Dominican in Part II:

När ... ett hemligt brott är begånget, läses Deuteronomions förbannelse över den miss-tänkte; är han oskyldig, går han oskadd ifrån saken, men träffas han, då sker såsom Paulus säger, att hans kropp lämnas att plågas av

¹⁴ Skrifter, XI, 160 (III, i): "... to put all these affairs in order."

Satan, på det hans själ måtte bättra sig och
 ,varda räddad.¹⁵

The quality most grievously lacking in the Stranger's life, the Abbess informs him, is charity (barmhärtighet: variously translated in English as charity, mercy, or compassion), and he must find this quality in the world of experience before he can hope to ascend the holy mountain: she directs him to return to the Rose Room in search of it. When he arrives there after an absence of three months, he finds that the only person in whom he can expect to find it, the Lady, has left, and he sets off after her. When they finally meet, there is no charity, and the two continue retracing their steps in search of it. They meet disappointment at every stage, and this series of disappointments becomes the series of crosses the Stranger erects at every station, as the Mother has instructed him to do.

Since the second half of the play follows exactly the same pattern as the first, but in reverse, it need not be dealt with in such detail. Following the Mother's advice, they retrace their steps to the

¹⁵ Skrifter, XI, 176 (I, i):

When ... a secret crime has been committed, the curse of Deuteronomy is read over the suspected perpetrator; if he is innocent, he will go away from the experience unharmed, but if it sinks home, then it will happen as St. Paul says: his body will be delivered over to Satan to be tortured, in order that his soul might reform itself and be saved.

seventh station. That station is, in fact, also the first station: the Fall from grace is identical with the sentence passed on the sinner. Eve eats of the apple, and the Fall is inevitable; Pandora (with whom the Lady is identified in Part III) opens her casket, and the world is doomed; cause and effect are inseparable. The Lady unleashes the woes of the world on the Stranger by reading of his past life at the seventh station, but the Stranger has already been sentenced to his journey of reparation for that life at the first. The Lady, furthermore, is but an extension or manifestation of the Stranger himself (she first appears in response to his need, she has no thoughts of her own, he is accused of moulding her in his own image, etc.) and so, presumably, knew of the Stranger's past life even before she read about it in the chronological sequence of the play (she and the Doctor used to curse the Stranger with the curse of Deuteronomy even before she met him). Chronology is irrelevant in this play: the events on the street corner and those in the Rose Room occur at the same point in time ("Så råkas vi vid sjunde stationen! Där vi började!"), as does all that happens in between.

This play is not about a chronological series of events, then, but rather about a state of being: the state of sinfulness, of existence in the world of experience, the world of the cyclical order. It ends where

it began, on a street corner in the world, and it has never really left there: Hell and this world coexist. The Stranger is allowed to glimpse the path he must follow in order to escape this whirling of time, but he must work out his salvation within it. Like the hero of *Inferno*, he descends once again into the valley of tears, but now with the knowledge that that Hell is not eternal. He understands why his life has been one of suffering:

Jag låg sjuk ... i en feber, och ... så drömde jag att jag såg en krucifix utan den korsfäste; och när jag frågade Dominikanern ... vad det skulle betyda ... då svarade han: "du vill icke ha honom lidande för dig; så lid själv!"¹⁶

The way now lies open for his salvation.

¹⁶ *Skrifter*, XI, 168 (IV, iii):

I lay sick ... with a fever, and ... I dreamt I saw a crucifix without the Crucified; and when I asked the Dominican ... what it meant ... he answered: "You do not want Him to suffer for you; suffer then yourself!"

Chapter 49

Till Damaskus II

*Till Damaskus II*¹ (1898) is a descent into Hell. It describes many of the same events as *Inferno*: Strindberg's experiments with alchemy, his sojourn with his mother-in-law, the mental anguish of the Rose Room, and so on. The dominant colour symbolism in the play is red and white, with black and white forming the secondary symbolism. Hell itself is the Rose Room, and the principal instrument of torture is the Lady. The birth of the Stranger's child is, in effect, a total rejection of the Stranger by the Lady, whom he has loved as a mother, but who now directs her maternal affection towards their child.

Till Damaskus II is divided into four acts, three of which end with scenes in the Rose Room. Of the remaining scenes, two are familiar from *Till Damaskus I* and the remainder -- the laboratory, the banquet hall, and the prison cell -- have to do with the Stranger's experiments with alchemy and their consequences.

The Stranger's interest in alchemy seems to be at least partly the result of his growing alienation from the Lady. Subjected to the tortures of the Rose Room, he endeavours to achieve spiritual perfection (the syn-

¹ *Skrifter*, XI, 173-99.

thesis of gold). His motives, however, are wrong: he wants to make gold not for its intrinsic value, but for the honour it will bring him: "... för en man [den] varaktigaste av alla illusioner."² Because of this, and also because his task is impossible for one in his present state (i.e., in Hell), his experiments are unsuccessful. The honours showered upon him prove empty mockeries, and in the two banquet hall scenes all the uses of this world are shown to be indeed weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable: wholly illusion, including even the steadfast and long-suffering image we have of the Lady, who is revealed (IV, i) to have been completely unscrupulous and diabolic even before she knew the Doctor, certainly long before she met the Stranger.

Returning from the degrading humiliations of the banquet hall and the prison cell, with their revelations, the Stranger encounters the Beggar-Confessor-Dominican in the ravine of Inferno and Part I (i.e., at the entrance to Hell). His defeat and, more important, his acceptance of defeat (the realization that all is vanity) have changed things considerably, even affecting the landscape; the smithy and the mill have disappeared: the torture and suffering of the forge and the grinding of sins in the mill are at an end. The Beggar predicts that the Stranger will become a monk

² *Skrifter*, XI, 182 (II,i): "... for a man, the most enduring of all illusions."

and, unaided, drive out the spirits which haunt him. The Stranger's children, his last bonds to this earthly Hell, fail to recognize him, and the blow renders him at last into a state of submission to his destiny. After a final encounter with the Lady in the Rose Room, he leaves Inferno in the company of the Confessor, to begin his ascent of Purgatory.

Chapter 50

"Silverträsket"

"Silverträsket"¹ ("Silver Lake") is a short story Strindberg had in mind for several years before finally writing it down in 1898. It was published in the annual *Vintergatan* (*The Milky Way*) for the same year. Set in the Stockholm archipelago like so many of Strindberg's stories, it contains some fine descriptions of nature as well as some insights into the psychological state of the author during the final two years of his marriage to Siri von Essen: many of the circumstances described correspond to events in his own life during the summers of 1889 and 1890.

The story relates the experiences of a man identified only as the conservator,² who passes two succes-

¹ *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 273-332.

² The Swedish term is *konservertorn*, which can be rendered by any of the three English terms curator, conservator, or taxidermist. Neither here nor in the other instances in which Strindberg so labels characters (all modelled largely on himself) -- the short novel *Taklagsöl* (1907) and the play *Svarta handsken* (1909) -- does he give any indication of the precise nature of the occupation he has in mind; my translations will therefore use the English term most closely resembling the Swedish, conservator. The professional concerns of the conservator, preserving and restoring artifacts of the past, presents a nice analogy to those of the author of historical fiction and drama; but, it must be admitted, similar analogies could also be found for the other two professions. A reader can keep all three possibilities in mind; a translator must make a choice!

sive summers on an island in the archipelago, the first with his family and the second alone. On both occasions he finds himself irresistibly drawn to one of the island's lakes, which, according to local legend, holds a treasure at its bottom: the eighteenth-century inhabitants are said to have sunk their valuables in the lake to keep them from the hands of the marauding Russians,³ and those valuables were never recovered. None of the present inhabitants fish in the lake, and they consider it unwise for anyone to do so.

The conservator, however, feels compelled towards this lake, and even before he first sees it he feels there is something extraordinary about it:

Konservatorn hade bössan med sig när han en solig försommarmorgon gick ut på ön i havet för att upptäcka nya skönheter. Han ville nämligen icke tala om att hans ärende var att söka det förtrollade Silverträsket, ty för att finna det, måste man vara tystlåten och gå ensam.⁴

³ According to Hans Lindström, the editor of *Samlade verk*, XXIX, Russian ships carried out raids in the archipelago and on the east coast of Sweden during the period 1719-21 (361).

⁴ *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 275:

The conservator had his shotgun with him when, one sunny morning in early summer, he set out to discover new beauties on Sea Island.* The fact was, he did not want to admit that his intention was to look for the enchanted Silver Lake, for in order to find it one had to be discreet and go alone.

This is the first paragraph of the story, in its entirety.

* Strindberg calls the setting of the story simply "the

When he finds the lake, he discovers that it indeed appears to be a charming place, but closer examination reveals that there is something unsettling about it: the colour of the water reminds him of death:

En svag morgonbris hade nu rört på ytan något litet så att det skvattrade i strandstenarne. Men vattnet som i ytan speglade blå himmel, visade sig i stranden av en brunröd hemsk färg som levråd blod. En hemsk idyll....⁵

He can, furthermore, find no logical explanation for how the lake came into being: the bed seems to be a volcanic crater or the entrance to an abandoned mine, but in either case, where did the water come from?

Notwithstanding this impression, he decides that the attractive properties of the lake outweigh its negative or mysterious aspects, and determines to fish there, once he has fetched a boat. While returning to

—
island in the sea", but he italicizes the phrase, as if he wishes it to take the place of a name. The autobiographical elements of the story took place on the island of Runmarö.

⁵ Samlade verk, XXIX, 276:

A gentle morning breeze now disturbed the surface a little, making the pebbles on the shore chatter. But the water, the surface of which reflected the blue sky, revealed itself by the shore to be of a ghastly brownish-red colour, like coagulated blood. A ghastly idyll....

his cabin with this in mind, he gets lost, and feels that some mysterious power has led him astray deliberately. He does not succeed in identifying this power, but subsequent events lead the reader to conclude that it is the lake itself, which is in some mysterious way bound up with the conservator's fate. For the moment, he at least eliminates the possibility that he is a victim of the powers or of mere chance:

Jägaren kände sig i kamp mot någon. Mot sig själv kunde han icke erkänna, ty han stod nog på sin egen sida; alltså mot en annan. Vem? De blinda krafterna var det ej, ty de hade ögon fram och bak och uppträdde beräkande, medvetna, sluga som han själv och mer ändå. Slumpen? Nej, ty den skulle under hans många försök lika väl ha lett honom rätt som galet, då i begreppet slump låg något indifferent, oberäkande, utan för och utan mot, och här fanns bara mot.⁶

The logic is rather circular and contradictory, reflecting the state of mind (and the meandering) of a man lost in the woods; the point is made, however, that

⁶ Samlade verk, XXIX, 278:

The hunter felt that he was striving with someone. He could not acknowledge that it was with himself, for surely he was on his own side; so it must be with another. Who? It was not the implacable powers, for they had eyes before and behind and appeared calculating, deliberate, as cunning as himself and even more so. Chance? No, for in the course of his many trials chance would have led him in the right direction just as soon as in the wrong one, since in the concept of chance there was something indifferent, uncalculating, without pros and cons, and here there were only cons.

at least for the conservator something is going on for which there is no simple, rational explanation.

He eventually finds his way home, but the impression that something is not as it should be returns the following day, after he has returned to the lake with his boat and succeeded in catching an unusual fish:

Det var den största gädda han sett, och så olik alla andra i färg och teckning att han blev obehagligt stämd, så att han lade märke till en så enkel sak som att spillkråkan spillade gällt i stranden, att ett moln drog förbi solen och väckte en väderil som krängde båten utan att ett träd rörde sig i stranden.⁷

We are dealing here with the post-Inferno Strindberg, the author of *Ockulta dagboken*, who saw significance in even the most trivial of events! In the story "En häxa", the tapping of a woodpecker is a warning of impending doom, like the sound of the death-watch beetle in *Till Damaskus I* and the ticking of clocks in *Gustav III*. Clearly, something is afoot! Nevertheless, despite these warnings and those of the island's inhabitants, he cannot stay away from the lake: "Han fiskade

⁷ Samlade verk, XXIX, 280:

It was the biggest pike he had seen, and so unlike others in colouring and markings that he became uncomfortably disposed, to such a degree that he noticed so simple a thing as the sharp tapping of a great black woodpecker on the shore, and that a cloud passed in front of the sun and awakened a breeze, which rocked the boat without disturbing a single tree on the shore.

... varje dag och kunde för övrigt ej slita sig ifrån det trolska träsket, vilket bergtagit honom."⁸

This obsession with the lake and his continuing to fish in it despite their warnings does not go unnoticed by the local inhabitants, and earns him a very unsavoury reputation. He in turn is aware of their attitude towards him, but does not concern himself about it so long as they leave him to pursue his activities in peace. When a former acquaintance of his drowns himself in another of the island's lakes (another omen of doom: the suicide had a name that differed from his by only one letter, and took his life as the result of a series of marital difficulties very similar to those the conservator is experiencing), his main reaction is relief that Silver Lake had not been chosen as the suicide site, for that would definitely have put an end to his fishing there. The inhabitants now think of him as one who tempts fate:

... hade olyckan skett i Silverträsket, då hade det varit som att klyva huvet på honom, emedan folket då haft full bevisning på att något sattyg fiskats upp av den gudlöse.⁹

⁸ Samlade verk, XXIX, 281: "He fished ... every day and, moreover, could not tear himself away from the bewitching lake, which had enchanted him."

⁹ Ibid., 284:

... had the calamity taken place in Silver Lake it would have been like burying an axe in his skull, since the people then would have had full proof that mischief had been fished up by the godless one.

The following summer he returns to the island, but this time without his family (the previous year husband and wife had slept in separate cabins). Significantly, he lives in the cabin occupied the previous summer by the suicide. The island people, who are already convinced that his fishing in Silver Lake was the indirect cause of the suicide, now see his altered marital circumstances as further proof that he has tempted fate and called down disaster. Indeed, he is now blamed for every misfortune, great or small, that takes place on the island. Still they do not hinder him from going to the lake, and one day he discovers lichen formations on a rock near the lakeside which he interprets as the letters CVII. For some time now he has believed that the lake is somehow intimately bound up with his own fate, and he now regards these letters as the key to understanding the nature of the connection. If he can only understand their significance! The first interpretation that occurs to him is that they are a royal cipher, standing for Carl VII,¹⁰ but this he rejects, thinking it more likely that all four letters are Roman numerals: the number 107. But what does that mean?

¹⁰ There was never a Swedish king called Carl (or Karl) VII, the first numbered Karl being Karl IX. Counting back two kings of that ilk we come to Karl Sverkersson (reigned 1161-67), who was, in fact, the very first Swedish king to be named Karl! There are, then, several reasons for rejecting this interpretation!

Meanwhile, his psychological state is rather unsettled, mainly because he is unaccustomed to loneliness and misses his family, particularly his children. By his own account, he appears to be moving through each day as if it were a living death: "Om dagen 'gick han omkring och dog', sakta men märkbart, så beskrev han själv sitt tillstånd."¹¹ He particularly avoids the part of the island where he and his family had lived the previous summer, for he does not trust his ability to control the emotions which the sight of the place would arouse. As windmills appear frequently in Strindberg's writing, the symbolic association of this particular one is not without interest. The arrested sails of the windmill could easily form the letter X, canceling out the past, but whenever he pictures it the sails instead form a Greek cross, implying sorrow and mourning for what has been lost:

Men hur han gick, gick han dock aldrig till kvarnen, ty där såg man hyddorna och ängen, och så långt sträckte sig icke hans självförtroende. Och kvarnen stod där som en vård med vingarne i ett stort kors på de vackraste minnenas grav.¹²

¹¹ Samlade verk, XXIX, 288: "By day he 'walked about dying, slowly but noticeably', as he himself described his condition."

¹² Ibid., 288-89:

But wherever he walked, he never went to the mill, for from it one could see the cabins and the meadow, and his self-confidence did not extend that far. And the mill stood there like a monument, with the sails forming a large cross over the grave of the most beautiful memories

When one day he is forced to pass nearby, however, he cannot resist the temptation to examine more closely the scene of his previous happiness (the last he was to enjoy with his family). The green gate, its association with his children, and the thoughts of death to which it now gives rise are strong links to the scene "Vid sista grinden" ("At the Last Gate") in *Stora landsvägen*. The empty house and the illusory nature of human happiness which it implies are also strong links to the late plays, particularly to *Ett drömspel*:

När han kom till gröna grinden där barnen som svalor brukade flyga honom i famnen, kände han blodet krypa tillbaka mot hjärtat och en känsla sade: nu dör jag!

Men han gick in. Svarta tomma gapade fönstren; in i barnens sovrum där de små sängarne stodo ... Det var icke gravar, ty i graven finns något, men här var det tomma intet. Det var hemskare än döden, det var levande begravnen.¹³

Sic transit gloria mundi.

In this state, and more to keep himself from brooding over what he has lost than for any other rea-

¹³ *Samlade verk*, XXIX, 289:

When he came to the green gate where the children like swallows used to fly into his arms, he felt the blood flow slowly back towards his heart, and the sentiment formed itself: "Now I am dying!"

But he went in. The windows gaped black and empty; in the children's bedroom, where the small beds stood ... It was not a tomb, for there is something in a tomb, but here there was empty nothing. It was more dismal than death: it was being buried alive.

son, he begins trying to discover the significance of the number 107. Strindberg's interest in numerology and the kinds of connections which he drew from it are well documented in his poem "Rosa Mystica" (in *Ordalek och småkonst*). Here, the conservator discovers that the base of the third and smallest of the pyramids at Gizeh is 107 meters and that a meter is one ten-millionth of the distance between the earth's poles and the equator, which suggests to him that the number 107 has an astronomical significance. Sure enough, the distance between the earth and the sun is 107 times the diameter of the sun, Venus is 107 million kilometers from the sun, and Jupiter ten times that distance.¹⁴ He then tries to find a connection between all of this and his own destiny, (presumably through such numerological operations as determining his name number, birth path number, destiny number, etc., as well, perhaps, as consulting his horoscope), but comes up with nothing.

Much later in the summer, he chances to see a child playing with a piece of rock that appears to contain silver, and his researches soon turn up the fact that silver has an atomic weight of 107. At last, he feels, he has discovered the secret of Silver Lake:

¹⁴ These are not terribly accurate figures (the numbers yielded are 107.8, 108.2, and 77.8, respectively): the first two are perhaps close enough, give or take a million kilometers, but the third is quite exaggerated; they perhaps correspond to information available at the time.

Detta var sålunda öns hemlighet skriven i kartlavens hieroglyfer på berget. Detta var Silverträskets hemlighet, i vilket aldrig någon skatt blivit nedsänkt, utan ur vars igenlagda gruvöppning man kanske fordom upphämtat den vita skatten, som nu syntes bevakad av avundsjuke makter.¹⁵

The connection with his own fate is, presumably, that this has been revealed to him in order that he might exploit the forgotten resources of the island.

He spends considerable time and effort trying to convince the islanders and investors in the city to get involved in what he is by now convinced is a sure thing, but in vain. He decides to begin work himself, and prepares to drain the lake, but is prevented from doing so by the islanders, who now vent their pent-up resentment of him. It is then that he discovers that the atomic weight of silver is not in fact 107, and he abandons the project.

Two short scenes complete the tale. The first is aboard the steamboat which carries the conservator away from the island for good. As he catches his last sight of the island, his reaction suggests what this story is

¹⁵ Samlade verk, XXIX, 292:

This, then, was the secret of the island, written in lichen hieroglyphics on the mountain. This was the secret of Silver Lake, in which no treasure had ever been sunk, but through the filled-in mine entrance of which perhaps at one time white treasure was brought to the surface, treasure which now seemed guarded by jealous powers.

really about, as his failed dreams merge with his failed marriage:

När den lilla ångaren backade ut från ön satt konservatorn i aktersalongen hopkrupen och såg rätt framför sig som om han trodde, att han kunde göra sig osynlig och blind på samma gång. Men en tvärsjö från fjärden krängde båten så att lä-ventilerna dök ner. Genom det runda hålet såg han nu som i en diorama, men blott en sekund, kvarnen, hyddorna, berget ...

-- Bländverk! Djävulens bländverk! allt, alltsammans! tänkte han.¹⁶

Silver Lake is, then, as he himself has sensed, a symbol, and one intimately bound up with his own fate. It represents ambition: the pursuit of happiness. And human happiness is an illusion. The secret of the lake, the key to that happiness, is also an illusion, or at least unattainable.

But that is not the end of the story. In a final scene the conservator, now retired, picks up his morning newspaper ten years later and reads of important mineral discoveries on just that island in the archipelago. Investors have been found and a mining company

¹⁶ Samlade verk, XXIX, 293-94:

When the little steamboat backed out from the island the conservator sat in the after saloon, staring straight ahead, as if he believed that he could make himself at once both invisible and blind. But a cross-current from the bay rocked the ship, causing the leeside portholes to dip. Through the round hole he now saw, as if in a diorama, but only for a second, the mill, the cabins, the mountain ...

"Illusion! Damned illusion! everything, the whole works!" he thought.

formed, to which the islanders have sold their land at very lucrative prices, and Silver Lake is about to be exploited. This is an ironic twist to the story, but it goes a considerable way to lightening the cynicism of the conservator's departing thoughts. He has not benefited from the exploitation of the lake, but at least he has the satisfaction of knowing that he had been right. Nature can communicate with man, the jealous powers can be conquered, and there is a secret to the universe which can be found, if one persists! One can be disappointed by life, but not defeated!

Chapter 51

Advent

Written near the end of 1898 (during the season, in fact, of Advent), *Advent: ett mysterium*¹ (*Advent: A Mystery*) is a Christmas play. Its subtitle uses the term mystery in its mediaeval sense, a play about the mysteries of the faith, rather than in the modern cloak-and-dagger sense. Mystery, morality, dream play, a mixture of expressionism and naturalism, of fairy tale and nightmare, it has been described (Sprinchorn, 250) as "one of [Strindberg's] more abstruse dramas." It is also, along with *Påsk* (1900) and *Kronbruden* (1901), one of Strindberg's most explicitly Christian plays, and, in its treatment of evil, is heavily Swedenborgian.

Advent is a season of preparation for Christmas. The beginning of the liturgical year, Advent, like Lent, is a time of penance and reconciliation: there is a tradition of preaching the "Four Last Things" (Death, Judgement, Heaven, and Hell) during its four Sundays. The season not only commemorates the first coming of Christ in the Nativity, but looks forward to the Second, when Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. A time, then, for examination of

¹ *Samlade verk*, XL, 7-126.

one's conscience and one's life; for contrition, confession, reconciliation, and new beginnings.

This is relevant to Strindberg's play, which is one of his many attempts to come to grips with the problem of evil in the world: if God is all-powerful, why does he allow evil to exist, and if Christ suffered and died for the sins of all men, why is there still so much suffering in the world, including the suffering of innocent victims? Weighty problems indeed for a Christmas entertainment (the gravity of the themes, as well as the mixture of styles in the play -- not to mention the difficulty of working with child actors, who have extended scenes -- have ensured that it is not often tackled by directors, despite the fact that most productions have met with singular success). The gravity is made easier to swallow by the fairy-tale elements of the plot and by a considerable amount of theatrical hocus-pocus, and, as with the season of Advent itself, is dissipated at the end by the tranquil joy and optimism of the Nativity.

Strindberg thought very highly of the play. In a letter written January 3, 1899, he claimed to have solved, in this play, "... Det Ondas, Den Ondes och De Ondas problem ... från monistisk synpunkt."² A good

² Letter to Gustaf af Geijerstam, quoted in *Samlade verk*, XL, 256-57: "... the problem of evil, the Evil One, and evil people, from a monistic point of view."

deal of his "solution" is adapted from Swedenborg, whose works, particularly *Heaven and Hell* (1758), throw considerable light on the play.

Swedenborg teaches that man is born into evil, which he inherits from his parents. Evil was not created by God, who is all good and all truth, and is therefore incapable of creating evil or falsehood, but is a result of man's own self-love and pride. God allows evil to exist in order that man might exercise his free will; He has provided man with the knowledge and the means necessary for rejecting evil and accepting good, thus becoming part of Heaven, but He has left him entirely free to choose. The choosing of good is the acceptance of the divine law, which manifests itself in love of neighbour. The choosing of evil is the rejection of the divine law, manifested in love of self. Salvation is not the reward for a good life or damnation the punishment for a bad one, but the consequence of our own free choice. The choice must be made on two levels: the intellect and the will: i.e., one must give one's intellectual assent (or not) to the divine law (one must believe it to be good and true), and one must also then, through an act of will, apply that law (or not) to one's own life, by continuously rejecting evil (selfish) actions and choosing those which are good. If either element of the choice is lacking (as for instance if a man professes belief and

even appears to conform to it, but inwardly continues to act selfishly and counter to the interests of his neighbour), it is invalid, for it partakes of evil, and the man condemns himself. God has done everything possible to permit man to choose the good and thus to partake of Heaven, and He encourages him to do so at every opportunity, but He does not compel him to do so. Those who reject the good because they do not believe in it (because of love of self: they trust their own judgement over that of God) and/or because they do not wish to live according to its laws (because of love of the world: the coveting of worldly goods or pleasures) continue, after death, to live as they have lived on earth: outside of the divine law and the presence of the divine, that is, in Hell; likewise those who believe in and live according to the good, continue in the good after death, i.e., in Heaven. God does not cast the sinner into Hell: he casts himself there!

In this system, the Devil (Satan, Lucifer) does not exist, at least not in the traditional sense, as ruler of Hell or Prince of Darkness. Rather, the spirit of every man is either an angel or a devil, both while he is alive and after he has died, according to whether he has chosen or rejected the good. At death, the spirit has a natural affinity for those that are like itself, and quite naturally seeks them out, either in Heaven or in Hell. Likewise, the spirits that are

already in Heaven and in Hell, have an affinity for spirits like themselves still on earth, and they seek them out. Thus, when "the Devil" appears to someone, it is simply the spirit of one who lives in Hell seeking out the company of a spirit which resembles it (misery loves company!). The Devil is not sent (even less does it come of its own accord) to tempt us, then, but is called forth by evil already within us. In a way, then, the Devil is an embodiment of our own evil and his appearance can serve as a warning of the consequences of our choices and actions. Since such a warning can lead to reform, even the Devil can be seen as serving the good: God rules in Hell as well as in Heaven!

The actions of the good man are motivated by love of neighbour, those of the evil man by love of self. The evils we suffer are either the consequences of our own evil actions (whenever we ourselves have rejected the good out of love of self or love of the world), or of the evil actions of our neighbours. Everything which exists on earth corresponds to something which exists either in Heaven or in Hell; i.e., all "good" things (those which are useful or beneficial to man) are manifestations of love, truth, good deeds, kindness, consideration, etc., whereas all "evil" things (those which are counter-productive or harmful to man) are manifestations of hatred, lies, lust, avarice, dishonesty, etc. In Heaven there are only good things, and in

Hell only evil, but on earth the two are mixed and fall indiscriminately on good and evil alike. This, again, is to aid us in our choice of good or evil: since the good man is only good because he rejects evil, it follows that he must experience evil to be able to reject it (or conquer it with his goodness); if the evil man is to be reformed, he must experience good to be able to accept it. Depending on our response, then, our sufferings can save us, and our blessings damn us (and vice-versa, but there is no moral problem when the good prosper and the evil suffer)!

To reduce this to Strindberg's three points: 1) evil is the state into which man is born and is the result of sin (the rejection of good); by rejecting evil and accepting good we make ourselves part of Heaven, but we cannot reject evil if we do not experience it; 2) the Evil One is an evil spirit which is attracted to us because it finds affinities with our own evil natures; it can serve as a warning and a correction, helping us to reject evil and choose good; and 3) evil people are those who, despite God's every effort to persuade them otherwise and countless opportunities to reform, continue to reject the good, out of love of self and/or love of the world. If they die without reforming, they have condemned themselves. Finally, we suffer as a result of evil, but it is not necessarily always our own evil, and it is not neces-

sarily always the evil who suffer; suffering can be an opportunity to practice virtue by rejecting evil.³

At the beginning of the play, the two central characters, the Magistrate and his wife, are pictured as a respectable, pious, and comfortable old couple, enjoying the fruits of hard work and public service. All is not, however, as it seems: their lives are a sham. They have done everything to appear model members of the community, but are filled with envy, greed, vanity, and pride. Whether in their public, religious, or family lives, they have always acted according to the letter of the law, but their observances have been external only; inwardly they are filled with corruption. In Swedenborgian terms, what they do is good because it conforms to the law (human or divine), but they themselves are not good because they do not believe in the principles upon which they act: they are motivated by self-love (conforming to the law for what

³ I make no claim that the above summary is doctrinally accurate from a Swedenborgian point-of-view. Any summary must necessarily simplify; in doing so, I have tried to present the salient points, as I see them, as fairly and as clearly as possible. Works consulted were Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (which Strindberg is known to have read with great interest), Part III ("Hell"); *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Providence* (1764), Ch. XIV-XVI; and *Angelic Wisdom Concerning Divine Love and Wisdom* (1763), Part III, sections 264-281. Strindberg proceeded from Swedenborg to the play; I have gone from the play to Swedenborg. My reading of the latter may or may not be orthodox Swedenborgianism, then, but I believe it comes very close to what Strindberg himself took from the mystic.

they can get out of it) rather than love of neighbour. In public life their hypocrisy shows up in the Magistrate's amassing of worldly goods through his manipulation of the law and of his position (love of the world). In the religious sphere, their beliefs are nothing more than superstitions; their hypocrisy is symbolized by the monstrance promised as a thank-offering to the monastery: it was to have been of pure gold, but when the favour was granted the monstrance donated was of gilded silver. In their family life they attempt to break up their daughter's marriage, drive off their son-in-law, turn the daughter into a household slave, and mistreat their grandchildren. Everything about them, even their conduct to each other, is motivated solely by self-love. Professedly Christian and meticulous about religious observance, they are devoid of the Christian virtues.

When the play opens, this pair is seated in front of a mausoleum built on a portion of their land as their final resting place. It is a rather charming and attractive little building:

Till vänster Mausolén: En vittrappad liten tegelbyggnad med dörr- och fönsteröppning i spetsbågsstil utan bågar eller rutor; rött tegeltak; ovan på gaveln ett kors. Clematis med den violetta korsformiga blomman klänger på väggen. Vid murens fot åtskilliga blommor.

I förgrunden ett persikoträd med frukt,
under vilket sitter Lagmannen och Lagman-
skan.⁴

Like the couple themselves, this is a picture of quiet and dignified respectability. As we learn more about them, however, it becomes apparent that the white-plastered mausoleum is an appropriate symbol for their hypocrisy; a symbol, in fact, used by Christ Himself:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness (Matthew 23:27. King James translation).

This (physical) whited sepulchre is empty, of course, but it has been built on the site of a gallows, so in a sense is built upon dead men's bones; the sense in which it can also be said to contain them is discussed

⁴ Samlade verk, XL, 15:

To the left, the Mausoleum: a small brick building plastered in white, with door and window openings in the Gothic style, but without frames or window-panes; atop the gable of the red tiled roof, a cross. It is covered with the violet cross-shaped flowers* of clematis. At the foot of the wall, a profusion of flowers.

In the foreground, a peach tree in fruit, under which sit the Magistrate and the Magistrate's Wife.

* Since they are not mentioned in dialogue, the significance of the colour (violet = memory, nostalgia) and shape of these flowers would probably escape an audience.

below. The importance Strindberg attached to the mausoleum as a symbol is indicated by the fact that an early working title for the play was *Mausolén* (*The Mausoleum*) (Ollén, 263).

It soon becomes clear that the Magistrate and his wife are filled with self-satisfaction and self-righteousness. The Magistrate's Wife, moreover, is very vain about her physical appearance, despite the fact that the introductory stage direction specifies that she looks like a witch! They are, then, full of self-love. When the Neighbour enters, it is shown that they are, consequently, devoid of neighbourly love. His vineyards have been attacked by mildew and starlings, while theirs are untouched. Far from sympathizing, they gloat over their own (in their opinion, highly merited) good fortune, and suggest that he is responsible for his own misfortunes:

GRANNEN: Ojämnt falla ödets lotter....

LAGMANNEN: Det har väl sina goda grunder det!

GRANNEN: Jag förstår! Den rättfärdiges lön uteblir icke, och den orättfärdiges straff låter icke vänta på sig.

LAGMANNEN: Inte så illa menat! Men erkänn i alla fall att det är besynnerligt: två skiften ligga invid varandra, det ena bär god frukt och det andra bär dåligt.⁵

⁵ Samlade verk, XL, 18-19 (Act I):

THE NEIGHBOUR: The lots of fate fall unevenly....

THE MAGISTRATE: I suppose there are good reasons for that!

THE NEIGHBOUR: I understand! The reward of the righteous never fails, and the punishment of the unrighteous is not long in coming!

Ironically, the Magistrate is right: there is a good reason for the phenomenon, but it is not what he thinks: the Neighbour is an innocent victim, suffering the effects of evil committed by others. He comes even closer to the truth when he suggests that the Neighbour's misfortunes are the result of a curse:

... ni är en man med otur. Det är nämligen ingen hemlighet att ni misslyckas i allt vad ni företar er, och folket har sina egna tankar om den som går ensam och vänlös som ni. Inte sant: Ni har ju faktiskt inte en vän?⁶

These are the curses of Cain and of Deuteronomy, but are not visited on the Neighbour as punishment for his own crimes; rather, they are called forth by the evil of the Magistrate and his wife. Like all evils (and all blessings) in this world, they fall indiscriminately on

THE MAGISTRATE: It wasn't meant so harshly! But admit, in any case, that it's curious: two sections lie right beside each other, and the one bears good fruit while the other bears poorly.

The reference is to Matthew 7:17: "... every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: and every evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit." (Douay-Rheims translation.)

⁶ Samlade verk, XL, 20 (Act I):

... you're an unlucky man. You must know it's no secret that you fail in everything you undertake, and people are suspicious of anyone who walks alone and friendless, as you do. It's true, isn't it: you don't, in fact, have a single friend?

good and evil alike: the Magistrate will soon experience problems with his own vineyard (it is destroyed in a hailstorm), and his faith in his own righteousness will be shaken.

This is all very well as an explanation of why the innocent suffer, but it is not really much comfort to those who are suffering. What comfort there is, is offered by the Neighbour to Amalia (another innocent victim): the acceptance of adversity, especially when unmerited, brings great spiritual rewards:

Mitt goda barn: att lida rättvist, det göra straffångarne, och det är ingen ära, men att få lida orätt, det är en nåd och en prövning som den ståndaktige hämtar gyllene frukter av.⁷

The luck of the Magistrate and his wife begins to turn after they have thrown their son-in-law, Adolf, off the farm (he has had poor harvests for several seasons, and is unable to pay the rent he owes them), preventing their daughter, Amalia, from going with him by threatening to separate her from her children. A Franciscan monk arrives, ostensibly to bless the mausoleum, but instead he confronts them with evidence of their

⁷ *Samlade verk*, XL, 35 (Act I):

My good child, to suffer deservedly is something that prisoners do, and is no honour, but to be able to suffer undeservedly is a grace and a testing, from which the steadfast soul reaps golden fruits.

wrongdoings and deceptions, and ends up with what sounds very much like a curse:

... nu skall du se vad sort du skall skörda;
tistel och törne skall växa i din vingård;
ensam och vänlös skall du gå, och din ålders
ro skall bytas i kiv och strid!⁸

This is a combination of elements from the curses on Adam (Genesis 3:17-19), on Cain (Genesis 4:11-12), and of Deuteronomy, and this time the curse is merited. It is important to note, however, that the Franciscan does not actually call the curse down on their heads -- there is no cursing formula ("Accursed be you in these respects," or "May these things happen to you") -- but rather, simply predicts what will happen to them: the disasters which befall them are a consequence of their actions, not external punishment for them.

At the same time as their fortunes begin to turn, the couple is presented with a series of supernatural occurrences which also serve as warnings of the direction in which they are heading: God spares no effort to induce them to reform their lives. The first of these, and one of the most important symbolically, is the

⁸ Samlade verk, XL, 31 (Act I):

... now you'll see what kind of harvest you have: thistle and thorn will grow in your vineyard, you will walk alone and without friends, and the tranquility of your old age will be replaced by quarrels and fighting!

appearance of a spot of reflected sunlight, or sun-cat,⁹ even though the sun has already set.

In Swedenborg, the sun is a symbol of God, and, more specifically, of His presence and love: it shines (or not) on good and evil alike, while the lower orders of creation seek protection from its rays in holes, caves, and dark places. The symbolism is not particular to Swedenborg, however; so consistent is the association of the sun with the divinity, that the symbolic identification of the two seems part of the nature of things. In Christian symbolism, the sun is more particularly associated with Christ and, because of its pervasiveness, with the all-seeing, all-knowing Eye of God. This aspect of sun symbolism is especially important in Advent, particularly in Acts I and II, where the sun-cat seeks out and exposes hidden secrets and hypocrisy. Fear of the sun symbolizes fear of exposure.

Ironically, the very first words in the play refer to the sun in an obviously symbolic sense. The Magistrate uses it as a symbol of life's blessings, which the couple now enjoy after a life of labour: "Livets

⁹ The Swedish word is *en solkatt*: a reflection of sunlight onto another surface, as from a mirror. The word is made up of two other words, that for sun and that for cat. Quite apart from the delightfulness of the conceit, for which no English equivalent exists, it is desirable to coin an English term on the Swedish model for the purposes of this play: in Act III Amalia's children and their Playmate treat the reflection as if it were in fact a cat. Accordingly, the term sun-cat will be used throughout the present discussion.

afton har slutligen skänkt oss det solsken, som dess morgon lovade...."¹⁰ His words are ironic: actual evening is rapidly approaching throughout the opening act, and the sunshine in their lives is drawing to an end, not beginning. There is also a promise and a warning implicit in his observation, for the sun sets only to rise again the next day: although their sun is setting, they can enjoy it again (in the next life) if they do not die in darkness!

The sun-cat appears on the wall of the mausoleum, as if to point out the whited-sepulchre symbolism discussed above. The reaction of the old couple is significant: the Magistrate tries to find a natural explanation for it, but nevertheless both view it with superstition, as an omen. It should be a good sign, but appearing as it does on the house of death, its message is, at best, ambiguous:

(En sol-katt synes på mausoléns vägg; den dallrar som om den reflekterats från ett rinnande vatten.)

....

LAGMANNEN: Det är solen som speglar sig i floden. Det betyder ...

LAGMANSKAN: Det betyder att vi skola se solen lysa ännu en lång tid ...

¹⁰ Samlade verk, XL, 15: "The evening of our life has finally sent us the sunshine which its morning promised...."

LAGMANNEN: Eller tvärtom.¹¹

As it happens, the Magistrate is right: it is a warning from God that they are soon to die. The main function served by this exchange is to alert the audience that the sun-cat means something, and that its appearances should be noted. It remains on the mausoleum wall during the scenes with the Neighbour and with Adolf. During the latter, Adolf reveals that the Magistrate cannot bear the sun (he has secrets he does not wish exposed), and after he leaves, the Magistrate discloses three important things about this revelation: it is true; the condition was inherited from his mother (cf. the Swedenborgian doctrine of the inheritance of evil from our parents, and the doctrine of Original Sin); and the Magistrate's Wife is similarly afflicted:

Minns du vad han sa om solen! Det tyckte jag var det underligaste av allt! Hur kan han veta att ... att det är så? Att jag är så egendomligt född att solen alltid bränner mig, det säger man beror därpå att min mor

¹¹ Samlade verk, XL, 17-18 (Act I):

(A sun-cat appears on the wall of the mausoleum; it wobbles as if reflected by running water.)

....

THE MAGISTRATE: It's the sun, reflected by the river. It means ...

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: It means we'll see the sun shine for a long time yet ...

THE MAGISTRATE: Or the opposite.

fick solsting då hon bar mig, men att du också ...¹²

The Magistrate's Wife shuts him up at the mention of her own weakness. This shows that she knows intolerance of the sun is somehow bound up with evil spirits, and indicates her own fear of being exposed. At this point they notice something very odd indeed about the sun-cat; if they had thought earlier that it was an omen, they are convinced of it now:

LAGMANSKAN (skrämd): Tyst! -- När man talar om trollen, så ... Säg, är inte solen nere?

LAGMANNEN: Jo visst är han nere?

LAGMANSKAN: Hur kan då solkatten sitta kvar på mausolén?

(Solkatten rör sig.)

LAGMANNEN: Jesus Maria! Järtecken!

LAGMANSKAN: Järtecken! säger du! och på graven. Det är inte alla dagar det händer ... och endast vissa, få människor som levat i tron på de högsta tingen ...

(Solkatten slocknar.)¹³

¹² Samlade verk, XL, 26 (Act I):

Do you remember what he said about the sun? I thought that was stranger than anything else! How can he know that ... that it's so: that I was born in such odd circumstances, that the sun always burns me? They say it's because my mother got sunstroke when she was carrying me, but that you also ...

¹³ Ibid., 26-27 (Act I):

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE (frightened): Quiet! -- Speak of the devil, and ... Say, hasn't the sun gone down?

THE MAGISTRATE: Yes, of course it has; why do you ask?

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: Then how can the sun-cat still be sitting on the mausoleum?

(The sun-cat stirs.)

THE MAGISTRATE: Jesus and Mary! An omen!

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: An omen, you say! And on the tomb. That doesn't happen every day and only to a chosen few who have

The Magistrate's Wife persists in seeing the sun-cat as a sign of special favour, a blessing upon their final resting place, and not as the warning which it is. It is no accident that as she launches into her litany of hypocrisy, the sun-cat disappears: the outward signs of piety cannot deceive the Eye of God! The sun-cat is back in its old spot when the Franciscan arrives, and when the couple try to get him to confirm that it is a sign of special favour he, knowing their true natures, dismisses the notion out-right, giving his opinion that the spot on the wall is only phosphorescence.

The Magistrate and his wife are more and more being revealed for what they are; the words of the Franciscan and his refusal to consecrate their mausoleum, are additional steps in the process. As this happens, they drop their pretenses, especially towards each other. The sun-cat participates in this unmasking, now making it clear even to them that it is inseparably linked to the same sun they fear:

LAGMANSKAN (som nu belyses av solkatten):
Ve! Han bränner mig!

LAGMANNEN: Nu fick man se hur du ser ut!
(Sol-katten träffar Lagmannen.) Ve! nu
bränner han mig!

—

lived with faith in the highest things ...
(The sun-cat disappears.)

LAGMANSKAN: Och så ser du ut!¹⁴

This is the sun-cat as the Eye of God, unmasking hypocrisy, but another aspect of sun symbolism also applies here: according to Cirlot (305),

[The sun] is related to purification and tribulation, the sole purpose of which is to render transparent the opaque crust of the senses so that they may perceive the higher truths.

The burning sensation experienced by the Magistrate and his wife, then, is an attempt by divine providence to burn through the masks behind which they have hidden, in order that they might indeed see themselves as they really are and recognize the need for reform!

Already in Act I, the reactions of the Magistrate and his wife to the sun and the sun-cat are contrasted sharply to the reactions of their two grandchildren (the children of Adolf and Amalia), Erik and Thyra, as indeed the innocence of the children is contrasted to the guilt of the grandparents. When the children make their first appearance, they too are illuminated by the sun-cat, but since they are free of evil, they are not burned by it as the old couple was; it is, rather, a

¹⁴ Samlade verk, XL, 33 (Act I):

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE (who is now illuminated by the sun-cat): Help! He's burning me!

THE MAGISTRATE: So that's what you really look like! (The sun-cat falls on the Magistrate.) Help! Now he's burning me!

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: And that's what you really look like!

thing of wonder and delight for them. Although they do not know how the sun-cat has just affected their grandparents, that interaction must certainly be included among the good works the sun has performed that day!

ERIK och THYRA (in; sol-katten faller på barnen, omväxlande).

ERIK: Se sol-katten!

THYRA: Åh, den vackra solen! Men han hade ju gått och lagt sig nyss!

ERIK: Han kanske fått vara oppe längre i kväll efter han har varit snäll i dag.¹⁵

Those who have nothing to hide need not fear the sun, and consequently rejoice in it (and, as Act III demonstrates, it rejoices in them)!

The old couple's growing distrust of each other manifests itself in an inability to sleep at night, lest the other get up to no good in the meantime, and each begins to suspect the other of trying to poison him. This occasions one of the play's few classical allusions, which is fraught with irony:

LAGMANNEN: Det blir en angenäm ålderdom för Philemon och Baucis.

LAGMANSKAN: Åtminstone komma inga gudar på besök till dem.

¹⁵ Samlade verk, XL, 35:

ERIK and THYRA (enter; the sun-cats falls on the children, alternately).

ERIK: Look at the sun-cat!

THYRA: Oh, the beautiful sun! But didn't he go off to bed just now?

ERIK: Maybe he got permission to stay up later tonight because he has been good today.

LAGMANNEN: Inte precis gudar!¹⁶

Philemon and Baucis were two old cottagers who were visited by Zeus, whom they entertained so hospitably, despite their poverty, that he promised them whatever they wished. Their wish, that they might die together, was granted. Philemon was transformed into an oak tree, Baucis into a linden, and their branches intertwined. They have become an emblem of conjugal love which endures into old age. What a contrast the biting irony of this exchange makes to the Magistrate's opening words, cited above!

As the closing words of this extract are spoken, the Magistrate catches sight of the next supernatural inducement to reform: a procession of the ghosts of those who have suffered from the old couple's evil, led by Death, with his scythe and hourglass. There is a White Lady (the Magistrate's first wife -- Amalia's mother -- all traces of whose existence the Magistrate's Wife has tried to eradicate, even to the extent of persuading Amalia that she is her own daughter); the goldsmith who made the false monstrance (and was wrongfully accused by the Magistrate's Wife of having done

¹⁶ Samlade verk, XL, 40 (Act I):

THE MAGISTRATE: It's turning out to be a pleasant old age for Philemon and Baucis!

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: At least they won't be visited by any gods.

THE MAGISTRATE: Not exactly gods!

so without her knowledge); a beheaded seaman (wrongfully executed as a result of the Magistrate's corruption) carrying his severed head; an auctioneer (who has auctioned off the property of other victims of the Magistrate's corrupt judgements, and presumably has been blamed for the hardships they consequently suffered); a Chimney Sweep (forced into that occupation and thus deprived of his childhood because the Magistrate, his guardian, stole his inheritance); a fool bearing a cap with ass-ears and a sign reading "Caul" (the Magistrate was born with a caul, which was taken as a sign of special favour, a token of prosperity); a surveyor (who had been provided with false maps by the Magistrate and was imprisoned for making illegal land divisions); and, finally, a judge, dressed exactly like the Magistrate and like him missing his right index finger (a token of perjury: the finger stuck to the Bible when the false oath was taken), with a rope around his neck. Significantly, these ghostly figures, who cross the stage twice in succession, leave each time from the mausoleum: they are the "dead men's bones" of the whited-sepulchre allusion! Neither the Magistrate nor his wife is able to pray when confronted with this evidence of their own evil: their professed religious beliefs have now been proved hollow and empty; having rejected God, they have nowhere to turn in their anguish. Having realized this, they get their

next supernatural visitation: the arrival of the Other.

The Other is a Swedenborgian devil: a creature from Hell, but nothing like the traditional image of Satan. His appearance is bizarre, but there is nothing satanic or demonic about it, unless perhaps the red colour of his woolen scarf:

DEN ANDRE (fram från baksidan av Madonnans Kapell. Han är ytterst mager och maläten; tunt benat snusbrunt hår; glest skägg som blått; urvuxna dåliga kläder, utan linne; en röd yllehalsduk virad om halsen; glasögon och en rotting under armen).¹⁷

So harmless is his appearance, that Amalia, who has no idea of his identity, describes him as "den främmande skolmästaren med röda halsduken."¹⁸ Quite apart from the social comment on the eccentricities and/or poverty of schoolmasters implicit in this description, it points to the Other's function; in the letter to Geijerstam cited above, Strindberg explains: "... Den Onde (legio) endast är Esprit correcteur (Swedenborgs tanke!) icke

¹⁷ Samlade verk, XL, 43 (Act I):

THE OTHER (appears from behind the Madonna's chapel. He is extremely thin and moth-eaten: thin snuff-brown hair worn in a part; a light beard which gives a blue tinge to his skin; ancient, shabby clothes, with no shirt; a red wool scarf wound around his neck; wearing glasses, and carrying a cane under his arm).

¹⁸ Ibid., 51 (Act II): "... the unfamiliar school-master with the red scarf."

ond princip...."¹⁹ What better image for a spirit of correction than a schoolmaster, however down-and-out!

On his first appearance, the Other explains that he was once a human being (hence, not Lucifer), that he is in the service of the good (i.e., his mission is to achieve reform, not damnation), that he nevertheless is the Evil One (since he -- together with those like him -- is all there is corresponding to traditional conceptions of Satan), and that the evil natures of the Magistrate and his wife have summoned him:

LAGMANNEN: Vem är ni!

DEN ANDRE: Jag blev den Andre, emedan jag ville vara den Förste; jag var en ond människa och har fått till straff att tjäna det Goda!

LAGMANNEN: Då är du icke Den Onde?

DEN ANDRE: Jo; och jag har till uppgift att pina er fram till korset, där vi skola råkas en gång.

LAGMANSKAN (till Lagmannen): Hör icke på honom! Bed honom gå!

DEN ANDRE: Det hjälper inte! Ni ha kallat på mig och nu få ni dras med mig!²⁰

¹⁹ Samlade verk, XL, 257: "... The Evil One (Legion) is only an esprit correcteur (Swedenborg's idea!), not the principle of evil...."

²⁰ Ibid., 43-44 (Act I):

THE MAGISTRATE: Who are you?

THE OTHER: I became the Other because I wanted to be the First;* I was an evil man and as punishment must serve the Good!

THE MAGISTRATE: You aren't the Evil One, then?

THE OTHER: Yes, I am; and my task is to goad you forward to the cross, where we shall one day meet.

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE (to the Magistrate): Don't listen to him! Ask him to leave!

THE OTHER: That won't help! You have summoned me forth, and now you will have to put up with me!

In Act II, the sun-cat continues to function as the Eye of God, searching out and exposing secrets. One of these secrets is that the Magistrate has been married before, to Amalia's mother. The secret is closely guarded, but the sun-cat ferrets it out:

LAGMANSKAN: (Solkatten faller på Lagmanskans porträtt.) Ser du! Han vet den hemligheten också.

LAGMANNEN: Du menar att det sitter ett porträtt av henne bakom ditt!²¹

Meanwhile, the Other further clarifies his nature and his mission. He explains that even though he is a devil from Hell, he is nevertheless a servant of God -- this devil even quotes Scripture! -- and that he has not come to secure their souls for Hell (their own evil natures seem to be taking care of that quite nicely),

—
* There is a four-level pun here: andre can mean either "other" or "second", and förste (first) is pronounced the same as furste (prince, or sovereign): a possible reference to Lucifer's ambition to rule in Heaven. I have given what seems the most probable primary meaning: the Other became what he is because he wanted to put himself first (i.e., he suffered from self-love).

²¹ Samlade verk, XL, 55:

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: (The sun-cat falls on the portrait of the Magistrate's Wife.) You see! It knows that secret too.

THE MAGISTRATE: You mean that there's a portrait of her behind yours!

but rather to attempt to reverse the course of their lives and turn them towards the good. He predicts that the evil consequences of their actions, hitherto visited on others, will now begin to redound on themselves. As with the Franciscan in Act I, he does not call disasters down on them; they are the logical consequences of choices they have freely made:

DEN ANDRE: Du har aldrig trott på det goda; nu skall du tro på den Onde! Ser du den All-gode kan icke göra ont, därför överlåter han det åt sådana uslingar som jag är! Men för säkrare resultat skall ska ni två få pina varandra och er själva!

LAGMANSKAN (på knä för Den Andre): Skona oss! Hjälp oss! Nåd!

DEN ANDRE (som om han reve sina kläder): Stig upp, människa! Ve mig! En är Den Ende du skall bedja till! Nå, nu tron I, fastän jag inte har röd kappa och svärd och penning-pung och kan säga lustigheter; men akta er ni för att ta mig skämtsamt. Jag är allvarlig som synden, och sträng som vedergällningen! Icke har jag kommit för att locka er med guld och ära, utan för att tukta er med ris och skorpioner ... (....) Er tid hastar åt slutet, därför ställ om ditt hus, ty du skall dö! (Det hörs ett dån som av oväder.) Vems röst är det nu som talar? Säg det, och skrämden med harskramlan när han blåser fram över din vingård! Storm och hagel, heter han, och han bär förödelsen under sina vingar och straffet i sina klor. Tag på dig segerhuvan nu och kläd dig i det goda samvetet ... (Hagelskuren höres smattra.)

LAGMANNEN: Nåd!

DEN ANDRE: Ja om du lovar förbättring!²²

²² Samlade verk, XL, 58 (Act II):

THE OTHER: You've never believed in the good; now you'll have to believe in the Evil One. You see, the All-Good cannot do evil, so He leaves that task to wretches like me! But to obtain a more certain result, you two will have to torment each other and yourselves!

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE (on her knees before the Other): Spare us! Help us! Mercy!

At the end of this act, the Magistrate takes a

THE OTHER (as if rending his garments):
Stand up, mortal! Woe is me! There's Only One
to whom you should pray! Well, now you
believe me, even though I don't have a red
cape and a sword and a money-pouch, and can
say amusing things; but beware of not taking
me seriously. I am as serious as sin and as
exacting as retribution! I have not come to
entice you with gold and honour, but to chas-
tise you with the switch and with scorpions*
... (....) Your time is quickly running out,
so set your house in order, for you're going
to die!** (A rumble, as of a storm, is
heard.) Whose voice speaks now? Tell me, and
frighten him away with a rattle when he blows
over your vineyard! Storm and hail is his
name, and he carries destruction under his
wings and punishment in his talons. Put on
your caul now, and clothe yourself in your
good conscience ... (The clattering of hail-
stones is heard as the storm strikes.)

THE MAGISTRATE: Mercy!

THE OTHER: Yes, if you promise to amend
your life!

* This is a rather interesting variation (especially considering the speaker!) on 1 Kings 12:14 (3 Kings 12:14 in translations based on the Vulgate), where Rehoboam (son of King Solomon) says "... my father ... chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." (King James translation.) Strindberg often alluded to the verse: see, for example, *Engelbrekt* (*Skrifter*, X, 208: Act IV), where Engelbrekt himself paraphrases the verse, and *Riksföreståndaren* (*The Regent*, *Ibid.*, 314: Act I), where the paraphrase is spoken by Gustav Trolle.

** This is another biblical allusion: a direct quotation, in fact of the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah

(1) to the fleeing Hezekiah (reported in identical

first faltering step towards regeneration: he promises to free the children, who have been locked in the wine-cellar as punishment for a misdeed of which they are innocent. A small step, considering the magnitude of his sins, but nevertheless a step in the right direction. This pleases the Other, who warns him, however, against backsliding:

Första steget framåt alltså, men vänder du dig om, så skall du se att jag gör skäl för mitt namn, ty jag heter: Legio!²³

The allusion is to Mark 5:9, where an unclean spirit challenged by Christ tells him, "My name is Legion: for we are many." (King James and Douay-Rheims translations.) The implication is that if the Magistrate reverts, he will be visited not only by one, but by innumerable devils.

Also of interest in Act II is the Other's reaction to sunlight. While he was alive, he too spurned the sun and sought out darkness. Now that he has seen Hell,

—

verses, in 2 Kings 20:1 and Isaiah 38:1): "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." (King James translation.)

²³ Samlade verk, XL, 59:

And so you've taken the first step, but if you turn back again you'll discover that I live up to my name: for my name is Legion!

however, he finds sunlight (the Truth) more and more attractive:

LAGMANNEN: Han är rädd för solen, han också! Haha!

DEN ANDRE: Ännu en tid, ja. Men när jag vant mig vid ljuset en gång skall jag hata mörkret!²⁴

Meanwhile, Erik and Thyra are still locked up in the wine-cellar. Again as an indication of their innocence, they are joined by the sun-cat, with which they frolic as if with a real cat. Like their grandparents, they are also joined by a supernatural visitor in human form; since they know nothing of evil, however, the visitor they attract is also innocent; indeed, their Playmate eventually turns out to be the Child Jesus! In a series of actions the symbolism of which scarcely needs comment, he leads them out of the dark cellar to the Fountain of Living Waters, pausing there to baptize the Chimney Sweep (whose countenance changes from black to white before our very eyes) and to reunite him with his mother ("en vit dam"-- a white lady -- possibly, but not necessarily, the same person as Amalia's mother, "Vita Frun" -- the White Lady). As they enter the garden, and again before He leaves them there, the

²⁴ Samlade verk, XL, 57:

THE MAGISTRATE: He's afraid of the sun; he also! Ha ha!

THE OTHER: Yes, for awhile yet. But once I get used to the light, I'll hate the darkness.

Playmate warns Erik and Thyra against disturbing a tree which overhangs the spring. While this parallels the Garden of Eden story -- with the exception that the children will not disturb the tree -- Strindberg has modified a few details of that story, and thus extended its symbolism. The tree which they are not to touch, presumably because if they do so its flowers will fall, is an enormous fuschia, the flowers of which are popularly known in Swedish as *Kristi bloddroppar*, drops of Christ's blood (cf. the English popular name for the flower, bleeding-hearts): they are not to do anything which would cause the shedding of Christ's blood. In other words, they are admonished to refrain from sin.

A golden bird flies unto the scene and perches in the tree (thus disturbing it), and when this bird breaks into sound, it gives the call of the cuckoo. The Swedish word used for this bird, *guldfågel* (literally, gold bird), is not the name of a specific bird, but rather a general term referring to its golden colour; it is also a colloquial term for a rich person. In the superstitious world in which the Magistrate (who is a rich man) lives, to see a cuckoo in a dream is an omen of the death of someone close (Meurice, 63). A characteristic peculiar to the cuckoo is relevant here: it lacks parental solicitude, laying its eggs in the nests of other birds and leaving the unwilling hosts to raise its young: an interesting comment, perhaps, on the lack

of affection shown by the old couple to Amalia and her children (and to the Magistrate's ward, the Chimney Sweep, who is left to fend for himself in an unfamiliar world)! What we have then, is an emblem of the Magistrate, his sin, and his imminent death!

The Magistrate and his wife both appear in the garden, but both are expelled: the Magistrate by the sun-cat, which chases him out, the Magistrate's Wife by her shame at not being able to accept the forgiveness offered by the Playmate (He tells her to "go and sin no more", but she is too proud and vain to admit her sins). The Other also appears, the serpent in this Garden of Eden, but quite unlike the original:

DEN ANDRE: Så ser jag ut därför att jag en gång rörde vid trädet; sedan var det min lust att narra andra göra detsamma. Men nu sedan jag är gammal har jag ångrat mig, och nu går jag omkring bland människorna och varnar dem, men nu tror ingen mig mer, ingen, därför att jag en gång ljugit.²⁵

Strindberg here goes beyond Swedenborg, who holds that after death reform of the spirit is impossible; the Other indicates that it is indeed still possible, and elsewhere suggests that his present duties are a kind

²⁵ Samlade verk, XL, 81:

THE OTHER: I look like this because I once disturbed the tree; then it was my delight to lure others into doing the same thing. But now that I'm old, I've repented, and now I walk among mankind warning them, but nobody believes me anymore, nobody, because once I lied.

of penance. This prepares us for the events of the final act. The passage also explains why, despite the efforts of both God and the devil, so many still tread the primrose path to Hell: they believe neither the good news nor the bad!

In contrast to most Protestant churches, Swedenborg believed that both faith and good works were necessary to attain salvation (the good must be chosen with both the intellect and the will). The Magistrate and his wife reject the good mainly through their evil works, which belie the faith they profess, but their profession of faith is also deficient: there is no belief, only lip-service, belief in God and His Son having been replaced by superstition. This is summarized in the Magistrate's Wife's experiences at the spring. She has heard that it is miraculous (on a symbolic level it is both the Fountain of Living Waters -- Christ, in Whose blood all sins can be washed away -- and the miraculous pool of Bethesda²⁶), but she does

²⁶ John 5:2-4:

Now there is at Jerusalem ... a pool ... called ... Bethesda*....

....

... an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

(King James translation.)

* The name Bethesda means House of Mercy.

not believe it. She decides that there is no harm in trying its waters anyway (a manifestation, not of faith, but of superstition), and kneels down to drink. She perceives in the spring a truth (that the children have been released from their captivity), which she rejects, preferring her own judgement to the evidence of the spring, and when she drinks of the water, she finds it not to her taste. Exposure to the good, however, paralyzes her, and in this state of helplessness she panics, calling on God for deliverance (from the effects of good!):

LAGMANSKAN: (fram till källan): Se här är den berömda källan, som ska bota för allt! sen ängelen har rört om förstås! -- Men det är nog bara lögn! Nå, man kan ju alltid släcka törsten, och vatten som vatten! (Hon lutar sig över källan.) Men vad ser jag för slag! -- Erik och Thyra med en främmande gosse! Vad betyder det! För de äro icke här! Det måtte vara en spåkälla! (Hon tar bägaren och fyller samt dricker.) Fy, så det smakar koppar (Hon gör ansträngningar att komma på benen.) Min Gud, min Gud hav förbarmande ... eljes blir jag liggande ...²⁷

²⁷ Samlade verk, XL, 77-78:

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE (approaches the spring): And this is the famous spring that's supposed to cure everything! after the angel has disturbed it, of course! -- But surely that's just a lie! Well anyway, one can always slake one's thirst, and water's water! (She bends over the spring.) But what in the world do I see here? -- Erik and Thyra with an unfamiliar young boy! What does that mean! For they aren't here! The spring must be able to foretell the future! (She takes the cup and fills it, then drinks.) Ugh! it has such a taste of copper (She tries hard to stand up.) My God, my God, have mercy ... or I'll be left lying here ...

The Magistrate's Wife has regularly attended Mass and has been a frequent receiver of the Holy Sacrament (the fountain of grace);²⁸ this little scene recreates symbolically her approaches to the altar, and shows why her pious practices do not stand in her favour: internally she was and remains an unbeliever. It is significant that she tastes copper in the water, for that metal is traditionally associated with Venus; it does not come from the water, but is a projection of her own feminine vanity (love of self). Her prayer for help is typical of those who pay no heed to religion until they are in trouble: then, and only then, do they pray!

Probably to her great surprise, her prayer is answered: the Playmate runs to her assistance. She does not recognize him (although after he has gone the children make it clear that they have done so), but accepts his help, and instead of gratitude she gives him curses, and she remains unchanged: once a soul has rejected the good, he cannot recognize it in others.

²⁸ Frida Uhl's parents, who provided the inspiration for the old couple, were devout Austrian Catholics, who nevertheless treated Strindberg and his second wife (their daughter) badly. As well, his first four children, Karin, Greta, Hans, and Christine (Kerstin), were raised as Catholics. The middle two of these children (he was to have another daughter, Anne-Marie, with Harriet Bosse, in 1902) are said to have been the models for Erik and Thyra, although in 1898 Hans would have been fourteen and Greta seventeen!

Acts IV and V are visions of Hell. In Swedenborg, Hell consists of many small communities, the members of each of which have led similar lives, have suffered from the same delusions, and have committed the same types of sins, damning themselves for the same reasons: after death the spirit seeks out spirits like itself and voluntarily goes where they are. In Act IV, accordingly, the Magistrate's Wife, whose sins can all be attributed to her vanity, is transported to an infernal ball, at which the other guests are also monsters of self-love. The Master of Ceremonies at the ball is, in fact, the Other; the Seven Deadly Sins are in attendance; there is a Prince (who, despite being a grotesque hunchback, considers himself quite a success with the ladies, not realizing that whatever favours he has received from them were given out of pity); and the other guests (whose physical appearance now reflects their spiritual condition) are cripples, beggars, and other social outcasts. The musicians, clad in grey with whitened, sorrowful faces, seem to play their instruments, but no sound is heard: there is no music in Hell! The Magistrate's Wife, whose aged and ungainly appearance has not altered, is now decked out in a parody of elegance, and she is chosen Queen of the Ball. Unfortunately, she can see the other guests as they really are rather than as they imagine themselves, and is so seen by them. The Prince pays her courtly

respect, but when she draws attention to his grotesqueness, he spits in her face and calls her a hag: the damned are in Hell to torment each other, and the instrument of torture is what they least can stand -- the truth! The Prince reveals himself as her brother, and confronts her with another of her buried crimes.

The main decoration of the ballroom is a bust of Pan, an appropriate deity for Hell: the mediaeval image of Satan was patterned after Pan, with his human face and torso, but the horns, beard, and lower limbs of a goat. The identification is innate: as a nature god, Pan symbolizes the baser aspects of humanity. Strindberg identifies the statue for the audience (a consideration he does not always accord them) and makes the Pan-Satan connection in Act V:

LAGMANNEN: Vems är bysten där?
 LAGMANSKAN: Det skall vara den nye Guden!
 LAGMANNEN: Han ser ju ut som en get!
 LAGMANSKAN: Det är kanske getternas gud.
 LAGMANNEN: "Getterna på den vänstra sidan"
 ... Vad är det jag sitter och minns för slag?
 PRINSEN: Det är guden Pan!
 LAGMANNEN: Fan?
 PRINSEN: Densamme! Alldeles densamme! Och när herdarne om natten -- jaja inte de herdarne -- få se ett hår av fällen intagas de av en panisk förskräckelse ...²⁹

²⁹ Samlade verk, XL, 112-13:

THE MAGISTRATE: Who's that a bust of?
 THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: It must be the new God!
 THE MAGISTRATE: He looks like a goat!
 THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: Maybe it's the god of the goats.
 THE MAGISTRATE: "The goats on the left side" ...What in the world is that, that came into my mind?*

Quite apart from this association, Pan is particularly suitable as presiding divinity: he was constantly enamoured of one nymph or another, but they all shunned him because of his grotesque ugliness.

Everyone in this extraordinary setting is silent except the Prince and the Magistrate's Wife (whose special task it is to torment each other), and the Master of Ceremonies (the Other), who explains to them (and to

THE PRINCE: It's the god Pan!

THE MAGISTRATE: The Devil?**

THE PRINCE: The same! The very same! And at night when the shepherds -- no, not those shepherds!*** -- catch sight of a hair of his hide, they are seized with panic ...****

* It is Matthew 25: 31-33:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory.... ...he will separate men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. (Jerusalem Bible.)

** This is actually quite funny. Swedish cuss-words are mainly demonic (as English ones are sexual, French sacrilegious, German excremental, etc.), and fan (a corruption of Satan) is a mild oath!

*** A reference to the shepherds who received the first news of Christ's nativity.

**** The word panic is, in fact, derived from Pan's mischievous habit of frightening shepherds and woodsmen with his sudden appearances!

the audience) the implications of their situation. It is here, for instance, that Strindberg addresses the problem of why man should have to suffer for his sins if Christ has already done that for him:

PRINSEN: ... jag fattar ej varför jag skall lida evigt, då Han lidit i mitt ställe.

....

CEREMONIMÄSTAREN: -- Men när du var stolt och icke ville ha hjälp att lida så får du dras med det själv.³⁰

Christ's sacrifice is indeed applicable to all, but we ourselves have to make the application by accepting the vicarious satisfaction; otherwise, we are on our own!

When the Prince refuses to join in tormenting the Magistrate's Wife, it is explained that he has no choice in the matter, because his own nature (which he has formed himself through his free choices) will drive him towards it "... du [kan] icke straxt ... upphöra att vara vad du är; och du är vad du velat bliva!"³¹

An interesting little Strindbergian tag slips into the dialogue of this scene. The expression sums up Strindberg's view of history, namely that there are

³⁰ Samlade verk, XL, 88 (Act IV):

THE PRINCE: ... I don't understand why I have to suffer eternally, when He has suffered in my stead.

....

THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES: -- But since you were proud and did not wish help in suffering, you have to put up with it yourself.

³¹ Ibid., 90 (Act IV): "... you can't suddenly stop being what you are, and you are what you've chosen to become!"

patterns, in individual experience and in history in general, which repeat themselves over and over again. These patterns form the symbolic framework of his art:

LAGMANSKAN: gå de döda igen?

PRINSEN: Allt går igen!³²

By far the most important revelation, however, is that the scene does not take place in Hell itself, but in an antechamber, or waiting-room, and that something very important is expected to happen, although nobody is quite sure what or when:

... ni är i Väntsalen vi kallar. Den kallas så emedan vi -- (suckar) -- tillbringa vår tid här i väntan -- -- -- i väntan på något som skall komma en gång ...³³

Meanwhile, the Magistrate is undergoing his own harrowing experience. He finds himself in a courtroom, the only other occupant of which is his own ghost. Nevertheless, the bell rings as if by itself, the gavel strikes on the judge's bench, the chairs all shuffle towards the table, and the handcuffs and executioner's axe on the wall move ominously. The Magistrate is, in

³² Samlade verk, XL, 96 (Act IV):

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: do the dead come back again?

THE PRINCE: Everything comes back again!

³³ Ibid., 90 (Act IV):

... you're in what we call the Waiting Room. It's called that because we -- (He sighs.) -- pass our time here in waiting -- -- -- in waiting for something that will happen some time ...

fact, trying himself for his own crimes, and he finds himself guilty!

Act V begins with an auction of the possessions of the Magistrate and his wife, in which all of the property is restored to its rightful owners, and the Magistrate joins his wife in the Waiting Room. The realities of the situation come quickly, and it is all dismal, hard, and unforgiving news: it is too late for repentance, their present situation will never end, their sins will have to be suffered until they swell up inside them and suffocate them, and those they have left behind have either forgotten them, or rejoice that at last they are rid of them! Nevertheless, changes begin to transform them, as they realize and accept the justice of their situation: both of them finally admit that they are sinners; the Magistrate recognizes that Adolf, Amalia, and the children are much better than he ever was, and his wife admits that she now only reaps what she has sown: "Vi lida det våra gärningar värda äro ... klaga därför icke ..."³⁴

Delusions of self-importance are stripped away. When the Magistrate protests that everything he sees is an affront to human dignity, his attention is drawn to a large set of scales, upon which all new arrivals are being weighed:

³⁴ Samlade verk, XL, 117 (Act V): "We're suffering what our deeds deserve ... so don't complain ..."

PRINSEN: Haha! Människovärde! -- Haha! Se på vågplatsen därborta; där väges människovärdet och alla befinnas för lätta!³⁵

A witch distributes stereopticons, in which each viewer can review scenes from his past life. The Magistrate and his wife discover that nothing in either of their lives brings the slightest pleasure when recalled: everything about them was corrupt and shady. They remember the names of life's blessings, but not the experiences themselves (because these are things they never truly experienced: their self-love always got in the way). In the most pessimistic passage in the play, human love (or at least love not informed by love of the good) is compared to the brute coupling of beasts:

LAGMANNEN: orden har jag kvar,
fastän de blott äro klang utan betydelse ...
Kärlek, vin, sång! Blommor, barn, glädje! --
Låta icke orden vackert! och det är allt som
är kvar! -- Kärlek! Vad var det?

LAGMANSKAN: Vad var det? -- Två kattor på

³⁵ Samlade verk, XL, 118 (Act V):

THE PRINCE: Ha ha! Human dignity! -- Ha ha!
Look at the weighing station over there;
that's where human dignity is weighed, and
everyone is found wanting!

The reference is to the words of doom written by an unseen agent at Belshazzar's feast: Mene, Mene, Tekel and Parsin; the prophet Daniel interprets the word Tekel as "you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting" (Daniel 5:27. *The Jerusalem Bible*). Belshazzar is assassinated that very night.

ett avträdestak.

LAGMANNEN (fånigt): Ja, så var det! Så var det. Och tre hundar på en trottoarkant! Det är ljuvt att minnas!

LAGMANSKAN (trycker hans hand): Ljuvt är det!³⁶

The final exchange in this passage allows a great variety of interpretation: surely the Magistrate's comment is ironic, but why does she repeat the words as if she agrees with them? Perhaps she is only seeking to calm him down (he is obviously quite agitated), perhaps she believes that any memory of a positive emotion, no matter how debased, is a comfort in their present situation, or perhaps she too speaks with irony. At any rate, her gesture of pressing his hand is the first sign of tenderness between them since the early scenes

³⁶ Samlade verk, XL, 120-21:

THE MAGISTRATE: the words remain, even though they're only meaningless noises ... Love, wine, song! Flowers, children, happiness! -- Don't the words sound beautiful? And that's all that's left! -- Love! What was it?

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE: What was it? -- Two cats on a backhouse roof.

THE MAGISTRATE (as if raving): Yes, that's what it was! That's what it was. And three* dogs in a gutter! That's a sweet memory!

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE (presses his hand): It is sweet!

* This seems to be a reference to the fact that the Magistrate (like Strindberg himself, at this point) had been married twice!

The conversation is interrupted by the arrival of a new character, identified only as *den Gråklädde*: the Man in Grey. He is described as a thin little man with grey clothing, a grey face, black lips, a grey beard, and grey hands, who talks in an undertone. No clue to his identity is given. He asks the Magistrate's Wife to step outside with him, smiles in a horrible and evil way when she hesitates, but eventually persuades her to leave with him. The Prince implies that she is being led out in order to be physically punished, and the Other drops an unexplained comment about animal magnetism (hypnotism). The colour grey, being halfway between black and white, perhaps indicates some kind of purification process. In Christian symbolism it signifies penance (grey is the colour of ashes) and humility, but also the death of the body and the immortality of the soul (Ferguson, 151). All this seems to indicate that the Magistrate's Wife is being led out to be chastised in some way, in order to bring her to a state of humility and repentance; perhaps the same process through which the Magistrate is now led by the Prince and the Other.

First he is led to admit that he understands nothing of what is going on. Rather than condemning him further, this is viewed as a good sign: in his intellectual pride, the old Magistrate would not have made such an admission, no matter how true:

lectual pride, the old Magistrate would not have made such an admission, no matter how true:

LAGMANNEN: Jag förstår ingenting av allt detta!

DEN ANDRA: Det är just meningen det, och det är ett vackert erkännande av dig att det finns saker som du icke förstår!³⁷

Next, he is led to an even greater manifestation of humility: the acknowledgement that, even were mercy possible, for him it would be out of the question, so great were his sins:

LAGMANNEN: För mig finns ingen nåd!

DEN ANDRA (ger ett tecken åt Prinsen att han går avsides): Du tycker då att din skuld är för stor?

LAGMANNEN: Ja!³⁸

³⁷ Samlade verk, XL, 123-24:

THE MAGISTRATE: I don't understand any of this!

THE OTHER: That's precisely as it should be, and it's a handsome admission on your part that there are some things you don't understand!

For reasons not explained, Samlade verk, XL alters the spelling of the Other's name from den Andre (otherwise used throughout the play) to den Andra in the Waiting Room scene of Act V. Presumably this change in spelling will be explained in Samlade verk's separate volume of textual notes for the play, when it appears.

³⁸ Ibid., 124-25:

THE MAGISTRATE: For me there's no mercy!

THE OTHER (signals the Prince to withdraw): You think your guilt is too great?

THE MAGISTRATE: Yes!

This acknowledgement, wrenched from the Magistrate's very being, with no possible hope (so far as he knows) of advantage, represents the accomplishment of the Other's task: he has goaded the Magistrate on to the foot of the Cross, and redemption is now possible: even in Hell! Punishment is not eternal, but in order for it to cease the sinner himself must move toward the good by acknowledging his sins and his need for redemption. As the Other explains immediately upon the Magistrate's admission of guilt,

DEN ANDRA: Då skall jag tala vackert vid dig! Ser du: det finns ett slut bara det finns en början. Och du har gjort början!
 Men: fortsättningen är lång och svår!
 LAGMANNEN: Åh! Gud är god!
 DEN ANDRA: Du sade't!³⁹

The play ends with a Nativity pageant: as seen from the depths of Hell! The Christmas star is the only light which ever penetrates these depths. As the moment approaches, the bust of Pan sinks into the ground, and the Magistrate's Wife rejoins her husband. She has evidently undergone the same journey to contrition as he has, for she seems calm and peacefully happy, and as she approaches him she stretches out her hand in a ges-

³⁹ Samlade verk, XL, 125:

THE OTHER: Then I'll speak nicely to you!
 You see: there is an end, if only there's a beginning. And you've made a beginning! But: the process will be long and hard!
 THE MAGISTRATE: Oh! God is good!
 THE OTHER: You said it!

cliff opens up to reveal the traditional Nativity tableau, as four female voices sing (with special emphasis, one feels, on the last three words), the song of the angels:

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Et in terra pax
Hominibus bonae voluntatis!

Strindberg here departs from Swedenborgian doctrine. Remembering the Christian tradition of the Harrowing of Hell (that, between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, Christ descended into Hell in order to apply His redemptive sacrifice to the souls that had been assigned there before His Coming), he posits a God so merciful that even the Gates of Hell are no barrier to His attempts to redeem fallen man. This is symbolized by the tableau of the Nativity (the birth of hope) even in Hell. This descent of divine grace is the event for which those in the Waiting Room have been waiting; Christ has been waiting too: for the act of contrition that will summon His grace.

This is not as at variance with orthodox Christian teaching as might appear; it can be reconciled fairly easily with the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, for instance. It can be fully reconciled with both Swedenborg and with traditional Christianity if the Hell of Acts IV and V is viewed as a symbol for a psychological state: the feelings of helplessness and despair that so often accompany suffering and guilt. Strindberg's mes-

sage is that there is no-one, however wretched, who cannot hope for redemption.

It is possible to see the play as a dream, occasioned by the examination of conscience traditionally associated with Advent, a dream in which that examination of conscience is in fact carried out. This possibility is suggested as early as Act I: as the procession of shades files past, the Magistrate's wife asks, "Är det skuggor eller spöken, eller våra egna sjuka drömmar?"⁴⁰ Viewed in this light, the scenes in Hell are vivid warnings of the consequences of sin: warnings which work towards the desired end: examination, contrition, confession, absolution, and amendment of life!

The manuscript version of the play concludes with an additional scene, now published (although not as part of the play) for the first time in *Samlade verk*, XL (271-77). It is evident that this scene was eliminated from the final version by the author himself, probably at the galley-proof stage, since the manuscript bears no signs of a decision to cancel the scene. There is similarly no indication of the author's reasons for the deletion, but the scene itself is both overly sentimental and anticlimactic. In it the banished Adolf returns to Amalia and their children in time for Christmas and the family, although poor, gives

⁴⁰ *Samlade verk*, XL, 41: "Are they shadows or ghosts, or our own morbid dreams?"

shelter to a beggar boy (who turns out to be an envoy of the Playmate/Christ-Child) and to the Magistrate and his wife (unrecognized by their children and grandchildren), who have now been released from Hell and are embarking on a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre "... för att försona ... fel, som lagen icke straffar ..."⁴¹ The Neighbour arrives with food and Christmas presents, and when more poor people seeking shelter arrive than either the house can hold or the provisions feed, the Beggar Boy performs a Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes: the rear wall of the house disappears, and a table arises from the floor, laden with food and gifts for all. Above this scene is revealed a tableau of the Annunciation to the Shepherds, and a choir is heard singing, once again,

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Et in terra pax
Hominibus bonae voluntatis!

It is a scene which expresses Strindberg's own yearning for reconciliation with his family and reunion with his children, especially at Christmas; he seems to have recognized, however, that it weakened the impact of the play, and sacrificed the fantasy in the interests of dramatic tightness.

⁴¹ Samlade verk, XL, 275: "... to atone for ... faults the law doesn't punish ..."

Chapter 52

Brott och brott

The title of *Brott och brott: komedi*¹ (*Crimes and Crimes: A Comedy*, 1899) refers to two kinds of crimes: real crimes which have gone unpunished, and crimes of conscience, for which there is no legal punishment but which nevertheless incur guilt. The crime in the legal sense was committed by Henriette, the woman to whom the hero feels irresistibly drawn: she has assisted at an abortion which resulted in the death of the mother, and could be sentenced to death should her involvement be established. There are three crimes of conscience: the playwright Maurice, who wants to leave his mistress for Henriette, wishes that the only obstacle to his doing so, his daughter, did not exist, and as if in answer to his wish, the child dies; Henriette hated her father so much he lost the will to live; and Adolphe, her former lover, often wished his father dead when he was young. Strindberg's point is that there is as much guilt attached to a crime of conscience as there is to one of deed, and in both cases guilt incurs punishment and requires repentance.

Although it ends happily, *Brott och brott* is a black comedy: an atmosphere of death hangs over it from

¹ *Samlade verk*, XL, 129-250.

its opening scene, a cemetery. Although Maurice experiences a great theatrical success in Act II, so that the world seems transformed, bathed in the rosy glow of the rising sun, that sun soon disappears behind a cloud and is seen no more. At the very height of his happiness, he, like the central figures in *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, *Till Damaskus I*, and *Han och Hon*, expresses a death-wish: "... nu har jag intet mer att önska i livet! -- Vill du dö nu, med mig?"² Henriette demurs: she is haunted by the shadow of the guillotine (her guilt) and by the five of diamonds which symbolizes it, and is afraid of death. The flowers in the graveyard and elsewhere bloom, fade, and wither; and the laurel wreath which symbolizes Maurice's success also withers all too quickly, as he falls under suspicion of having murdered his daughter in deed as well as in thought, and his triumph is snatched from him: like the Magistrate in *Advent*, he is now to be whipped forward to the foot of the Cross.

All is not gloom in this comedy, however, for beside the symbols of death march those of reawakening, rebirth, resurrection, etc., indicating that redemption is possible: from the inscription on the cemetery crosses in the first scene ("O Crux! Ave Spes unica!")

² *Samlade verk*, XL, 181 (II, ii): "... now I have nothing left to wish for in life! -- Will you die now with me?"

to the chapel of Saint-Lazare (i.e., Lazarus, who was raised from the dead), where Maurice seeks refuge in the arms of the Church.

Maurice's first rebirth is a false one, occasioned by his dramatic success after years of obscurity and privation: "Jag tycker att det är världens första dag som den uppgående solen belyser...."³ A new period in his life has begun, or so he thinks. Paradoxically (so confused are the powerful emotions aroused by success), even his death-wish is part of a feeling that his life is really only just beginning:

Hittills har jag levat i umbäranden, men nu, nu -- -- -- börjar livet för mig! (Klockan slår tolv.) Nu börjar en ny dag, en ny tidräkning!⁴

Ironically, life will not really begin for either Maurice or Henriette until they die to their former selves! The apparent rebirth that results from Maurice's success, is extended, according to Adolphe, to all of mankind, which his play has vindicated: "Mänskligheten har varit förtalad ... och du har rehabilite-

³ Samlade verk, XL, 180 (II, ii): "I think this is the first day of the world, illuminated by the rising sun...."

⁴ Ibid., 169 (II, i):

Until now I've lived in hardship, but now, now -- -- -- life is beginning for me! (The clock strikes twelve.) A new day, a new era, is beginning!

rat den...."⁵ This is the height from which Maurice falls, but Adolphe's remark indicates the possibility that that fall (like mankind's) need not be permanent.

After the death of his daughter and the consequent annihilation of his prospects, Maurice is reborn yet again, this time after a night in prison: "Här är jag, go vänner, om det nu är jag, ty den förflutna natten i fängelset har gjort mig till en annan människa."⁶ The rosy glow in which the rising sun had bathed the Bois de Boulogne in the previous act has become obscured, as if Jeanne's mourning dress has confused Maurice's senses: "Det är som om ett svart flor lagt sig över mina ögon och förändrat hela livets form och färg."⁷ He is advised to go away in order to begin his life yet again: "Lämna Paris på ett år och låt saken glömmas; du som rehabiliterat mänskligheten skall själv bli återupprättad!"⁸

This advice is followed not by Maurice but by Henriette: in Act IV she has left to begin a new life.

⁵ Samlade verk, XL, 184: "Mankind has been slandered ... and you have rehabilitated it...."

⁶ Ibid., 214 (III, ii): "Here I am, good friends, if it really is me, for the past night in prison has made me into another man."

⁷ Ibid., 216 (III, ii): "It's as if a black veil were drawn over my eyes, changing the form and colour of everything in life."

⁸ Idem.: "Leave Paris for a year and let the affair be forgotten; you who have rehabilitated mankind will yourself be rehabilitated!"

Maurice, on the other hand, looks for regeneration not in a different place but on a different plane: he seeks a spiritual rebirth:

MAURICE: ... jag vet blott att jag är förlorad; att mitt liv är förstört, min bana stängd, mitt anseende för evigt förlorat i denna världen.

ABBÉN: Och därför söker ni en ny existens i en annan bättre värld, som ni nu börjar tro på?

MAURICE: Så är det!⁹

Miraculously, confession of his guilt, repentance, and acknowledgement of his own worthlessness, restores to Maurice all he has lost (the happy ending of the comedy): his (legal) innocence of his daughter's death is established, his reputation is reaffirmed, and he rushes off to the theatre to receive his acclamation, with a promise, however, to attend first to his spiritual regeneration:

MAURICE: Varför straffades jag så hårt då jag var oskyldig?

ABBÉN: Hårt? Två dygn bara! Och oskyldig var ni icke, ty våra tankar, ord, begär äro ansvariga, och ni mördade i tankarne, då er onda vilja önskade livet ur ert barn.

MAURICE: Ni har rätt! -- Men min beslut är fast: i afton möter jag er i kyrkan för att

⁹ Samlade verk, XL, 246 (IV, ii):

MAURICE: ... I only know that I'm lost: that my life is destroyed, my path closed, my future in this world lost forever.

THE ABBOT: And that's why you seek a new existence in another, better world, in which you're now beginning to believe?

MAURICE: That's how it is!

göra opp detta med mig själv -- men i morgon
går jag på teatern!¹⁰

As with Job, after his time of trial everything is restored to him. Will he really progress towards rebirth in the chapel of the resurrected Lazarus, or will the rebirth of his worldly ambitions eventually hold sway? The question is unresolved. Meanwhile, at least for the time being, his repentance has won him forgiveness.

Whatever the future holds, we know that the new life begun by both Maurice and Henriette will not be an easy one, for it commences after a symbolic expulsion from Eden (the Luxembourg Gardens: see below): "Trädgården skall stängas! -- 'Förbannad vare marken för din skull, törne och tistel skall hon bära!'"¹¹

¹⁰ Samlade verk, XL, 249-50 (IV, ii):

MAURICE: Why was I punished so severely when I was innocent?

THE ABBOT: Severely? It was only for two days! And you weren't innocent, for we are answerable for our thoughts, words, and desires, and you committed murder in your thoughts, when your evil will wished the death of your child.

MAURICE: You're right! -- But my decision is firm: tonight I'll meet you at the church to settle accounts with myself for that -- but tomorrow I'll go to the theatre!

¹¹ Ibid., 232 (IV, i): "The garden is closing! -- 'Cursed be the earth for thy sake, ... thorns and thistles shall it bring forth!'"

* Genesis 3: 17-18 (translated directly, as none of the English versions corresponds exactly to the wording used here).

This would seem to indicate that Maurice's earthly rehabilitation at the end of the play will also be short-lived, and that he would be best to follow his impulse toward spiritual regeneration. Those who fall in the world can also rise again in the world, but the Wheel of Fortune spins on, and that ascent will be followed by another fall!

The play was intended as a companion piece to *Advent*, and there are several Swedenborgian elements in it, quite apart from the concept of thought-crime. Henriette is described as "en satans kvinna"¹² when Maurice first meets her. She is, in fact, a Swedenborgian *esprit correcteur*, sent to force Maurice to recognize the dark side of his nature, and leading him to repentance (Adolphe, whose career rises as Maurice's plummets, plays a similar rôle). Maurice and Henriette experience their Hell on earth, most notably in the Luxembourg Gardens, which is a very ironic Eden: the early paradise is, in fact, Hell!

The musical accompaniment Strindberg has chosen for the play is Beethoven's Piano Sonata in D-Minor (op. 31, no. 2), particularly bars 96-107 from the Finale (*Allegretto*), which, Strindberg noted in his diary for June 1, 1897, reminded him of the drill of

¹² *Samlade verk*, XL, 152 (I, ii): "the very devil of a woman".

conscience boring into his mind (Sprinchorn, 234). The piece is played in the first scene of Act II, during which Maurice celebrates his triumph with Henriette instead of with the friends who had stood by him when times were rough. It is first heard as Maurice reflects on his desertion of those friends and their simple belief in his goodness, building in intensity as he suffers the pangs conscience: "... först piano, sedan allt mer forte, passionerat upprört, slutligen vilt."¹³ It then continues throughout the scene, as if Maurice were being warned to turn from this devil of a woman and reject the dark side of his nature:

(Pianisten i rummet invid har under hela denna scen pianissimo ibland, ursinnigt fortissimo ibland övat sig på D-mollsonaten; stundom har det varit tyst; stundom har man hört takterna 96-107 ur Finalen ensamma.)¹⁴

Strindberg leaves it up to the director and the pianist to adapt this stage direction to the dialogue and action. A full discussion of the relationship between the sonata and the play is found in Sprinchorn (135-45), and is worth reading.

¹³ *Samlade verk*, XL, 171: "... first softly, then gradually getting louder, passionately disturbed, and finally wild."

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 178:

(The pianist in the next room has been practising the D-Minor Sonata during this whole scene, sometimes pianissimo, sometimes frantically fortissimo; at times it has become silent, at times only bars 96-107 of the Finale have been heard.)

Another function of Henriette, although perfectly consistent with that of Swedenborgian devil, is as *femme fatale*: at one point Maurice calls her Astarte, ancient near-eastern goddess of love and war (in itself a nice symbol of the paradoxical nature of male-female relationships in Strindberg's plays), whose love for the youth Tammuz brought about his death. His use of the name for Henriette and her acceptance of it, indicates that both are aware of the dangers inherent in their relationship.

Chapter 53

Folkungasagan

*Folkungasagan*¹ (*The Saga of the Folkungs*, 1899) has been called "... without question one of the greatest glories of the Swedish drama and theatre" (Johnson, 75). Strindberg had already written one history play, *Mäster Olof*, the prose version of which dates from 1872. With *Folkungasagan*, he resumed the genre, which he was to pursue relentlessly for most of the following decade. Inspired by the history plays of Shakespeare, he resolved to do the same thing for the history (and the drama) of his own country, and conceived a great cycle of plays dealing with Swedish history from the end of the twelfth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This he accomplished: *Birger jarl*, the hero of *Bjälbo-jarlen* (*The Earl of Bjälbo*, 1908), was born sometime around 1210, and references in *Gustav III* (1902) extend to the reign of Karl XIII (1809-18); the ten intervening plays (arranged by subject matter), if one considers not only their immediate subjects, but also backward and forward references within them, present an account of Swedish history over a period of six centuries.² A magnificent accomplish-

¹ *Skrifter*, X, 51-83.

² Vide Johnson, 13-14.

ment, especially considering that each of the plays is a masterpiece in its own right!

The Folkung dynasty ruled Sweden from 1248 to 1364. The founder of the dynasty was Birger jarl (Earl Birger Magnusson), who was never crowned king but held the title Dux et Prorex Sueciae, and was the effective power in Sweden from 1248 to 1266. His elder son, Valdemar, was king 1250-75, and was succeeded by his brother, Magnus Ladulås (1275-90). The son of the latter, Birger Magnusson, reigned 1290 - 1318, and should have been succeeded by his son, Magnus Birgersson. The young prince was executed in 1318, however, and the throne passed instead to Magnus Eriksson, the king's nephew, then only three years old. This King Magnus is the central figure of *Folkungasagan*; he reigned 1319-64, for part of which period, 1356-59, he shared the throne with his elder son, Erik Magnusson. Not mentioned by Strindberg is the younger son, Håkan Magnusson, who from the age of three was King of Norway (Håkon VI), and who also shared part of his father's reign in Sweden, 1362-65. In Sweden the dynasty came to an end in 1365, with the accession of Albrekt of Mecklenburg (who was, however, the son of Magnus Eriksson's sister, Eufemia). Håkan Magnusson's son, Olof, became King of Denmark in 1376: it was a powerful dynasty!

It was also a great dynasty: the Folkungs did much to solidify Swedish holdings and unify the country, and

were champions of the people against the aristocracy. They codified and unified the laws of the country, made rape a crime, released farmers from the necessity of providing free room and board to travelling noblemen, founded cities, cathedrals, and monasteries, freed the slaves, and generally tried to advance the ideals of Christianity and chivalry in Sweden. But they ruled during raw and uncivilized times, and in their personal and public lives those ideals were more often neglected than exemplified. Except for one of them: Magnus Eriksson, the hero of this play, not only promulgated those ideals among his subjects, but did his very best to live up to them himself. He was, in fact, too good for the times in which he lived, and his reign, although it accomplished much, ended in disaster.

He seems a tailor-made Strindberg hero, whose life follows a pattern recognisable in Strindberg's works in general: a good man who nevertheless suffers enormously; a man whose life, in fact, seems an atonement for the sins of his age; in other words, a scapegoat. Strindberg summarizes this particular aspect of Magnus' character (which determines the action of the entire play) in *Öppna brev till Intima teatern* (*Open Letters to the Intimate Theatre*, 1909):

Efter allt vad jag ur historien kunde efara var Magnus verkligen en god människa, som lärt sig med undergivenhet bära sitt öde, och därför av en ond tid med onda människor blev föraktad. Nära till hands låg då, för diktaren, att betrakta honom som ett försoning-

soffer för andras skulder, vilket var att ställa frågan på antik och kristlig grund. Och därmed var sorgespelets grundtanke given.³

The play deals only with the dénouement of Magnus' reign. It opens with him at the height of his power, at a festival celebrating his victories and accomplishments, and progresses rapidly through his military defeats, his excommunication, the attempt to depose him, and the death of his son Erik. At the end of the play he is quite alone, awaiting the arrival of Albrekt of Mecklenburg and his troops, who are at the city gates. In the interests of a tight dramatic structure, Strindberg has telescoped the historic events (six years passed between the death of Erik and Magnus' defeat by Albrekt of Mecklenburg, for instance); the effect is quite devastating.

Everything in the play emphasizes the ritual, sacrificial nature of Magnus and of his kingship. The great prayers of the mediaeval church provide the acoustic background and set the mood for the play: the

³ *Samlade skrifter*, L, 241:

From all I could gather from history, Magnus was really a good man who had learned to bear his fate with humility, and for that reason was despised by evil people in an evil age. It was natural, then, for the author to regard him as a sacrifice of atonement for the guilt of others, which was to place the matter in a classical and Christian framework. And that provided the basic idea of the tragedy.

Te Deum is sung by the entire cast in Act I, the Litany of Mary serves as a counterpoint to the secular festival being held in the square outside the convent in Act IV, and the De profundis is intoned in the same act, after the plague has broken out. The rituals of the Church -- the Mass, Confession, excommunication, prayers for the dead, marriage -- are omnipresent, and focus attention on the ritual aspects of the action.

Biblical references, parallels, and allusions abound, the most pervading of these being Exodus 20:5: "... I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God and I punish the father's fault in the sons, the grandsons, and the great-grandsons of those who hate me...." This biblical warning comes at the end of the First Commandment. Two characters seem to be victims of this implied curse. The first is Magnus Birgersson, the slain young prince whose crown Magnus wears, and the blood-guilt for whose death he must expiate. His story is recounted three times: once (Act II) by the King's kinswoman Brigitta (later St. Birgitta⁴), once (Act IV) by Knut Porse, the lover and later husband of the King's mother, and once (Act V) by Magnus himself; each time, it is made clear that the young prince was innocent of crime, but was executed for those of his father. The second victim of

⁴ The former spelling of the name is the one Strindberg used, the latter is the modern Swedish spelling. St. Birgitta is known in English as St. Bridget or occasionally as St. Bride.

the curse is King Magnus himself, who must expiate the earlier Magnus' death (and, according to Birgitta, all the crimes -- and they were many -- of all his Folkung ancestors), although himself innocent of complicity in it. The pattern is seen most clearly, perhaps, in Magnus' own account, as he relates the saga of his family to his wife in the final act:

Nu skulle den unge Magnus, konung Birgers son, fått tronen; men herrarne hals-höggo honom, som de själva uppgåvo för fadrens brotts skull. Det är hans martyrkrona jag bär -- har burit. -- Han var oskyldig, ty han var minderårig, och vistades i Danmark när Nyköpingsmorden skedde; och jag var oskyldig till hans död, ty jag var blott fyra år gammal, då hans huvud föll.⁵

⁵ *Skrifter*, X, 81:

Then the young Magnus, son of King Birger, should have attained the throne; but the lords beheaded him: as they themselves declared, for the crimes of his father. It is his martyr's crown that I wear -- have worn. -- He was innocent, for he was a minor, and was living in Denmark when the murders at Nyköping* occurred; and I was innocent of his death, for I was scarcely four years old when his head fell.

* King Birger Magnusson imprisoned his two brothers, Erik (the father of the play's hero) and Valdemar, in a tower at Nyköping. When their supporters began advancing on the town, Birger threw the keys to the tower into the river, and his brothers starved to death. This was the crime for which Birger's son was executed, after the king himself had fled to Denmark.

The most obvious biblical parallel is to Job, upon whom God also visited disasters for no apparent reason, or at least for reasons Job does not fully understand. Unlike Job, however, Magnus is not restored to his fortunes: he must go on accepting his fate in meekness and humility right up to the end: "... jag väntar på min banas slut; på den bittraste kalken."⁶

Biblical allusions occur right from the beginning of the opening act, when the court barber refers to the King as Pharaoh, and the royal cupbearer refers to the singular success with which all of the King's undertakings have met thus far. The Cupbearer's words are important, for they are echoed later in the play, when Magnus' fortunes are reversed:

BARBERAREN: Härligt majväder på Faraos födelsedag!

MUNSKÄNKEN (...): Välsignat väder! Men vår konung är också född i solskenet och allt vad han företar lyckas.⁷

Compare this to the speech of Ingeborg (the king's mother) in Act III: "Du ser att Herrans hand har lagt sig tungt över honom så att allt vad han företar miss-

⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 81 (Act V): "... I await the end of my road; the most bitter cup."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 53 (Act I):

THE BARBER: Glorious May weather for Pharaoh's birthday!

THE CUPBEARER (...): The weather is a blessing. But our king was also born in the sunshine, and everything he undertakes prospers.

lyckas...."⁸ The biblical allusion is double-barrelled: first, the Cupbearer's and Ingeborg's remarks echo the blessing of Mount Ebal and the curse of Mount Gorizim from the Book of Deuteronomy, respectively, a recurrent symbol in Strindberg; but together with the Barber's epithet they also recall the story of the Pharaoh who became the employer of Joseph, and the seven years of plenty followed by seven of famine which Egypt experienced during his reign:⁹ a remarkable parallel to the history of Magnus' own career, but unlike the Pharaoh, he had no Joseph to help him overcome the difficulties!

When one of the freed slaves greets Magnus as saviour at the great triumphal festival, and kneels at his feet, the King is horrified:

MAGNUS (reser sig, förtvivlad): Ve, ve!
 Icke så! Hädare! Må himlen icke höra dig,
 förmätne. Herren din Gud skall du tillbedja,
 icke mig, fattig syndig människa! -- Gån i
 frid och frihet.¹⁰

⁸ *Skrifter*, X, 68: "You see that the hand of the Lord lies heavy upon him, and all that he undertakes fails...."

⁹ The story is told in Genesis 41. It is interesting that a cup-bearer and a baker (one of the other commoners in the play) also appear in the story of Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 40).

¹⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 56 (Act I):

MAGNUS (rises, desperate): Alas! alas! Not so! Blasphemer! May Heaven not hear your presumption! To the Lord your God you must address your prayers, not to me, a poor, sinful man! -- Go in peace and freedom.

This recalls the scene in which St. Peter is greeted by the early Christian Cornelius, who prostrates himself at Peter's feet. Peter's rebuke is gentler, but otherwise identical: "'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man after all!'" (Acts 10:26)

Magnus' son, the co-king Erik, makes a speech extolling his father's achievements, and again the blessings of Ebal (shortly to be balanced by the curses of Gorizim) are alluded to: "-- bönderna ... kunna åter i ro ärja och köra, och själva skörda där de sått!"¹¹ Then news of the first disaster strikes: a message arrives that the Russians (whom Magnus defeated in Finland) have retaken the fortress of Nöteborg. Immediately, Magnus is given another Old Testament parallel, this time Hezekiah, King of Judah (716-687 B.C.):

BISKOP STYRBJÖRN: "Då Hiskia hade anammat brevet av budet och läsit det, gick han upp i Herrans hus och upplät det för Herranom." Låter oss gå upp i Vår Herras tempel och bedja för landets väl till Gud och Sankt Erik, konung!¹²

¹¹ *Skrifter*, X, 57 (Act I): "-- the farmers ... can once again plow and till, and themselves reap where they have sown!"

¹² *Ibid.*, 57 (Act I):

BISHOP STYRBJÖRN: "Hezekiah took the letter from the hands of the messenger and read it; he then went up to the Temple of Yahweh and spread it out before Yahweh." [2 Kings 19:14] Let us go up to the temple of Our Lord, and pray for the wellbeing of the country to God and Saint Erik, King!

It is an apt comparison at this stage in Magnus' reign: Hezekiah's story is told in 2 Kings 18, 19, and 20, and up to the cited quotation contains many parallels to Magnus' story so far. There is even an echo of the Cup-bearer's observation on Magnus' successes:

[Hezekiah] put his trust in the God of Israel. No king of Judah after him could be compared with him -- nor any of those before him. He was devoted to Yahweh, never turning from him, but keeping the commandments that Yahweh had laid down for Moses. And so Yahweh was with him, and he was successful in all that he undertook. (2 Kings 18:5-7. *Jerusalem Bible.*)

Strindberg expected a great deal of biblical knowledge in his audience, if they were to catch allusions such as this! In turn-of-the-century Sweden he probably would have found it. At the point of the bishop's quotation, Hezekiah is menaced by invasion from the Assyrian armies, just as Magnus is threatened by the Russians. From that point, the stories diverge: Hezekiah is aided by God, whose messages are transmitted to him through the prophet Isaiah; through the prophetess Birgitta, God demands something else entirely of Magnus: atonement for the sins of his forebears.

There are two voices of prophecy in the play: Birgitta and the character known as Den Besatta (The Possessed Woman). Birgitta (related to the Folkungs through her mother), was not always a reliable prophetess, at least in Strindberg's account: she admits in Act V that at least some of her visions proceeded not

so much from God as from her own pride and ambition for power. But her vision of Magnus as a sacrifice of atonement is confirmed by the Possessed Woman, one of the expressionistic elements Strindberg introduces into the play. She it is who first introduces the themes of unexpiated blood-guilt, Magnus' innocence, and his resemblance to a lamb:

Du har blod i kronan, kung Magnus! men du är utan skuld, att rikets laglige tronföljare Magnus Birgersson blev halshuggen. Du måste gå upp på tronen över hans döda kropp, du har folkungablod i din purpur; vit som hermelinen är din själ så att du icke kan se de svarta svansstumparne på dina fiender.

I helgd och frid
som lammet blid
i fejd och krig
som Lindorm vig.

Stackars lamm, du lever bland ulvar och drakar, men din oskyldighets ljus bländar dig så du ser endast skenet av din egen renhet ...

...¹³

¹³ Skriffter, X, 58 (Act I):

Your crown is bloody, King Magnus! but it isn't your fault the lawful heir to the throne of the nation, Magnus Birgersson, was beheaded; you had to ascend to the throne over his dead body. Your royal purple is stained with Folkung blood! Your soul is white as ermine, so you're unable to see the black tail-tips on your enemies.

In holiness and peace
Gentle as a lamb;
In disputes and war
Nimble as the Lindorm.*

Poor lamb, you live among wolves and dragons, but the light of your innocence blinds you, so that you see only the lustre of your own purity ...

* The Lindorm is a mythological beast, represented as a gigantic snake, according to *Illustrerad svensk ordbok*.

These are ostensibly the ravings of a madwoman; it takes Birgitta to explain their significance to Magnus' career, and to point out that Magnus is indeed a lamb, but a sacrificial lamb:

BRIGITTA: Den kedja av Folkungabrott, som börjar med morden vid Herrevadsbro och slutar med Håtuna och Nyköping, skall med dig utsonas och du skall bli den sista Folkungen på tronen!

MAGNUS: Men jag har inga sådana brott på mig!

BRIGITTA: Nej, du är den förste, som i det fallet är ren, och försoningsoffret skall vara utan fläck och lyte.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Skrifter*, X, 61 (Act II):

BIRGITTA: The chain of Folkung crimes, which begins with the murder at Herrevad's Bridge* and ends with Håtuna** and Nyköping, will be expiated by you, and you will be the last Folkung on the throne!

MAGNUS: But I have committed no such crimes!

BIRGITTA: No, but you are the first who is guiltless in this matter, and the sacrifice of atonement must be without spot or blemish.***

* Sweden's king from 1222 to 1250 was Erik Eriksson lāspe och halte (Erik the Lispng and Lame), for all but five years. From 1229 to 1234 he lived in Denmark, and Sweden was ruled over by Knut Långe. Knut's son Holmger assumed the crown on his father's death, in 1234, but was never acclaimed king, and Erik Eriksson was returned to power. Holmger was executed in 1248, and in 1251 Knut Långe's younger son, Filippus, was slain by Birger jarl at Herrevad's Bridge, ending the claims of that family on the Swedish crown, and clearing the way for his own son, Valdemar (barely twelve

Magnus accepts his fate with humility, even though, like Job, he does not understand it. When he asks why he should have to suffer for the sins of others, Birgitta points out that the young Birger Mag-

—
years old), to become king when Erik Eriksson died childless in 1250.

** Magnus' predecessor on the throne, Birger Magnusson, was imprisoned by his brothers, Erik and Valdemar, at Håtuna in 1306, and only freed when he had ceded to them more than half of the kingdom. This led to the imprisonment of the two brothers by the king at Nyköping, and their eventual death by starvation, in 1317: the crime for which the young Magnus Birgersson was beheaded the following year.

*** Cf. Leviticus 4:22-26:

When a leader sins and inadvertently does one of the things forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh his God, thus rendering himself guilty (or if anyone draws his attention to the sin thus committed), he is to bring a goat as an offering, a male without blemish. He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and immolate it in the place where holocausts are immolated before Yahweh. This is a sacrifice for sin.... and he will be forgiven.

and 1 Peter 1:18-19:

Remember, the ransom that was paid to free you ... was not paid in anything corruptible, neither in silver nor gold, but in the precious blood of a lamb without spot or stain, namely Christ....

nusson, whose death he must expiate, had done the same. She then asks him if he dares question God's justice; his reply raises a valid point:

BRIGITTA: Vill du sätta dig till domare över Herrans rådslag?

MAGNUS: Jag skulle nog ha lust ibland, men modet sviker mig. Mig lyster dock fråga om vi leva i gamla testamentet, där det gällde hämnd mot hämnd, öga för öga, och fädernas missgärningar straffades på barnen, eller om icke Kristus kommit i världen för att lyfta på lagens förbannelse. Kan icke Gud förlåta länge, utan måste ta ut hämnd till sista skärven, under det han fordrar att vi skola förlåta? Ställer han större fordringar på oss än på sig?¹⁵

Birgitta can only reply that man has no right to ask such questions. This apparently satisfies Magnus, for when the question is raised again in the final act by Magnus' wife, Blanche (of Namur), his reply seems to indicate he is no longer interested in why things happened as they did; it just was so:

BLANCHE: ... jag förstår icke varför du

¹⁵ *Skrifter*, X, 62 (Act II):

BIRGITTA: Do you want to set yourself up as a judge over the counsels of the Lord?

MAGNUS: I certainly feel like it at times, but I lack the courage. Nevertheless, I'd like to ask whether we live in the Old Testament, where the rule was vengeance for vengeance, an eye for an eye, and the sins of the fathers were visited on the children, or if Christ didn't come into the world to remove the curse of the law. Does God's forgiveness not last, or must He take revenge to the last shard, while requiring us to forgive? Does He make greater demands on us than on Himself?

Magnus alludes here to Matthew 5:38-42.

fick det värst. Om vi levde i Gamla Testamentet då fädernas missgärningar ännu straffades på avkomlingarne, skulle jag förstå något, men vi leva ju under Jesu Kristi her-radöme, där förlåtelse är löseordet!

MAGNUS: Jag fick det värsta.

BLANCHE: Ja, men vänta i tålamod och det skall ljusna även för dig, stackars vän.

MAGNUS: Nej, säg icke så! Kalken är icke tömd än, och det stå många bägare och vänta på mig, ännu.¹⁶

In Act III, Magnus discovers that those upon whom he has most relied for guidance, help, and support, have all failed him. His mother and Knut Porse (both of whom had been regents during his minority) are lovers; so are his wife and his friend, Bengt Algotson. Far from being ashamed when discovered by her son in the arms of Porse, Ingeborg tells him essentially that it is none of his business, and warns him against meddling, once again with a biblical allusion:

¹⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 82:

BLANCHE: ... I don't understand why the worst happened to you. If we lived in the Old Testament, when the sins of the fathers were still visited on the offspring, I would understand a bit, but don't we live under the dominion of Jesus Christ, where forgiveness is the order of the day!

MAGNUS: The worst happened to me.

BLANCHE: Yes, but wait patiently and the sun will shine again even for you, poor friend.

MAGNUS: No, don't say that! The cup has not yet been emptied, and there are so many goblets waiting for me, still.

Akta dig; och minns Noe sons öde som blottade det som skulle vara fördolt! Han vart förbannad och en träl under sina bröder.¹⁷

They then remind each other of their moral responsibilities, each pointing out which of the Ten Commandments the other least respects:

INGEBORG (...): Pilt, glöm icke fjärde budet....

MAGNUS (...): Och du, förgät icke det sjätte!¹⁸

¹⁷ *Skrifter*, X, 66:

Be careful! and remember the fate of Noah's son, who revealed what should have been hidden! He was cursed, and became the slave of his brothers.

Ingeborg refers to Genesis 9:18-27. Noah's son Ham had discovered his father drunk and naked. When he told his brothers, Shem and Japheth, about it, they covered Noah with a cloak, walking backwards so as not to see his nakedness. When Noah awoke and discovered what had happened, he cursed Ham (ancestor of the Canaanites) and made him a slave of his two brothers. If children see things they should not, Ingeborg implies, it is best for them to close their eyes and say nothing! She continues to think of Magnus as a child.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66 (Act III):

INGEBORG (...): Don't forget the Fourth Commandment,* brat....

MAGNUS (...): And you, remember the Sixth!**

* "Honour your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that Yahweh your God has

It is a grim confrontation scene, of the kind Strindberg made his specialty, but it soon softens as Magnus returns to the role of child at his mother's knee. Meanwhile, an important point has been made, especially if we recall the wording of the First Commandment, which forms the underpinning of the play: Magnus is indeed honouring his mother, more than she knows, by atoning for her sins, while she continues to add to his burden by her adulterous relationship with Porse.

Perhaps the most chilling of the biblical references is Birgitta's quotation of part of the vision of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. She clearly sees this as a revelation specifically applicable to Sweden, and she obviously relishes the thought that she is going to see it fulfilled (Magnus has denied her support for the founding of a monastic community and she looks forward to revenge). She has been meaning to depart on a pilgrimage to Rome, but puts it off in order to watch the disasters unfold at home:

BLANCHE: Du har icke rest, fränka?

BRIGITTA: Nej; jag vill först se vredens dag komma, när det tredje inseglet skall brytas. -- Och jag såg, och si en svart häst: och den där satt uppå hade en vågskål i sin hand. Ett mått vete om en penning och tre mått bjugg om en penning. Och det fjärde inseglet blev brutet: och jag såg, och si en

given to you."

** "You shall not commit adultery."

black häst, och den som på honom satt, hans namn var döden, och helvetet följde honom efter!

BLANCHE: Var får du dessa rysliga bilder ifrån?

BRIGITTA: Ifrån Guds eget heliga ord. De som öron haver att höra, han höre!¹⁹

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have traditionally been identified as Conquest, Slaughter, Famine, and Death. Birgitta obviously feels that the first two have already visited Sweden, perhaps thinking of Russian and Danish incursions, and the slaughters at Herrevad's Bridge and Nyköping. Famine and Death follow shortly. Like the other biblical references and allusions, this prophecy strengthens the cosmic, ritual, and inevitable

¹⁹ *Skrifter*, X, 70 (Act III):

BLANCHE: Haven't you left yet, kinswoman?

BRIGITTA: No, first I want to see the day of wrath come, when the third seal will be broken: "And I beheld and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. ... A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny.... And when he had opened the fourth seal.... I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat upon him was Death, and Hell followed with him." [Apocalypse 6:5-8, King James translation]

BLANCHE: Where do you get these dreadful images?

BRIGITTA: From God's own holy word. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

* This injunction of Birgitta's is a prophetic formula, which occurs no less than eight times in the Apocalypse. It was also used frequently by Christ; Matthew cites three examples.

nature of the events portrayed. Birgitta finishes with another biblical parallel, one not flattering to the worldly, scheming, power-hungry, and godless court surrounding Magnus, or to Sweden. Referring to the festival which is to take place the following day (the setting of Act IV), she asks Blanche to prevent it. When Blanche protests that she is unable to do so, Birgitta replies, "Då skall du se Balthazars fest..."²⁰ She is presumably referring to the Feast of Belshazzar²¹ described in Daniel 5: a great festival turned into a scene of fear and trepidation by a visitation from the Lord. Not a bad summary of Act IV, giving to those events also a ritual and cosmic significance!

In Act IV the scheming against Magnus is at its height. Porse has had the Barber organize a popular army of rabble to demand that the King abdicate or be deposed, and he and Ingeborg have worked on the youth and inexperience of the co-king, Erik, to persuade him to assume all power to himself (Porse feels that once this is done he can easily overthrow Erik and himself become king). Into the scene of public festivity walks

²⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 70 (Act III): "Then you'll look on the Feast of Balthazar ..."

²¹ The name Balthazar does not appear in the Bible, but has been assigned by tradition to one of the Three Magi; it is possible that the mistake is Strindberg's, but it is entirely consistent with his portrayal of Birgitta that she herself should make such a mistake.

Magnus (whose excommunication has been arranged by Bishop Styrbjörn and Birgitta), dressed as a penitent and carrying a large black cross, doing public penance. Erik unwittingly (but his father does not know that) gives the signal for the coup to begin, the rabble raise a great cry against the king, and Magnus is bound and arrested. For Magnus, this too is part of his destiny, this too must be borne in humility; his reaction to these events, and especially to Erik's apparent treachery, is immediately to find the biblical parallel, the rebellion of Absalom against his father David, described in 2 Samuel 15 ff.:

MAGNUS (till Erik): O Absalon, min son! O
Absalon, min son!²²

The parallel is complete: like Absalom, Erik was egged on by evil advisors, and both rebellious sons predecease their fathers.

There is another biblical parallel to the career of Magnus: his obvious similarities to the Christian Bible's foremost example of a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of others, Christ Himself. Strindberg insisted that he did not wish Magnus to be portrayed as if he were Christ:

När mina Folkungar skulle ges, fann jag
titelrollen maskerad som Kristus; jag för-

²² *Skrifter*, X, 74:

MAGNUS (to Erik): Oh Absalom, my son! Oh
Absalom, my son!

klarade för honom att Magnus Eriksson, som visserligen i Norge kallades Magnus den Gode, icke var någon Kristus, och jag bad aktören icke bära korset på ryggen som Frälsaren till Golgata.²³

It would be a mistake to take this passage out of context; it is part of a letter in which Strindberg is warning actors of the dangers of falling into clichés. At the play's première (in 1901) Magnus was played by a distinguished actor, Anders de Wahl (1869-1956), who ignored Strindberg's advice; the fact that the latter let the matter rest there (at least for the eight years between that performance and *Öppna brev*) indicates that perhaps he saw the aptness of the portrayal after all, so long as it was not hackneyed.

At any rate, even if Magnus was not to be played as if he were Christ, the play contains abundant internal evidence that the character is nevertheless Christ-like; this would seem inevitable given Strindberg's ritual and symbolic conception of his story. Early in the play the Possessed Woman identifies Magnus as a lamb; in her very next speech she mentions the Lamb of

²³ *Samlade skrifter*, L, 133:

When my *Folkungasagan* was going to be produced, I found the leading actor made up as Christ. I explained to him that Magnus Eriksson, although certainly called Magnus the Good in Norway, was no Christ, and I asked the actor not to carry the cross on his back as the Saviour did to Golgotha.

God, and goes on to mention a lamb which could be either Christ or Magnus:

Agnus Dei, O, Guds Lamm som borttager världens synder!
 Offret är redo.
 Elden brinner som rö.
 Kniven är dragen,
 lammet skall dö!²⁴

After she has explained his mission to Magnus, Birgitta does not offer to help him bear the cross (metaphorical here), but says she will nevertheless support him by offering solace (rather like St. Veronica) and by explaining things to him: "... när ditt kors blir för tungt eller kalken för bitter, då skall jag vara nära dig som en tröstare och en tolkare."²⁵ Metaphor, yes, but both the cross and the bitter cup (the Swedish word is *kalk*: chalice) serve to link Magnus to Christ: his role is to be a Christ-figure to his family and his nation.

In Act IV Magnus appears bearing a real cross. The stage direction reads:

MAGNUS (in, i vit tunika med rep om livet,

²⁴ *Skrifter*, X, 58 (Act I):

Agnus Dei, Oh Lamb of God who take away the
 sins of the world!
 The sacrifice is ready.
 The fire burns like reeds.
 The knife has been drawn,
 The lamb will die!

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 62 (Act II): "... when your cross gets too heavy or the cup too bitter, I will be near you, as a comforter and interpreter."

bärande ett stort svart krucifix....).²⁶

Strindberg specifies that Magnus is carrying a crucifix (i.e., a cross to which is attached a representation of the body of the Crucified Christ) rather than a plain cross, which could be carried on the back in the manner described above. Nevertheless, he apparently permitted the scene to be staged, at the play's première, using a full-size cross carried in just that manner! Magnus' public penance is to consist of carrying this cross around the church forty times: as one of the monks accompanying him explains,

... lika många gånger som vår frälsare
fastade dagar i öknen.

MAGNUS: Men om jag tröttnar?

GRÅBRODERN II: Så bed, och du blir hul-
pen!²⁷

Even in these circumstances, it seems, a Simon of Cyrene can be found!

Magnus disappears behind the church carrying his cross. Meanwhile, the public festival begins, simultaneously with the singing of the Litany of Mary inside

²⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 72:

MAGNUS (enters, wearing a white tunic with
a rope around his waist, carrying a large
black crucifix....).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, X, 73:

... once for every day Our Saviour spent
fasting in the desert.

MAGNUS: But if I get tired?

SECOND FRANCISCAN MONK: Then ask, and
you'll be helped!

the monastery, and a group of flagellants enters and joins in the singing of the litany: the petitions to the Mother of Christ make a very ironic contrast to the behaviour of Ingeborg, who hurls curses and insults at her son when he reappears! Magnus falls under the weight of the cross, and in this position is taken prisoner. His St. Veronica is there, but it is not Birgitta, who had promised to comfort him should his cross prove too heavy; rather it is Beatrix (of Brandenburg), Erik's wife, who, apart from Magnus himself, is the only innocent character in the play: "BEATRIX (ner från estraden; mot Magnus, vars panna hon torkar med sin näsduk)".²⁸

Beatrix also has words of reproach for Ingeborg: a direct quotation from accounts of the Crucifixion although given a totally different application (originally the words were spoken by Christ to His Mother, regarding St. John), again emphasizing the contrast between this mother and Mary: "Kvinna, se din son!"²⁹ She then turns to Magnus again and addresses to him (in slightly extended form) words Christ spoke from the Cross when he asked His Father to forgive His tor-

²⁸ Skrifter, X, 74: "BEATRIX (comes down from the dais and approaches Magnus, whose forehead she wipes dry with her handkerchief)".

²⁹ Idem.: "Woman, behold thy son!"

mentors: "Min dyre fader, förlåt dem och oss, ty de veta icke vad de göra, och icke vi heller!"³⁰

Finally, the last words of the play, spoken by Magnus over the body of his son (Erik has proved himself worthy of his father after all, by refusing to assume power once he has realized what is going on), are another direct quotation from accounts of the Crucifixion: "MAGNUS (lyfter händerna och sjunker ner vid Eriks lik): Det är fullkomnat!"³¹ These were Christ's last words, in recognition that with His death His mission of redemption and atonement was complete. With Erik's death, Magnus too has completed his mission of expiation, and the prophecy is accomplished: Magnus will now be the last Folkung on the Swedish throne (disregarding, as Strindberg does, the brief reign of Håkan). To make sure the connection is made between these (Swedish) words spoken by Magnus and those of Christ, Strindberg has placed the familiar Latin version of them near the beginning of the play; they are spoken, albeit in jest, by the Barber, pointlessly it

³⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 74: "My dear father, forgive them and us, for they know not what they do, and neither do we!"

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83: "MAGNUS (raises his hands and sinks down over Erik's body): It is finished!"

seems, until the final few seconds of the play: "Det är gjort. Consumatum est! -- Finis!"³²

Despite the abundance of Judeo-Christian references, which provide the framework of the play, it draws on a primitive and pagan notion, in which the destiny of the land and the well-being of its people are inextricably linked to the person, health, and ritual actions of the king: one thinks of the rituals described in Frazer, in which the king is ritually sacrificed in order to ensure the fertility of the land and the protection of the gods. Appropriately, awareness of this pagan tradition seems sharpest in Ingeborg, one of the two characters -- the other is Porse -- least touched by Christian values: to her, the disasters which befall Sweden are not part of what Magnus must suffer, but a result of his misfortunes:

Du ser att Herrans hand har lagt sig tungt över honom så att allt vad han företar misslyckas; och du märker granneliga huru hans olyckor falla tillbaka på land och folk och oss alla.³³

³² *Skrifter*, X, 54 (Act I): "It is done. Consumatum est! -- Finis!" The Barber speaks a ludicrous amalgam of Swedish, German, and French, with the occasional Latin tag thrown in, as here.

³³ *Ibid.*, 68 (Act III):

You see that the hand of the Lord lies heavy upon him, and all that he undertakes fails; and you see precisely how his misfortunes recoil on the country and on the people and on all of us.

Ingeborg believes that Sweden's misfortunes will cease once Magnus is removed from the throne -- as if he were a jinx on the prosperity of the country -- and cannot believe the evidence of her senses when this proves not to be the case; Magnus is arrested and imprisoned, but news of fresh disasters continues to arrive: the Plague Girl (another expressionistic character) announces the outbreak of the plague, and a message arrives that the Danish king has landed on the Swedish island of Gotland and destroyed its principal city. Porse explains that removing Magnus from the throne has solved one set of problems, but another has arisen in its place:

INGEBORG: Har icke förbannelsen lyftade från vårt arma land sedan han, som bar blod-skulden, blev avlägsnad!

PORSE: Har icke hunnit än! Detta gick på den gamla räkningen; men nu börjar en ny!³⁴

Porse sees deeper into the truth than he is aware: if the king is to undergo a ritual purification for the benefit of his family and the country, surely it is incumbent on those for whom suffers to support and cherish him, not turn against him! The people, at least, eventually seem to realize this, and when that

³⁴ Skrifter, X, 76 (Act IV):

INGEBORG: Hasn't the curse been lifted from our poor country now that he who bore the blood-guilt has been deposed!

PORSE: There hasn't been time yet! That settled the old account; now a new one begins!

news reaches Ingeborg's ears her designs on the throne collapse and she begins to fear for her life:

INGEBORG: För tionde gången: låtom oss fly. Men först viga oss, ty hovet och folket fråga sig nu efteråt med vad rätt vi uppträdde tillsammans. Och med denna allmänna döds-skräck ha samvetena blivit ömtåligare, så att man icke mer lider vad man nyss tolererade.

PORSE: Fly ifrån segern?

INGEBORG: Det är ingen seger än! Ty folkets sinnen, ombytliga som väder och vind, ha nu tagit en ny riktning.

PORSE: Hur så?

INGEBORG: Vet du ej? att man säger pesten är straffet över drottsvikarne. Magnus är på väg att bli helig förklarad!³⁵

The betrayers of the king are indeed punished, every last one of them: Algotson is beaten to death with cudgels by the people; the Barber dies (very graphically, on stage) of the plague; and Ingeborg and Porse, after marrying, leave the court to await death in a lonely and secluded spot:

³⁵ *Skrifter*, X, 77 (Act IV):

INGEBORG: For the tenth time: let's get away from here. But first, let's get married, for the court and the people are now looking back and asking themselves what right we had to appear together. And with the fear of death everywhere, consciences have become more tender, so that people no longer suffer what only recently they tolerated.

PORSE: Run away from victory?

INGEBORG: There's no longer any victory! The sympathies of the people, changeable as the wind and the weather, have altered course again.

PORSE: How so?

INGEBORG: Don't you know? They're saying that the plague is a punishment on the betrayers of the King. Magnus is on his way to being declared a saint!

PORSE: Kom då, så sätta vi oss ner vid en havsstrand och vänta livet ur oss; jag skall sakta gräma ihjäl mig, att jag lät narra mig lita på en kvinna!³⁶

Erik too is stricken down, even though he was only a tool in the hands of others; as a king he is responsible for taking bad advice! With him goes Beatrix (another innocent victim!); these two deaths are presumably punishment enough for Blanche.

Tradition has it that Erik did not die of the plague but was poisoned by his mother, Queen Blanche: his last words are supposed to have been "Hon som skänkte mig livet har också tagit det ifrån mig."³⁷ Strindberg was aware of the tradition, but he was also aware that the tradition is spurious, so we are told nothing in the play of the cause of Erik's death (there is, however, a marked contrast between the peaceful manner in which he and Beatrix die and the violence of the Barber's death from the plague):

³⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 80 (Act IV):

PORSE: Come then, we'll sit ourselves down beside the sea and wait until life deserts us; I'll probably grieve myself to death, for having let myself be deceived into trusting a woman!

³⁷ Ohlmarks, 75: "She who gave me life has also taken it from me."

Då historieböckerna numera icke anse sig kunna stämpla drottning Blanche som gift-blanderska, lät jag samvetsgrant frågan stå öppen.³⁸

While this is true, Strindberg does not resist the tradition completely, and he lets it come out on the level of symbolism: nothing is said explicitly, but enough is suggested that anyone who knows the old story will not find it completely neglected. It is Birgitta who paints the highly suggestive metaphor:

MAGNUS: -- Finns det ont hos
[Blanche]?

BRIGITTA: Hos henne som hos alla, men hos henne ligger giftet som hos blomman Bella Donna: i ett skönt kärl, så att man icke vill tro det finns där.

MAGNUS: Så är det! -- Bella Donna!³⁹

There is another reference to poison which could point to Blanche; certainly the play contains no other poisoned goblets than the one which may or may not be used by Blanche in the final act. This is in an early

³⁸ Samlade skrifter, L, 243:

Since the historians nowadays do not consider themselves able to label Queen Blanche a poisoner, I conscientiously left the question open.

³⁹ Ibid., 82 (Act V):

MAGNUS: -- Is there evil in [Blanche]?

BRIGITTA: In her as in everyone, but in her, as in the flower belladonna, the poison is hidden in a beautiful receptacle, so that nobody would believe it were there.

MAGNUS: Yes, that's what she is! -- Bella Donna!*

* Italian for "beautiful lady".

speech by the Possessed Woman, in which she predicts the disasters about to befall Sweden:

... nu stunda onda tider, varga tider!
 Asgårdsrejan går, pestgossen med räfsen och
 pestflickan med kvasten, giftbägarn och
 hungerfebern, skattevägran och lönskaläger --
⁴⁰

Again in Act III, poison and Blanche are associated. After Magnus has discovered Ingeborg in the arms of Porse (possibly the fornicators referred to in the Possessed Woman's prophecy), she tries to make him see that nothing is as it seems, and that those things he has so far considered blessings may in fact hide treachery. She is thinking particularly of Algotson and Blanche when she says this, as her subsequent actions reveal (she tries, unsuccessfully -- Blanche's adultery was another question on which historians could not make up their minds -- to arrange for Magnus to catch the two in *flagrante delicto*).

Magnus never really knows or understands Blanche: in Act V he is still asking others what her character is like; here his mother's taunts reveal that he himself has suspicions about her, and the metaphor he

⁴⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 58 (Act I):

... evil times are approaching, times of desperation! The cleansing of the slaughterhouse begins: the Plague Boy with the rake and the Plague Girl with the broom; the poisoned goblet and the fever of starvation; tax evasion and fornication --

chooses is, to say the least, striking: "Åter igen dessa smygande tvivel, som drypa gift i mitt blod."⁴¹

In the final act, when Magnus says he still has many goblets to empty, Blanche responds, "Vad för bägare?"⁴² Is she seeking further details; does she not understand his metaphor; or has his reference to emptying cups, coupled with talk of death, given her a guilty start? She then tries to persuade him to see Erik (whom he has not yet fully forgiven), but he refuses. Attributing his bad humour to the fact that he has fasted too much, she offers to bring him a glass of wine, he accepts, and she leaves to get it. When she returns, it is without the wine, and with the news that Erik and Beatrix are ill. Have they unknowingly partaken of poisoned wine previously prepared for Magnus? Strindberg, as he says, leaves the question open, but symbol, metaphor, and innuendo combine to make sure the possibility is not totally discounted!

The dying words of Beatrix add more weight to the possibility, again through the use of a symbol:

BEATRIX: det är skönt i sin ungdom
dö ... strö violer på min kista, moder.

BLANCHE: Älskade barn, var skall jag tager
violer i hösten ...

BEATRIX: Jag tyckte det var vår ... ja, det
finns bara surkullor, som lukta så illa ...

BLANCHE: Rosor finnes, mitt barn, rosor ...

⁴¹ Skrifter, X, 66: "Once more these creeping doubts, which drip poison into my blood."

⁴² Idem.: "What kind of goblets?"

BEATRIX: Nej, de äro så falska ...⁴³

In turn-of-the-century flower symbolism, violets symbolized faithfulness or modesty,⁴⁴ both attributes of Beatrix. The rose, usually a symbol of love, has a particular significance in this play; it is associated with Blanche: in Act III (66) Magnus has called her "min vita ros" ("my white rose")! Does Beatrix know that she has been poisoned; is she referring to Blanche's involvement with Algotsson; does she just have general suspicions about her; or does she merely think roses are too showy? Precisely by not providing answers to these questions, Strindberg has created a fascinating little game at the end of his play!

Much has been said of Magnus' role as a sacrifice of atonement, and of the difficulties which first he and then Blanche have with the application of the Old

⁴³ Skrifter, X, 83 (Act V):

BEATRIX: it's beautiful to die in one's youth ... strew violets on my coffin, Mother.

BLANCHE: Dear child, where would I find violets in the autumn ...

BEATRIX: I thought it was spring ... yes, now the only flower is dog-fennel, which smells so bad ...

BLANCHE: There are roses, my child, roses

...
BEATRIX: No, they're so false ...

⁴⁴ Vide [F.W.L.], *The Language of Flowers* (pages unnumbered, but flowers arranged alphabetically), and the reproduction of a postcard, "Blomsterspråket", (original, 1900) published by Irenco Robert Bier AB, Stockholm (#108 in the series "Good Old Days").

Testament concept during the Christian era. Everyone (even the diabolical Porse) agrees that Magnus is innocent of the crimes he is called upon to expiate, and he is presented throughout the play as a Christ-figure, and yet Ingeborg makes a rather curious (in light of all this) remark about him: "Min son har vålat sin undergång själv; och han förtjänar sitt öde ..."⁴⁵ The fall to which she refers is the fall from the throne which she is engineering, not his apparent fall from grace, but nevertheless, there are indications that good as Magnus is, to the point of being Christ-like, he is not perfect (has not Strindberg himself indicated that Magnus was no Christ?); for what is a tragic hero without a tragic flaw? Magnus' weakness was the sin of pride; not worldly pride in his accomplishments (all of which he attributes to God), but spiritual pride: he knows he is a model Christian -- humble, meek, and obedient to God -- and he not only takes comfort in this knowlege (and who could begrudge him that, given what he has to suffer?), but he is proud of it, wearing it with ostentation, like his garment of penance. Birgitta (hardly one to criticize, but Strindberg allows her the grace of repentance for her pride in the final act) has noticed this, even before things have begun to go wrong for him; in Act I, after

⁴⁵ *Skrifter*, X, 64 (Act III): "My son has brought about his own fall; and he deserves his fate ..."

he has made a particularly sanctimonious speech, she calls him a Pharisee:

MAGNUS: O, Evige Jag tackar dig som gav mig den son, som är mitt hjärtas glädje, att han må hjälpa mig bära den tunga kronan

BRIGITTA (fram): Tyst, tyst, tyst! Farisé! Ödmjuka dig!⁴⁶

This is not the first sign of Magnus' spiritual pride: during the triumphal festival he has freed the prisoners-of-war who have formed part of the procession (men who would otherwise have become slaves, but Magnus has freed the slaves), all at once and in the same place, against the advice of the lords, the bishops, and the co-king. At the end of the act, these freed prisoners are wreaking havoc in the city, and are suspected of carrying the plague! The Barber sums up Magnus' ostentatious act of Christian charity:

Är det godhet detta att bära sig åt som en fåne? Släppa vilda djur på gatorna! Han gör ju alla de andra ont med sin godhet!⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Skrifter, X, 57-58:

MAGNUS: Oh, Eternal Father.... I thank You, who gave me this son, who is the joy of my heart, that he might help me bear the heavy weight of the crown

BRIGITTA (comes forward): Hush, hush, hush! Pharisee! Humble yourself!

⁴⁷ Ibid., 59:

Is it goodness to behave like a fool? Releasing wild animals into the streets! Now everyone else has to suffer wrong because of his goodness!

Even the great ritual action of the first act, the singing of the *Te Deum*, is seen as an example of the king's spiritual pride: he is giving thanks to God for victories which, it soon becomes clear, are far from consolidated: the singing itself is twice interrupted by fanfares announcing the approach of a herald, and the song of praise and thanksgiving is still going on as Magnus reads the news of renewed Russian attacks. The significance is pointed out by the Cupbearer at the close of the act: "... man ska inte sjunga *Te Deum* för-rän miserere är förbi."⁴⁸ The king should still be asking God for mercy, not giving thanks for victory! That observation is later echoed by Ingeborg:

Du sjöng *Te Deum* för tidigt, och det får man icke; du prisade dig lycklig inför allt folket, och man får icke tala om sin lycka.⁴⁹

In Act IV, after Magnus has been excommunicated he continues nevertheless to receive the Sacrament, setting his own judgement above that of the Church, and in the final act, even though his public penance is finished and the excommunication has been lifted, Magnus continues to wear the white penitential tunic. Is there

⁴⁸ *Skrifter*, X, 59: "... one shouldn't sing the *Te Deum* before the *Miserere* has finished."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 66 (Act III):

You sang *Te Deum* too early, and one mustn't do that; you proclaimed yourself fortunate before the whole people, and one mustn't speak of one's good fortune.

not also dogged spiritual pride in his refusal to even hear Blanche's attempt to comfort him with the belief that things will get better, even for him?

None of this is enough to earn Magnus the enormity of suffering which befalls him, nor does it detract from his central function as an atoner for the sins of others, but perhaps it clarifies what Strindberg had in mind when he claimed that the tragedy has both a classical and a Christian foundation.

The seasonal symbolism in the play is in keeping with the ritual nature of its action: it begins in the springtime, when things are burgeoning with life and promise (Sweden at the high point of Magnus' reign), and it closes in the autumn, when nature has run its course, and the time for harvest has come. Magnus too is spent and exhausted: "Det är höst! -- Ute och inne!"⁵⁰ he remarks, and indulges in a reverie over the vernal days of his youth. Significantly, the dying Beatrix hallucinates that it is spring: she, at least can look forward to the beginning of a new life after death! Autumn is a fitting season, as well, for the closing line of the play! There is also balance: we learned in Act IV that the young Magnus Birgersson had been executed thirty years previously, on the Feast of Ss. Simon and Jude (October 28, i.e. in the autumn).

⁵⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 80 (Act V): "It's autumn! -- Outside and in!"

The play does not end optimistically: the future for Magnus is as bleak and barren as the season which approaches: captured by Albrekt of Mecklenburg in 1365, he was imprisoned for the next seven years. He died the year following his release, while visiting Norway.

Perhaps Magnus can take consolation in a remark made by the Possessed Woman. Because she is so obviously not a historical character (although given a vague historical identity, as the estranged wife of Algotson), her every utterance carries more weight than would otherwise be so, and she briefly introduces an idea that becomes increasingly important in Strindberg's drama, the notion that life is an illusion, and that therefore our sufferings have no more reality than our dreams: "Det har ingen skuld till det som skall ske; för övrigt är det bara drömmar allt vad vi lever och lider ..."⁵¹

Strindberg has made full use of colour to give a sense of mediaeval pageantry to his play. Each of the three royal generations is identified by a combination of two colours: yellow and black for Ingeborg; white and gold for Magnus and Blanche; and white and silver for Erik and Beatrix. In addition, Porse wears Ingeborg's colours in Act I (he and Algotson are scheduled

⁵¹ Skrifter, X, 69 (Act III): " There's no guilt in what's going to happen; besides, everything we live and suffer is only a dream ..."

to fight a joust at the festival), and Algotson wears yellow and blue, Sweden's national colours: from his first entrance Porse is visually connected to Ingeborg, a graphic symbol of the connections of love, hate (often indistinguishable, with these two!), ambition, ruthlessness, etc. which are established during the course of the play. Significantly, Algotson is not so connected to Blanche! Also significant is the fact that the colours yellow, blue and black belong to alchemy's descending scale (indicating spiritual degeneracy) whereas the kings' colours belong to the ascending scale (Cirlot, 53), something one need not know in order to notice that those most opposed to the king are clad in darkish tones, those who are basically supportive are radiant in their apparel. There is also a significance to the gold worn by Magnus and Blanche and the corresponding silver worn by Erik and Beatrix: gold is traditionally associated with the sun, silver with the moon. Both rule the skies, but one is but a dim reflection of the other. The moon also reigns over the night, and it is the dark characters Ingeborg and Porse who try to establish Erik as sole king.

More traditional colour symbolism (but still derived from alchemy), and much more representative of Strindberg's use of colour, is seen in the appearance of the Plague Girl:

(... Pestflickan kommer fram på scenen.
Hon är klädd i svart klädning, svarta

strumpor och skor; är cinnoberröd i ansiktet och om händerna, samt har en vit mössa på huvudet. Hon bär en kvast på axeln och har en kritstycke i handen, varmed hon tecknar kors: på estraden, på galgen, på husportar och bord samt på folkets kläder.)⁵²

A grizzly sight! The two principal colours, black and red, represent death and suffering respectively: apt colours for the herald of the plague (particularly if we remember that the two great plagues which swept over Europe were known as the Red Death and the Black Death).⁵³ She is dressed mainly in black, as she represents the coming of the Black Death, a fact attested to when the messenger who appears at the end of the act turns his face to the audience: he has the plague and his face is covered with large black spots. The white cap could indicate that the coming plague is to be a purgatorial (i.e., purifying) experience, but is most likely just an echo of the white chalk crosses which the Plague Girl draws everywhere: the mark attached to

⁵² *Skrifter*, X, 75 (Act IV):

(... the Plague Girl advances to the front of the stage. She is wearing a black dress, and black shoes and stockings; her face and her hands are vermillion; and she has a white cap on her head. She carries a broom over her shoulder and has a piece of chalk in her hand, with which she draws [white] crosses: on the dais, on the gallows, on the doors of houses and the market tables, and on people's clothing.)

⁵³ The plague referred to here is the Black Death, which devastated Europe in the years 1347-51; it reappeared in some places as much as ten years later (Grun, 191-93).

houses stricken by the plague as a warning to others to stay away!

The traditional stage hangman is a figure dressed entirely in black and wearing a hood. While the colour symbolism of that is appropriate, Strindberg dresses his Hangman instead entirely in red;⁵⁴ the association with blood and the symbolism of suffering also seem appropriate. This red figure complements the largely black figure of the Plague Girl, who enters during the same scene, and they become almost emblems of suffering and death.

In contrast, Act V is dominated by white: Magnus (who has spurned the regal gold in favour of his penitential garment) in white, Blanche in white and gold, and Erik and Beatrix in white and silver; the ritual process of purification is being achieved.

A minor instance of colour symbolism characterizes Porse. On his first appearance, he visits the Barber in order to have his blood let; his explanation refers to the mediaeval theory of humours: "Jag är så ond så gallan stiger i blodet och jag ser gulgrönt!"⁵⁵ According to this theory, an excess of yellow bile produces a

⁵⁴ *Skrifter*, X, 71 (Act IV).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54 (Act I): "I'm so vexed ,the gall is rising in my blood, and everything I see looks yellowish-green!"

choleric disposition, characterised by anger and violence. Porse seems to bear the theory out!

That significance of green carries over to Act III, where Magnus sees heavenly portents of what is in store for his kingdom: violence, strife, and disease:

Ser du norrskenets gröna efterströmmar rinna
ner för att dränka de förtappade -- det är
grönt som galla i kväll, och där sitter den
röde Mars som en spikböld ...⁵⁶

If the play does not end in optimism for Magnus' future, at least it ends in peace: his mission has been accomplished; this is as close as we get to the traditional reestablishment of order at the end of a tragedy. But the reign of Albrekt of Mecklenburg (whom Birgitta refers to as vargen, the wolf) was not a bad one for Sweden: he was forced to become king in name only, handing over most of his power to his (Swedish) advisors. Strindberg's no doubt would have regarded that as a positive step!

⁵⁶ *Skrifter*, 66:

Look, the green rays of the Northern Lights
are streaming down to drown the damned --
they are green as gall tonight, and there
sits Mars, red as a festering boil ...

Chapter 54

Gustav Vasa

*Gustav Vasa: skådespel i fem akter*¹ (*Gustav Vasa: Drama in Five Acts*, 1899) is the second of what Strindberg referred to as his Vasa Saga trilogy, the first being the prose version of *Mäster Olof* (1872) and the third *Erik XIV*, written later in 1899 (*Gustav Vasa* also appears in *Engelbrekt*, 1901, *Siste riddaren*, and *Riksföreståndaren*, both 1908). It follows the careers of two characters from the earlier play, *Mäster Olof* and the King, and introduces several who appear in the third: Prince Erik, Göran Persson, Prince Johan, and, with less emphasis, Agda and Karin Månsdotter. It deals with events surrounding the Småland uprising about the middle of Gustav Vasa's reign (1521-60), a great crisis for the King, as he did not know until it actually arrived in Stockholm whether a large army from the province of Dalarna had come to join Småland against him or to help crush the uprising.

Gustav Vasa is a Man of Destiny (*Försynens man*), protected by God and doing His will. Måns Nilsson, the King's old Dalarna friend whom he must execute for joining the plot against him, refers to him at the beginning of the play as "Guds underman" (God's mira-

¹ *Skrifter*, X, 85-122.

cle-worker), but it is Jakob Israel, the son of the King's Hanseatic creditor, who is most aware of the special relationship between God and Gustav Vasa: "... i sanning, Gud, den högste, är med honom;"² and "... fader, tag icke upp strid med Vasa, ty Herrans hand leder honom -- har du icke insett det?"³ The point is emphasized in Act III, the scenery for which includes a painting which specifically depicts Vasa as favoured by God (and implies a blessing on his descendants):

På väggarne målningar ur Gamla Testamentet; den mest i ögonen fallande föreställer "Herren Gud besöker Abraham i Mamre lund". Denna bild av Abraham har ett starkt tycke av konungen.⁴

Not only are others aware that Gustav Vasa is chosen of God, but he himself constantly seeks God's advice and is aware of receiving His guidance:

... jag fattar aldrig ett beslut eller fäller en dom utan att ha frågat Den evige, Den allsmäktige till råds. När jag så, efter fasta, bön och betraktelser fått det äskade svaret ovanfrån, då slår jag gladeliga till,

² Skrifter, X, 97 (II, i): "... in fact, God, the Most High, is with him."

³ Ibid., 98 (II, i): "... father, don't pick a fight with Vasa, for the hand of the Lord guides him -- haven't you realized that?"

⁴ Ibid., 103:

On the walls, paintings of scenes from the Old Testament; the one which most catches the eye shows "The Visit of the Lord God to Abraham in the Grove of Mamre." This representation of Abraham has a strong resemblance to the King.

om ock jag skall klippa hjärterötterna av mig själv.⁵

Nor is he here merely trying to appear pious, for he so consults the Almighty later in the same act.

Against this background, things begin to go wrong for Vasa. The farmers of Småland rise up against him (an event prepared for in the speeches of the Man from Småland in *Mäster Olof*), and the province of Dalarna, formerly the most loyal region of Sweden, with whose aid Vasa defeated Denmark and came to the throne, seems to have turned against him as well. God seems to have deserted him. But what can he have done wrong, if he has always sought God's advice before acting and always acted upon that advice when he received it?

Herrans hand har lagt sig tungt över mig, utan dock att jag förstår varför. Ty, om Gud talar genom samvetet och bönen, så har han intalat mig att handla såsom jag handlat. Varför min lydnad nu straffas, fattar jag icke; men jag böjer mig för den högre visdomen som går över mitt förstånd!⁶

⁵ *Skrifter*, X, 106 (III):

... I never make a decision or pronounce a judgement without having asked the Eternal, the Almighty, for advice. When I then, after fasting, prayer, and meditation, receive from above the answer I sought, I strike willingly, even if doing so should sever the roots of my own heart.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 115 (IV, i):

The hand of the Lord lies heavy on me, although I don't know why. For if God speaks through the conscience and prayer, he has inspired me to act as I've acted. Why my obedience should now be punished, I don't understand, but I bow before the higher wisdom that passes my understanding!

It is no use Olof's telling him to be penitent, for he does not know what he has done! In this respect, he is in a position familiar to many Strindberg heroes (the heroes of *Inferno*, *Till Damaskus I*, and *Folkungasagan*, to name but three): the situation of Job. His fate (and the future prosperity of Sweden) hangs upon how he responds to the test. He does not rail against the injustice of God or, like Karl XII, go his own way, leaving God entirely out of the picture; rather, he accepts his fate quietly and humbly, resigning himself to the consequences, if such be God's will:

Jag tror ingenting numera, annat än: att Gud
är vred på mig och jag väntar pålyxan! Väl!
Jag har tjänat och är uppsagd!⁷

Only when he at last learns that the army from Dalarna has come to support rather than oppose him, does he realize that God has not deserted him after all, but has sent his tribulations as a punishment: "O Gud, du har straffat mig, och jag tackar dig!"⁸ What he has been punished for seems to be his seizure of the church bells, ostensibly to help pay off Sweden's debt

⁷ *Skrifter*, X, 121 (V):

I don't believe anything anymore, except that
God is angry with me and I await the pole-
axe! All right! My usefulness is over and
I've been given my notice!

⁸ *Ibid.*, 122 (V): "O God, you have punished me,
and I give you thanks!" This is the play's curtain
line.

to the Hanseatic League, but in fact to a great extent lining his own coffers. This is an offence against God in that the bells were consecrated, but it is also a manifestation of the sin of pride, the danger of which is pointed out early in the play by Olof: "Genom ett långt ungänge med många människor har jag slutligen upptäckt att ursynen, alla lasters moder, är högfärden."⁹

Gustav makes reparation for his sin in the humility with which he accepts the fate he believes God has prepared for him. As with Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, his humility saves him from that fate at the final moment. Karl XII, condemned for a similar sin of pride, is not so fortunate.

The way in which the King's punishment is carried out is typical of Strindberg: he is delivered over to Satan to be chastised. Thus, in the first act the traitors from Dalarna (who the King fears may represent the feeling of the whole province) are linked with the powers of darkness through a play on words:

MAGISTER OLAUS: Gå, magister, genast,
eller skall I få rida barbacka!
MAGISTER STIG: Helvetet!

⁹ *Skrifter*, X, 93 (I): "Through a long association with many people I've at last discovered that the original sin, the mother of all vices, is pride."

MAGISTER OLAUS: Till helvetet! -- Ut!¹⁰

The leaders of the Småland uprising, Jon Andersson and Nils Dacke, are also associated with the dark powers:

KUNGEN: Vem är Jon Andersson?

HERMAN ISRAEL: Svårt att säga; men bakom hans ansikte syns ett annat, som tyckes vara djävulens. Har du hört namnet Dacke?¹¹

But these trials, from which Vasa is eventually delivered, are not the only punishment: the sin of the father is also visited on his children: the Vasa dynasty will be a troubled one. One of the sources of turmoil will be Göran Persson: private secretary, friend, and adviser to Prince Erik. He is the person most strongly identified with the forces of Hell in the play. When Erik falls in love with the commoner Karin Månsdotter, he parts company (but not permanently, as we see in *Erik XIV*) with Persson, whose cynicism now repels him: "Jag lämnar dig som om en ängel kommit och

¹⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 92 (I):

MASTER OLOF: Go, master, at once, or you will have to ride bareback!

MASTER STIG: Hell!

MASTER OLOF: To Hell! -- Out!

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 107 (III):

THE KING: Who's Jon Andersson?

HERMAN ISRAEL: It's hard to say; but behind his face there appears another, which seems to be the devil's. Have you heard the name Dacke?

hämtat mig från de ondes boningar...;"¹² and Master Olof's son Reginald has no doubt who Persson's master is: "... Göran Persson är visst satanist...."¹³

The other force opposed to Erik is Prince Johan, whom Vasa favours as his successor even though he is the younger son, and the struggle for power between the two will lead to unrest and uncertainty in the kingdom. Erik lets his step-mother know exactly what he thinks of her son, who is also cast in the rôle of infernal being: "... jag förstår att I skulle vilja se kronan på den röda djävulns ännu rödare hår...."¹⁴

Finally, young Reginald Petri sees even his father's great work, the Reformation, which has caused much of the discontent in the kingdom and divides even the royal family (the King's mother-in-law is a Catholic nun, Johan a crypto-Catholic, Erik a Calvinist, and the King a Lutheran, although he still makes the sign of the cross when praying), as the work of the devil:

REGINALD: ... jag vill icke mer studera
teologi!

MAGISTER OLAUS: Varför så då?

REGINALD: Jag tror att det är djävulsverk

¹² *Skrifter*, X, 112 (IV, i): "I leave you, as if an angel had come and fetched me from the dwellings of the evil ones...."

¹³ *Ibid.*, 116 (IV, ii): "... Göran Persson is, of course, a Satanist...."

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 104 (III): "... I understand you'd like to see the crown upon the red devil's even redder hair...."

till att göra människorna till fiender!¹⁵

The criticism is not directed so much against the doctrines of the Reformation as against the disunity and strife that resulted from it. If Reginald is right, perhaps Måns Nilsson is also right when he says of Mäster Olof, the Reformation leader, "Jag tror det är fan själv!"¹⁶

Associated with the powers of darkness are symbols of humanity debased to animals. Every example of animal symbolism in the play except one (and that a bird rather than a beast) has a negative association. The most frequently occurring example is applied to Göran Persson, and strengthens his association with the baser powers. Five times in the play Erik calls him a swine,¹⁷ and, far from becoming angry or trying to defend himself, each time he accepts the label with complete equanimity:

PRINS ERIK: Är du ett sådant as då?

¹⁵ *Skrifter*, X, 116 (IV, ii):

REGINALD: I don't want to study theology anymore.

MAGISTER OLAUS: But why not?

REGINALD: I think it's the work of the devil, devised to turn men into enemies!

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 92 (I): "I think he's the devil himself!"

¹⁷ The Swedish word is *ett as*, literally an animal carcass, carrion, but used figuratively in the pejorative sense of the English *swine* or *skunk*. The examples are found on pp. 100, 101, 102 (all Act II), and 112 (Act IV, scene i).

GÖRAN PERSSON: Efter alla säger det, så måste jag ju tro det!¹⁸

Another animal symbol which does nothing to enhance the picture of Göran Persson is the (figurative) bestiality of which he claims to be the offspring:

GÖRAN PERSSON: Det vet du väl att min far var munk, och när klostren stängdes gick han åstad och gifte sig. Jag är således född i mened och tidelag, alldenstund herr fader bröt sin ed och ingick olovlig beblandelse med ett orent får.

PRINS ERIK: Du är ett as, Göran.

GÖRAN PERSSON: Har jag någon enda gång förnekat det?¹⁹

The King carries about with him a short boar spear, which he uses as a walking stick. This identifies him with the god of the hunt (the hunter is a symbol of persecution, and Vasa is persecuting the Church), Odin, and also as an enemy of the forces represented by the animal symbolism. It also throws an interesting light on the appellation "the old boar"

¹⁸ *Skrifter*, X, 100 (II, ii):

PRINCE ERIK: Are you such a swine then?

GÖRAN PERSSON: Since everyone says I am, I have to believe it, don't I!

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101 (II, ii):

GÖRAN PERSSON: You must know that my father was a monk, and, when the monasteries were closed, he went off and got married. And so I was born in perjury and bestiality, inasmuch as my honoured father broke his vows and entered into an illicit union with an unclean sheep.

PRINS ERIK: You're a swine, Göran.

GÖRAN PERSSON: Have I ever once denied it?

applied to Svante Sture, the enemy of Erik XIV in the play which follows Gustav Vasa.

Erik, the weak and dissolute young prince, is called a pig by the barmaid Agda (111: IV) and a raven by his father (121: V). The raven and the rook are both birds of ill omen and are properly attached to individuals (Erik and Nils Dacke, respectively) whose destinies are opposed to the King's. The other birds in the play are the caged birds which decorate the Blue Dove tavern (the setting of Act II). Symbolically, Agda is one of these birds, and she is momentarily freed when the tavern is closed by the King's order:

JAKOB ISRAEL: Landsbefriaren har stigit ner i nattens mörker och befriat dig lilla fågel! -- Vill du nu flyga med mig?²⁰

Before she can fly, however, Jakob is killed, and she is once more caged, first in another tavern, the Golden Apple, and then (in Erik XIV) in the Blue Dove again, where she becomes the unfaithful mistress of Göran Persson.

There is no animal symbolism for the King. He is larger than life, the chosen one of God, a living legend, and is compared to a giant and to the gods Odin and Thor. At the beginning of the speech quoted immedi-

²⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 103 (II, ii):

JAKOB ISRAEL: The liberator of the country has stepped down in the darkness of the night and freed you, little bird! -- Do you want to fly with me now?

ately above, Jakob compares the intervention of the King in their lives to the descent of a giant hand from among the clouds, but it is Erik who best expounds the giant symbol:

PRINS ERIK: som jag levat i den tron att jag bara nådde honom till höften, så fann jag till min förvåning att jag var lika lång som han. Men när jag igen såg honom på avstånd växte han och blev till en jätte.

JAKOB ISRAEL: Det är han också....²¹

The King may be no taller than Erik, but he is nevertheless impressive in stature: his clothing is always referred to in the stage directions as stor (large).

His boar spear, size, and costume all suggest to Erik a likeness between his father and Odin:

Vet du, ibland när han kommer i sin stora filthatt och blå kappan och bär sitt vildsvinsspjut som käpp, då tror jag det är guden Oden själv.²²

The association is strengthened by Vasa's plundering of church lands and property:

Och ... Denna tanke förföljer mig ... Jag tycker han liknar den gamle Oden, sade jag.

²¹ Skrifter, X, 96 (II, i):

PRINCE ERIK: as I'd lived in the belief that I only came up to his waist, I was surprised to discover that I was as tall as he was. But when I saw him again from a distance, he'd grown and become a giant.

JAKOB ISRAEL: And that's what he is, too....

²² Ibid., 100 (II, ii):

You know, sometimes when he arrives in his large felt hat and blue cape, carrying his boar spear as a walking-stick, I believe that he is the god Odin himself.

Oden som kommer igen och skövlar de kristnes tempel liksom de en gång plundrade hans ...²³

But if Gustav Vasa sometimes resembles Odin, god of the hunt and of war, at other times he is Thor, god of thunder:

När han då är vred uppe i översta stockverket så påstår folket att de känner det ända ner i källaren, alldeles som när åskan går.²⁴

Furthermore, Vasa, like Thor, uses a hammer as a weapon; he throws it at people in fits of temper and is said to have killed his first wife in this manner:

... han ville förbjuda mig gå hit i afton; och när jag gick ändå, kastade han sin ungerska stålhammare efter mig, som guden Tor kastar sin efter trollen. Det var på ett hår han slagit ihjäl mig -- som de påstår ... att han slagit ihjäl min mor!²⁵

These associations are certainly not in keeping with Vasa's rôle as the chosen one of God, and indicate symbolically two more reasons for the punishment he undergoes: his plundering of church property and his

²³ Skriffter, X, 100 (II, ii):

And ... I can't help thinking ... I said just now that I thought he resembles the old Odin: Odin come back to pillage the temples of the Christians, just as they once plundered his ...

²⁴ Idem.: And then, when he is angry up in the topmost attic, the people say they can feel it right down in the cellar, just like when it thunders.

²⁵ Idem.: ... he tried to forbid me to come here tonight, and when I was going anyway, he threw his Hungarian steel hammer at me, as the god Thor throws his at the trolls. He only missed killing me by a hair -- just as they say ... he killed my mother.

quick temper have to be expiated, as well as his pride. There is also a parallel between Odin, the father of the Aesir, Abraham, the father of the people of Israel, and Gustav Vasa, who is regarded as the father of the Swedish nation (the significance of his resemblance to the painting referred to above).

Father of his nation Gustav Vasa may have been, but father of a great dynasty he was not. Much in this play is preparation for the events of Erik XIV. Such, for example, is the comparison of Erik to King David, with specific reference to David's weakness for the commoner Bathsheba (i.e., Karin Månsdotter). Furthermore, Erik is physically weak. This and his unsuitability for ruling are conveyed through blood symbolism: Erik, though destined to reign, bears a curse in his blood: "... mitt blod är förgiftat i födseln och jag tror icke något motgift finnes."²⁶ The poison was his parents' loveless marriage, but his birth was also attended by a portent of violence and bloodshed: "... jag kom ... till jämmerdalen med näven full av blod!"²⁷ His tainted blood and resultant weakness is physically apparent, and attention is drawn to it, both in this

²⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 97 (II, i): "... my blood was poisoned at birth, and I don't believe there's an antidote."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 105 (III): "... I ... entered this vale of tears with my fist full of blood!"

play and in Erik XIV, by Karin Månsdotter, who uses the same symbol in both instances:

... jag ... kan aldrig förgäta hans sorgsna blickar och hans långa ansikte -- han är så lik en docka jag hade en gång och som jag kallade Blinda Blodlös....²⁸

The tainted blood (or, as this symbol seems to indicate, anaemia) seems to have been inherited from his mother, as Johan is healthy and robust. In a slip of the tongue, Erik foresees his own death at the hands of his brother (in a manner of speaking: Erik was given poison by his jailers after being condemned to death by a parliament loyal to Johan). He is referring to Johan's Danish ancestor (through his mother), Erik Plogpenning, who was murdered by his brother Abel, with obvious parallels to the Cain and Abel story and his own situation:

Erik och Abel hette de fina farbröderna! icke Kain och Abel! Och den gången var det Abel som slog Kain -- jag menar Erik -- ihjäl! Det varslar gott i anträden! -- Erik blev ihjälslagen! Stackars Erik!²⁹

²⁸ *Skrifter*, X, 111 (IV, i):

... I ... can never forget his sorrowful glances and his long face -- he is so much like a doll I once had, which I called Blind Bloodless....

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 105 (III):

Erik and Abel were the names of the distinguished uncles! not Cain and Abel! And that time it was Abel who slew Cain -- I mean Erik! That's a fine precedent in the family tree! -- Erik was slain! Poor Erik!

Throughout most of the play, a bloody massacre is expected when the forces from Dalarna arrive in support, it is believed, of the Småland rebels. Erik, who has otherwise shown himself a good reader of omens, allows the general expectation (and perhaps his own wishes) to colour his judgement here:

DRONNINGEN: Här talas bara om blod och gift i denna dag. Jag vet icke hur solen gått upp denna sköna morgon.

PRINS ERIK: Solen är falsk, tro inte den! Här kommer blod att flyta innan aftonen!³⁰

But the sun does not lie, for the first time we see Gustav Vasa in the play (at the beginning of Act III: a new ploy of Strindberg's), he stands bathed in sunlight (a symbol that, in spite of everything, he enjoys the Divine favour and protection), and that symbol is realized in the happy ending of the play.

A similar use of the sun is made by Reginald Petri, who bemoans the lack of it in his life:

Min framtid? Jag ser den som ett grått töcken, där solen aldrig skall lysa; och tränger en gång en ljusstråle igenom, skall

³⁰ Skrifter, X, 105 (III):

THE QUEEN: Nobody speaks of anything but blood and poison here today. I don't know how the sun rose on this beautiful morning.

PRINCE ERIK: The sun is a liar; don't believe it! Blood will flow here before evening.

den upptäckas vara ett irrbloss, som leder
vilse!³¹

The sun is used as a symbol of life and victory in other Strindberg works as well, notably *Fröken Julie* and *Brott och brott*.

Gustav Vasa was one of Strindberg's greatest theatrical successes during his lifetime, and continues to be frequently mounted in Sweden and Finland. Unfortunately, it is little known outside of Scandinavia, where audiences cannot be expected to know Swedish history. A production provided with a good set of programme notes could introduce these audiences to a remarkably effective play, with Strindberg at his best as a creator of living characters.

³¹ *Skrifter*, X, 116-17 (IV, ii):

My future? I see it as a grey mist which the sun will never pierce, and should a ray of light ever penetrate, it will be found to be a will-o'-the-wisp, which leads one astray.

Chapter 55

Erik XIV

*Erik XIV: skådespel i fyra akter*¹ (*Erik XIV: Drama in Four Acts*, 1899) was written immediately following *Gustav Vasa* and deals with many of the same characters. Although a dismal failure as king (1560-69), Erik was a fascinating personality, particularly to Strindberg, who saw in his situation many parallels to his own. He is a typical post-Inferno Strindberg hero: the helpless victim of circumstances and of foes both material and immaterial, and, like other Strindberg heroes, he has an ambivalent attitude towards women: deeply in love with Karin Månsdotter, the mother of his children, he is repelled by her lower nature, here symbolized by her low station in life (she is the daughter of a soldier). Woman is, as well, intimately bound up with his destiny: when Erik meets Karin, she is busy at her needlework (like one of the Parcae, or the Lady in *Till Damaskus I*).

Erik suffers under a curse: "Har du icke märkt, att allt vad jag lägger hand vid blir dumt och bakvänt!"² He is beset by demons and malevolent powers:

... det är verkligen sanning att jag skäms,
men ingen undgår sitt öde och jag har aldrig

¹ *Skrifter*, X, 123-54.

² *Ibid.*, 131 (I): "Haven't you noticed that everything I set my hand to becomes foolish and absurd!"

undgått mitt ... min far sa att det skulle sluta illa för mig; hur kunde han veta det, om det ej var så skrivet; och vem kunde ha skrivit det om icke den som förut bestämt det!³

Indeed, Satan seems to control the action of this play, which is full of curses: characters are wished to Hell and called devils from beginning to end. And when no human plays devil's agent, Satan operates himself, as when Erik loses the speech Göran Persson has written for him, with disastrous results:

... Det var som om någon rört om ini mitt huvud och petat sönder min tungas mekanik; denne någon, som jag icke tvekar kalla Satan, tvingar mig att förväxla Svante Sture med Peder Welamson....⁴

While the gods sleep, the devils are active, interfering with everything. Because of his particular vision of the world, Strindberg has turned a weak and ineffectual king into a modern anti-hero: a man who cannot be blamed for his failures, but who should rather be

³ *Skrifter*, X, 145 (III, iii):

... it's absolutely true that I'm ashamed, but nobody escapes his fate, and I've never escaped mine ... my father said I'd come to a bad end; how could he have known that if it weren't so written, and who could have written it if not he who had decreed it beforehand!

⁴ *Ibid.*, 143 (III, ii):

... it was as if someone had rummaged about inside my head and disassembled my speech mechanism; that someone, whom I don't hesitate to call Satan, forced me to confuse Svante Sture and Peder Welamson....

admired for his struggle against the powers which finally and inevitably defeat him.

The object of the struggle is the crown: symbol of worldly power. A new crown is made for Erik's intended bride, Elizabeth I of England,⁵ and Erik jokingly makes Karin Månsdotter put it on her head, much to her embarrassment. This is a symbolic enactment of events to come: Elizabeth's rejection of Erik's suit, his taking of Karin Månsdotter as his wife, and her uneasy situation as queen. In Act III, scene ii, Erik complains of the heaviness of the crown, particularly in the heat of the troublesome situation in which he finds himself: "Det är en förfärlig hetta och kronan pressar svetten ur håret!"⁶ In the same scene, however, he shows the crown to his children and refers to it as a bauble; a few minutes later he removes it from his head in a very tired and overburdened manner. Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown!

In Strindberg, struggles call forth animal symbolism (which is why that symbolism is so common in the marriage plays), and the struggles of Erik XIV are no exception. Sweden's lion embraces England's leopard

⁵ Erik negotiated for Elizabeth's hand from 1558 to 1565, but between 1562 and 1564 made proposals of marriage to several other distinguished ladies, including Mary, Queen of Scots.

⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 141: "It's a dreadful heat, and the crown presses the sweat out of the hair!"

(i.e., a heraldic "leopardized" lion) on the new crown Erik has had made for Elizabeth (their alliance will control the six jewels of the crown: Sweden, Norway, Finland, England, Ireland, and Wales). Erik, indeed, is usually associated (but always ironically) with heraldic beasts: with an eagle in a facetious comment of Johan's ("Herr broders statsmannatankar bäras av örnvingar, att jag en fattig sparv icke mäktar följa!"⁷; with a tiger when he throws himself down on a tiger skin in the same act (and cries); and with a bear when he laments the departure of his children. A truer picture of the state of the kingdom, however, is provided by Erik's son Gustav, who mistakes the ermine on the mantle of state for rats (141: III, ii).

Erik's two noble enemies, his brother Johan and Svante Sture, are compared to wild animals: Johan to a fox (noted for its stealth and craftiness) and Svante Sture to a boar:

Vem har vågat röra björnens ungar. Det är vildsvinet! Men då skall björnen riva vildsvinets ungar igen! Det är logik!⁸

⁷ *Skrifter*, X, 141 (I): "My lord brother's statesmanship soars on eagle wings which I, a poor sparrow, cannot follow!"

⁸ *Ibid.*, 145 (III, ii):

Who has dared touch the bear's young ones? The boar! In that case, the bear in turn will tear apart the boar's young ones! That's logic!

The commoners do not fare so well: as in Gustav Vasa, Göran Persson is a swine (137: II, *et passim*), and Karin Månsdotter, refused hospitality by her father, is told to eat and drink with the swine if she needs sustenance (147: IV, i). Göran Persson at least does not mind the label, for to say he is a swine is, to him, to say he is human: "... man kan indela människobyket i: religiösa svin och irreligiösa svin! Svin bli de alltid!"⁹ Göran is also associated with the bird which gives its name to the Blue Dove tavern,¹⁰ where he has spent a good deal of his time:

ERIK: Du är ett as, Göran!

GÖRAN PERSSON: Jag har varit, men är icke mera, men det känner jag, att skulle hon svika mig, då ... då skulle den gamle Göran komma igen!

ERIK: Gamle Göran Djävul från Blå Duvan!

....¹¹

⁹ *Skrifter*, X, 145 (III, ii): "The human scum can be divided into religious swine and irreligious swine! They're still swine!"

¹⁰ The Blue Dove appears also to be a brothel. The colour blue and the dove, then, are associated with Venus rather than with the spirit: the ambiguity of both symbols perhaps reflects Göran's relationship with the tavern-maid Agda, which begins to produce a spiritual awakening in him until she proves to be "a whore like all the rest".

¹¹ *Skrifter*, X, 136 (II):

ERIK: You're a swine, Göran!

GÖRAN PERSSON: I have been, but am no longer; but I know this: if she lets me down, then ... then the old Göran will return!

ERIK: The old Devil Göran from the Blue Dove!

Sergeant Max (Karin Månsdotter's childhood sweetheart), noble in his refusal to give in to corruption, dies ignobly:

Vi tog honom i en säck som en kattunge ...
men ... han sam som en utter, så vi måste
klubba honom som man klubbar lake vid tret-
tondagstid.¹²

The teachings of Plato play an increasingly important part in Strindberg's post-Inferno works, particularly the idea that this world is but a distorted reflection or shadow of an ideal world, where perfection exists. That concept makes a brief appearance in Erik XIV, emphasizing the theme of earthly corruption and transforming Göran Persson from a successor of the mediaeval Vice (one -- like Shakespeare's Iago -- who does evil purely for the sake of doing evil) into a disillusioned idealist. This aspect of Göran is brought out early in the play, as he describes his beloved Agda:

ERIK: Är hon skön?
GÖRAN PERSSON: Nej, för världen är hon ful;
men i ett visst ögonblick såg jag urbilden,
Plato kallar. Du vet den där uppenbarelsen av
det bästa, det otimliga bakom hennes ansikts-

¹² Skrifter, X, 138 (III, i):

We stuffed him into a sack like a kitten ...
but ... he swam like an otter, so we had to
stun him with a club, as they stun burbot in
early January.

mask, och sen dess ... hm ... älskar jag henne.¹³

Göran's ideal woman, however, proves fickle, chooses another, and returns the ring he has given her. Erik, who sees the return of the ring, is sadistically delighted: "Haha! Det var urbilden! En gathora, den med! Håhå!"¹⁴

As usual, Strindberg points out parallels between his story and relevant portions of the Bible. When Göran threatens Max, the latter likens himself to Uriah, husband of Bathsheba, whom David removed from the scene by sending him into battle. Although this seems an accurate representation of his relationship to Erik and Karin Månsdotter, nevertheless Göran is right when he turns the parallel against Max: "I detta fallet är det du som lockar Bathseba, vilken aldrig tillhört dig, ifrån hennes barns fader."¹⁵

¹³ Skrifter, X, 131 (I):

ERIK: Is she beautiful?

GÖRAN PERSSON: No, to the world she's ugly; but at a certain moment I saw what Plato calls the ideal. You know, that revelation of the best, the timeless, beneath the mask of her face; and since then ... hm ... I've loved her.

¹⁴ Ibid., 144 (III, ii): "Haha! So much for the ideal! A streetwalker, like the rest! Hoho!"

¹⁵ Ibid., 135 (II): "In this case, it's you who are luring Bathsheba, who never belonged to you, away from the father of her children."

Göran's love is almost religious, and with its collapse comes the annihilation of a growing religious feeling. When Erik suggests that Agda might not reciprocate Göran's love, he is asked to forbear such suggestions, "... för då stiger djävulen ner i min själ, där jag nyss rest ett litet kapell åt den okände Guden ..."¹⁶ The reference is to Acts 17:23, where St. Paul uses an altar to the Unknown God as proof that the Athenians worship the Christian God without knowing it. When Göran's love and budding faith are crushed, he almost goes so far as to commit the sin against the Holy Spirit, but is prevented from doing so by, of all people, Erik:

GÖRAN PERSSON: Nu kommer Göran som djävulen! -- Tänk, att det bästa livet ger är det sämsta av allt; att helvetet ligger i paradiset, och att änglarne äro djävlar; att satan är en vit duva, och den heliga anda ...

ERIK: Håll!

GÖRAN PERSSON: Är du religiös, din djävul?¹⁷

¹⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 136 (II): "... for then the devil descends into my soul, where I have just raised a little chapel to the Unknown God ..."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 144 (III, ii):

GÖRAN PERSSON: Now Göran appears as the devil! -- Just think: the best life has to offer is the worst of all; Hell lies in Paradise, and angels are devils; Satan is a white dove, and the Holy Spirit* ...

ERIK: Stop!

GÖRAN PERSSON: Are you religious, you devil?

* Strindberg takes pains not to commit blasphemy himself: he uses another word for spirit than that nor-

Despite this outburst of religious feeling, it seems Erik is indeed among the powers of darkness, as Göran suggests, for it is his enemies who are treated as redeemers: the Stures greet Johan with flowers in their hands, as if awaiting the bridegroom (140: III, i), and when they are betrayed into Erik's hands, the money he pays their relatives as compensation is referred to as Judas money (152: IV, iii).

Erik's reenactment of the parable of the wedding feast (at his wedding to Karin Månsdotter), symbolizes how utterly alone he is as the play draws to an end. The wedding feast is similar to the banquet honouring the Stranger in *Till Damaskus II*:

Å! Jag konungen, hedrar skurkar med att bjuda
dem till mitt bröllop, och de komma icke!
.... Låt blåsa till taffeln! Kalla in patras-
ket och befall dem till bords! Allihop!
Skicka ut på gator och torg, hämta tiggarn
från rännstenen och horan från krogen!¹⁸

mally used for the Holy Spirit, and drops the usual capitals (den heliga anda instead of den Helige Ande).

¹⁸ Skrifter, X, 150 (IV, iii):

Oh! I, the king, honour scoundrels by invit-
ing them to my wedding, and they don't come!
.... Let the trumpets announce the feast!
Call in the rabble and tell them to take
places! All of them! Send out to the
streets and the marketplaces, fetch the beg-
gar from the gutter and the whore from the
tavern!

The play closes with Erik's arrest and imprisonment. As disaster approaches, Göran Persson experiences difficulty in breathing (his career ends when Erik falls: Johan had him broken on the wheel in 1568) and hears what is surely the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Sweden does not fare well under Erik's Vasa successors:

Det är så dovt i luften och jag hör så mycket! I ena örat hör jag hästtramp, och i det andra trumslag av den sorten som brukas vid spetsgårdar.¹⁹

Erik XIV and Göran Persson were, in their opposition to the nobility, champions of the people, but they were champions who failed. Their failure, Strindberg suggests, was attributable in large part to a trait they shared: their godlessness.

¹⁹ *Skrifter*, X, 151 (IV, iii):

The air is so stifling, and I hear so much! In one ear I hear the tramping of horses and in the other, drumbeats of the sort usually heard at the gallows.

Chapter 56

Midsommar

Midsommar: ett allvarsamt lustspel i sex tablåer¹ (*Midsummer: A Serious Comedy in Six Tableaux*) was written during the summer of 1900 and first performed at Stockholm's Svenska teatern (The Swedish Theatre) April 17, 1901. It is an example of Strindberg at his most jovial: his love of Stockholm and its people and his faith in the future of Sweden combine with themes of forgiveness and reconciliation to form at once a light-hearted, celebratory holiday entertainment and the personal tribute of a prodigal son come home.

The plot is slight: Ivar Lundberg, a young student, has returned home after six years of study abroad. His travels have not done him any good: he is selfish, conceited, ill-tempered, inconsiderate of others, and a snob. The play concerns his reformation, as he experiences a series of unpleasant adventures on the day of Midsummer Eve; he is, in fact, reformed by the good people of Stockholm. Although the play is light-hearted, there is, as the subtitle indicates, a "serious" undertone to it; indeed, one discerns beneath the picturesque surface of the play the pattern of *Advent*: Ivar is, in fact, whipped forward to the foot of the

¹ *Samlade skrifter*, XXXIII, 129-291.

Cross. Here, however, Strindberg uses a light touch: there is no Swedenborgian machinery, no Devil, and, although religion is mentioned (Ivar frequently interprets the simple goodness of those he meets as *läseri*: pietism), God is also kept well in the background. Even the powers are no more than barely hinted at!

The main symbol is Midsummer itself: the festival which marks the height of the summer solstice, when the day is at its longest. Most of the characters in the play have secrets, more or less serious things they wish to hide away in darkness, but on this day of maximum daylight, all secrets are exposed, and the darkness that surrounds them vanishes. And that is truly a cause for celebration!

The mood is set even before the action of the play begins, in the opening stage direction: "Fonden Mälarfjärd med klar, molnfri blå sommarluft. I fjärran gröna öar, holmar och låga land."² The presence of verdant isles in the background is an indication that the play will be touching on spiritual matters.

That indication is borne out in the opening exchange between the Count's Head Gardener and his Wife (Ivar's parents), where it is closely linked with Midsummer and sunshine. The exchange also makes reference

² *Samlade skrifter*, XXXIII, 131: "In the background, the waters of Lake Mälär, under a clear, cloudless blue summer sky. In the distance, green islands, islets, and low-lying country."

to the suffering of nature during less clement seasons,
a theme taken up again in Påsk:

TRÄDGÅRDSMÄSTAREN: Härlig morgon på en
lugn, ljus natt. Vindarne ha gått till vila
och de arma växterna ha fått ro; pingstnordan
ruskade dem i tre dagar och tre nätter, så
att de ingen sömn fingo; det var riktigt synd
om dem. Luften är ljum, så att det värmer om
hjärtat, och mänskornas hat har tinat; ljuset
har kommit åter och ingen natt är mer.

HUSTRUN: Ljuvelig, ljuvelig midsommartid.³

These sentiments are echoed by two other characters in the play: the old Fisherman, who is something of a wise fool, and Louise (Ivar's cousin), who is a precursor of Påsk's Eleanora: a creature of light and innocence who represents hope in the future. In Tableau V, the Fisherman reflects on the unhappiness of the Count and his mother, the dowager countess: the only blot on an otherwise perfect day. In keeping with the general mood of the play, the doubt he here expresses dissolves even as he speaks:

FISKAREN: Hm! hm! -- Tänk, fröken Mia, när
jag stod opp i dag morse, och solen sken så
jag tyckte jorden var vackrare än nånsin, och
människorna liksom snällare, så såg jag upp
till den vita herrgårn, där två riktigt

³ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 131-32:

HEAD GARDENER: A glorious morning after a
calm, clear night. The winds have gone to
rest and the poor plants are left in peace;
at Pentecost, the north wind so jostled them
for three days and three nights that they got
no sleep; I felt really sorry for them. The
air is mild, warming the heart, and the hatred
of mankind has melted; light has come
again, and it's no longer night.

WIFE: Lovely, lovely Midsummer.

olyckliga människor bo; och så tänkte jag:
varför kan jag inte få tro Gud om gott!⁴

Towards the end of the play, Louise gives Ivar a gentle rebuke for his low opinion of his fellow men (who, to be sure, have been giving him a hard time all day):

IVAR: Fiender! Alla människor jag råkat äro fientliga, onda!

LOUISE: Ånej! Jag tycker alla människor äro så snälla i dag, som om solen lyst opp i sinna och värmen smält ner hatet.⁵

But all is not sunshine, even in this best of all possible worlds, as the Head Gardener goes on to remark after his opening paeon: "I dag är solens dag, men i morgon gå vi åter mot mörkret ... och så är det vinter igen, och så vår igen ..."⁶ Life, in other words, is cyclical in nature; there are bad times as well as

⁴ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 234:

THE FISHERMAN: Hm! hm! -- Just think, Miss Mia, when I got up this morning, with the sun shining so, that I thought the world had never been so beautiful, and everyone seemed nicer, I looked up towards the white manor-house, where two truly unhappy people live; and then I thought: why can't I believe good of God!

⁵ Ibid., 262-63 (Tableau VI):

IVAR: Enemies! Everyone I've met is hostile, vicious!

LOUISE: Oh, no! I think all people are so nice today, as if the sun lit up their hearts and the heat melted their hatred.

⁶ Ibid., 132: "Today it's the sun's turn, but tomorrow we begin moving towards the darkness again ... and then it will be winter again, and then spring again ..."

good, but those in turn are succeeded by good times again. Strindberg's four previous plays had been the beginning of his great cycle of Swedish history plays. His concept of the cyclical nature of history (and of personal experience) is very much on his mind as he writes *Midsommar*, which portrays a cycle as it approaches and attains its apex: the day on which all shadows of the past are first revealed and then banished, in order that a new cycle might begin (the "fresh starts" made by most of the characters at the end of the play). As the ferryboat Engineer walks off with the waitress Mia in the final tableau and the owner of the onboard restaurant wonders how their relationship will fare, the Mate sums up this cyclical aspect of experience, suggesting that the good times are perhaps adequate compensation for the bad times which inevitably follow:

STYRMANNEN: Nu är mästern fast!
 RESTAURATRISSEN: Ja, hur ska det gå!
 STYRMANNEN: Det varar så länge det varar!
 Sommarn räcker icke längre än till hösten,
 men det är roligt om sommarn!⁷

⁷ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 281:

THE MATE: The master won't get away now!
 THE RESTAURANT OWNER: * I wonder how they'll get along!
 THE MATE: It will last as long as it lasts!
 Summer extends no farther than to autumn, but summer is very pleasant!

* English does not possess a word which would indicate that this character is a woman: we regularly use the French word *restaurateur* but *restauratrice* (the source

There is a touch of sadness in this: the knowledge that good times are inevitably followed by bad is not exactly the height of optimism. But this plays deals with the light half of the cycle, when bad times are followed by good, and the knowledge that those good times will recur regularly, along with memories of good times in the past, will perhaps be enough to sustain us over the intervening bad times, just as the glorious Scandinavian Midsummer makes it possible to endure the mid-winter gloom!

Strindberg's belief in the cyclical nature of experience finds frequent expression in the formula "Allt går igen!" ("Everything happens again!" or "Everything comes back!"). That formula is explicitly used in this play, both as a general principle and as a specific application of that principle: all of our bad deeds come back to haunt us! :

STADSBUDET: Jag fuskade i Västerås ... så jag skäms egentligen tala om det! Ja, det var skamligt ...

IVAR (förlägen): Ja så?

STADSBUDET: Och det går igen nu, som ni ser!

IVAR: Går igen!

STADSBUDET: Allt går igen! Allt skoj går

—
of the Swedish word) seems ill-at-ease in English. I therefore take this opportunity to point out that the character in question is indeed a woman.

igen!⁸

The little scene is poignant, because Ivar too has cheated on examinations.

Indeed, a skeleton comes tumbling out of almost everyone's closet during the course of the play: the secrets they wish hidden in darkness, but which must be revealed before they can make a fresh start: the Mate was formerly a captain, but lost a ferry in his command; the Engineer is a nobleman, but has dropped the von from his name (the abolition of Sweden's Upper House had made the nobility seem effete); the Restaurant Owner is the unwed mother of Lina, the ferryboat waitress (who thinks she is an orphan); the Police Constable is the one who helped Ivar cheat on his Latin exams; the Mate's wife is unfaithful to him; the Fish-

⁸ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 221 (Tableau IV):

THE PORTER: I cheated in Västerås* ... so badly that I'm really ashamed to speak of it! Yes, that was shameful ...

IVAR (embarrassed): You don't say!

THE PORTER: And now it's all coming back, as you see!

IVAR: Coming back!

THE PORTER: Everything comes back! All mischief comes back!

* Västerås is one of Sweden's most important industrial cities. Situated to the west of Stockholm, it is the site of Sweden's first secondary school (gymnasium), which was founded in 1623. It was perhaps at this school that the Porter's cheating took place.

erman has had three unhappy marriages; and Ivar is worst of all: he has achieved his position as a student through cheating, has picked up all manner of bad habits abroad, and has failed to report for military service (introduced experimentally in 1900: the play is very topical). Present unhappiness is seen as a consequence of past indiscretions; we cannot complain of our circumstances, then, for we have created those circumstances ourselves.

As seen above in the Fisherman's speech, the exception to this rule seems to be the Count, who suffers greatly but seems to have led an exemplary life: the source of his unhappiness is that his father was murdered in a brothel and the stain on the family name was made seemingly indelible when that circumstance was immortalized in a popular ballad. The Fisherman's doubts in the fairness of the Count's fate disappear, however, when he learns that the latter has not always been the gentle and generous public benefactor he now is; in his younger days, when he occupied a position of influence in the civil service, he was an oppressor of the poor:

När nu fröken Mia talar om det här med greven, att han inte alltid varit god ... så tycker jag det är lugnare, att leva! För det finns rättvisa! Så tycker jag!⁹

⁹ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 234 (Tableau V):

Now that you mention this business with the Count, Miss Mia -- that he has not always been a good man -- life seems easier to bear!

When the Count himself acknowledges his past and realizes that he is in fact not just the innocent victim of circumstances beyond his control, a great weight is lifted from him, and he too finds life easier to bear. The following exchange ensues immediately upon the Fisherman's discovery of justice in the situation:

MIA: Jag förstår vad han menar; och märkte han, hur greven blev kav lugn, när slaget träffade honom här ...

FISKAREN: Ackurat ja! Alldeles som om han fått räkningen kvitterad! Full valuta bekommen!¹⁰

This is another symbolic pattern in Strindberg's works, that of debit and credit: we can know no happiness while life is our creditor. "Allt går igen!" until the debt is settled. The pattern emerges again in the final tableau. For years the Mate has blamed his marital difficulties on the fact that in his youth he had seduced the woman who became his wife, thus teaching her wanton ways. When the Restaurant Owner now reveals that the wife had been wayward even before meeting him, he must look elsewhere for the cause of his suffering:

RESTAURATRISEN: Är det icke bättre att lida oskyldigt än skyldigt?

For there is justice! That's what I think!

¹⁰ Idem.:

MIA: I see what you mean; and did you notice how dead calm the Count became when the blow fell on him here ...

THE FISHERMAN: Exactly! Just as if an old account had been settled! Paid in full!

STYRMANNEN: Nej; jag har aldrig trott på martyrer, har alltid hånat sådana, och nu skulle jag själv bli en sådan!

RESTAURATRISEN: Då får ni kvitta detta mot något annat då!

STYRMANNEN: Det var visdomsord. -- -- --
Låt mig se, var jag skall skriva upp det! ...
Åjo, det finns nog poster på debetsidan! Men det är i alla fall rysligt att behöva betala en annans laster med egna försakelser!

RESTAURATRISEN: Det är rysligt allihop, men därför ha vi kommit hit för att glömma det en stund, medan solen skiner och marken är grön! (De gå ut.)¹¹

The Mate is to become captain of a new ferry; presumably he will also now find happiness with the Restaurant Owner. She, in the meantime, has acknowledged that she is Lina's mother, bringing peace to her own conscience and happiness to her daughter. As all the old secrets are brought into the light of day, they dissolve, and as Ivar witnesses what is going on all around him, he realizes the basic goodness of his fellow humans, and he too begins to change. The play ends

¹¹ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 271-72:

THE RESTAURANT OWNER: Isn't it better to suffer in innocence than in guilt?

THE MATE: No; I've never believed in martyrs, have always scorned such people, and now I've become one myself!

THE RESTAURANT OWNER: Well then, you must set this against another debt!

THE MATE: That's a good idea. -- -- -- Let me see, what shall I chalk this up to! ... Oh yes, there are plenty of entries on the debit side! But in any case, it's terrible to have to pay for another's vices by depriving oneself!

THE RESTAURANT OWNER: What isn't terrible? but that's why we've come here: to forget for a moment, while the sun shines and the countryside is green! (They walk off.)

with his reporting to the military authorities to begin his service: his fresh start is marked by acceptance of responsibility towards a society that has given him everything. The play ends happily for everybody, and if the happiness will not last "ever after", everyone has at least had his day in the sunshine and now knows that that too will return: "allt går igen!"

All of these people have suffered, and even if they have all merited their suffering, it has been a corrective rather than a punishment (just as the Other in Advent is an *esprit correcteur* rather than an *esprit vengeur*), necessary in order to turn them into good, honest, responsible, and ultimately happy human beings. Suffering, then, is not something to be railed against and resisted, but rather a purifying fire, to be endured meekly in order that the old Adam might make way for the new. Thus, the advice the Count receives from the Curate (Komministern) in the fourth tableau: "Akta dig för otålighet! Lid, lid ut i det sista, och ditt namn kan en gång bli ärat igen...."¹² and "Glöm nu inte vad jag bad dig om! Fall icke för prövningen, även om den är aldrig så bitter!"¹³

¹² Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 210 (Tableau IV): "Beware of impatience! Suffer, suffer to the very last, and one day your name can be respected again...."

¹³ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 211: "Now don't forget what I implored you! Don't give way before the test, be it never so bitter!"

If this sounds a bit harsh, the simple wisdom of the Fisherman puts it into perspective and removes its sting:

GREVEN: Nå, Långviken, som är gammal och just inte haft så roligt i sin dar, hur ser livet ut när man bli äldre?

FISKAREN: Ja, vad ska jag säga ... det är sig nog likt, men man liksom förlorar minnet lite ...

GREVEN: Förlorar man minnet? Vilken lycka!

FISKAREN: Si, jag kan inte säga, om det är ögon eller öron som sviker, för när jag läser bladet eller hör berättas något, så blir det alltid lite galigt ...

GREVEN: Det var inte så jag mente, men sorgerna, sorgerna, glömmar man dem också ...

FISKAREN: Sorgerna? Menar greven sorgen man får, då nån dör?

GREVEN: Inte precis det! ... Bekymren, olyckorna ...

FISKAREN (småler): Dom, får man dras med ... Det är enda sättet ... för det har jag lagt märke till, att om jag klagar, får jag alltid sämre.

GREVEN: Är det så? Är det så? -- -- -- Ja, så är det! Man får dras me't! Och inte klaga!¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid., 230-31 (Tableau V):

THE COUNT: Well, Långviken,* you're old and haven't exactly had an easy time of it; how does life seem when you get older?

THE FISHERMAN: Well, what can I say ... it doesn't change much, but you sort of lose your memory a bit ...

THE COUNT: Do you lose your memory? What a blessing!

THE FISHERMAN: You see, I don't know whether it's the eyes or the ears that let you down, but when I read the paper or hear about something, it always gets a little mixed up ...

THE COUNT: That isn't what I meant, but sorrows, sorrows -- do you forget them too ...

THE FISHERMAN: Sorrows? Do you mean the sorrow you feel when somebody dies?

THE COUNT: Not exactly! ... Worries, misfortunes ...

THE FISHERMAN (smiles): Those you have to

In the meantime, during the suffering, life can seem pretty grim. Thus, the refrain of Indra's Daughter in *Ett drömspel*: "Det är synd om människor!" ("Mankind is to be pitied!"), a refrain anticipated in *Midsommar*. Early in the play, Ivar has (unwittingly) caused pain to both Lina and her mother (suffering which leads to the happy result of the latter's acknowledging her daughter); in the final tableau, well on his way to reform, he apologizes for his thoughtlessness. The Restaurant Owner's final few words refer to the continuing uncertainty about her and her daughter's jobs (an uncertainty soon resolved happily):

IVAR: Jag förstår fortfarande ingenting;
men har jag gjort er ont, så förlåt mig!

LINA (till Restauratrisen): Det är synd om honom, bestämt är det; han ser så olycklig ut!

RESTAURATRISEN: Det är synd om alla människor ... Och om oss icke minst ...¹⁵

put up with ... That's the only way ... for I've noticed that if I complain, something worse always happens.

THE COUNT: Is that so? Is that so? -- -- -- Yes, that's how it is! You have to put up with it! And not complain!

* Långviken is the Fisherman's surname.

¹⁵ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 269:

IVAR: I still don't understand anything;
but if I've hurt you, forgive me!

LINA (to the Restaurant Owner): He's to be pitied, that's for sure; he looks so unhappy!

THE RESTAURANT OWNER: All mankind is to be pitied ... And we not least ...

The pattern described here applies not only to individuals, but to nations as well. Like Ivar, Strindberg has returned to Sweden after a long absence, and he likes what he sees: the bitter satire of the 1880s is replaced by affection and hope in a new, just, and democratic society. Many scenes in the play point toward what this new Sweden will be like (and many of Strindberg's predictions have since been realized): the country too is about to enter days of sunshine and hope, and the social abuses against which Strindberg railed in the past were part of the suffering which has produced this regeneration. The parallel between the personal experiences of the characters and their collective destiny as a nation is drawn by Louise in the final tableau, as she invites Ivar to stay to watch the dancing around the maypole on Midsummer Eve:

IVAR: Kan ni leka, stora människorna?

LOUISE: Ja, vi ha lärt oss det igen! Vi leker i våra minnen, att vi äro av ett stort mäktigt folk, som under lidanden tillkämpa oss liv; vi leker, att vi ännu ha en framtid, som måste vara frukten av en lång sorglig förtid ...¹⁶

¹⁶ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 266:

IVAR: Can you, grown-up people, play?

LOUISE: Yes, that's something we've learned how to do again! We rejoice in our memories, that we come from a great and powerful people, who through suffering have enabled us to live; we rejoice that we still have a future, which must be the fruit of a long and sorrowful past ...

Strindberg's manuscript contains a final scene which he cut before publication: a pageant in which the seven Swedish kings from Gustav Vasa to Gustav III appear.¹⁷ While the cut was undoubtedly a wise one from a dramatic point of view, the scene nevertheless reinforces this social dimension of the play, particularly its final few lines, spoken by a character called Gullhjelmsriddaren (The Knight of the Golden Helmet):

.... Vi vänta eder alla, ädla skuggor;
men under tiden, och till dess, till stunden
ingen vet,
god natt igen! Och drömmen storhetsdrömmar,
ty även drömmar stundom sannas,
det vet kung Gösta; som sin djärvsta
ungdomsdröm
fullbordad såg: ett fritt och stort och enigt
Sverige!¹⁸

The representative of the new Sweden is Louise:
simple, loving, kind to all and contemptuous of none,

17 The scene is published in *Samlade skrifter*,
XXXIII, 316-19.

¹⁸ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 319:

.... We wait upon you all, most noble shadows;
but in the meantime, and until the day that
no one knows,
good night again! And dream the dreams of
greatness,
for even dreams come true sometimes,
King Gösta* knows it, who his wildest dreams
of youth
has seen fulfilled: a Sweden free and great
and unified!

* Gösta is a diminutive of Gustav, and refers here to Gustav Vasa, regarded as the founder of modern Sweden.

rejoicing in the simple pleasure of honest work well done, free and eternally optimistic. When Ivar worries that a reformed life might prove dull, she attempts to reassure him with her home-spun view of life:

IVAR: Luise har du någon glädje av att leva?

LOUISE: Ja, det har jag visst! När jag, om morgonen, då jag vaknat, utsövd stiger upp och ser att solen ännu belyser en kommande arbetsdag, och jag går till mitt arbete som ger mig livets villkor, då njuter jag av själva känslan att vara till! Njuter av något så enkelt som att natten är över och att det är dag igen!¹⁹

Ivar and Louise have been childhood friends, and indeed have been promised to each other in marriage. In the new Sweden, however, arranged marriages are unheard of, and the young lady is allowed to marry where her heart leads her. Accordingly, Louise has fallen in love with Julius, her uncle's apprentice, who (in contrast to Ivar) has been doing his military service). Julius is a male version of Louise, and is, in fact, everything Ivar is not: humble, gentle, kind, good-natured, and slow to take offence. Indeed, his main function in

¹⁹ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 266 (Tableau VI):

IVAR: Louise, do you have any joy in life?

LOUISE: Yes, of course I do! When, after I have awoken in the morning, I get up thoroughly rested and see that the sun still shines on the beginning of a new workday, and when I go to my work, which provides me with the necessities of life, then I rejoice at the very sensation of being alive! Rejoice at something so simple as that night is over and it's day again!

the play is as a contrast to Ivar. In one extraordinary scene, however, that in which he declares his love for Louise, he reveals a quite unexpected side to his character. The following occurs just after Julius and Louise kiss for the first time:

LUISE: Det kommer någon!

JULIUS: Ja, låt dem komma, solen ser oss, himlen ser oss och ler! varför skulle icke mänskorna få se vår kärlek! Ring i stapeln, skjut, skjut med kanonerna, blås i lurarne, förkunna det för hela riket: jag älskar henne.

LUISE: Vill du vara snäll och komma ner nu! Du är alldeles för högt oppe! Jag ser efter dig som en lärka, jag hör dig sjunga, men du är bara en prick ...

JULIUS: Är jag en lärka, jag trodde jag var en gråsparv ... det trodde nog flera ...

LUISE: Tyst! Se på svanorna i dammen; somliga äro vita och somliga svarta; vad kunna de därför? Så äro människors öden ...

JULIUS: Förlåt, mig! Lyckan rusar som vin och kärleken är grym ... Då jag älskar dig, börjar jag fatta vad hat är! Jag känner just nu ett behov att slakta någon och bränna upp honom med fett och hud på ett stenaltare ...

LUISE: Julius! Var är Julius?

JULIUS: Här!

LUISE: Nej, jag, jag hörde en annans röst och som nerifrån jorden.

JULIUS: Varför kysste du mig; det skulle vi aldrig ha gjort.

LUISE: Vad hände?

JULIUS (efter en paus): Jag har nyss läst i en bok, att två oskyldiga kroppar, kol och kväve, när de förenas, bilda ett rysligt gift. Vi ha fött giftet på våra läppar, och ur vår oskyldiga kärlek föddes hatet.

LUISE: Så djupsinnig Julius har blivit!

JULIUS: Idioten! ... Det är du Luise, som väcker och eldar slumrande krafter ... Ensam eller i andras sällskap ... ja, då bär jag kappsäckar, till orätt ställe ...

LUISE: Nu går jag ifrån dig på en stund! (Paus.) ... Är detta kärleken?

JULIUS: Ja, den grymma leken, som av två

människoliv gör ett! (Går till vänster.)²⁰

²⁰ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 273-75 (Tableau VI):

LOUISE: Someone's coming!

JULIUS: Let them come! The sun sees us, heaven sees us and smiles! why shouldn't people be permitted to see our love! Let the bell tower ring out; fire, fire the cannons; sound the trumpets;* proclaim it to the whole realm: I love her!

LOUISE: Will you please come down now! You are far too high up! I watch you as I would a lark: I hear you singing, but you're only a speck ...

JULIUS: Am I a lark? I thought I was a house-sparrow ... that's what quite a lot of people thought ...

LOUISE: Quiet! Look at the swans in the pond; some are white and some black; what can they do about it? It's the same with the fates of men ...

JULIUS: Forgive me! Happiness intoxicates like wine, and love is cruel ... When I love you, I begin to understand what hate is! Right now I feel a need to slay someone and make a burnt offering of his fat and hide upon a stone altar ...

LOUISE: Julius! What's become of Julius?

JULIUS: Here I am!

LOUISE: No, I, I heard another's voice, as as if from beneath the ground.

JULIUS: Why did you kiss me? we should never have done that.

LOUISE: What happened?

JULIUS (after a pause): I read in a book recently that two inoffensive substances, carbon and nitrogen, form a horrible poison when they unite. We have produced the poison on our lips, and from our innocent love, hate has been born.

LOUISE: How profound Julius has become!

JULIUS: Idiot! ... That's what you are, Louise, for rousing and igniting dormant forces ... Alone or in the company of others ... yes, then I carry overnight bags: to the wrong place ...**

LOUISE: I'm going to leave you for awhile now! (Pause.) ... Is this love?

JULIUS: Yes, the cruel game,*** which makes two human lives into one! (Exits left.)

* Tableau VI is set in Skansen, Stockholm's large out-

This is the sudden rush of power and elation which so often in Strindberg's works accompanies intense feelings of love. Often, as in *Han och Hon* and *Till Damaskus I*, this surge of power is succeeded by a death-wish: the lover wishes to die at the very height of his ecstasy. Julius too experiences a form of death-wish, but for the death of another: presumably of Ivar, whom he has long perceived as his social superior and his rival for Louise's affections. Strindberg is making several points here. First, the awakening of the sexual urge has transformed the mild-mannered Julius into a man, and the loss of innocence is not to be taken lightly. Secondly, love is a revolutionary force, capable of transforming even the most humble into a cham-

—
door museum of typical Swedish architecture; hence the bell tower. *Skansen* means "The Redoubt" and is in part an old fortress; hence the cannons and military trumpets.

** A reference to a previous series of events in which Julius, misdirected by the Fisherman, carried Ivar's bag, not to the Rosenbad Hotel, but to Rosendal Palace, where he met the Crown Prince.

*** A pun: *lek* (game) is also the last syllable of *kärlek* (love); in his present state, Julius finds love *grym* (cruel) rather than *kär* (dear).

pion of justice (i.e., equality of the social classes): the lowly house-sparrow becomes a soaring lark. Nor is this to be taken lightly, for it is capable of transforming society. Thirdly, and more darkly, the twice-married and twice-divorced Strindberg²¹ is all too well aware that love can bring not only great joy, but also great sorrow, that love and hate are but two sides of the same emotion.

The gentle and optimistic Louise is understandably confused and frightened by all this. Not only does she not recognize in the transformed Julius the good-natured youth with whom she fell in love, but she is also upset by the social implications of his words. In her vision of society, equality is achieved not through bloody revolution, but through peace, harmony, and understanding, as a result of which all men and all walks of life will be invested with dignity and accorded respect. Hence, her symbol of the white and black swans: people are different, they have different talents and capacities, and no amount of squabbling will change that; but they are still all men and no one is any better or any worse than anyone else. This is the ideal of the socialist monarchy that is Sweden. The

²¹ By the autumn of 1900, when *Midsommar* was written, Strindberg had already met Harriet Bosse, but he did not propose to her until the following March, and they were not married until May, when the play had already received its first production.

Strindberg of the 1880s was a strong admirer of the French Revolution; the Strindberg of the 1900s has come to believe that the ideals of that revolution can be realized without class hatred and bloodshed.

Despite the intensity of this scene, which seems jarring in a play written with an otherwise far lighter touch, it parallels the symbolic structure of the other dramatic actions. Even the pleasant Julius, it seems, has a secret: the destructive potential which has lain dormant within the darkness of his psyche is here revealed under the steady Midsummer light. And through exposure this secret too is neutralized: when Julius and Louise are subsequently reunited, their love is as gentle and attractive as both of them are. If Julius' grim reflections have served as a reminder that the nature of love also is cyclical, here too there is hope that the glory of summer will make the darkness of winter easier to bear!

In many respects, *Midsommar* is a dramatic realization of *Gamla Stockholm*, Strindberg's prose celebration of his native city. Four of the six tableaux are set in well-known and well-loved Stockholm landmarks: the Midsummer market on Riddarholmen, where the stalls are decorated with birch leaves and city-dwellers can buy birch boughs for the decoration of their homes for Midsummer, as well as participate in maypole dancing, concerts of folk music, etc.; Klara Churchyard, beside

which Strindberg had both lived and attended school as a child; Djurgården, a large island-park which contains museums, a zoo, an amusement park, a circus, restaurants, tea shops, and other opportunities for amusement; and Skansen: all favorite haunts of Stockholmers, then as now. One of the attractions of Djurgården described with affection in *Gamla Stockholm* was a puppet show. The principal characters were Kasper and his wife, Karolina, who correspond roughly to the English Punch and Judy. Tableau IV of *Midsommar* concludes with a short performance by this puppet show.

This short play-within-the-play, written as an interaction between the on-stage audience and the puppets, is more than a piece of nostalgia in a nostalgic play. The slapstick relationship of Kasper and Karolina is a grim parody of marriage, and thus shows the dark, or winter side of the love relationships in the play, but, much more significantly, Strindberg seems to use Kasper as a means to speak to his audience about his own experiences and about the new direction his work has been taking since the *Inferno* crisis.

When Strindberg's Kasper appears on the puppet stage, he is not at all the character which the public knows and loves, but presents a reformed face. He astounds his audience by announcing that he wants to entertain them in a different manner than he has done heretofore. The cynical humour is gone, replaced by piety:

PUBLIKEN: Se så för tusan! Nu har Kasper blitt läsare! ... Skratta lite! Det gör så gott!

KASPER (vred): Ja, skratta, ja! Vad vill ni skratta åt? Åt andras elände och olyckor; åt elakheter och gemenheter ...²²

The autobiographical works, particularly those dealing with Strindberg's first two marriages, seem specifically referred to in another of Kasper's outbursts:

KASPER (allvarligt): Vad grinar ni åt nu! Åt att jag piskar på min hustru! Är det något att skratta åt, ni dåliga människor?

STYRMANNEN: Nej, nu tror vi inte mer på dig Kasper!

KASPER (vred): Ni tror inte, att jag har mänskliga känslor ... Ni tror inte, att det finns något gott i mig!²³

Kasper is enough of a realist to know that he cannot afford to alienate his audience completely, and so, in the end, he gives them what they want, to the delight of all. Reformation of character is also part of a cyclical process, it seems, and the bitter and

²² Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 258-59:

THE PUBLIC: Well, I'll be damned! Now Kasper has become a pietist! ... Laugh a little! That's what we need!

KASPER (angry): Yes, laugh, yes! What do you want to laugh at? At the misery and misfortunes of others; at evil-doings and dirty tricks ...

²³ Ibid., 260:

KASPER (seriously): What are you grinning at now! That I beat my wife! Is that anything to laugh at, you bad people?

THE MATE: No, we don't believe in you any more, Kasper!

KASPER (angry): You don't believe that I have human feelings ... You don't believe there's any good in me!

cynical observer of human foibles will surface again in Strindberg's writings, interspersed now with works informed by his faith:

KASPER (vred): Ni tror inte, att det finns något gott i mig! Karolina -- omfamna mig! och visa världen att även du kan uppskatta ett manligt hjärta!

....

FRU KASPER: Min, dyra make!

KASPER (skriker): Högre! Tala högre! Kvinna! eller ska du min liv och kniv få pisk! (Han piskar henne.)

PUBLIKEN (applåderar): Bravo, Kasper!

KASPER: Si nu knep jag applåden! Tack, min snälla herrskap! Tack, tack! Tack så mycket, tusen tack!²⁴

Writing for the puppet stage apparently appealed to Strindberg, for he expanded the idea in his next play, "Kaspers fettisdag" ("Kasper's Shrove Tuesday").

An instance of alchemical symbolism has been cited above, when Julius compares the birth of hatred from love to the forming of a powerful poison (cyanide) from the union between carbon and nitrogen. Another occurs at the beginning of the same tableau, when Louise tells

²⁴ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 260-61:

KASPER (angrily): You don't believe there's any good in me! Karolina -- embrace me! and show the world that even you can appreciate a manly heart!

....

MRS. KASPER: My own, dear husband!

KASPER (screams): Louder! Speak louder, woman! or, by my life and knife, I'll beat you! (He beats her.)

THE PUBLIC (applauds): Bravo, Kasper!

KASPER: You see, now I get applause! Thank you, kind ladies and gentlemen! Thank you, thank you! Thank you very much, thanks a million!

Ivar that she is in love with Julius. Ivar is at his lowest point here, and Louise has led him to an awareness that perhaps the faults he finds in all around him really exist within himself: he projects his own shortcomings on others. His problem is that he has believed in nothing but himself, and that way lies spiritual annihilation:

LOUISE: Vad tror du på?

IVAR: På ingenting!

LOUISE: Har du hört sagan om silvertråden? Silvertråden, som blir så tunn ibland, men ändå underhåller ledningen, förbindelse med det stora okända! All godhets och kärleks källa? Den som rycker av den i otålighet, han faller slutligen ner på jorden och äter jord, tills han blir jord igen! Men då är anden död! för evigt!

IVAR (efter en paus): Vet du! ... Jag skulle ha lust att bli läsare! ibland!²⁵

This symbol is picked up a few lines later, as Louise and Ivar part:

LOUISE: Giv mig din hand, Ivar, att vi icke äro ovänner!

IVAR (räcker sin hand): Här, Luise! utan bitterhet!

²⁵ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 265-66:

LOUISE: What do you believe in?

IVAR: Nothing!

LOUISE: Have you heard the story about the silver wire? The silver wire, which is sometimes so thin, but nevertheless supports the cable, the link with the great unknown! The source of all goodness and love? Whoever tears it down in impatience, at last falls down to the earth and eats earth, until he becomes earth again! But then the spirit is dead! forever!

IVAR (after a pause): Do you know! ... I almost feel like becoming a pietist! sometimes!

LUISE (mottager hans hand): Tack!
 IVAR: Men silvertråden är av!
 LUISE: Ack, se bara, luften är full med
 koppartrådar, som förena människohjärtan;
 börja med dem vackert, så kommer silvret sen,
 högre upp!²⁶

The source of Strindberg's symbol is obscure, but it seems to have something to do with turn-of-the-century electrical wiring. What is important, however, is not where it comes from, but what it means. In alchemy, silver is associated with the moon, and thus with the goddess Diana, copper with Venus. The particular aspect of moon/silver symbolism Strindberg draws upon is the moon's position as mediator between earth and heaven, which corresponds to silver's intermediate position between the baser metals and gold. Man's link between earth and heaven is faith, the meaning of Louise's silver wire: something which Ivar lacks (or rather, which he has destroyed), to the peril of his life and perhaps of his eternal soul. But there is hope: if Ivar is not connected to the silver wire, he can at least connect with the copper wire which is

²⁶ Samlade skrifter, XXXIII, 267:

LOUISE: Give me your hand, Ivar, that
 we might not be enemies!
 IVAR (offers his hand): Here, Louise! with-
 out bitterness!
 LOUISE (takes his hand): Thank you!
 IVAR: But the silver wire has been broken!
 LOUISE: Why, just look: the air is full of
 copper wires which unite human hearts; make a
 good start with them, and you'll reach the
 silver, higher up!

human love, and love of one's fellow man leads to love of God (faith). This is a modern adaptation of the mediaeval notion of the ladder of love, through which love of the particular leads to love of the general, love of the creature to love of the Creator, eros to philias to agape.

This look at *Midsommar* has concentrated on the serious rather than the comic aspects of the play, for it is in them that symbols are used to carry the meaning. It is worth repeating, then, that the overall effect of the play is light-hearted and optimistic. The play was not a success at its première, and has seldom been staged since, chiefly because of its rather loose structure, a large cast, and the heavy demands made on scenery: besides the four tableaux set in well-known Stockholm locales, another is set on the shores of Lake Mälär and one in the ferry saloon. More than most other Strindberg plays, *Midsommar* is very specifically Swedish, both in content and in intended audience, and has won little or no following abroad: Ollén records only one foreign production (in Germany, during the 1922-23 season). Nevertheless, the play finally seems to be finding an audience in Sweden, as a radio play,²⁷ where the difficulties in staging are non-existent. Modern

²⁷ I was fortunate enough to hear a radio performance of the play on Sweden's Program 1 on June 22, 1984 (coinciding with Midsummer celebrations that year).

Swedes particularly enjoy the delightful evocations of turn-of-the-century Stockholm: perhaps not the play's most important ingredient, but this reaction is certainly not alien to the celebratory mood in which it was written. One suspects it would make an interesting and successful film.

Chapter 57

"Kaspers fettisdag"

The short play "Kaspers fettisdag: fastlagsspel"¹ ("Kasper's Shrove Tuesday: a Lenten Play") was written in the autumn of 1900, possibly to fill out a theatre bill with the three-act play *Påsk*, which was already in the planning stage; at any event it served this function at its first two performances, April 16 and 19, 1901 at Kungliga dramatiska teatern. Although it is a bagatelle, written in a broadly farcical style, it shares several elements with *Påsk*: the liturgical season, the springtime, the *fastlagsris* or bundle of twigs that form part of the Swedish Lenten and Easter traditions (see the note in the chapter on *Gamla Stockholm*), a character who is a creditor, and, despite its farcical nature, a sinister undertone of approaching death.

The characters are the *dramatis personae* of the puppet theatre at Djurgården, and two others: the Director of that theatre and his Wife. In the 1901 production all parts were performed by actors, but more recently the play has enjoyed somewhat more success using a combination of actors and marionettes (Ollén, 336-37).

¹ *Samlade skrifter*, XXXIII, 5-36.

It is a delightful little play, well worth reading (and staging) for the masterful way in which Strindberg blends together his farcical plot and the sinister undertones embodied in the characters Döden (Death) and Frestaren (The Tempter). There is also a nice bit of business between the Director and his Wife, whose conjugal life seems a parody of that of the two principal puppets! It is not, however, one of Strindberg's major works, and its symbolism, if any, is slight: populating the stage with characters and situations from the puppet theatre is perhaps in itself a comment on the illusory nature of experience (and of the theatre); the fact that Death and the Tempter do not appear in the final tableau to take their bows with the rest of the cast perhaps indicates that, unlike the other characters, these will not disappear when the curtain falls.

Chapter 58

Påsk

Påsk¹ (Easter, 1900) is set on the three days immediately preceding Easter and draws upon their Christian associations. On Holy Thursday, Eleonora looks ahead to the suffering that is to come: "... det är påsk, och vi ska lida."² On Good Friday (in Swedish *långfredag*, literally Long Friday: the point of Elis' remark "Ja, långfredag! Men så fruktansvärt lång!"³), the family suffers: "... Elis skall lida; alla skola lida på långfredan, därför att de skola erinra Kristi lidande på korset."⁴ And on Holy Saturday, the Resurrection, or triumph of life over death, of rejoicing over suffering, is anticipated. Holy Saturday is the last day of Lent, and therefore as much a day of penance as those which precede it, but it is also the eve of the most joyful feast in the Christian year, and indeed becomes that feast day at midnight. Thus, as

¹ *Skrifter*, XI, 267-91.

² *Ibid.*, 276 (I, iii): "... it's Easter, and we have to suffer."

³ *Ibid.*, 279 (II, i): "Yes, it's Good Friday! But so dreadfully long!" This is the opening line of the act.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 282 (II, iv): "... Elis has to suffer; everyone should suffer on Good Friday, in order to remember Christ's suffering on the Cross."

Good Friday draws to an end, Eleonora summarizes the symbolic meaning of the day ahead:

... det mesta skall reda sig, bara Långfredan är över, men icke allt! I dag ris, i morgon påskäggen! I dag snö, i morgon tö! I dag döden, i morgon uppståndelsen!⁵

The symbolism of Easter is reinforced by Strindberg's choice of music for the play: Haydn's oratorio *The Seven Words from the Cross* (*Sieben Worte des Erlösers*). Before Act I (Holy Thursday), the Introduction (*maestoso adagio*) is played; before Act II the First Word (*largo*: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"); and before Act III (Holy Saturday) the Fifth Word (*adagio*: "I thirst"). In addition, the work is referred to in the text; it is to be performed in the Cathedral on Good Friday:

ELEONORA: Det är ju konsert i morgon?
och de ger Haydns Sju orden på korset!
"Moder, se din son!"
(Hon gråter i händerna.)⁶

⁵ *Skrifter*, XI, 283 (II, vi):

... most things will right themselves once
Good Friday is over, but not everything!
Today the switch, tomorrow the Easter eggs!
Today it snows, tomorrow it will thaw! Today
death, tomorrow resurrection!

⁶ *Ibid.*, 276 (I, iii):

ELEONORA: Isn't there a concert tomorrow?
and they're giving Haydn's Seven Words from the Cross!
"Woman,* behold thy son!"
(She covers her face with her hands and weeps.)

* In the text, the word Mother (*Moder*) is used.

This is the third of the Seven Words from the Cross, in which Christ commended His Mother to the care of St. John, and is used by Eleonora, the Christ-figure of the play, to attempt to draw compassion from their mother for the suffering Elis. Kristina, Elis' fiancée, attends the concert, arousing his suspicions that she is secretly seeing his rival, Petrus (another reference to the Passion narrative: Petrus denies his teacher Elis, just as St. Peter denied Christ), and causing a rift between them.

Another use of music in the play is a song Elis has heard during the night:

Vet du, jag vaknade i natt vid studentsång;
man sjöng: "Ja, jag kommer, hälsen glada vin-
dar ut till landet, ut till fåglarne, att jag
älskar dem, till björk och lindar, sjö och
berg, jag vill dem återse. Se dem än som i
min barndoms stunder ..." (Reser sig, upp-
rörd.)⁷

The words of this song so express Elis' desire to escape the city and its many problems, back to the country, back to his childhood, that one wonders if he indeed awakened in the night, or whether the song was heard in a dream, an expression of his subconscious.

⁷ *Skrifter*, XI, 271 (I, i):

Do you know, last night the singing of stu-
dents woke me up; they were singing: "Yes,
I'm coming! Carefree winds, carry a message
to the countryside, to the birds, that I love
them; to the birch and linden, sea and moun-
tains, that I long to see them again: see
them even as in the days of my childhood ..."
(He stands up, agitated.)

Later, at the beginning of Act II, the silence is emphasized by the bass notes of an organ in the distance, no doubt the somber tones of the *Ex tenebrae*, since it is Good Friday.

Finally, there is the strange story of the clock which reacted impolitely to music and was banished to the kitchen in consequence:

Men så hade vi en elak [klocka] ... den får hänga i köket nu också! Den kunde inte lida musik, utan så fort Elis spelade på pianot, så började hon slå, det märkte vi alla, icke bara jag; och därför får hon sitta i köket, för hon var stygg!⁸

Although several characters identify themselves at one time or another with Christ, Eleonora does so most consistently. From the speech which begins with an echo of Christ's "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30):

ELEONORA: detta lider du för min skull?

BENJAMIN: För din fars skull.

ELEONORA: Det är enahanda, ty han och jag äro en och samma person ...⁹

⁸ Skrifter, XI, 283 (II, iv):

But we had an evil [clock] too; and now it has to hang in the kitchen! It couldn't stand music, and no sooner had Elis begun to play the piano, than it began to strike; we all noticed it, not just I. And that's why it has to sit in the kitchen: because it was naughty!

⁹ *Ibid.*, 274 (I, iii):

ELEONORA: are you suffering this for my sake?

BENJAMIN: For your father's sake.

ELEONORA: It's the same thing, for he and I are one and the same person ...

she goes on to identify even more explicitly with Christ:

För mig finns icke tid och icke rum; jag är överallt och när som helst! Jag är i min fars fängelse och i min brors skolrum, jag är i min mors kök och i min systers butik.... När det går min syster väl ... så känner jag hennes glädje, och går det henne illa så lider jag, man mest lider jag, när hon handlar orätt. Benjamin, du heter Benjamin, emedan du är den yngsta av mina vänner ... ja, alla människor äro mina vänner ... vill du låta mig upptaga dig, så skall jag lida för dig också.¹⁰

As well as the two circumstances linking Elis with Christ mentioned above (his betrayal by Petrus and his having to suffer on Good Friday), the legal seals on the documents which cause him so much anguish are likened to the wounds of Christ: "... de röda sigillan ... Jesu fem sår likna de ..."(278: II, i). But he is not a Christ-figure like Eleonora; rather, like the Stranger in *Till Damaskus*, he has to repeat the Passion of Christ because he will not allow Christ to suffer for

¹⁰ *Skrifter*, XI, 274 (I, iii):

For me time and space don't exist; I'm everywhere at all times! I'm in my father's prison and in my brother's school room, I'm in my mother's kitchen and in my sister's shop.... When things are going well for my sister ... I feel her happiness, and if things go ill for her I suffer, but I suffer most when she deals unfairly. Benjamin, your name is Benjamin, and you're the youngest of my friends ... yes, all people are my friends ... if you let me take you up, I'll suffer for you too!

him: "... Försonaren lidit för våra skulder, och ändå få vi fortsätta betala. Ingen betalar för mig!"¹¹

Even Mrs. Heyst links herself to Christ at one point, when she repeats (and extends) the Fourth Word from the Cross: "Min Gud, vi haver du övergivit mig! Och mina barn!"¹² But she too suffers because she will not allow Christ to suffer for her; it is Eleonora who is one of Swedenborg's higher beings, come down to earth to suffer for others. She further echoes Christ (see Matthew 7:14; 10:9-10) in the speech:

Ja, man skall inte äga något, som binder en vid jorden. Ut på de steniga vägarne och vandra med såriga fötter, ty den vägen leder uppåt, och därför är han mödosam ...¹³

Eventually, she is recognized (by Benjamin) as the Paschal Lamb:

BENJAMIN: Du är alldeles som ett lamm, när det skall slaktas.

ELEONORA: När det vet, att det skall slak-

¹¹ *Skrifter*, XI, 272 (I, i): "... the Redeemer suffered for our faults, and still we have to continue paying. No one pays for me!"

¹² *Ibid.*, 281 (II, ii): "'My God, why hast thou forsaken me!' And my children!"

¹³ *Ibid.*, 283 (II, iv):

Yes, you shouldn't own anything which binds you to the earth. Out on the stony roads, and wander with wounded feet, for that road leads upwards, and that's why it's arduous ...

tas, så klagar det icke och söker icke fly.
Vad kan det annat göra!¹⁴

The branches of two trees, the olive and the birch, are important symbols in the play. The first has its traditional symbolism (drawn from the sign to Noah that the Flood was over: an olive branch borne by a dove), of peace, the end of struggle and hardship, and reconciliation:

ELIS: Vet du, jag tror, at friden återvänder och att olyckorna tröttnat ...

KRISTINA: Varför tror du det?

ELIS: Jo, även därför, att, när jag gick förbi domkyrkan nyss, kom en vit duva flygande; hon slog ned på trottoaren och fällde en kvist, som hon bar i näbben, alldeles framför mina fötter.

KRISTINA: Såg du, vad det var för en kvist?

ELIS: Oliv kunde det inte gärna vara, men jag tror, att det var fridstecknet....¹⁵

¹⁴ Skrifter, XI, 285 (III, iv):

BENJAMIN: You're just like a lamb going to the slaughter.

ELEONORA: When it knows that it will be slaughtered, it neither complains nor tries to escape. What else can it do!

¹⁵ Ibid., 269 (I, i):

ELIS: Do you know, I believe that peace will return, and that our misfortunes have exhausted themselves ...

KRISTINA: Why do you think that?

ELIS: Well, just because, when I was walking past the Cathedral just now, a white dove came flying by; she dropped down to the sidewalk and dropped a branch she was carrying in her beak right at my feet.

KRISTINA: Did you see what kind of branch it was?

ELIS: It could hardly have been olive, but I believe it was the sign of peace....

Peace will indeed be restored, the deprivation of Lent will make way for the joy of Easter, but the suffering is not over just yet! This symbol of hope is kept before the audience, however, by referring to it again in the next scene, where it is contrasted to the birch switch:

ELIS (tar riset från matbordet och sätter
det bakom spegeln): Det var ingen olivekvist
duvan kom med -- det var björk!
(Ut.)¹⁶

Immediately Elis leaves the stage, Eleonora enters bearing a sign of hope, a daffodil (see below).

The birch switch is a symbol of penance, and is particularly associated with Lenten practices, presumably once having been used for self-flagellation.¹⁷ If the branch the dove bore was birch rather than olive, it signalled that Elis had penance, not peace, in store for him. That this is indeed what he must undergo (before the olive branch buds, as it were) is confirmed

¹⁶ Skrifter, XI, 273-74 (I, ii):

ELIS (takes the switch from the dining
table and places it behind the mirror): That
was no olive branch the dove brought me -- it
was birch!
(Exits.)

¹⁷ During the season of Lent, Swedish homes are still decorated with what is known as a Lenten switch (fastlagsris): birch twigs, often decorated with coloured feathers, which are put in water and placed in the sunshine to bud in time for Easter. Strindberg discusses the practice and its origins in *Gamla Stockholm*.

when he receives an anonymous package in the mail, containing a birch switch.

But the birch has associations quite apart from its connection with Lent. Its leafy branches are used to decorate Midsummer maypoles, for instance, and it holds a very special place both in the Swedish landscape and Swedish affections. These positive associations appear in Elis' student song, where the birch and the linden are symbols of the carefree country life of his childhood. Strindberg manages to combine both strains of symbolism: Elis is not pleased to receive the birch switch, but he does not throw it out because of the other associations birch has for him:

Nå, det är ju oskyldigt, och jag skall sätta
det i vatten, så grönskar det som Arons stav!
"Björk ... som i min barndoms stunder" ...¹⁸

The birch switch, then, is penitential, but the birch in leaf is a symbol of carefree, more pleasant days. As we have seen, Elis prevents this switch from budding by putting it behind the mirror rather than in water as he had planned.

It remains there for the rest of the play, a reminder of the penitential nature of the action. Finally, on Holy Saturday, as Easter draws near and as

¹⁸ Skrifter, XI, 272 (I, i):

Well, it's harmless enough, and I'll put it in water, and it'll grow green, like Aaron's staff! "Birch ... as in the days of my childhood" ...

events seem to be taking a turn for the better, Elis asks if they might throw it out:

ELIS: Få vi kasta riset på elden snart?
FRU HEYST: Inte än! Det är litet kvar!¹⁹

Mrs. Heyst's response is ambiguous: does she mean that there is still a little time left in Lent, or that there is still a little left to be atoned for? Both meanings, it would seem, are intended. As Holy Saturday and the family's period of suffering both draw to an end, the creditor Lindkvist (whose name, ironically enough, means linden twig) tells the family to dispose of the switch, but is opposed by Eleonora:

LINDKVIST: Nu kan ni kasta riset på elden!
ELEONORA: Nej, det ska sitta där, för barnen är så glömska!²⁰

The continued presence of the birch switch will remind them of the penance they have undergone and help keep them on the straight and narrow path!

Flowers play particularly large rôles in the symbolism of Påsk. Of chief importance is the daffodil

¹⁹ Skrifter, XI, 286 (III, ix):

ELIS: May we throw the switch on the fire soon?
MRS. HEYST: Not yet! There's still a little left!

²⁰ Ibid., 291 (III, xi):

LINDKVIST: Now you can throw the switch on the fire!
ELEONORA: No, it must stay where it is, because children are so forgetful.

(called påskliljan, literally the Easter lily, in Swedish, and serving the same symbolic function in Sweden -- except for the colour -- as the flower we call the Easter lily does elsewhere), symbol of the Resurrection and of spring:

Det är en påsklilja som är hemma i Schweiz
... den har en kalk som druckit solljus, därför
 är han gul och stillar smärtorna ...²¹

Just as the birch switch symbolizes penance, the daffodil, also present on the stage throughout the play, symbolizes the end of suffering, the state of grace of the purified soul. The daffodil represents the destination of the characters, the birch switch the road they must travel in order to arrive at that destination. The flower's golden colour is the alchemical symbol of spiritual perfection.

Eleonora's insight into the lives of those around her, and indeed into all of nature, is explained by her having been treated with henbane during her illness:

Vet du att när jag var sjuk, fick jag ta in
 en drog av bolmört, som har egenskapen att
 göra ögat till ett förstöringsglas ... Belladonna
 däremot gör, att man ser allting förminskat
... Nåväl, nu kan jag se längre än

²¹ Skrifter, XI, 276 (I, iii):

It's a daffodil, which is native to Switzerland ... it has a calyx which has drunk the light of the sun; that's why it's yellow and can ease suffering ...

andra, och jag kan se stjärnorna på ljusa dagen!²²

This power enables her, among other things, to understand the language of flowers, and to realize their suffering:

... förstår du blommornas tysta språk! Varje doft uttrycker en hel mängd tankar, och dessa tankar överföller mig; och med mitt förstorande öga såg jag in i deras verkstäder som ingen sett. Och de talade till mig om sina sorger som den oförståndige trädgårdsmästaren ådragit dem....²³

The suffering of flowers is referred to again in each of the following acts. In Act II, two particular flowers are singled out for sympathy:

Tänk ... på alla utslagna blommorna, blåsip-porna, snöklockorna, som fått stå i snön hela dagen och hela natten, och frysa ute i mörkret! Tänk vad de skola lida! Natten är nog svårast, då det är mörkt, och de bli mörkrädda, och kan inte springa sin väg ... och

²² Skrifter, XI, 276 (I, iii):

You know, when I was sick I had to take a draught of henbane, which has the property of making the eye into a magnifying glass ... Belladonna, on the other hand, makes you see everything smaller than it is ... Well, now I can see farther than others, and I can see the stars in daylight!

²³ Idem.:

... do you understand the silent language of flowers? Every scent expresses a whole wealth of thoughts; these thoughts overwhelmed me, and with my magnifying eye I saw into their repair shops, which nobody had ever seen before. And they told me of the sorrows brought upon them by the foolish gardener....

de stå och vänta det skall bli dager. Allt,
allt lider, men blommorna mest!²⁴

In Act III, anemones alone receive attention: "Jag har varit på torget och köpt blåsippor och nu ska jag värma dem, för de hade frusit, stackrarna."²⁵ Flowers, in their sensitivity, fragility, and transitory nature, particularly the flowers of very early spring, are the perfect symbol for the fragile and transitory nature of life; the symbol is adapted here to emphasize that life, brief (and beautiful) though it be, is full of suffering: perhaps precisely because it is so sensitive and fragile.

Closely linked to the flower symbolism, especially that of the daffodil, is the symbolism of the sun and its life-giving rays. The sun, symbol of the source of life and of the ultimate wholeness of man, according to Jung,²⁶ shines only at the beginning and end of the

²⁴ Skrifter, XI, 282 (II, iv):

Think ... of all the blossoming flowers -- the anemones, the snowdrops -- which have had to stand in the snow all day and all night, freezing out there in the dark! Imagine how they must suffer! Night is no doubt most difficult, for then it's dark, and they're afraid of the dark but are unable to run away ... they have to stand and wait for the daylight. Everything, everything suffers, but the flowers suffer most!

²⁵ Ibid., 284 (III, i): "I've been to the market-square and bought some anemones, and now I have to warm them, for they'd frozen, poor things."

²⁶ *Psychology and Alchemy*; cited in Cirlot, 304.

play; the rest of the time is gloomy, either because it is night or because the sun is obscured by mist or cloud. When it is not visible, the sun symbolizes sin and expiation (Cirlot, 304). This is why the characters in the play seek and long for sunshine:

ELIS: Vill du gå ut och spatsera?

KRISTINA: Och söka upp solen? Gärna!²⁷

And it is why they dread its absence: "Jag blir skickad tillbaka ... dit, varifrån jag kommit, där solen icke lyser...."²⁸

The appearances and disappearances of the sun conform exactly to the pattern of the days before Easter which give the play its structure. Three remarks in Act II (Good Friday) illustrate this: "I går lyste solen...;²⁹ "Och i morgon skiner solen, då är det uppståndelsens afton...;"³⁰ and, once midnight has passed and Good Friday is over, "Nu är det påskafton! Nu går

²⁷ Skrifter, XI, 272 (I, i):

ELIS: Would you like to go for a walk?

KRISTINA: To seek out the sun? With pleasure!

²⁸ Ibid., 285 (III, iv): "I'd be sent back ... there, where I came from, where the sun never shines...."

²⁹ Ibid., 279 (II, i): "Yesterday, the sun shone...."

³⁰ Ibid., 281 (II, iii): "And tomorrow the sun will shine, for it's the eve of the Resurrection...."

solen snart opp...."³¹ But the sun does not appear on Holy Saturday; it hides behind a veil of mist, and only a glimpse of it is seen. This glimpse, however, is enough to inspire Elis to continue along the short course of expiation that remains: "Nu, sedan jag sett en solstråle, fruktar jag icke möta jätten. Må han komma!"³² Finally, when the full sun of the Resurrection breaks through the window at the end of the play, it is greeted with great jubilation:

ELEONORA: (River lappar av datumvisaren och strör i solstrimman som faller in i rummet.) Ser du hur dagarne gå! April! Maj! Juni! Och solen lyser på dem alla! Se! ...³³

A symbolic way of saying, perhaps, that they all lived happily ever after!

Birds serve a function similar to that of flowers in this play: they indicate Eleonora's supernatural powers (in that she is able to understand them) and in a few places underline the action. The first bird encountered is the dove which drops the birch twig --

³¹ Skrifter, XI, 282 (II, iv): "Now it's Holy Saturday! Soon the sun will rise...."

³² Ibid., 287 (III, ix): "Now that I've seen a ray of sunshine, I'm not afraid to meet the giant. Let him come!"

³³ Ibid., 291 (III, xi):

ELEONORA: (Tears the pages from the calendar and scatters them in the sunshine which streams into the room.) See how the days fly! April! May! June! And the sun shines on them all! Look! ...

or is it an olive branch? -- at Elis' feet. Then Eleonora tells Benjamin some extraordinary things she knows about birds:

ELEONORA: jag vet ändå vad stararna säger.

BENJAMIN: Inte kan de tala?

ELEONORA: Har du inte hört starar som man lärt tala?

BENJAMIN: Jo, som man lärt!

ELEONORA: Alltså kan starar lära tala! Nu finns det sådana som lära sig själva eller äro autodidakter ... de sitter och lyssnar, förstås, utan att vi vet det, och så säger de efter. Jag hörde nyss, när jag kom, två stycken i valnötsträdet som satt och prata.

BENJAMIN: Så rolig du är? Men vad sa de då?

ELEONORA: Jo! "Petrus" -- sa den ena. "Judas!" sa den andra -- "Lika mycket" sa den förre. -- "Fi, fi, fi!" sa den andra. Men har du märkt, att näktergalarna bara sjunga i de dövstummas trädgård härinvid?

BENJAMIN: Ja, det är känt! Varför gör de det?

ELEONORA: Därför, att de som ha hörsel höra inte vad näktergalarna säga; och dövstummarne hör det!³⁴

³⁴ Skrifter, XI, 275 (I, iii):

ELEONORA: I even know what the starlings say.

BENJAMIN: They can't talk?

ELEONORA: Haven't you heard of starlings that have been taught to speak?

BENJAMIN: Yes, that have been taught!

ELEONORA: Well then, starlings can learn to talk! Now there are some that have taught themselves, or are autodidacts ... they sit and listen, of course, without our knowing it, and they repeat what they hear. When I came in just now I heard two of them sitting in the walnut tree, chattering away.

BENJAMIN: Aren't you funny! But what did they say?

ELEONORA: Well! "Petrus," said one. "Judas!" said the other. "The same to you," said the first one. "Fi, fi, fi!" said the other. But have you noticed that the only place the nightingales sing is in the garden of the deaf-mutes next door?

These stories serve two functions: the altercation between the two starlings recalls the betrayals of Christ by Judas and Peter and the denial of Elis by his pupil Petrus; the story of the nightingales provides another link between Eleonora and Christ: the point of her parable is Christ's observation, "... hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." (Matthew 13:13.)

Eleonora's story of the evil bird of prey illustrates the Swedenborgian teachings that our sufferings are the result of our evil natures and that the punishment fits the crime:

Ska jag tala mera om fåglar! Det är en ond fågel, som heter rått-vråken; som man kan höra av namnet, så lever han av råttor. Men som han är en elak fågel, så skall han ha svårt att ta råttorna. Därför kan han bara säga ett enda ord, och det låter, som när katten säger "miau". När nu vråken säger "miau", så går råttorna och gömma sig ... men vråken förstår inte vad han själv säger -- men utan mat blir han ofta, för han är stygg!³⁵

they do that?

ELEONORA: Because those who are able to hear, don't hear what the nightingales are saying, but the deaf-mutes hear it!

³⁵ Skrifter, XI, 276 (I, iii):

Shall I tell you some more about the birds? There's a wicked bird called the rat buzzard; as you can tell from its name, it lives on rats. But since it's an evil bird, it must have a hard time catching rats. That's why it can only say one word, and that's the same sound a cat makes when it says "meow". Now when the buzzard says "meow", the rats go and hide ... but the buzzard doesn't understand what it's saying -- and it often goes without its dinner, because it's naughty!

Elsewhere, birds, like flowers, emphasize the suffering of all of nature:

ELEONORA: Och flyttfåglarne som kommit! Var ska de sova i natt?

BENJAMIN (barnsligt): De sitter i ihåliga trän, vet du ju.

ELEONORA: Inte finns det så många ihåliga trän så de räcker åt alla! Jag har bara sett två ihåliga trän i parkerna, och där bo ugg-lorna ju, som dödar småfåglarne ...³⁶

and

BENJAMIN: Såg du, att fåglarne levde ännu därute?

ELEONORA: Ja, och det faller ingen till marken utan att Gud vill. Men på torget, där fanns döda fåglar ...³⁷

The characters in Påsk, like those in Kamraterna and "Leka med elden", are overgrown children. Elis yearns to return to the countryside of his childhood, Mrs. Heyst treats him and Eleonora (who is sixteen) as if they still were children, and Eleonora herself treats Benjamin (who is fourteen) and indeed everyone

³⁶ Skrifter, XI, 282 (II, iv):

ELEONORA: And the migratory birds that have returned! Where will they sleep tonight?

BENJAMIN (childishly): I'm sure you know that they sleep in hollow trees.

ELEONORA: There aren't enough hollow trees for all of them! I've only seen two hollow trees in the parks, and they're inhabited by owls, you know, which kill small birds ...

³⁷ Ibid., 284 (III, i):

BENJAMIN: Did you see that he birds outside were still alive?

ELEONORA: Yes, and not one falls to the ground unless God wills it. But there were dead birds on the market square ...

she knows as children. The creditor Lindkvist, the cause of so much anguish in the play, is regarded eventually as perhaps more terrifying than dangerous: "Vet du, när jag nu tänker på Lindkvist, ser jag honom som en godmodig jätte, som bara vill skrämma barn!"³⁸ Indeed, that is the way he sees himself; the others, of course, are the children:

LINDKVIST: Nå, pysslingar, stig på och var inte rädda ... Vet ni vem jag är? ... (Med förställd röst.) Jag är jätten i Skinnarviks-bergen, som skrämmar barn! Muh! Muh! ... Men jag är inte så farlig!³⁹

He has not come to avenge a wrong or even to punish these naughty children, but simply to frighten them, knowing that this should be enough to keep them on the straight and narrow in the future:

ELEONORA: Varför skall jätten komma och skrämma barnen?

LINDKVIST: För att barnen skall bli snälla!

ELEONORA: Det är sant! Jätten har rätt!

³⁸ Skrifter, XI, 281 (II, iii): "You know, when I think of Lindkvist now, I see him as a good-natured giant, who only wants to frighten children!"

³⁹ Ibid., 290 (III, xi):

LINDKVIST: Well now, little ones, come in; don't be afraid ... Do you know who I am? ... (In an assumed voice:) I am the giant of the Skinnarvik* Mountains, who frightens children! Boo! Boo! ... But I'm not so dangerous!

* Literally, Skinner's Bay. En skinnare, literally a skinner, is a figurative epithet for a businessman who overcharges.

(....) Tack snälla jätten!⁴⁰

In other words, the sufferings of this world are sent to induce us to strive for perfection!

It has been suggested above that Elis has much in common with the Stranger in *Till Damaskus* (and hence also with the hero of *Inferno*); this similarity is reinforced by his feeling that he labours under the curse of Deuteronomy, as the city from which he longs to escape with all its troubles is transformed in his mind to Ebal, the mount of curses, and the countryside of his childhood, symbol of happier times, becomes Garizim, the mount of blessings: "... skall jag komma ifrån denna rysliga stad, från Ebal, förbannelsens berg och skåda Garizim åter?"⁴¹

In addition to this biblical allusion and the ones mentioned above, the play abounds in biblical quotations, which comment significantly on the action. A quotation from Proverbs, for example, expands on the meaning of the birch switch: "Ris och straff giver vis-

⁴⁰ *Skrifter*, XI, 290 (III, xi):

ELEONORA: Why has the giant come to frighten the children?

LINDKVIST: So the children will be good!

ELEONORA: That's a good reason! You're right, giant! (....) Thank you, good giant!

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 271 (I, i): "... shall I escape from this dreadful city, from Ebal, the Mount of Curses, and look upon Garizim again?"

het, och den, som straff hatar, måste dö ..."⁴² Elis' sin is spiritual pride, and another quotation from the same book warns him against it: "Övermod går före fall!"⁴³ The way to end the suffering that results from sin is indicated by a quotation from the Psalms: "... de offer som Gud behaga -- är en bedrövad ande."⁴⁴

The quotation Eleonora wishes to write on the Easter eggs indicates that the family members suffer because they have been delivered over to Satan, in order that they might repent and reform their lives; she repeats Christ's words to Peter at the Last Supper:

"Si vedersakaren haver begärat Eder, att han skulle sälla Eder såsom vete; men jag haver bedit för dig" ...⁴⁵

⁴² *Skrifter*, XI, 274 (I, iii): "The rod and reproof give wisdom...." and "He that, being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall ... be destroyed...." [Proverbs 29:15 and 29:1. King James translation. The word translated rod in English is here rendered ris (switch) in Swedish.]

⁴³ *Idem.*: "Pride goeth before ... a fall." [Proverbs 16:18. King James translation.]

⁴⁴ *Idem.*: "'A sacrifice to God' -- 'is an afflicted spirit....'" [Psalm 51:17 (Vulgate 50:19). Douay-Rheims translation.]

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 282 (II, iv):

"Satan, you must know, has got his wish to sift you all like wheat, but I have prayed for you...."

The rest of the quotation is perhaps necessary to understand fully Eleonora's allusion. It continues, "... that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you, in your turn must strengthen your

Finally, there are two instances of animal symbolism worth noting, both concerning Lindkvist. In the first, he is said to be a spider: "... Lindkvist, som flyttat hit för att sitta som spindeln mitt i nätet och bevaka flugorna ..."⁴⁶ The other is an onomatopoetic imitation of the sound his galoshes make as he crunches over the snow: "'vargar, vargar, argar, argare, argast, vitsch, vitsch!'"⁴⁷ Elis (the speaker) sees him, in other words, as a ravening wolf, using a classification that reappears in *Dödsdansen* II. At the end of the play he turns out, after all, to be a kindly sheep in wolf's clothing (he also wears a fur coat)!

At the Swedish première of *Påsk* (Holy Thursday: April 4, 1901) the rôle of Eleonora was played by Harriet Bosse. Two months earlier, Strindberg had sent her a letter in which he tried to help her prepare for the rôle. The letter confirms that Eleonora is a Christ-figure, and points to several influences on the conception.

brothers." (Luke 22:31-32. Jerusalem Bible translation.)

⁴⁶ *Skrifter*, XI, 273 (I, ii): "... Lindkvist, who has moved here to sit like a spider in the middle of the web and keep an eye on the flies ..."

⁴⁷ *Idem.*: Literally (and without, unfortunately, the onomatopoeia), "'Wolves, wolves, angers, angrier, angriest, scrunch, scrunch!'"

tion of her character, including Balzac and Maeterlinck:

Eleonora har genom en familjesorg råkat i det sinnestillstånd, sjukliga kalla somliga det, varigenom hon inträtt i rapport (telepatisk) med dels sina anhöriga, dels hela mänskligheten och slutligen den lägre skapelsen, så att hon lider med allt levande, eller förverkligar idéen "Kristos i Mennesket." Hon är därför släkt med Balzacs Seraphita, Swedenborgs nièce, vilken bekantskap jag velat rekommendera Er som introduktion till Påsk.... Hade även ämnat bedja Er läsa: ... Fru Skram: Hieronymus och framför allt: Maeterlinck: Le Trésor des Humbles.⁴⁸

In an article in Aftontidningen (The Evening Paper), May 9, 1910, under the title "Mitt och Ditt"⁴⁹ ("Mine and Yours"), Strindberg again discusses Påsk,

⁴⁸ Ur ockulta dagboken, 21-22 (February 8, 1901):

Because of a family tragedy, Eleonora has fallen into that state of consciousness, called morbid by some, in which she has entered into (telepathic) rapport first with her relatives, then with all of humanity, and finally with the lower orders of creation, so that she suffers with everything living, embodying the idea of "Christ in Man". She is thus related to Balzac's Séraphita, Swedenborg's niece, an acquaintance with whom I wished to recommend to you as an introduction to Påsk.... Had also intended to bid you read ... Mrs. Skram's* Hieronymus and, above all, Maeterlinck's Le trésor des humbles [1896].

* Amalie Skram (1847-1905), Norwegian novelist whose pessimistic works were concerned chiefly with the (erotic) problems of women (Thorlby, 726).

⁴⁹ Samlade skrifter, LIII, 467-70.

clarifying his conception of the play, its characters, and its structure:

Vad nu Påsk ... angår, så vet August Palme bland andra var jag i livet hämtat typen Eleonora, som dessutom förberetts i Advent och Inferno: den ena som lider i stället för den andra (*satisfactio vicaria*). Det andra motivet: den Vålvilliga Nemesis, eller en god gärning, som går igen, har jag fått av avlidna kykoherden K. i Värmdö.

Stämningen har jag ur Haydns Sieben Worte, som är rent kristen.

Formen: de tre Påskdagarna, är min uppfinning, utgörande Passionsspelets tre aktar.

....

Mina allegoriska attribut Påskliljan och Riset behöva ingen förklaring.

Det jag hämtat ur den rika livet självt, eget och andras det blir mitt, om jag ger detta en egen form, och fyller med mitt vin, detta må vara bittert eller sött.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Samlade skrifter, LIII, 468:

As for Påsk ... August Palme,* among others, knows who the model for Eleonora** was; the character, moreover, is anticipated in Advent and Inferno: the person who suffers in the place of others (*satisfactio vicaria*). The second theme -- Benevolent Nemesis, or a good deed which returns*** -- I got from the late Pastor K.**** of Värmdö.

The atmosphere I took from Haydn's Sieben Worte, which is completely Christian.

The structure -- the three days before Easter -- was my own invention, representing the three acts of the [Oberammergau] Passion Play.*****

....

My allegorical attributes, the Daffodil and the Switch, need no explanation.

What I have drawn from the richness of life itself (my own and others' lives), is mine once I give it a form of my own and fill it with my wine, be it bitter or sweet.

* August Palme was a prominent Swedish actor and a friend of Strindberg.

** According to Ollén (340), this was Strindberg's sis-

—
ter Elisabeth (1857-1904), who suffered from manic depression, for which she was admitted to a mental hospital in 1898, and of whom Strindberg was very fond.

*** Lindkvist forgives the family their debt because of a kindness once done him by the father.

**** S.J. Kallberg, who had supported Strindberg in his divorce from Siri von Essen, and who in his youth had received help from Strindberg's father (Ollén, 342).

***** Strindberg had studied photographs of the 1900 performance of the Oberammergau Passion Play, showing particular interest in the arrangement of the scenes (Ibid., 338).

Chapter 59

Dödsdansen I

With *Dödsdansen*: drama: första delen¹ (*The Dance of Death I: A Drama*, 1900) Strindberg returns to the theme of marriage. In what is perhaps his most nightmarish work on that theme, he takes essentially the same characters he had used in *Fadren* thirteen years earlier, but matches them more evenly this time. The resultant duel is savage in the extreme. The play is a direct ancestor of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?

Although the atmosphere of two desperate caged animals, worrying each other to death, dominates the play, actual occurrences of animal symbolism are infrequent. In the most notable example, Kurt describes the awakening of his animal passions:

... jag vill bita dig, i strupen, och suga ditt blod som en lokatt! Du, du har väckt vilddjuret hos mig som jag i årtal sökt döda med försakelser och självplågerier!²

¹ *Samlade verk*, XLIV, 7-135.

² *Ibid.*, 116 (IV, ii*):

... I want to bite you, in the throat, and suck your blood like a lynx! You, you've awakened the beast in me, which for years I've tried to kill with privations and self-tortures!

* The Swedish text is not divided into numbered acts and scenes, and translators do not agree on the numbering. I have adopted Walter Johnson's four-act division

This is actually a variation on the vampire symbol, of which there are two other instances in the play. The first is in Alice's explanation of why she has broken with the Captain's relatives: "... de höllo på att beröva mig livet, sedan de tagit heder och ära."³ The only vampire specifically identified as such, however, is the Captain himself:

KURT: ... nyss när han kände sitt liv
rinna undan, klängde han sig fast vid mitt,
började reda i mina angelägenheter, liksom om
han ville krypa in i mig och leva mitt liv.

ALICE: Det är just hans vampyrnatur -- --
-- att gripa in i andras öden, suga intresse
ur andras existens, ordna och reda för andra,
då hans eget liv är honom absolut intresse-
löst.⁴

(Dramas of Testimony, 13-74), and have supplied scene numbers according to divisions in the Swedish text (indicated there with an asterisk, and generally corresponding to entrances and exits).

³ Samlade verk, XLIV, 52-53 (I, x): "... they were on the point of depriving me of life, after they'd taken away honour and reputation."

⁴ Ibid., 94 (II, iv):

KURT: ... just now when he felt his life draining away, he clung fast to mine, began to arrange my affairs, as if he wanted to creep into me and live my life.

ALICE: That's exactly his vampire nature ... to intervene in the destinies of others, suck interest from the lives of others, to order and arrange things for others, for his own life is absolutely without interest to him.

Nevertheless, all three characters are vampires, preying on and drawing sustenance from each other. It is not a pretty picture. But it is fascinating.

As the struggle intensifies, the weather outside worsens. Early in the play the approaching crisis is indicated by a sign there will be a storm: "Om ni kunde se hur barometern faller! Jag kände det på mig!"⁵ A bit later (59: I, xi), a strong gale is blowing, and still later (80: II, i) a stage direction indicates that the sea is raging. By the end of the play both the storm without and the storm within have passed.

The title of the play refers to Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*, which Strindberg originally intended to use for the Captain's grotesque dance; he was precluded from doing so, however, when he discovered that his arch-rival, Ibsen, had used the music in *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), and he chose instead *The Entry of the Boyars*, a march by the Norwegian Johan Halvorsen (1864-1935). The title, nevertheless, is to be taken in the sense that Saint-Saëns used it, rather than in that used by the artist Dürer, for instance. The dance of the play is a celebration of the victory of death over life and is closely linked to the death-throes not only of the Captain (where they are premature), but also of

⁵ *Samlade verk*, XLIV, 43 (I, vii): "If you could see how the barometer is falling! I had a feeling it was!"

his marriage and, it would seem, of mankind in general. The symbolism of death is all-pervading. As in "Leka med elden", the air is heavy with the stench of a rotting corpse beneath the floor:

... vad har ni för er här i huset? Vad händer här? Det luktar som giftiga tapeter, och man blir sjuk, bara man kommer in! Det ligger lik under golven; och här hatas så att det är svårt att andas.⁶

Furthermore, the characters do not see death in a Christian context, but rather as total and absolute annihilation. If there is another life, it is, at very best, little different from this one:

KAPTEN: Hela livet är rysligt! Och du som tror på fortsättningen, menar du att, det blir frid efteråt?

KURT: Det blir väl kamp och stormar där med!

KAPTEN: Där med -- om det finns något där! Hellre då förintelsen!⁷

⁶ Samlade verk, XLIV, 49 (I, viii):

... what have you got here in the house? It smells as if the wallpaper were poisoned, and you feel sick as soon as you enter! There are corpses under the floors; and there is hatred here, making it difficult to breathe.

⁷ Ibid., 48 (I, viii):

THE CAPTAIN: Everything in life is dreadful! And you who believe in the hereafter, do you think there will be peace afterwards?

KURT: I suppose there'll be strife and storms there too!

KAPTEN: There too -- if there is a there! Better annihilation, then!

The force of the imagery denies an afterlife, however: death is only the end of life, in both senses of the word end. Before it all human life -- ambition, achievement, emotion, thought -- is meaningless, as are suffering, pain, hardship, and failure. In the play's powerful image, death reduces humans to a barrowful of dung ("... som dock icke är prima!"⁸) with no other value than that it might fertilize a garden:

Det är visserligen sant att när mekaniken är slut, så blir det bara en skottkärra att skjuta ut på trädgårdslandet....⁹

Such a conception of death does have its consolations, however, slight though they may appear, for death is an end to suffering and the futility of life as well as to its joys. If one has never experienced the joys, even such a death might appear welcome: "Nu kan bara döden skilja oss; det vet vi, och därför vänta vi honom som befriaren!"¹⁰

But the Captain and Alice are already in Hell, and their suffering is therefore eternal or at least, in

⁸ *Samlade verk*, XLIV, 90 (II, iii): "... which isn't even of the best quality!"

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42 (I, vi):

It's a certain fact that when the mechanism stops, there's nothing left but a wheelbarrowful to throw out on the garden plot....

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52 (I, x): "Now only death can separate us; we know that, and therefore we await him as the deliverer!"

Swedenborgian terms, will last until they reform, in which case they will be liberated by life, not death:

KAPTEN: När jag föll första gången, så var jag över ett stycke på andra sidan graven. Vad jag såg har jag glömt, men intrycket blev kvar!

ALICE: Vad var det?

KAPTEN: Hoppet -- om ett bättre!

ALICE: Ett bättre?

KAPTEN: Ja! Att detta skulle vara livet självt, det har jag egentligen aldrig trott ... detta är döden! eller något ändå sämre

...

ALICE: Och vi ...

KAPTEN: Hade troligen till uppgift att pina varann ... så förefaller det!¹¹

That they are, in fact, in Hell, is clear. The action of the play takes place on an island called Little Hell (lilla helvetet) by the people who live there (109: III, vi), and the point is driven home by Kurt:

KAPTEN: Du är väl inte så barnsligt och tror på -- helvetet?

KURT: Tror du inte på't du som är mitt uti det?

KAPTEN: Det är bildligt, bara!

KURT: Så verkligt som du skildrat ditt,

¹¹ Samlade verk, XLIV, 132 (IV, vi):

THE CAPTAIN: The first time I fell, I went partly over to the other side of the grave. I've forgotten what I saw, but the impression remained!

ALICE: What was that?

THE CAPTAIN: Hope -- for something better!

ALICE: Something better?

THE CAPTAIN: Yes! I've never really believed that this was life itself ... this is death! or something even worse ...

ALICE: And we ...

THE CAPTAIN: Probably had the task of tormenting each other ... that's how it seems!

utesluter varje tanke på bilder, poetiska eller icke!¹²

Indeed, the Captain even goes so far as to suggest that the institution of marriage is in itself infernal: "Så där blir det när du stiftar äktenskap...! Att det inte stiftades i himmeln, det är säkert!"¹³

This Hell is inhabited by demons who, for want of other victims, torture each other. Kurt, an innocent bystander in the beginning, is first informed (by Alice) that the Captain is not what he seems: "Det är en dämon och ingen människa!"¹⁴ He accepts this as true but soon begins to suspect that the Captain is not the only demon in Little Hell: "Alice! Är du en djävul, också?"¹⁵ His suspicion is promptly confirmed: "KURT (med lysande ögon): Du är en djävul!"¹⁶ Indeed, as he

¹² Samlade verk, XLIV, 77 (I, xx):

THE CAPTAIN: You're not so childish as to believe in -- Hell, are you?

KURT: Don't you believe in it, you who are right in the midst of it?

THE CAPTAIN: That's only a metaphor!

KURT: You've described your Hell so realistically that any thought of metaphor, poetic or otherwise, is out of the question!

¹³ Ibid., 91 (II, iii): "That's what happens when you contract marriage...! It wasn't made in heaven, that's for sure!"

¹⁴ Ibid., 109 (III, vi): "He's a demon, not a man!"

¹⁵ Ibid., 111 (III, vi): "Alice! Are you a devil too?"

¹⁶ Ibid., 112 (III, vi): "KURT (his eyes shining): You are a devil!"

gets pulled into the situation through his admiration of Alice, he begins to feel the operation of the demonic powers within his own soul, changing him also into a devil:

Jag kom, och jag trodde mig vara en bit bättre än ni, men nu är jag den uslaste! Sen jag fick se dig i hela din rysliga nakenhet, sedan min lidelse förvände synen på mig känner jag hela det ondas styrka; det fula blev skönt, det goda blir fult och svagt!¹⁷

When Kurt realizes that he is only being used by Alice and the Captain as yet another instrument with which to torture each other, he flees, like the Friend in "Leka med elden", leaving the couple alone in what is once more their private Hell. Like the family in that play, they resume their lives as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

But something has happened. The Captain has had a glimpse of "the other side", which has given him hope of something better than the grim life he now leads. When Kurt leaves, they realize that they have only each other, that they need each other. The way is now open for them to reform their lives, for hope will strengthen their wills:

¹⁷ Samlade verk, XLIV, 116 (IV, ii):

I came, thinking myself a bit better than you two, but now I'm the basest of all! Now that I've seen you in the full horror of your nakedness, Alice, now that my passion has altered my vision, I feel the full strength of evil: the ugly has become beautiful, the good appears ugly and weak!

ALICE: Ha vi pinat varann nog?
KAPTEN: Ja, jag tror det! Och huserat sen!
(Ser sig omkring.) -- -- -- Ska vi städa
efter oss? Och göra rent?
ALICE (reser sig): Ja, om det är möjligt!
KAPTEN (ser sig omkring i rummet): Det går
inte på en dag! Det gör det inte!
ALICE: På två, då! Många dagar!
KAPTEN: Låt oss hoppas det! -- -- --¹⁸

In the terms of Advent, they have whipped each other to the foot of the cross, but that is not the end of their struggle; now they must embrace it. The Captain at least seems on the verge of doing so; having realized that Hell exists and that he is in it, he is now prepared to admit the existence also of an afterlife where peace and happiness exist:

ALICE (sätter sig slö, förtvivlad): Detta
är ju de eviga kvalen! Finns då intet slut?
KAPTEN: Jo, om vi ge oss till tåls! Kanske
när döden kommer, börjar livet.
ALICE: Om så vore!¹⁹

¹⁸ Samlade verk, XLIV, 132-33 (IV, vi):

ALICE: Have we tortured each other enough?
THE CAPTAIN: Yes, I think so! And then run
riot! (Looks around him.) -- -- -- Shall we
tidy up after ourselves? And clean up?
ALICE (rises): Yes, if that's possible!
THE CAPTAIN (looks around the room): It
can't be done in a day! It certainly can't!
ALICE: In two, then! Many days!
THE CAPTAIN: Let's hope so! -- -- --

¹⁹ Ibid., 134 (IV, vi):

ALICE (sits down listlessly, disconsolate):
Aren't these the same old torments! Is there
no end?
THE CAPTAIN: Yes, if we have patience! Per-
haps when death comes, life begins.
ALICE: I hope you're right!

In the meantime, their task will be to forgive each other and begin again ("Ingenting är ohjälpligt, bara man stryker över det och går vidare!"²⁰) They resolve to give it a try: in three months they will repeat their wedding vows on their Silver Anniversary (with Kurt to give the bride away!), and will not mind if the rest of the world thinks them foolish. The most pessimistic of the marriage plays thus ends on an optimistic note:

KAPTEN (allvarligt): Alltså silverbröllop!
 -- -- -- (Reser sig.) Stryka över, och gå vidare! -- Alltså: låt oss gå vidare!²¹

Dödsdansen I, then, is in the tradition of the *Till Damaskus* plays and *Advent*: a demonstration that Hell is on earth, and that it serves a redemptive purpose. It is not, like *Fadren*, a tragedy, but is far too grim throughout most of its action to be called a comedy, and at its close a "happy ending" is only a possibility: the Captain and Alice are now headed in the right direction, but they still have a long way to go,

²⁰ *Samlade verk*, XLIV, 129 (IV, vi): "Nothing is beyond remedy, if only one crosses it out, and goes on!"

²¹ *Ibid.*, 135 (IV, vi):

THE CAPTAIN (seriously): A Silver Wedding, then! -- -- -- (Rises.) Cross out, and go on!
 -- Very well, let's go on!

This is the play's curtain line.

and no doubt there will be many sets-back on the journey.

An interesting link to the *Till Damaskus* plays, as well as to symbols which become much stronger in Strindberg's work during the next decade, is the old woman from the poorhouse who makes a brief appearance in the first act (I, xvii). The poorhouse has sinister connotations for Strindberg, and is associated with the tortures of the Rose Room. The old woman's name is Maja (pronounced maya), a name also given one of the old women in *Till Damaskus III*, and the Sanskrit word for cosmic illusion: the ignorance that prevents man from realizing his identity with brahman, or the absolute. Significantly, the Captain perceives her as a ghost, come to haunt him.

Chapter 60

Dödsdansen II

Dödsdansen: Andra delen¹ (The Dance of Death II), written the same year (1900) as Dödsdansen I, is dramatically inferior and seldom performed. In it the struggle of Part I is continued into the next generation, with Judith (the daughter of the Captain and Alice) and Kurt's son, Allan. What Alice has called the Captain's vampire nature, whereby he must live others' lives for them in compensation for the emptiness of his own, is given full rein here. Finally, his Dance of Death (i.e., his life) comes to an end, and despite the sense of relief experienced by the other characters, the extraordinary conclusion we are left with is that "... han var en god och en ädel man -- likafullt!"²

Animal symbolism, particularly that classifying people as either wolves or sheep, abounds. The classification is first applied to the younger generation:

ALLAN: Jag är inte av vargsläkt!
JUDITH: Då blir du fåret!

¹ Samlade verk, XLIV, 137-231, 255-56.

² Ibid., 231 (III, xii*): "... he was a good and a noble man -- in spite of everything!"

* As in Dödsdansen I, Strindberg did not number the acts and scenes of the play. The divisions are, however, somewhat easier to establish.

ALLAN: Hellre det!³

and:

ALLAN: Mig tycks du ha utvalt till
ditt får.

JUDITH: Du är ett får, och därför skall jag
beskydda dig!

ALLAN (reser sig): Vargen är allt en dålig
fårvaktare! ... Du vill äta mig ... det är
nog hemligheten!⁴

Later, the classifications are also applied to the
older generation. Like his son, Kurt is a sheep:

Det finns vargar och det finns får, det är
ingen mänsklig ära vara fåret! Men jag vill
vara't ändå, hellre än vara vargen!⁵

The Captain, like Judith, is a wolf: "Han har ätit dig
och de dina levande....";⁶ "Tacka [Gud] för befrielsen

³ Samlade verk, XLIV, 144 (I, i):

ALLAN: I don't belong to the wolf family!

JUDITH: Then you're a sheep!

ALICE: Rather that!

⁴ Ibid., 148-49 (I, i):

ALLAN: You seem to have chosen me as
your sheep.

JUDITH: You are a sheep, and therefore I'll
protect you!

ALLAN (stands): The wolf is altogether a
poor shepherd! ... You want to eat me ...
that's all there is to it!

⁵ Ibid., 219 (III, vi):

There are wolves and there are sheep. It's no
honour for a man to be a sheep! But I'd still
rather be that than a wolf!

⁶ Ibid., 220 (III, vii): "He has eaten you and
yours alive...."

från tornet, från vargen, från vampyren!"⁷ Alice, on the other hand, is a wolf that wants to become a sheep: "Då vill jag bli fåret också! Litet medgång gör oss bättre, men bara motgångar gör oss till vargar!"⁸

Animal symbolism is also used to convey Allan's desire to be left in peace; unlike the Captain, he does not want to be drawn into the lives of others, for he fears he will be overwhelmed by them. This is expressed in his dislike of cuttlefish, starfish, and "stingers":

... jag får inte vara i fred! De drar en in
... alldeles som bläckfiskarne nere vid bryg-
gan ... de bitas inte, men röra upp en virvel
som suger ...⁹

This is why he prefers to live inland or on the open sea rather than by the shore: "... i stränderna är det snärjgräs, bläckfiskar, maneter, nässeldjur eller vad de kallas!"¹⁰ His world is peopled with poisonous crea-

⁷ Samlade verk, XLIV, 224 (III, viii): "Thank [God] for delivery from the tower, from the wolf, from the vampire!"

⁸ Idem.:

Now I want to become a sheep too! A little good fortune makes us better, but having only misfortunes turns us into wolves!

⁹ Ibid., 151 (I, ii):

... I'm not allowed to be left in peace! They draw you in ... just like the cuttlefish down by the pier ... they don't bite, but they stir up a whirlpool which sucks ...

¹⁰ Idem.: "... on the shores, one finds goose-grass, cuttlefish, jellyfish, and stingers [literally, nettle-animals], or whatever they're called!"

tures he is unable to escape: the sheep is destined to be eaten by the wolf; the victim cannot escape the vampire! The little island seems nothing but shore, and the Captain in particular is like a poisonous creature lying in wait for a careless step. The point is vividly made by Alice, after the Captain, helpless in his final seizure, has spit in her face with rage:

Kan du spy etter än, huggorm, så skall jag
rycka tungan ur din hals! (Slår kapten en
örfil.) Huvudet är av, men rodnar ännu! ...¹¹

The atmosphere of the previous play, that of hunted, desperate animals, is reinforced here with the information that the island, "Little Hell", was once a royal hunting preserve.

The final occurrence of animal symbolism is when Alice refers to her dying husband as "... ett ruttet djur!"¹²

The symbolism of the colour white informs Judith's romantic dream of dying with Allan at sea:

Allan, gå inte, inte ensam! Vi ska följas åt
ut, och så ta vi lilla slupen, den lilla vita
-- och ... så segla vi i kvav -- ... där det
inte finns något snärjgräs eller några maner-
ter -- ... -- Men vi skulle ha tvättat seglen

¹¹ Samlade verk, XLIV, 224 (III, viii):

If you can still spit venom, viper, I'll tear
the tongue from your throat! (She slaps him
across the face.) The head is off, but still
grows red! ...

¹² Ibid., 225 (IV, ix): "... a rotten animal!"

i går -- de skulle vara alldeles vita -- jag vill se vit i den stunden....¹³

The seizure which finally kills the captain is brought on by the sudden collapse of his plans for Judith's marriage (he has arranged for her to be married to a sixty-year old colonel, who calls it all off after receiving an impudent telephone call from her). Judith is thus the instrument by which the other characters are delivered from the dominating influence of her father. Thus, in her rejoicing over her husband's impending death, Alice compares Judith to Hercules, who slew the hydra, while herself taking the rôle of the assistant who aided him in the task:

Huvudet är av, men rodnar ännu! ... O, Judith, härliga flicka.... Du, du, har befriat oss, alla! -- Har du fler huven, hydra, så ska vi ta dem med! (Drar honom i skägget.)¹⁴

The classical allusion has a biblical parallel in the story of Judith and Holofernes, underlined by Strind-

¹³ Samlade verk, XLIV, 209 (III, iii):

Allan, don't go, not alone! We'll go together, and we'll take the little cutter, the little white one -- and ... then we'll sail until we founder -- ... where there's no goose-grass and no jellyfish -- ... -- But we should have washed the sails yesterday -- they should be completely white -- I want to see white at that moment....

¹⁴ Ibid., 224 (III, viii):

The head is off, but still grows red! ... Oh, Judith, wonderful girl.... You, you've freed us all! -- If you have more heads, hydra, we'll take them too! (Pulls his beard.)

berg's choice of Judith as the name of his heroine. The allusion appears twice earlier in the play, once when her father thinks he has arranged her marriage:

ALICE: Judith! Judith!
KAPTEN: Och Holofernes? -- Ska det vara jag? Pah!¹⁵

and again when he discovers that she has shattered those arrangements:

KAPTEN (bleknar): Det är Judith!
ALICE: Och där är Holofernes!
KAPTEN: Vad är du då? ...
ALICE: Det ska du snart se!¹⁶

Judith, it seems, is a good shepherd after all: like the Jewish heroine after whom she is named, she has delivered the sheep from the ravaging wolf!

This is not how the Captain sees himself, however; his last words are reported to have been (he dies off-stage) an echo of one of Christ's last words from the Cross: "Han sade: `förlåt dem, ty de veta icke vad de göra'."¹⁷ Indeed, the attitude of the other characters

¹⁵ Samlade verk, XLIV, 198 (II, v):

ALICE: Judith! Judith!
THE CAPTAIN: And Holofernes? -- Is that supposed to be me? Pah!

¹⁶ Ibid., 222 (III, viii):

THE CAPTAIN (turns pale): It's Judith!
ALICE: And there's Holofernes!
THE CAPTAIN: What are you then? ...
ALICE: You'll soon see!

¹⁷ Ibid., 229 (III, xi): "He said: `Forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" [Luke 23:34. Douay-Rheims translation.]

softens towards him after his death; even Alice, who only a moment before has been dancing on his grave, as it were, finds it impossible to maintain her resentment: "... nu, då han är död, känner jag en underlig benägenhet att tala väl om honom!"¹⁸ In Kurt's final assessment there is the implication that he was a chosen one of God: "Han var en förbigången! Det säger mycket!"¹⁹ There is an ambiguity here, which Strindberg emphasizes with italics and by adding the second sentence: the Captain was one whom life had passed by (hence his vampire nature), but there is also a sub-linear allusion to the Passover, when the Chosen People of God were marked off from the iniquitous Egyptians. He was certainly no saint, but perhaps, like Attila the Hun, he was a scourge of God, chosen to chastise the iniquitous, that they might repent (an *esprit correcteur*, in other words). Hence, Alice's desire to become a sheep rather than a wolf, when she discovers that his death is imminent.

Plant symbolism is minimal, and closely related to the animal symbolism. Bound up with Allan's aversion to shore creatures, for instance, is an aversion to goose-grass, a weed which catches and becomes entangled in

¹⁸ *Samlade verk*, XLIV, 230 (III, xii): "... now that he's dead, I feel a curious disposition to speak well of him!"

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 231 (III, xii): "He was one who was passed by! That says a lot!"

clothing, forcing itself upon one even if one does not wish to become involved. The vampire is defined in terms of its botanical equivalent, the parasitic plant:

Vet du vad de mena med en vampyr? ... Jo, det skall vara en död människas själ som söker en kropp för att få leva med som parasit. bara han får fatt i en människa, så slår han fast på den, sticker ner sina sugrötter och börjar växa och blomma.²⁰

Judith is associated with violets, delicate and requiring constant care: "Det doftar violer! Det är hon!"²¹ When the Captain lies dying, Alice again refers to Judith as a flower: "Tänk, att blommor kunna växa ur smuts!"²² The flowers in this comment also symbolize the new life which all of the characters will presumably lead when the Captain has been reduced to a barrow-load of manure (his own phrase from *Dödsdansen I*) -- despite the fact that his remains seem too foul to

²⁰ Samlade verk, XLIV, 167 (I, vi):

Do you know what's meant by a vampire? ... Well, it's the soul of a dead person which seeks a body to live upon as a parasite. if only he can get hold of a person, he fastens himself to him, puts down fibrous roots, and begins to grow and flower.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 171 (I, viii): "I smell violets!" It's she!"

²² *Ibid.*, 227 (III, x): "Imagine, that flowers can grow out of dirt!"

serve even as fertilizer: "Ett trädgårdsland vore för fint att mottaga denna kärra orenlighet!"²³

The Captain's oppression of the other characters, especially of Alice, is symbolized by difficulty in breathing, which is relieved when he dies. Immediately he is carried from the room, Alice orders the doors to be opened and fresh air admitted: "Ut med kadavret! Ut me'n, och upp med dörrarne! Här ska vädras!"²⁴ After his death is announced, she goes out into the fresh air, accompanied by Kurt: "Giv mig er arm! Jag vill ut och andas. -- Andas!"²⁵

The projected happy ending of *Dödsdansen I*, then, was not realized, but is purchased at the end of *Dödsdansen II* with the Captain's death. In a way, this is an ironic confirmation of his own speculation in that play that perhaps life begins with death, as well as of his view of himself as a Christ-figure: his death has set the others free!

²³ Samlade verk, XLIV, 225 (III, ix): "A garden plot would be too refined to receive this barrow-load of filth!"

²⁴ Idem.: "Out with the cadaver!* Out with it, and throw open the doors! This place needs airing!"

* These are strong words; the Captain is not yet dead!

²⁵ Ibid., 228 (III, xi): "Give me your arm! I want to go out and breathe. -- Breathe!"

Chapter 61

Kronbruden

Strindberg completed *Kronbruden*¹ (*The Virgin Bride*)² early in 1901. It is in many ways the most Swedish of his plays, for it was inspired by Swedish folk materials, and by the turn-of-the-century Swedish National Romantic Revival. Originally, Strindberg had hoped that his friend, that most Swedish of painters, Carl Larsson, would design the sets, but Larsson seems to have been either uninterested in the project, or too busy to take it on. The setting is in Dalarna,³ the Swedish heartland, and is written in a lyrical approximation of the Dalarna dialect. It is full of music, most of it drawn from Richard Dybeck's *Svenska vallvisor och hornlåtar* (*Swedish Herdsmen's Songs and Horn*

¹ *Skrifter*, XI, 293-322.

² The title of the play presents a problem to translators, referring as it does to a wedding custom which does not exist in English-speaking countries. It has been translated as *The Bridal Crown* and the strictly literal *The Crown Bride*, neither of which says a great deal to the English-speaking theatre-goer, except that they play concerns a wedding. I have therefore opted for Michael Meyer's less literal but more readily comprehended title.

³ Dalarna is often (and inexplicably) called Dalecarlia in English. The Swedish name, which I have retained, means, literally, the Dales.

Tunes, 1846),⁴ and arranged by Strindberg's brother Axel; the exception is a rather notable one: the song of the Water Sprite is set to a tune composed by the author himself: his only known completed composition (Ollén, 389).

Just as one of the chief considerations in the writing of both *Gillets hemlighet* and *Herr Bengts hustru* had been to provide Siri von Essen with suitable rôles, *Kronbruden* was conceived to feature Strindberg's daughter Greta (1881-1912, second of three children from his first marriage) in the rôle of Kersti. Greta did indeed enjoy considerable success in the rôle, but the first Kersti (both in the 1906 world première in Helsinki, and in the première in Sweden the following year) was Strindberg's third wife,⁵ Harriet Bosse, who also won critical acclaim in the part.

While the play incorporates a good deal of material drawn from traditional sources, the story is nevertheless Strindberg's own, dealing with his great themes of sin, punishment, redemption, and reconciliation. There is a good healthy dose of Christian moral-

⁴ A few of these songs and tunes, including two used by Strindberg, have been annotated and published with English translations by John Horton as *Old Mountain Tunes from Sweden*.

⁵ Perhaps "third ex-wife" would be more accurate: Strindberg and Harriet Bosse were divorced in 1904, only three years after they were married. In fact, she eventually married the actor who played Mats in both the Helsinki and Stockholm premières, Gunnar Wingård.

ity here (it has been suggested that Strindberg deliberately took advantage of the circumstance that the play was being written for Greta to incorporate into it some fatherly caveats about sexuality: Ollén, 330), as the country girl Kersti is brought, through pride and ambition, to commit the heinous crime of infanticide and then, through humility (and humiliation), to an acknowledgement of her guilt, and finally, though her death, achieves reconciliation between the parties of an ancient feud. Like *Advent*, it is an optimistic play; although some pretty grim things happen during its course, its central messages are that no-one is beyond redemption, and that one soul, brought into harmony with the divine will, can transform its environment.

The play's central character, Kersti, falls in love with Mats, the miller's son. There is a feud between their two families, however, and marriage seems out of the question. Nevertheless, before the play opens, their relationship has progressed so far that they have had a child, whom, since it is summer (and both are tending their families' livestock in the summer pasture on the mountain above the village), they have managed to keep hidden in the forest, a secret from all but the Midwife who assisted in the birth. In

the opening scene,⁶ they engage in a marriage of conscience -- exchanging the vows from the marriage ceremony (and a ring) "in the sight of God" -- and determine to have the Midwife perform an "emergency" baptism of the child. Mats and Kersti both seem devoted to the child, but both are also obviously disappointed in the clandestine and impoverished circumstances of their "marriage", which is not at all the sort of thing either of them expected. Kersti especially knows that, with the birth of the child, even should circumstances change and a real marriage become possible, that wedding would now be a private and discreet affair, rather than the lavish and joyous celebration she would like. Her disappointment, resentment, and shame are symbolized in her realization that she would not be entitled to wear the bridal crown, traditional Swedish symbol of a virgin bride.⁷ In a foreshadowing of what is to come, she focuses these emotions on the child, momentarily breaking out of her rôle as a caring young mother to let a more selfish side of her nature blaze forth:

⁶ Kronbruden is not divided into acts: Strindberg has marked only where he wishes the intermission to come. There are, however, six scene changes (or rather, the opening scene and five changes) during its course, and I shall refer to these as scenes i to vi.

⁷ This is similar to the custom of reserving the honour of a white wedding gown for virgin brides. Sexual mores change; perhaps it is necessary to point out that these symbols were once taken very seriously indeed!

MATS: Vad ska vi kalla den lille?
 KERSTI (vilt): Påhäng, oheld, nödtvång,
 kronrövare ...
 MATS: Varför kronrövare?
 KERSTI: Därför och därför och därför ...
 för att jag icke finge bära krona, om så vi
 ock vunne ett rätt bröllop! Vad han skall
 heta? Brudskämmare, modersorg, skogspilt!⁸

The situation comes to a head when Mats' family decides to make the mill over to him. He will now be able to marry, and will have enough status to choose his own bride. The family, which is the most prominent in the region, has made only one condition: his bride must wear the bridal crown! Kersti hears this news from her Mother (who suspects that her daughter has already disqualified herself as a candidate, but has no proof). When the Mother asks her point-blank if she has "lost something" which might prevent her wearing the crown, Kersti avoids the question, mentioning an old prophecy (no doubt made by a fortune-teller) that she would wear the crown: "Vet du, att jag spåddes till krona?"⁹ Prophecies in folk tales, as well as in plays, have a

⁸ Skrifter, XI, 298 (sc. i):

MATS: What shall we call the little one?
 KERSTI (savagely): Millstone, Misfortune, Necessity, Crown-thief ...
 MATS: Why Crown-thief?
 KERSTI: Because, because, because ...
 because I wouldn't be able to wear the crown even if we were allowed a proper wedding! What shall we call him? Bride-shamer, Mother-sorrow, Forest-brat!

⁹ Ibid., 299 (sc. i): "Do you know that it was foretold I would wear the crown?"

tendency to come true in unexpected ways, and this proves to be the case here: Kersti's evasive remark is full of dramatic irony!

Kersti's Mother reveals that Mats' father drove Kersti's family off their land, so that her father is now obliged to support his family as a soldier. The Mother mentions this as grounds for her disapproval of a liaison between Kersti and Mats, but in an indirect way her remarks introduce the play's principal theme: reconciliation. The feud between the two families is ancient, but has been kept alive and added to right up to the generation of Kersti's and Mats' parents (and indeed, Mats' sister Brita does what she can to continue the enmity): the possibility of marriage between the families represents a chance that at last the feud will be resolved. The bridal crown becomes, then, not only an obstacle to their personal desires and ambitions, but to social peace as well.

The obstacle to the crown is the baby; his existence is incontrovertible evidence that Kersti cannot be a virgin bride. Kersti decides to remove this evidence, and finds an accessory in the Midwife, who is, in fact, a witch: to leave the audience in no doubt of this, she has a tail, and in the final scene she strikes fire from two pieces of ice! As a witch, she represents the powers of darkness, or the evil side of human nature; the scene in which she exchanges the baby for a bridal

crown, coming as it does immediately after Kersti has learned of Mats' improved prospects, implements a thought process within Kersti's own mind:

JORDEGUMMAN (in ... med väskan synlig): ...
nu kanske jungfrun tar emot jordegumman!

KERSTI: Vad ger I?

JORDEGUMMAN (tar upp en brudkrona ur väskan): Den här! ...

KERSTI: Vad tar I?

JORDEGUMMAN (pekar på vaggan): Du ser'et, jag ser'et, hela världen ser'et, och det finns ej ändå!

KERSTI: Så ta't!

JORDEGUMMAN (går till vaggan): Jag har't!
(Hon tar oförmärkt något ur vaggan och lägger det i väskan, som hon döljer under kappan.)
Må jag så komma till bröllop?¹⁰

The text is unclear about whether the baby is already dead at this point: the scene has been played both ways (Ollén, 397). When Mats first brought the baby on to the stage, it was placed in a cradle slung between two trees and at the approach of her Mother, Kersti threw first a rug and then her fur coat over the

¹⁰ Skrifter, XI, 301 (sc. i):

THE MIDWIFE (enters ... with her bag in full view): ... now, perhaps, the young lady will welcome the midwife!

KERSTI: What will you give?

THE MIDWIFE (takes a bridal crown out of her bag): This! ...

KERSTI: What will you take?

THE MIDWIFE (points to the cradle): You see it, I see it, the whole world sees it, and yet it doesn't exist!

KERSTI: Take it, then!

THE MIDWIFE (approaches the cradle): I have it! (She unobtrusively takes something out of the cradle and puts it in her bag, which she hides under her cloak.) May I come to the wedding, now?

cradle, to give the appearance that she was airing clothes; it is possible that the baby was then smothered, in which case the Midwife's comment that the child does not exist has added bite, and her function is merely to dispose of the body. On the other hand, she could take a living baby with the intention of killing it; something which would fit in with her necromantic nature. In either case, her ostensible motive is to ingratiate herself enough with Kersti that she will be invited to a wedding: her profession often requires her to be present at baptisms and funerals (both of which she conducts herself), but she has never attended a wedding and craves the social respectability that she feels a wedding invitation would lend her. As the play progresses, however, it becomes evident that she wishes to gain a hold over Kersti in order to exact a larger prize: her immortal soul.

Whoever actually kills the baby, Kersti is morally responsible for his murder, which she either commits or consents to in order to satisfy her own ambitions. Mats' cooperation is obtained by deceit: Kersti manipulates him into suggesting that they put the child into the care of the Midwife until after the wedding has taken place, crown and all; she even goes so far as to suggest that if something should happen to the baby in the meantime they could not be held to account, having made arrangements for its welfare!

The symbolism of the crown begins to expand. It is the traditional symbol for a bride's virginity, but through Kersti's intense desire to wear the crown at her wedding, it comes to symbolize as well her ambition. In scene ii, which takes place in the mill, as Mats' family (principally his Grandfather) decides that he may indeed marry Kersti (mentioning a hoped-for reconciliation between the two families), Brita makes it very clear that she does not like Kersti, does not believe her worthy of the bridal crown, and suspects the truth about the child and what has happened to it. Her animosity is expressed through two ritual gestures: she builds an infant grave on the stage to suggest that she knows about the child and its fate, and she then sprinkles some of the earth on Kersti's head to signify that Kersti's efforts to improve herself socially will be rewarded not with the bridal crown but with death:

BRITA (tar en nypa jord ur säcken och strör på Kerstis huvud): Jag viger dig vid jorden, jag kröner dig med jordkronan, skam få dig!¹¹

This symbolic "crown" of earth is an ironic contrast to the crown to which Kersti aspires. In more conventional (i.e., universal) symbolism, the crown is the symbol of success or achievement (as seen in such common expres-

¹¹ *Skrifter*, XI, 306 (sc. ii):

BRITA (takes a pinch of earth out of the sack and sprinkles it on Kersti's head): I marry you to the earth, I crown you with a crown of earth; shame on you!

sions as "crowned with success", "crowning achievement", etc.). This is what wearing the bridal crown represents to Kersti. Brita foresees that her efforts will not be rewarded by success, but by death: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Brita has no proof that her suspicions are true, but she believes them implicitly. She seems to have come by her knowledge by supernatural means: Mats tells Kersti that Brita has the evil eye! A psychologist would probably see in her a case of frustrated sexual desire focussed on her brother and expressed through intense jealousy of Kersti. She repeats her warning just before she leaves the setting of scene iii, the spinster party at Kersti's home on the eve of the wedding:

BRITA (fram till Kersti och håller näven
under hennes ansikte): Kronan ska du inte
ha!¹²

Kersti does wear the crown, however, but the victory it symbolizes is very temporary. Increasingly tormented by guilt over the child, uncomfortable in her awareness that she is an imposter, and startled by supernatural interventions, she must watch in dismay at her wedding reception as the crown falls from her head

¹² Skrifter, XI, 310:

BRITA (walks up to Kersti and shakes her
fist in her face): You will not wear the
crown!

and rolls into the millstream. Once again, the symbol of achievement is replaced (or, in this case, swallowed up) by a symbol of death. Water is, however, a complex symbol, signifying not only death but regeneration and rebirth. The falling of the bridal crown into the millstream indeed marks the death of Kersti's earthly ambitions -- she confesses to her crime at the end of this scene -- but it also points ahead to her regeneration and to her eventual attainment of the crown of eternal life! This is why, in the final scene, when the body of the dead Kersti is brought on stage by the County Justice and the Soldiers, she is still referred to as the crown bride, even though her wedding day is long past, and she did not merit the bridal crown: now that she has been granted the crown of salvation, she is a bride in a different sense:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God. For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation and with the robe of justice he hath covered me: as a bridegroom decked with a crown and as a bride adorned with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10, Douay-Rheims translation.)

Be thou faithful unto death: and I will give thee the crown of life. (Apocalypse 2:10, *Ibid.*)

Several of the play's characters are supernatural, drawn mainly from Swedish folklore, but given a significance within the framework of Christianity. Such are the Water Sprite (Forskarlen), the Midwife (who is a

witch), the Meuling (Mylingen),¹³ and the White Child (Christ). Other supernatural elements in the play are the hunting horns which Kersti alone hears (hunting is a symbol of the vain pursuit of worldly pleasures); the omens that something is amiss after Mats and Kersti's "wedding of conscience" (the cradle sways between the trees, although there is no wind, the smoke from Mats' and Kersti's pipes drifts in opposite directions); the apparitions of fantastically shaped and gaudily coloured snakes, dragons, and birds in the smoke of Kersti's fire after she has made the exchange with the Midwife; Kersti's inability to hear the church bells (i.e., the call to salvation) after that exchange; the setting in motion without cause of inanimate objects; the backward spinning of the mill wheel on the first occasion Kersti visits the mill; the army of ants which comes to free Kersti from her bonds in scene v; and the

¹³ The English spelling is Michael Meyer's. I have been unable to track down a single reference to the word in any English or Swedish reference work I have consulted. Meyer defines it as "the ghost of a child that has not received Christian burial." The definition fits the apparition which appears in scene iii. In scene vi, Kersti's kinsmen are called the Meulings (Mylingarne), and it is there that Strindberg gives his only clue to the meaning of the word: when the Midwife asks the Fisherman why they are so called, he replies that they are descended from the (legendary) child-slayer, King Krummedikke who, like Herod, had caused all male infants to be slain out of fear for his throne (i.e., his crown).

All references to Meyer in this chapter are to the BBC broadcast of his translation of the play (see Bibliography under *The Virgin Bride*).

sunken church which rises from the depths of the lake in scene vi.

On the first appearance of the Water Sprite, Strindberg identifies him, in parentheses, as a familiar figure in Swedish folk mythology, Näckén:¹⁴

Forskarlen (Näckén) synes i starkt vitt ljus uppe vid fallet. Han är klädd i en silvertunika med ett vassgrönt skärp om livet och röd mössa. Blond och ung med hängande blont hår. Han spelar på gyllene viol med silverstråke.¹⁵

This is the traditional image of Näckén, except for the clothing, a concession to the proprieties of the stage: he is usually portrayed stark naked! Swedish folklore has it that he is a beautiful young man who dwells in rivers, streams, waterfalls, lakes, etc. His practice is to play upon his violin or harp, luring young maidens with the beautiful sounds. He brings these hapless girls to his watery home, where they, of course, drown; many a death by drowning is attributed to Näckén!

¹⁴ Näckén is sometimes transliterated to Necken in English, and I have even seen it translated as "the Neck" (Steen, 96), doubtless the result of a confusion between Näckén and nacken (the nape, or back of the neck)!

¹⁵ *Skrifter*, XI, 299 (sc. i):

The Water Sprite (Näckén) appears in a bright white light up at the waterfall. He wears a silver tunic with a rush-green sash around his waist and a red cap. Young and fair, with long blond hair. He plays a golden violin with a silver bow.

As a seducer of virgins and a provoker of deaths by drowning, Näcken is an evil spirit, even if a rather romantic and attractive one. Strindberg acknowledges this aspect of his Water Sprite, but makes him a very sympathetic, if mischievous, creature. His refrain, "Jag förhoppas att min förlossare lever" ("I hope that my redeemer liveth"), is woven through all six scenes of the play, and indeed expresses its essential message: hope in redemption.

The words of this refrain are a significant variation on the opening words of a passage from the Book of Job:

For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in
the last day I shall rise out of the earth.
And I shall be clothed again with my skin:
and in my flesh I shall see my God.
(Job 19:25-26. Douay-Rheims translation.)

The significant variation is the substitution of the words *jag förhoppas* (I hope) for *jag vet* (I know): the Water Sprite represents hope in redemption, not certainty of it; he is a spirit of this world, not of the next! It is Kersti, after she has realized the enormity of her crime, confessed it, and received the intercession of the White Child, who restores the quotation: "Jag har funnit min hugsvalare, ty jag vet, att min förlossare lever!"¹⁶ The Water Sprite, then, is like the Other in Advent: an evil spirit himself, he never-

¹⁶ *Skrifter*, XI, 316 (sc. v): "I have found my comforter, for I know that my redeemer liveth!"

theless serves as a catalyst for Kersti's regeneration and redemption.

The Water Sprite makes it clear that he was once a mortal, and that he is now confined to darkness because of his own sins, through his song, which is sung twice during the course of the play. The first time is at the close of scene i, after Kersti has made her exchange with the Midwife, deceived Mats into cooperating, and sunk the empty cradle in the mountain lake; the song also serves to underline Kersti's guilt:

Skyarne lyktas och vattnen stå still,
vattnen stå still;
solen jag såg, när i tidernas värld
salig jag gick;
solen är släckt,
natten är när;
synden är tung
älven är djup,
Käckt var det då!
Lett är det nu!
Dvalhem och Kvalhem så heter mitt bo!
O!¹⁷

¹⁷ *Skrifter*, XI, 302:

The heavens vanish and the waters stand
still,
the waters stand still;
I saw the sun when in the world of time,
blissful, I walked;
the sun has gone out,
and night is now near;
sin is so heavy,
the river is deep.
Then it was dashing!
Now it is ugly!*

Lethargy and Anguish I now call my home!
Oh!

* Meyer translates these two lines "Light it was then!
/ Dark it is now!" and Horton, who says the refrain was

This is the song for which Strindberg composed the music. In a newspaper article¹⁸ ten years later, he says that "the best words" are adapted from the Eddas, particularly from "Solsången" ("The Song of the Sun"), and admits that the tune, while indeed written down and arranged by him, was based on a vaguely remembered tune he had heard somewhere but still could not identify.

The Water Sprite's anguish and his hope of redemption are again both emphasized in the final scene, as he awaits a visitation of divine grace:

FISKAREN: Du kan höra Forskarlen så gott. -- I dag är han uppe i tider, för han väntar något!

JORDEGUMMAN: Va kan en vänta?

FISKAREN: Du vet, vad han väntar! -- -- --

JORDEGUMMAN: Inte vet jag det! Säg!

FISKAREN: Så sägs! Varje Påskdagsmorgon, då Frälsaren stod upp ur graven, stiger Krummedikkarnes kyrka ur sjön! Och den, som får se

(11): "How nice it was then, but how boring it all is now!" As used here and by Kersti's Mother, however, the words seem intended to draw attention to the disparity between the expected benefits of sin and its actual consequences.

¹⁸ "Om musiken i Kronbruden" ("On the Music in Kronbruden"), published in *Aftontidningen* September 14, 1911 and reprinted in *Samlade skrifter*, LIII, 525.

henne, han har frid för året!¹⁹

At the final mention of the Water Sprite, he is heard in the distance, singing his refrain of tireless hope, but this time in a different key (D-Minor instead of C),²⁰ higher than the one in which he has been singing: perhaps an indication that he is one step closer to salvation himself, having seen Kersti through to hers, or perhaps he (together with the audience²¹) did see the church when it rose out of the lake.

¹⁹ Skrifter, XI, 320:

THE FISHERMAN: You can hear the Water-Sprite quite clearly. -- He's up early today because he's waiting for something!

THE MIDWIFE: What can he be waiting for?

THE FISHERMAN: You know what he's waiting for! -- -- --

THE MIDWIFE: No I don't! Tell me!

THE FISHERMAN: This is what they say: every Easter morning, when the Saviour arose from the grave, Krummedikke Church rises from the lake! And whoever sees it will have peace for the year!

²⁰ This corresponds to a change from the Lydian mode, characterized as pained and sad, to the Phrygian mode, characterized as ecstatic (Cirlot, 214).

²¹ This is a nice touch: Strindberg wishes his audience a year of peace after they have seen his play! He claims, in *Öppna brev* (Samlade skrifter, L, 285-86), however, that audiences are usually so interested in the dialogue and characters, they fail to see the church rising in the background. Perhaps he is just overstating a belief that character and dialogue are more important to a play than visual effects. It is just as well he felt that way: for technical reasons the scene in which the church rises is often cut from the play!

In the final scene, all of Kersti's family and all of Mats' meet on the frozen surface of Lake Krummedikke. Kersti is a prisoner in Krummedikke's former castle, but on Easter Sunday is going to perform her yearly penance in church; her family has come to fetch her, the mill-folk to watch. It is an appropriate place for them to meet, for it was at the church which lies sunken beneath the waters that the feud between the two families began: they fell out about which family should have the honour of sitting nearest the altar, and the dispute led to bloodshed inside the church itself. Legend has it that the church will remain sunken until the two families are reconciled. This almost happens when the families meet upon the ice: it has begun to separate from the shore on all sides and to crack ominously, so that both families fear they will perish, and gestures of reconciliation are made. But a fissure opens up in the ice between them, and prevents their approaching each other. In the meantime, Kersti has set off for church on her own, has fallen victim to the break-up of the ice, and has drowned. When her body is brought on stage, the fissure in the ice closes again, and the two families at last are reconciled. As a symbol of this, the church rises from the lake as promised, and both families kneel on the ice and sing the Te Deum as the curtain falls.

It is obvious that water plays a significant part in the symbolism of this play; it is present every-

where, from the waterfall and mountain tarn in scene i, to the millstream in scenes ii and iv, and the lake of scenes v and vi. The Water Sprite resides in the water, Kersti's child's empty crib is consigned to it, the White Child and the Meuling first appear out of it, the dead child is hidden in it, the bridal crown is swallowed up by it, as was Krummedikke Church, the two feuding families are reconciled upon its frozen surface, and it is the agent of Kersti's death.²² Reference has already been made to the dual symbolism of water: it stands for both death and regeneration. This symbolism derives from the sea, the origin and destination of all life, and from the water of baptism, in which man's sinful nature (Adam) dies and his divine nature (Christ) is born. This pattern is repeated several times within the play: the Water Sprite, consigned to the waters because of his sins, emerges in order to work good; Kersti's child, conceived in sin and most sinfully murdered enters the water, and the White Child emerges; the crown of shame is lost in the mill stream, and Kersti gains the crown of salvation; the desecrated church, symbol of the enmity between the

²² A small part is also played by water lilies (in Swedish *näckrosor*, literally *Näcken's roses*). In the language of flowers water lilies represent purity of heart (F.W.L.). Kersti wears a wreath of them at her wedding of conscience, but almost immediately afterward she discards it in the tarn; thereafter the flowers are associated exclusively with the White Child.

two families, is swallowed up by the lake, and emerges, purified of blood by its waters, as a symbol of reconciliation between them; and the waters which claim Kersti's sinful body release her redeemed and immortal soul. Kersti has even, ironically, predicted the means by which she will die when, in the opening scene, she falsely swears to her mother that she has no child: "Jag svär! Så må Forskarl ta mig, om jag ljuger!"²³ It is the nature of folklore (and drama) that this prediction should come true; it is the symbolic nature of water that the death so foretold should be redemptive! The past dies in the waters, from which emerges the foundation of a happier future.

Kersti's transformation from unrepentant to redeemed sinner occurs on her wedding day, in the mill, where she realizes the enormity of her sin in the confrontations with the Meuling (the ghost of her child), and confesses, an action rewarded by a visit from the White Child. The mill is a symbol of divine justice: "the mills of God grind slowly, but exceeding fine". Often, as in *Till Damaskus*, mills represent a sense of impending doom, punishment for sin. But the grinding of sins need not be disastrous. This mill is powered by water (the water of baptism), and through the grinding, the hard, coarse grain in its brittle hull emerges

²³ *Skrifter*, XI, 299: "I swear! And may the Water Sprite take me if I lie!"

soft, fine, and white; at the end of the process the husks are discarded but the flour is treasured. The mill is, then, a fitting place indeed for a spiritual transformation.

This mill is even more strongly linked with the waters of baptism through the fact that it is built on a lake bottom. When Kersti first enters it, she feels that she will die there;²⁴ she does not die in the mill, but her sin does, and she emerges a different person than she went in.

In scene v Kersti is a prisoner, exposed to the public by being placed, bound, in the penitent's chair, where all who enter the church can observe her shame. She has been condemned to death for her crime, and the gallows can be seen in the background. In these circumstances, she is visited once again by the White Child, who informs her, using a formula often used by Christ in similar circumstances, that her sins have been for-

²⁴ This is a realization of the refrain, sung by both Kersti's Mother and the Water-Sprite, "Hur käckt var det då, och hur lett är det nu!" ("How dashing it was then, and how ugly it is now!"): all that she has done so far has been in order to marry Mats and live in the mill, but when she attains that goal (permission for the marriage has just been granted) she finds it devoid of charm and, in fact, unpleasant and frightening. It is like the green fishing net in *Ett drömspel*: when finally attained it is not at all as it had been imagined.

given: "Din tro haver frälst dig!"²⁵ He adds a comment which links Kersti's salvation to the refrain of the Water Sprite: "Hoppet har tron fött!"²⁶ Kersti has already shown this spiritual birth by changing the Water Sprite's "I hope" to "I know that my Redeemer liveth!" and by her refusal of the Midwife's offer to help her escape, with the words:

Han, som dömer över levande och döda, Han,
som är livet och uppståndelsen har dömt mig
till den timliga döden och -- det eviga
livet.²⁷

The change which has come over her is symbolized in an incident during the White Child's visit: as he approaches her, he almost steps, unwittingly, on an ant, and she, who in scene i had callously killed (or caused to be killed) her own child, now intercedes with him on the ant's behalf: she has been filled with a reverence for all life. The White Child points out that she has now acquired the third of the Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love. He begins by alluding to

²⁵ Skrifter, XI, 318: "Your faith has saved you!" Cf. Luke 7:50, where Christ uses these exact words, and the many instances where He uses "Your faith has made you whole" (Matthew 9:22, Mark 5:34, Luke 8:48, et al.).

²⁶ Idem.: "Hope has given birth to faith!"

²⁷ Ibid., 317 (sc. iv):

He Who judges the living and the dead, He Who
is the Resurrection and the Life, has sentenced
me to temporal death and -- everlasting
life.

St. Paul's great hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13), and goes on to slightly expand it:

VITA BARNET (böjer sig ner och synes taga upp något på ett lövblad): Men störst är kärleken, kärleken till allt levande stort som smått!²⁸

He goes on to predict that in gratitude for this act of mercy, the ants of the forest will come and gnaw through her bonds to free her, and indeed, it soon appears that this is exactly what will happen: the church porch where she is confined is soon swarming with ants. As well as its common associations with activity, industry, and thrift, the ant can symbolize the frail nature of existence and the pettiness of life, as well as life which is superior to human life (Cirlot, 14; Garai, 101), both meanings which are relevant here. Through a rather elaborate bit of fantasy, the ants are made to seem the instruments of the commutation of Kersti's death sentence (which is itself symbolic of her redemption from the eternal punishment merited by her sins, namely Hell): the stay of execution is, in fact, granted by King Karl XV (reigned 1859-72), who performs on the temporal sphere what the King of Heaven has performed on the eternal. The case

²⁸ Skrifter, XI, 318 (scene v):

THE WHITE CHILD (bends down and seems to pick something up on a leaf): "But the greatest ... is love:" love for everything living, the great as well as the small.

has presumably been brought to the king's attention by the County Justice, a man Kersti has been led to fear by the Midwife, but who proves a great friend, the human representative of justice tempered by mercy.

Kersti's death achieves reconciliation between her people and Mats' by expiating the sins of both families (for her own she has already done penance). Her kinsmen are descended from the child-slayer Krummedikke; their exclusion from grace is presumably the result of his unexpiated crimes (the sins of the ancestors visited on the descendants, who repeat them). Mats' family have always considered themselves better than their neighbours (the sin of pride: no doubt the origin of the bloody dispute in the church, and certainly the basis of their insistence on a crown bride for Mats, although we are told that such were a very great rarity in their community). Kersti repeats the crime of her ancestor by killing her own child (and that of Mats, who has also sinned in fathering it out of wedlock); although she bears responsibility for her own actions, Mats' family shares in the sin: the baby would not have died had they not insisted on the bridal crown! She has undergone remorse, confession, and penance for her own actions, and has received absolution; the two families remain unrepentant until her death brings home to them their own responsibility for all that has happened, not only recently, but during the entire history of the two

families. The rising waters threaten the lives of both families throughout scene vi; they are spared, but Kersti goes to her death. Her own death sentence has been commuted; here (as a member, now, of both families), she satisfies theirs.

Before they know that Kersti has indeed died, the two families, stranded on the ice, looking for reconciliation but unable to achieve it (their unexpiated sins lie between them), come to a realization of the symbolic pattern they are reenacting: they are quite literally sinking under what they now accept is the burden of sin, and they determine that a sin-offering is needed if they are to be saved:

MATS FARMODER: Bryggan brast under brottets börda!

....
SOLDATEN: Och si, det var gott att en dödde för folket!

MATS FARFAR: Då sade de till honom: Vad skole vi då göra med dig på det havet måtte oss stilla varda?

KERSTIS MODER: Tager och kaster mig i havet, ty jag vet, att en sådan stor storm över eder kommit för min skull.

FARMODREN: Är det sagt?

ALLA: Det är sagt!²⁹

²⁹ Skrifter, XI, 321 (scene vi):

MATS' GRANDMOTHER: The bridge gave way under the burden of crime!

....
THE SOLDIER [Kersti's father]: And behold, it was good that one should die for the people!*

MATS' GRANDFATHER: "Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?"***

KERSTI'S MOTHER: "... Take me up and cast me forth into the sea ... for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you"***

There is already a good degree of unity between the two families, as Kersti's Mother caps Mats' Grandfather's quotation; it shows that their minds are working along similar lines. A modern audience might miss the fact that Kersti's Mother is quoting scripture, rather than offering herself as a sacrificial victim, even though there is no tempest raging on the stage; Strindberg's contemporaries presumably would recognize the quotation and the one which follows, in which Kersti's Mother alludes to the story of Abraham and Isaac, and it becomes clear that the sacrificial victim everyone has in mind is Kersti:

KERSTIS MODER: Si här är elden och veden,
var är nu lammet till brännoffret?
MYLINGARNE: Var är Kersti?

THE GRANDMOTHER: Is it spoken?
ALL: It is spoken!

* A paraphrase of the high priest Caiaphas' advice to the council of priests and Pharisees concerning Christ (John 11:50 and 18:14): "... it is expedient ... that one man should die for the people...." (King James translation.)

** Jonah 1:11 (Ibid.).

*** Jonah 1:12 (Ibid.).

KVARNFOLKET: Var är Kersti?³⁰

The biblical story is often regarded as a prefiguring of Christ: Isaac is spared, and God Himself provides the sacrificial victim. The Minister's quotation from the same story (and he has not heard what the Mother has said!) should be regarded as a proclamation of the New Covenant: the sacrifice has already been made and they need do nothing but accept it:

PRÄSTEN (till Soldaten): Herren sade: Kom icke din hand vid barnet, ty nu vet jag, att du fruktar Gud! och haver icke skonat ditt enda barn för min skull!³¹

Nevertheless, Kersti does die. But God has called her to Himself: i.e., she has died of more or less natural causes, and not at the hands of her kinsfolk (who would in sacrificing her have been perpetuating the crime of child-slaying). This is not cruel or vengeful: Kersti

³⁰ Skrifter, XI, 321 (sc. vi):

KERSTI'S MOTHER: "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"*

THE MEULINGS: Where's Kersti?

THE MILL-FOLK: Where's Kersti?

* Genesis 22:7 (King James translation).

³¹ Ibid., 321 (sc. vi):

THE MINISTER (to the Soldier): "The Lord said: "Lay not thy hand upon the [child].... Now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only begotten [child] for my sake!"*

* Genesis 22:12 (Douay-Rheims translation).

has in fact been preparing for just such a moment ever since she was pardoned by the king:

LÄNSMAN: Är du glad, Kersti?

KERSTI: Jag är tacksam, att mina och edra anförvanter sluppit ifrån den stora skammen. Glad är jag icke, ty ett liv i bojor är mindre än det eviga livet.

LÄNSMAN: Tag det som en beredelse!

KERSTI: Det vill jag!³²

Kersti passes from her life in chains to eternal life through the waters of the lake. At the same time, her two families are delivered up from the bottom of the lake (figuratively) where they have been wallowing in sin: significantly, the psalm they offer up in prayer on the ice before they learn of Kersti's death is the *De profundis*: "Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord". This is followed by the *Kyrie eleison* ("Lord, have mercy"), and almost immediately, Kersti's body is carried in. Her death is presented as a sacrifice still, but a sacrifice which imitates and participates in the sacrifice of Christ: Kersti does not atone for the sins of her kinsfolk through her own merits, but

³² *Skrifter*, XI, 318-19 (sc. v):

COUNTY JUSTICE: Are you happy, Kersti?

KERSTI: I'm grateful that my people and yours* have escaped the great shame [of seeing their kinswoman executed]. But I'm not happy, for a life in chains is of less value than life eternal.

COUNTY JUSTICE: Take it as a time of preparation!

KERSTI: I shall!

* The County Justice is Mats' uncle.

rather through the merits of Christ, whose death she imitates:

SOLDATERNA: O, Gud, se nådigt till vårt offer, såsom Du offrat Dig för oss!

PRÄSTEN: Ty så älskade Gud världen, att Han utgav sin enda son!³³

The fissure in the ice closes, the church rises from the lake, the Water Sprite sings his refrain in a raised key, Mats and even Brita kneel by Kersti's body, reconciliation is a fact, and the play closes with the Te Deum (sung in Swedish). Looking back at the opening of the play, we can reverse its other refrain: the ugly events of the summer pasture have been succeeded by expectations which are very attractive indeed!

We should not leave this cornucopia of biblical references without referring to the other biblical story alluded to: that of Dina and Sichem,³⁴ which is told in the thirty-fourth chapter of Genesis. The story is referred to three times in the play. The first is at the council of Mats' family, at which it is decided

³³ Skrifter, XI, 321 (sc. vi):

THE SOLDIERS: Oh God, look with favour upon our sacrifice, as You offered Yourself for us!

THE MINISTER: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son...."*

* John 3:16 (King James translation).

³⁴ Also called Dinah and Shechem in some translations.

that he may marry Kersti. The decision is reached with the aid of a biblical verse:

FARFADREN: Låtom oss rannsaka skriften!
 (Slår i bibeln, och läser.) Det är första
 Mose trettifjärde kapitlet, åttonde versen.
 "Då talade Hemor med dem och sade: Min son
 Sichems hjärta trängtar efter eder dotter;
 käre, giver honom henne till hustru."
 Är det nog?
 FARMODREN: Gudi nog!
 FADREN: Stod det om kvarnen ock?
 MODREN: Ske hans vilje!
 BRITA (kort): Amen.³⁵

Obviously, Mats' grandparents and parents feel this verse so exactly fits the present circumstances that the marriage must be God's will (as, indeed, it must be, given the ensuing events of the play). It fits more exactly than they are aware, for the verse is taken out of context; Genesis 34 opens with these two verses:

And Dina the daughter of Lia [also spelled Leah] went out to see the women of that country.
 And when Sichem, the son of Hemor the Hevite, the prince of that land, saw her, he

³⁵ Skrifter, XI, 303 (sc. ii):

THE GRANDFATHER: Let us consult the scriptures! (Opens the Bible, and reads.) The Book of Genesis, thirty-fourth chapter, verse eight:
 "And Hemor spoke to them: The soul of my son Sichem has a longing for your daughter; give her him to wife."*
 Is it enough?
 THE GRANDMOTHER: More than enough!
 THE FATHER: Does it mention the mill too?
 THE MOTHER: His will be done!
 BRITA (abruptly): Amen.

* Douay-Rheims translation.

was in love with her, and took her away, and lay with her, ravishing the virgin. (Ibid.)

Brita is aware of the whole of the Sichem-Dina story, as she is also aware of more about the Mats-Kersti relationship than any of the others. Her curt "Amen" is ironic: she suspects God's will in this case is very different from what the others imagine (it is, but it is also different from what she imagines)!

At the spinster party of scene iii, Brita brings up the biblical tale again, using it to humiliate Kersti and insinuate that her secret is known:

BRITA: vi ska läsa bibeln.
 KERSTI: Bibeln?
 BRITA: Ja, Mose första; trettiofjärde och åttonde.
 KERSTI: Om Sichem.
 BRITA: Jo, så! Och om Dina, som hans hjärta trängtrade efter -- -- Vet du vem Dina var?
 KERSTI: Det var Jakobs och Leas dotter!
 BRITA: Rätt! -- Vet du vad Dina var?
 KERSTI: Är det en gåta?
 BRITA: Nehej! -- Vet du vad hon var?
 KERSTI: Nej!
 BRITA: Hon var lite bort--skämd!
 KERSTI: Är det en ordlek?
 BRITA: Säkert!
 KERSTI (lutar huvudet ner i bröstet som om hon ville dölja det.)
 BRITA: Fatta du?
 (Tystnad.)³⁶

³⁶ Skrifter, XI, 309:

BRITA: we'll read the Bible.
 KERSTI: The Bible?
 BRITA: Yes: Genesis thirty-four and eight.
 KERSTI: About Sichem.
 BRITA: Yes, that's right! And about Dina, for whom his heart longed -- -- Do you know who Dina was?
 KERSTI: She was the daughter of Jacob and Leah!
 BRITA: Right! -- Do you know what Dina was?
 KERSTI: Is it a riddle?

Brita's pun is not meant to be amusing: she does not want to come right out and call Kersti a fallen woman, because at this point she has no proof that her suspicions are well-founded. She gets some confirmation in Kersti's reaction, but she gets the proof she needs at the wedding reception: she stays inside the mill when all the other guests rush out to try to recover the crown from the stream, and she sees the Midwife hide the child's body in a trap door in the floor. Then she enjoys her moment of triumph, and the euphemistic word-play disappears:

Kronan stal du, och Forskarln stal'na!
 Kvarnen stal du, men han går åter!
 Sichems Dina var skämd, icke bortskämd!
 Den lille sover, icke i skogen, men i älven!
 Min bror har du skämt, min släkt har du
 skämt,
 mitt namn har du skämt!

BRITA: But no! -- Do you know what she was?
 KERSTI: No!
 BRITA: She was a little -- spoiled!*
 KERSTI: Is that a pun?
 BRITA: Of course!
 KERSTI (hangs her head toward her breast,
 as if she would hide it.)
 BRITA: Do you understand?
 (Silence.)

* The pun is actually smoother in English than it is in Swedish: the Swedish word for spoiled (as in a spoiled child) is bortskämd, but Brita separates it into two words, bort (away, off) and skämd (shamed), implying that Dina was ostracized for her shame.

Dö skall du!³⁷

Brita then guides the County Justice to the hidden body, Kersti confesses her responsibility for the murder, and is taken prisoner.

Curiously, just as Brita's family elders had seemed ignorant of the beginning of the Sichem-Dina story, so Brita seems ignorant of its end: two of Dina's brothers entered the Hevite town and slew all the male inhabitants, including Hemor and Sichem, in revenge for the stain on their sister's honour! Kersti, on the other hand, through her participation in divine grace, averts rather than provokes further bloodshed.

³⁷ *Skrifter*, XI, 313 (sc. iv):

You stole the crown, and the Water Sprite
took it!
You stole the mill, but it grinds on!
Sichem's Dina was shamed, not spoiled!
The little one sleeps, not in the forest, but
in the river!
You have shamed my brother, you have shamed
my family,
you have shamed my name!
You will die!

Chapter 62

Svanevit

Svanevit¹ (Swanwhite, 1901), a product of Strindberg's growing infatuation with Harriet Bosse, whom he married later in the same year, is in form a fairy play, strongly influenced by the early works of Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) in the same vein, particularly *La Princesse Maleine* (1889). All elements of the fairy tale are here: the beautiful princess, the evil stepmother, the handsome young prince, the enchanted fairies (the mothers of Swanwhite and the Prince), and victory over death by the power of pure love. It is not, however, a children's play; the nature of the accusation against the Prince (that he has sexually defiled the intended bride of the young King) and many of the blunt speeches of the dissolute young monarch make this quite clear. Strindberg has come a long way from *Lyckopers resa*. In another sense, he has come a long way as well from *Giftas I*, for sexual purity and spiritual love are here extolled as supreme virtues (the first story in *Giftas I*, "Dygdens lön": "The Reward of Virtue", claims that sexual purity is not only unnatural, but physically and psychologically harmful as well).

¹ *Skrifter*, XI, 323-46.

The language is highly symbolic, although the action is fairly straightforward within the context of the fairy tale, and the major symbols are all to be encountered elsewhere in Strindberg's works.

Colour symbolism centres around the four colours of the alchemic progression: black, red, white, and gold. Indeed, these four colours, along with pink (a combination of red and white) and blue are the only colours emphasized. It is evident, then, that the play deals with the quest for spiritual perfection, with which the four basic colours are always associated.

The most difficult of the colour symbols to interpret is the dirtiness of Swanwhite's feet. It is fairly obvious that it symbolizes a taint which must be removed before spiritual purity can be achieved:

HERTIGEN: Vet du, helige män som till penitens ej få begagna det renande vattnet bliva vita som svanar, men ohelige svarta som korpar!

SVANEVIT: Då vill jag bli så vit! ...²

It is equally obvious that Swanwhite, as symbolized by her name, is pure and innocent. Whose sins, then, must she expiate before her feet can be cleansed? The answer must lie with the Stepmother, whose fault it is that

² *Skrifter*, XI, 327 (I, iii):

THE DUKE: You know, holy men who as a penance are not permitted the use of cleansing water become as white as swans, but unholy men as black as ravens.

SWANWHITE: Then I want to be white like that! ...

Swanwhite cannot wash her feet: "Mor gav mig vatten och såpa, styvmor nekar mig! Se mina stackars små fötter!"³ It is also the Stepmother who forces her to wear a black penitential garment instead of the more appropriate virginal white.

Swanwhite is, then, like Eleonora in *Påsk*, a Christ-figure, suffering for the sins of others, maintaining her own purity while bringing about that of another (the transformation of the Stepmother in the final act).

Red, the colour of the Prince's lily in the Test of the Flowers (see below) is the colour of love, particularly (in this play) as it is distinguished from lust (blue, the colour of Venus). Particularly effective use of the symbolism of red is made when the Prince removes a splinter from Swanwhite's hand: "Jag ser genom din hand som är röd inuti, jag ser livet och världen i rosenfärg ..."⁴ He is, in other words, looking at the world through the rose-coloured glasses of love. Here the Christian symbolism of red and white is also drawn upon, by which the two colours are, respectively, wine and bread, blood and flesh, body and soul,

³ *Skrifter*, XI, 327 (I, iii): "Mother gave me soap and water; Stepmother denies it me. Look at my poor little feet!"

⁴ *Ibid.*, 330 (I, vi): "I see through your hand, which is red inside: I see life and the world in rosy colours ..."

and, when found together, a symbol of life, balanced and complete (this does not in any way contradict the alchemic progression, but complements it: black is still sin and death, and gold the state of glory). The same symbolism applies when, on the anniversary of her death and in light of the Prince's love for Swanwhite (whose devotion to him in return is literally life-giving), the Prince's Mother changes the plume on his helmet from black to white and red (II, i).

The colour blue is ambiguous. On the one hand, it represents the soul or the world of the spirit: it is the colour of the heavens, of the sea (in which Swanwhite could bathe if she were allowed to visit it), and of Swanwhite's eyes (the mirrors of the soul). On the other hand, as we learn in *Till Damaskus III*, it is the colour of Venus. Thus, in the Test of the Flowers, the lily which represents the dissipated young King is blue (lust), whereas Swanwhite's is white (purity) and the Prince's is red (love). To this latter meaning, Strindberg adds an allusion to *Blå tornet* (the Blue Tower), the name formerly given to the prison in Copenhagen: sensuality is a prison! Perhaps he had this scene in mind three years later, when he christened his new residence, where he lived (alone) for the final eight years of his life, *Blå tornet*. The Stepmother first suggests that the Prince spend the night in a room called the Blue Room, but later amends this to the Blue

Tower, apparently the castle's torture chamber: "Sa jag blå kammaren? Jag menar blå tornet, där prinsen ska sova! hos järnjungfrun! ..."⁵

A good deal of the symbolism of the play, including the colour symbolism, is carried by flowers. In the castle, for example, there is a vase containing a rose (the flower of love, presumably a red one to symbolize the Prince as well), a white lily (the colour and the flower of innocence, and Swanwhite), and a sprig of mistletoe (regeneration and the restoration of family life): the pure love of the Prince and Swanwhite for each other is regenerative and will restore harmony to her family!

The Duke (Swanwhite's father) is a somewhat amorphous character: he and Swanwhite seem devoted to each other, and yet he readily leaves her to the mercies of the Stepmother, whom he knows to be evil. Nevertheless, he is a symbol of strength and security to Swanwhite:

Fader! ... Som en kungsek är du, och icke kan jag famna dig; men under ditt lövverk må jag gömma mig för de omilda skurar ... (....) Och på dina grenar vill jag gunga som en fågel⁶

⁵ *Skrifter*, XI, 333 (I, viii): "Did I say the Blue Room? I mean the Blue Tower! That's where the prince will sleep! with the iron maiden! ..."

⁶ *Ibid.*, 326 (I, ii):

Father! ... You are like a royal oak and I my arms won't reach around you; but under your foliage I can hide from the cruel storms ... (....) And I want to sway in your branches like a bird....

The rose in the vase withers when the Stepmother passes (love withers in her presence), but she is put to sleep when the swan (Swanwhite's Mother) passes by outside. Here, the poppy is used as an emblem of sleep:

(En svan flyger förbi utanför rosengården;
en vallmo faller från taket på Styvmodren som
somnar jämte tärnorna.)⁷

When the love of Swanwhite and the Prince blooms with her pronouncing of his name, her words are likened to a rose, his kiss to a violet:

SVANEVIT: (Viskar namnet igen.)
PRINSEN (liksom uppfångande namnet i luften
med ena handen): Var det en ros du kastade?
(Han kysser ett finger och kastar tillbaka.)
Svanevit!
SVANEVIT: Du gav mig en viol! Det är du!
Det är din själ! ... nu är du min!
PRINSEN: Och du min!
....
PRINSEN: Rosa!
SVANEVIT: Viola!⁸

⁷ Skrifter, XI, 332 (I, vii):

(A swan flies by in front of the rose garden; a poppy falls from the ceiling on to the Stepmother, who falls asleep, as do the maids.)

⁸ Ibid., 333 (I, vii):

SWANWHITE: (Whispers his name again.)
THE PRINCE (as if catching the name in the
air with one hand): Was that a rose you threw
me? (He kisses a finger and "throws a kiss"
back to her.) Swanwhite!
SWANWHITE: You've given me a violet! It's
you! It's your soul! ... now you are mine!
THE PRINCE: And you mine!
....
THE PRINCE: My rose!
SWANWHITE: My violet!

This is rather complicated. The rose she gives him (and which he "catches") is his name, and he is symbolized elsewhere by a red rose; the violet he gives her is both his kiss and his speaking of her name, and the violet, in the turn-of-the-century language of flowers, means shyness (or modesty). But in declaring their love for each other they give themselves to each other, and she becomes his rose, he her violet, as if to say "You are my very self!" But violets have another meaning in the language of flowers: "Take courage!",⁹ a message which might well be conveyed by his kiss (and his love) and returned when she calls him "My violet!"¹⁰

The declaration of love temporarily (she is, after all, still asleep) transforms the Stepmother, and among the signs of this transformation is the revival of the rose that had withered when she entered.

In the second act the flowers temporarily give way to weeds, for it deals largely with the period of discord between Swanwhite and the Prince which sets in with the arrival of the young King. This begins with a literal representation of the figure of speech "sowing the seeds of discord": Swanwhite and the Prince fall

⁹ *Good Old Days*, 16, 106. See also 108, for the first meaning.

¹⁰ This meaning is also appropriate to Judith, the heroine-deliverer of *Dödsdansen II*, who is also associated with violets.

out over the colour of a sower's clothing. The rose and the violet are supplanted by the vilest of weeds:

PRINSEN: Nu ... nu kastade du en stinknässla i min mun!

SVANEVIT: Nu doftade dina violer av libbsticka ... hu!¹¹

Love conquers all, however, and Swanwhite and the Prince are restored to each other, the rose to the violet, when Swanwhite, crowned with roses, reveals herself in the guise of the Stepmother's daughter Magdalena (the name suggests promiscuity), whom the Prince was to have wed. The bed is strewn with pink and white roses and the Stepmother, temporarily moved even despite her selfishness, describes the lovers as "Två rosor som mötas i vinden...."¹²

She soon recovers her nasty disposition, however, and accuses the two lovers, who have fallen asleep on the bed with a sword (symbolic of their chastity) between them, of sexual impurity. This charge is disproved by means of the Test of the Flowers. A pie is prepared of animal entrails, onions, spices, and herbs. Around it are placed three lilies: one white, one red, and one blue, representing Swanwhite, the Prince, and

¹¹ Skrifter, XI, 337 (II, iv):

THE PRINCE: Now ... now you've thrown a foul-smelling nettle in my face!

SWANWHITE: Now your violets smell of stinkweed ... Phew!

¹² Ibid., 339 (II, vii): "Two roses blown together by the wind...."

the King respectively. The aromatic pie symbolizes unbridled sensual delight, and before its heady fumes the flowers of Swanwhite and the Prince close, declaring their innocence, while that of the young King opens more fully, proclaiming his unworthiness of Swanwhite:

TOVA (betraktar de tre liljorna, som bete sig så som hennes ord angiva): Där sluter sig den vita liljan, att skydda sig mot orena inflytelser. Det är Svanevits.

ALLA: Svanevit är oskyldig!

TOVA: Och den röda, det är prinsens, stänger sig ... men den blå, det är konungens, öppnar sitt svalg att andas väl-lust!¹³

Thereupon, the effects of the test upon those involved are also mirrored in the flowers: "Jag ser den röda liljan böja sig i vördnadsfull kärlek för den vita; men den blå vrider sig i harm och avund!"¹⁴

In the events which ensue, the Prince dies, and before Swanwhite's love restores him to life he is borne in on a golden bier, preceded by four maidens who strew the floor with white lilies and small pieces of

¹³ Skrifter, XI, 345 (III, xvi):

TOVA (watches the three lilies, which behave as her words indicate): The white lily is shutting its petals, to protect itself from unclean influences. That's Swanwhite's.

ALL: Swanwhite is innocent!

TOVA: And the red one, that's the prince's, is closing too ... but the blue one, that's the king's, opens wide its throat to breathe voluptuousness!

¹⁴ Idem.: "I see the red lily bow in reverent love before the white one, but the blue one writhes with resentment and jealousy!"

yew (purity and death). The white linen cloth which covers his body is covered with red and white roses.

Most of the play's animal symbolism is associated with the Stepmother. Perhaps the lion skin on the castle floor is associated with her (a token that this side of her personality will eventually be defeated and trampled upon); certainly the lion is an animal with which she associates herself later in the play: "Allsmäktiga kärlek, evige danande Gud, hur har Du gjort mitt lejonhjärta mjukt!"¹⁵ Elsewhere, she is compared to a panther: "STYVMODREN (in från fonden med steg som en panther. ...): ...;"¹⁶ and to a serpent (the Serpent?): "STYVMODREN (... öppnar munnen som om hon spruttade etter....)".¹⁷ As a witch, she has as familiars not only swallows, a peacock, and a pair of doves, all of which serve her as spies, but a pack of bloodhounds, which patrol the rose garden.

The young King is also compared to an animal, a comparison which confirms the revelations about his character made during the Test of the Flowers:

KUNGEN: Vet ni vad jag heter?

¹⁵ Skrifter, XI, 339 (II, vii): "Almighty love, Eternal and Creative God, how soft you have made my lion heart!"

¹⁶ Ibid., 332 (I, vii): "THE STEPMOTHER (enters, rear, with the step of a panther. ...):"

¹⁷ Ibid., 345 (III, xvi): "THE STEPMOTHER (... opens her mouth as if she were spitting venom....)"

ELSA: Greve Bock!¹⁸

Birds also have important symbolic functions in the play. Chief among them, of course, is the swan. Not only does it represent immaculate whiteness (its significance in the name Swanwhite), but when it appears in conjunction with a harp, as it does here, it is a symbol of the journey of the soul to the afterworld (Cirlot, 306), which is why the mothers of Swanwhite and the Prince appear as swans.

In its ability to fly, the bird is a symbol of rising above the disappointments and sorrows of this world; thus, Swanwhite wishes herself a bird swaying high up in the branches of the royal oak, her father (see above), and he instructs her in the art of flying: "Lilla fågel, flyg, håll dig högt över gruset och tag alltid luft under vingarne!"¹⁹

The opposite of the swan, symbolically, is the raven, as black as the swan is white, and feeding on carrion while the soul (swan) speeds to heaven. It is the colour symbolism of these two birds which first contrasts them, in the Duke's speech about the holy man and the unholy deprived of water (cited above). That

¹⁸ *Skrifter*, XI, 341 (III, iii):

THE KING: Do you know what my name is?
ELSA: Count Goat!

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 326 (I, iii): "Fly, little bird, keep yourself high above the stones, and always take the wind under your wings!"

contrast (and the association with unholiness) informs the later speech of the King, when his passion for Swanwhite is fanned by a momentary sign of hardness on her part:

KUNGEN: ... giv mig din röst till avsked, så skall jag bevara dess genljud i mitt hjärta ... Ett ord! Vilket som, ett klingande ord, ett enda!

(Paus.)

SVANEVIT (hårt): Gå!

KUNGEN (springer upp): Korp! Nu svarar jag: blod! (Drar svärdet.) Och ingen skall äga dig, endast jag! Men jag vill ha korpen, jag älskar det starka, det hårda, det råa! Duvan är inte min fågel!²⁰

This outburst reveals much more about the King than it does about Swanwhite!

As usual, Strindberg makes effective use of music in the play. In the second act, for instance, he asks for a rather unusual musical effect (which he presumably wished repeated each time the swan or swans fly across the stage): "Nu flyger en svan förbi utanför över rosengården. Man hör ett ackord av trumpettoner

²⁰ Skrifter, XI, 343 (III, v):

THE KING: ... speak to me in farewell, and I'll preserve the echo of your voice in my heart ... One word! Anything at all, one resounding word, just one!

(Pause.)

SWANWHITE (severely): Go!

THE KING (jumps up): Raven! This is my answer: blood! (Draws his sword.) And nobody shall possess you but I! But I want the raven; I love what is strong, hard, and rough! The dove isn't the bird for me!

som när svanor flytta."²¹ In addition, the harp carried by Swanwhite's Mother, symbolically a bridge between heaven and earth, is played several times during the play. Both musical adornments reinforce the play's dream-like quality.

The powers are mentioned only once, and then by one of the swans, the most spiritual beings in the play:

SVANEVITS MODER: Må sorgen bytas i
glädje och jorden jubla vid deras unga lycka!
PRINSENS MODER: Om höga makter det till-
städja!²²

The higher powers do permit it, but only after the young lovers have been tested and found worthy.

Svanevit is Strindberg at his most lyrical and most symbolic. It has enjoyed considerable success on the stage, since its première in Helsinki in 1908 (with music composed by Jean Sibelius), but both its fairy tale genre and its sexual morality are currently out of fashion. It awaits rediscovery.

²¹ Skrifter, XI, 334 (II, i): "A swan flies by outside, over the rose garden. A chord of trumpet notes is heard, such as when swans move."

²² Ibid., 334 (II, i):

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER: May sorrow be
changed to joy, and may the earth rejoice at
their young happiness!

THE PRINCE'S MOTHER: If higher powers per-
mit it!

Chapter 63

Carl XII

Karl XII (reigned 1697-1718) holds an ambiguous place in history. Responsible for making Sweden a power known and feared in Europe, Russia, and as far away as Turkey, he also depleted Sweden's treasury and wasted a whole generation of her men. Although Strindberg was critical of Karl XII at a time when he had become a focus of nationalistic pride, *Carl XII: skådespel i fem akter*¹ (*Karl XII: Drama in Five Acts*, 1901) deals neither with his heroism and accomplishments, nor with his failures; it shows us, rather, the sad picture of a man at the end of his road, looking forward to death. Like Strindberg's Erik XIV, his Karl XII is only partly responsible for the disasters of his reign: he too is a victim of the powers, in this play called *Destiny*.

Despite realistic expectations raised by the history play genre, *Carl XII* is an expressionistic play. Many of the characters are nameless abstractions -- the Man, the Malcontent, the Woman, the Sailor, etc. -- already familiar from the first two parts of *Till Damaskus*, and the play is filled with symbolic action, charged with meanings which refer beyond the events themselves to Strindberg's views of existence.

¹ *Skrifter*, X, 155-83.

The most striking symbol is in the first tableau:²

Utanför stugan står ett avlövat, utblåst äppelträd med ett kvarsittande äpple, som skakas av vinden. Därinvid är en skräphög med vissna kardborrar.³

That this tree is a symbol of Sweden, wracked by war and ruled by a debilitated but firmly entrenched monarch,⁴ whom the wind of public discontent cannot dislodge, is made clear by the ensuing dialogue:

MANNEN: Detta äppelträd planterade jag, innan jag drog ut; jag fick aldrig se frukten ... Nu får jag se'n, men den är ruttent! (Skakar på trädet utan att äpplet faller.) Det är klart. Så här ser väl hela riket ut! ... En ruin, en skräphög -- och ett ruttet äpple i toppen ...

KUSTBEVAKAREN: Som borde skakas ner!

MANNEN (lågande): Av vem?

KUSTBEVAKAREN: Av en man med hjärta i bröstet!⁵

² Despite the subtitle, Strindberg called the five main sections of the play tableaux [tablåer] rather than acts [akter].

³ *Skrifter*, X, 157 (I, i):

In front of the cottage stands a leafless, wind-wracked apple tree with one remaining apple, which is shaken by the wind. Beside it is a scrap heap with withered burdocks.

⁴ The orb, symbol of royal power (and hence, of the King himself) is called *riksäpplet* (literally, the nation's apple) in Swedish.

⁵ *Skrifter*, X, 157 (I, i):

THE MAN: I planted this apple tree before I went off [to war]; I've never seen the fruit ... Now I can see it, and it's rotten! (Shakes the tree, but the apple does not fall.) That's obvious. The whole kingdom looks like this, doesn't it: a ruin, a scrap heap -- and a rotten apple at the top ...

THE COAST GUARD: Which ought to be shaken down!

MANNEN (lågande): Av vem?

The other plant symbol in the play is the rose, the flower of love. It is first used by the Dwarf (Luxembourg, the King's musician), who thinks himself spurned by the King and in consequence finds himself desolate in a hostile environment (the equally desolate Sweden): "Gå, taffeltäckare, och säg din herre, att du sett Luxembourg uppkastad på en strand, där inga rosor växa ..."⁶ Its significance, however, comes out best in the short scene in which Emerentia tries to win the affections of the King. The emblematic significance of the other plants mentioned is perhaps familiar enough, but myrtle has a particularly Swedish significance, as the plant traditionally used in bridal crowns:⁷

EMERENTIA (synes i högra allén; hon bär en bukett med rosor...).

KONUNGEN (...): Med blommor till mig? Varför ger du mig rosor?

EMERENTIA: Min hjälte har fått nog av lagrar ...

KONUNGEN: Och törnen! Cypressernas tid kanske är kommen!

EMERENTIA: Ännu icke! Myrten först!⁸

THE COAST GUARD: By a man with a heart in his breast!

⁶ Skrifter, X, 161 (I, iii): "Go, table-setter, and tell your master that you have seen Luxembourg cast up on a shore where no roses grow ..."

⁷ Johnson, Strindberg's Queen, 175, note 30.

⁸ Skrifter, X, 174 (IV, iv):

EMERENTIA (appears in the path at right; she is carrying a bouquet of roses...).

THE KING (...): Flowers for me? Why do you give me roses?

EMERENTIA: You've received enough laurels, my hero ...

THE KING: And thorns! Perhaps the time has

In other words, translating the language of flowers, she offers him love after he has been sated with victory and disappointment, but he thinks that perhaps the time has come to die. She thinks, rather, that now is the time for him to marry.

For Karl, however, women and marriage have no attraction. Emerentia, moreover, is loved by his friend and advisor, Swedenborg. He therefore spurns her love, first in deed, by resisting her advances, and then symbolically, by trying to give the roses away (they mean nothing to him) and finally by throwing them out. His sister's rejection of the roses as a gift is perhaps to be interpreted as a sign of her recognition that he is incapable of love (the roses are second-hand):

ULRIKA ELEONORA: Det är vackra rosor de här! Luktat så gott!

KONUNGEN: Var god behåll dem!

ULRIKA ELEONORA: Jag? Begagnade blommor? Nej, tusen tack.

KONUNGEN (kastar bort rosorna):⁹

Another symbol of the desolation of Sweden, introduced at the same time as the apple tree in the first

—
come for cypresses!

EMERENTIA: Not yet! The myrtle first!

⁹ Skrifter, X, 176 (IV, vi):

ULRIKA ELEONORA: What beautiful roses these are! Such a beautiful smell!

THE KING: Please keep them!

ULRIKA ELEONORA: I? Second-hand flowers? No, thank you very much.

THE KING (throws the roses out):

tableau, consists of the remains of burnt-out buildings which dot the scene, suggesting that the country is nothing but a crumbling hollow shell, everything of value within it having been consumed. More charred remains appear in the background of the third tableau, the setting of which is the square before the house of the King's new advisor, Görtz, who is eventually responsible for the economic collapse of the country.

The dominant colour of the play is black, the colour of these charred shells and of the foreboding fortress roof which looms over the final tableau:

Vid Fredrikstens fästning i Norge. Längst upp i fonden synes en del av fästningen. Taket liknar en stor, svart sarkofag.¹⁰

Opposed to black, the colour of death, is the white of life, -- Venus, the principle of feminine love, which Swedenborg rejects when he follows the King to Norway -- and the blue (associated in *Till Damaskus III* with the worshippers of Venus) of sensuality:

Mitt på scenen en toscansk kolonnbarriär av sten med tre vitblå fajanskrukor. Mitt på barriären en gammal vit staty av Venus.¹¹

¹⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 180 (V, i):

Before the fortress of Fredriksten, in Norway. Far up in the background can be seen part of the fortress. The roof resembles a large black sarcophagus.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 172 (IV, i):

Centre-stage, a stone balustrade of Tuscan columns and three pale blue earthenware pots. In the middle of the balustrade, an ancient white statue of Venus.

Ironically, it is before this statue that Emerentia unsuccessfully tries to engage the King's affections.

The King, hovering between life and death, is neither black nor white, but grey:

(Konungen.... ... är allvarlig, samlad,
värdig och hemlighetsfull med ett odeciderat
uttryck i ansiktet, som är sjukligt askgrått.
....)¹²

Grey also is the light which breaks over the ruined and desolate Sweden of the first tableau. Indeed, Karl's entire life seems to have been characterized by the colour grey, as he himself admits: "Inte var jag någon ängel, men så satans svart var jag väl icke!"¹³

During the course of the play, the King moves progressively from life towards death, for which he longs. Indeed, even before his first entrance, he is described as if he were already dead:

GYLLENBORG: Har du sett honom sedan han kom hem?

HORN: Jag såg honom i går!

GYLLENBORG: Nåå?

HORN: En död man, vars hydda går omkring

¹² Skrifter, X, 162 (II, iv):

(The King.... ... is serious, collected, dignified, and secretive, with an indeterminate expression on his face, which is a sickly ashen grey.)

¹³ Ibid., 182 (V, ii): "I was no angel, but surely I wasn't so damnably black as all that!"

och spökar. (Nu höres i fjärren Dvärgens
saraband.)¹⁴

Although obviously ill, he refuses a doctor, convinced
that only death can bring him the respite he seeks:

FEIF: Begär icke Ers majestät någon läkare?
KONUNGEN: Nej, min vän, för min sjukdom
finns bara en läkare!¹⁵

His desire for death is amplified by the knowledge that
his life brings no happiness to Sweden ("[Folket] är
onda på mig för att jag inte är död!"¹⁶) and that there
is jostling for the succession: "[Lant-greven av Hes-
sen] ... väntar livet ur mig! För att få tronen! ...
Det är allt fler som väntar livet ur mig!"¹⁷

¹⁴ *Skrifter*, X, 161 (II, i):

GYLLENBORG: Have you seen him since he came
home?

HORN: I saw him yesterday!

GYLLENBORG: Wel-l-l!

HORN: A dead man, whose carcass walks about
like a ghost. (The Dwarf's saraband is now
heard in the distance.)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167 (II, xiii):

FEIF: Does Your Majesty not require a doc-
tor?

THE KING: No, my friend; for my illness
there's only one doctor!

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 168 (II, xvii): "[The people] are angry
with me because I'm not dead!"

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 174 (IV, iii):

[The Landgrave of Hesse]* ... is waiting for
me to die! So he can assume the throne! ...
Rather a lot of people are waiting for me to
die!

* Fredrik, husband of Ulrika Eleonora, in whose favour
she abdicated in 1721 (she had succeeded her brother in

In his longing for death, he remembers some lines of heroic poetry, supposed to have been spoken by the seventh-century Danish hero Ragnar Lodbrok when he was cast into a pit of serpents: "Lidna äro livets stunder, leende vill jag dö"¹⁸

In the fifth tableau, in which his death-wish is realized, he is once again constantly referred to as already dead, long before he receives the fatal shot:

SWEDENBORG: Konungen synes också föra kriget mera som sysselsättning, medan han väntar på något ...

FEIF: Vad väntar konungen på?

SWEDENBORG: Säg det! ... Se hur han ligger och stirrar i elden! Ett stort rikt liv drar förbi ...

FEIF: Har dragit förbi -- en stor man!¹⁹

These are the two men closest to him, and indeed their admiration can be heard in their words. The unheeded advisor, Horn, who interprets the King's career in the light of Destiny or the powers (see below), has reached the same conclusion: "Denna man, som nu ligger där,

1718).

¹⁸ *Skrifter*, X, 177 (IV, vi): "Gone are life's bright moments; / Smiling, I wish to die."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180 (V, i):

SWEDENBORG: Indeed, the King seems to be waging war more to keep himself busy while he waits for something ...

FEIF: What's the King waiting for?

SWEDENBORG: You tell me! ... See how he lies staring into the fire! A great rich life is passing by ...

FEIF: Has passed by -- a great man!

väntande på sin griftefärd, ty han är död...."²⁰ The bluntest statement of this feeling comes from the King's two friends an instant before he is struck down by the fatal shot:

FEIF: Märker du att vi stå och tala som över en död man?

SWEDENBORG: Han är död!²¹

Once again, Strindberg makes effective use of music. The Dwarf plays a Bach saraband, the slow mournful tones of which are heard several times during the play. It is closely associated with the theme of death, a point which is emphasized every time it is heard, as if it inevitably calls forth thoughts of death:

GYLLENBORG: Vad är detta för en infernalisk musik, som jag hört hela morgonen?

HORN: Det låter som en gräshoppa ...

GYLLENBORG: Jag tycker det låter som höstvinden mellan dubbelfönsterna; eller gråtande barn. -- Vet du, att det dött sextio tusen små barn i sista barnpesten?

HORN: Lyckliga de!²²

²⁰ Skrifter, X, 181 (V, ii): "This man, who now lies there awaiting his funeral procession, for he is dead...."

²¹ Ibid., 183 (V, vii):

FEIF: Have you noticed that we're standing here talking about him as if he were dead?

SWEDENBORG: He is dead!

²² Ibid., 161 (II, i):

GYLLENBORG: What's this infernal music I've been hearing all morning?

HORN: It sounds like a grasshopper ...

GYLLENBORG: I think it sounds like the autumn wind between double windows, or the crying of children. -- Did you know that sixty thousand little children died in the last children's plague?

HORN: Lucky them!

At one point the saraband is used to draw a parallel between Karl XII and the tormented King Saul:

MANNEN: Varför spelar han alltid den där klagovisan?

DVÄRGEN: Därför att jag brukade spela den för min konung, då han var bedrövad intill döden.

MANNEN: Hör på den!²³

Several other biblical allusions attain the status of symbols. Perhaps the most striking is the King's comparison of himself to Christ in Gethsemane: an expression not only of his anguish, but also of his belief in Divine Right (i.e., that he, like Christ, was specially commissioned by God as an instrument of His Will): "KONUNGEN (ensam, förtvivlad): Å min Gud! Gånge denna kalken ifrån mig!"²⁴

Seemingly unaware of her brother's lack of interest in Emerentia or, indeed, in any woman, Ulrika Eleonora tries to draw a parallel between their still-born affair and the story of David and Bathsheba, with Swedenborg in the rôle of Uriah! This accusation (and its implication that the King takes Swedenborg to Norway in

²³ *Skrifter*, X, 169 (III, ii):

THE MAN: Why are you always playing that dirge?

THE DWARF: Because I used to play it for my king, when he was sorrowful unto death.

THE MAN: You don't say!

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 174 (IV, iii): "THE KING (alone, distressed): Oh, my God! Let this cup pass from me!"

the hope that he will be killed), which the audience knows to be false, nevertheless is taken seriously in some quarters; the analogy is attractive because David's punishment for his sin was similar to the recent histories of Karl XII and Sweden; obviously the King is being punished, and the analogy furnishes a reason. The real reason lies elsewhere, however, and is revealed by Horn in the final tableau (see below).

The nature of the King's feelings about women and marriage is revealed in another biblical allusion, which Strindberg had already used to great effect in *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*. In his sorrow at seeing Swedenborg deceived by the ambitious Emerentia, he chides him with the words, "Skall du lägga ditt huvud i ett knä och låta klippa din styrkas hår!"²⁵

Swedenborg's main function in the play is to express Strindberg's view (derived from Swedenborg's writings) that the King is executed by divine justice, whoever fired the fatal shot (see below); he was in fact, however, a trusted friend and advisor of Karl XII. Indeed, the esteem in which the King held him is recognized by his recollection and confirmation of the

²⁵ *Skrifter*, X, 178 (IV, ix): "Would you lay your head on a woman's knee and be shorn of your hair and your strength?"

meaning of Swedenborg's first name: "Emanuel, det är uttytt: Gud med oss!"²⁶

The powers are so called only once, and then in reference to Görtz rather than the King (but the two are very similar in the aspects being discussed):

HORN: Man påstår att [baron Görtz] anser sig vara jordens medelpunkt, att han varje morgon ser efter i avisorna, om Europas öden undergått någon förändring medan han sovit, och den lärde Swedenborg ...

KONUNGEN (lystrar).

HORN: ... försäkrar, att om Görtz doge i dag, skulle han i morgon resa dödsriket mot de himmelska makterna.²⁷

One recognizes the powers, however, under the name försynen (destiny), the cause, according to Horn, of the King's downfall. The pattern is familiar from other post-Inferno works, and is to be taken at face value:

Denna man ... var en gång försynens man och framgångar följde honom så länge han gick på rättfärdighetens stiger. -- Men sedan, när han för aderton år sedan ville gå sina egna vägar och själv styra mänskors och länders öden -- då tog försynen honom i örat och lekte blindbock med honom! ...

²⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 179 (IV, x): "Emanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us!"

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 163 (II, iv):

HORN: It's said that [Baron Görtz] views himself as the centre of the universe, that every morning he consults the dispatches to see if Europe's fates have undergone any change while he slept, and the learned Swedenborg ...

THE KING (brightens).

HORN: ... swears that if Görtz were to die today, tomorrow he would raise the kingdom of the dead in revolt against the heavenly powers!

Och nu står han -- eller ligger söndrad mot sig själv!

.... Han ville.... ...ett och gjorde ett annat! Så leker försynen med dem som vilja leka försyn!²⁸

Horn's speech prepares the way for Swedenborg's attribution of ultimate responsibility for the King's death:

SWEDENBORG: Gud vare hans själ nådig! -- Men var kom den kulan ifrån?

FEIF (pekar uppåt fästningen): Där uppi-från!

SWEDENBORG (pekar uppåt himlen): Där uppifrån!

FEIF: Låt oss tro det!

SWEDENBORG: Och kom den inte därifrån, så borde den ha kommit därifrån!²⁹

²⁸ *Skrifter*, X, 181 (V, ii):

This man ... was once a man of destiny, and success followed him as long as he walked in the paths of righteousness. -- But eighteen years ago,* when he wished to go his own way and direct the fates of men and of nations himself, Destiny took him by the ear and played blind man's bluff with him! ...

And now he stands -- or lies, rather -- divided against himself!

.... He wanted.... ...to do one thing, but did another! That's how Destiny treats those who act as if they were Destiny!

* In 1700 Karl left Stockholm for good, and began his campaigns against Peter the Great and Poland.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 183 (V, vii):

SWEDENBORG: May God have mercy on his soul! -- But where did the shot come from?

FEIF (points up towards the fortress): From up there!

SWEDENBORG (points to heaven): From up there!

FEIF: Let's believe that!

SWEDENBORG: And if that's not where it came from, that's where it ought to have come from!

Although these are the last words in the play, it does not end there; like the tragedies of Shakespeare, it ends with a ray (literal in this case) of hope:

(Allt upplöses. Mannen och Missnöjd kasta sig över Görtz och släpa ut honom. Alla rusa ut i villervalla; lägereldarne slockna; facklor och lycktor bäras ut. Det blir mörkt på scenen. Men nu synes en stor lykta uppe i löpgräven.)³⁰

The King is dead, and darkness descends on the land. But better days are ahead. One is reminded of the sunlight that streams into the room at the end of Påsk.

The expressionistic elements of the play provide particularly effective symbolism. Such, for instance, is the filling of the stage with shabby, despondent people as the economic ruin of the country is announced and the campaign against Norway mounted; a crowd gathers as Görtz arrives to see the King:

(Vid gallergrinden samlas nu folk, bland vilka märkas Mannen (från 1:a tablån), Missnöjd, Kvinnan (från 3:e tablån). De äro tysta, men hemska att åse.)³¹

³⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 183 (V, vii):

(The scene dissolves. The Man and the Malcontent throw themselves on Görtz and drag him off. Everyone rushes off in confusion. The fires in the camp die out; torches and lanterns are carried off. The stage is left in darkness. But now a large lantern is seen shining up in the trenches.)

³¹ *Ibid.*, 179 (IV, xi):

(People now gather at the wrought-iron gate; among them the Man from the first tableau and the Malcontent and the Woman from the third. They remain silent, but are dreadful to behold.)

As Görtz informs the King of the economic collapse and of the ascendancy of the Landgrave of Hesse, the rear of the stage fills with poor people:

(Ruskiga mans- och pojkfigurer börja garnera muren i fonden. De dyka upp tyst, omärkligt och sitta där ett tu tre, men märkas ännu icke av de på scenen.)³²

The King decides to ignore the difficulties of which Görtz informs him and to embark on a campaign against Norway. As he leaves, the iron gate opens and the stage is filled with the spectres of his people, destitute and now left to their own meager devices:

(Nu öppnas gallergrinden och ruskiga figurer smyga in, tysta, spöklika, nyfikna, och fingra på allt; till dem sälla sig figurerna från muren.)³³

Finally, there are a few symbols which are not of major importance in this play but link it to other Strindberg works. A grim comment of the King to his sister, for instance, echoes the symbolism (and cynicism) of the works dealing with marriage:

³² *Skrifter*, X, 179 (IV, xi):

(The shabby figures of men and boys begin to embellish the wall in the background. They appear silently and unobtrusively, and sit there in a row, but are not yet noticed by those on the stage.)

³³ *Idem.*:

(Now the wrought-iron gate is opened and shabby figures slink in: silent, ghost-like, curious, fingering everything; they are joined by the figures from the wall.)

KONUNGEN: Akta dig!

ULRIKA ELEONORA: För vad!

KONUNGEN: Att icke mina sympatier överflyttas på din gemål, vilken måtte ha ett hett helvete -- som alla äkta män för resten!³⁴

A notable feature of the setting for the third tableau (the square before Görtz' house) is a smithy, Strindberg's reminder of the fires of Hell, familiar from *Inferno* and *Till Damaskus*: a foreshadowing, perhaps, of what will happen to Görtz at the end of the play. Görtz is also thought to practise alchemy: "Det sägs, att han gör guld som Paykull."³⁵

Of particular interest, coming from Strindberg's pen, is the King's reminiscence of his mother:

Nu är du lik min mor! Den enda kvinna jag älskat, därför att hon var min mor, och

³⁴ *Skrifter*, X, 176 (IV, vi):

THE KING: Be careful!

ULRIKA ELEONORA: Of what!

THE KING: Lest my sympathies be transferred to your consort, who must have to endure the fires of Hell -- like all married men, for that matter!

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 169 (III, i): "They say he makes gold, like Paykull."*

Otto Arnold Paykull (c. 1662-1707) was unjustly condemned to death by Karl XII, and tried to save his life by claiming that he could convert lead into gold (Johnson, *Strindberg's Queen*, 175, note 25).

följaktligen ... icke var kvinnan för mig!³⁶

Eight years after the completion of Carl XII, in Öppna brev, Strindberg described its hero in terms of a ghost (one who is already dead), finally destroyed by the powers because he no longer had the will to live:

... Carl XII är en gengångare, ett spöke, som är bildad av knutrök och som dunstar bort så snart kanonerna förnaglas.... Han faller i kampen mot makterna, redan förfallen av sina uppdagade disharmonier och väckta tvivel.³⁷

This confirms both Horn's and Swedenborg's diagnoses, and indicates a certain amount of sympathy for a man Strindberg considered the destroyer of his country.

³⁶ Skrifter, X, 177 (IV, vi):

Now you resemble my mother! The only woman I ever loved, and consequently ... not the woman for me!

³⁷ Samlade skrifter, L, 251:

... Karl XII is a spectre, a ghost, formed of condensed smoke, which evaporates as soon as the cannons are rendered inoperative.... He falls in his struggle against the powers, already broken by his demonstrated inner conflicts and his awakened doubts.

Chapter 64

Till Damaskus III

Movement in *Till Damaskus III*¹ (1901), the final part of Strindberg's great trilogy, is upward, from a river bank (the Inferno side of the Stygian shore) at the foot of a mountain (Purgatory), to the white monastery at its summit, the goal of the trilogy. Progress up the mountain is steady, with only one instance of backtracking, when the Stranger and the Lady move lower down the mountain (but not off it) to try one last time to live together happily.

The play begins in Hell, with Charon in his shallow boat waiting in the background to take the Stranger across the river to begin his ascent of the mountain. A pageant of life appears on the river: four barges bearing groups of people with symbolic banners. The barges appear in the sequence of the seasonal cycle. The first carries a group of children with spring flowers and lighted lanterns (the light of simple childlike faith), whose banner is a white flag with a gilt lily (gold on white: the state of grace borne by innocence), the flower of innocence:

FRUN: De skönaste blommorna ge intet frö!
 Rosen är kärlekens!
 DEN OKÄNDE: Liljan oskuldens! Kan göra

¹ *Skrifter*, XI, 201-37.

frön, men vill icke upplåta sin vita kalk
till annat än kyssar!²

The second barge bears a group of young people, segregated by sex (unlike the children, who are intermingled, they are aware of their sexuality, but, unlike the married men and women, who are also intermingled, their sexuality is not yet productive), whose banner bears a rose, the flower of sensual love (see above). The autumnal stage of life is adulthood, and accordingly the third barge carries married men and women, whose banner bears the fruits of harvest: figs, grapes, pomegranates, melons, ears of wheat, etc., all symbols of fertility. The vegetation of winter is almost nonexistent, so the emblem of the old men and women on the fourth barge is a fir tree under snow (ever green under the white hair of old age). As the barges pass, the passengers sing Psalm 128 (Vulgate 127): *Beati omnes* ("Blessed are all they that fear the Lord").

With the encouragement of the Psalm, and life having passed him in review, as it were, the Stranger (after also being warned that on the other side of the river his life's work will mean nothing, his past life will cease to exist) desires to cross. He is granted an

² *Skrifter*, XI, 230 (vi):

THE LADY: The most beautiful flowers produce no seed! The rose is the flower of love!
THE STRANGER: And the lily, of innocence!
It can produce seed, but opens its white calyx only to kisses!

opportunity, first, to see his young daughter. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! Sylvia, the Stranger's one remaining tie to earth, whom he remembers as a creature of beauty, joy, and love, is a great disappointment to him: not only has her childhood love for him changed to hatred, but she has also lost her innocence: "... dina fixa, kalla blickar säga att du bär en hemlighet, som du skäms för, men gärna skulle vilja skryta med ..."³ Her age would place her on the second barge, but she has already lost her bloom: "... en vissnen ros, som tycktes ha blommat ut för tidigt ..."⁴

Before the Stranger, now thoroughly disillusioned, can embark, the Lady enters in deep mourning: "Så svart! Svart och elak!"⁵ She is here the archetypal female of the winter cycle: the crone, the witch, the mourning mother. In *Till Damaskus II* the Stranger's impetus to leave Hell in order to seek spiritual perfection was the Lady's rejection of him in favour of their child. Now she has lost the child and seeks to win him back, appearing as a sinister figure from Hell who attempts to dissuade him from his path.

³ *Skrifter*, XI, 206 (i): "... your cold steady gaze indicates that you have a secret you're ashamed of, but would rather like to boast about ..."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 209 (i): "... a withered rose, which seemed to have blossomed too early ..."

⁵ *Ibid.*, 208 (i): "So black! Black and evil!"

This perception of her does not last, however; the Stranger is still in Hell, and his perceptions are distorted; once he has crossed the river, the delusions of his past life fall away, as predicted. In revealing to him the true nature of the Lady and the purpose of his relationship with her, the Confessor (who corresponds to Dante's Virgil -- and to Swedenborg) informs him that the Lady was once an epitome of goodness but became evil by absorbing the Stranger's evil qualities, until finally she was so evil she had to undergo the worst torments of Hell (for her, the loss of the child) for his sake, in order to bring them both to atonement. She is, then, a Christ-figure, the personal God-bearing image which, according to Dante, every man must find, and which he himself found in Beatrice. The Stranger and the Lady grew to hate each other, they went through Hell together, precisely because they loved each other.

Like Dante, Strindberg notes those met along the way as the Stranger ascends the mountain. Chief among these are the red-handed invalids in blue who sit round a sulphur-fed fire. These figures associate themselves with mercury and copper, and their treatment involves sulphur; their significance is found in alchemy:

Regarding all substances as being composed of one primitive matter ... and owing their specific differences to the presence of different qualities imposed on it, the alchemist hoped, by taking away these qualities, to obtain the *prima materia* itself, and then to get from it the particular substance he desired by the addition of the appropriate

qualities. The prima materia was early identified with mercury. The prima materia ... had to be treated with sulphur to confer upon it the desired qualities that were missing.... Pure white mercury, fixed by the virtue of white noncorrosive sulphur, engenders in mines a matter which fusion changes to silver and united to pure clear red sulphur it forms gold....

.... Copper is potentially silver, and anyone who can eliminate the red colour will bring it to the state of silver, for it is copper in outward appearance, but in its inmost nature silver.... which can be rendered apparent by fire.⁶

The invalids being treated with sulphur and fire, then, are undergoing a kind of purgatorial transmutation: the worshippers of Venus (copper) have been devoted (as we learn later, and indeed as association alone suggests) to sins of lust, and are having this defect removed from them; the worshippers of Mercury (i.e., the mercurial: those characterized by fickleness or volatility) have lead incomplete lives and to them something must be added for their spiritual perfection; since they are said to be the reverse of the Venus-worshippers, what they (like the hero of Carl XII) are lacking is the ability to love.

In the encounters with the Tempter, Maia, and the madman Caesar, the reasons for the Stranger's sufferings are revealed, the charges which were the grounds for the sentence passed at the opening of Part I. He is guilty of the sin of pride, believing himself the

⁶ [H.M. Ross et al.], "Alchemy", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1947), I, 536.

origin of all evil in the universe, blaming himself for events that would have happened without him, and refusing to see good in himself even where it exists. He is guilty also of the deadliest sin of all, despair: "... att betvivla godheten och icke hoppas på förlåtelsen är att nämna ... (....) ... Gud ond."⁷ The Tempter and the Stranger were once the same person; the Stranger has succeeded in separating himself from this embodiment of sin, and must now be prepared to travel in an entirely different direction, upward, without the comfort of his sins, which to him had been his identity.

At the trial, everyone blames someone else, until at last the Serpent who beguiled Eve stands in the dock and raises the whole question of responsibility for evil. The question is not really answered, but the intimation that God is responsible, that He is a God of Vengeance, cursing his people from Mount Ebal, is countered by the Lady, who proclaims the God of Love, blessing them from Mount Garizim; the curses of Ebal can be wiped out, given only faith.

As she speaks, a wonderful thing happens, reminiscent of some of the sequences in *Svanevit* and anticipating *Ett drömspel*: she is transfigured, becoming the White Goddess in her manifestation as universal mother:

⁷ *Skrifter*, XI, 215 (ii): "... to doubt goodness and not hope for forgiveness is to call ... (....) ... God evil."

at once the Stranger's own mother, the maternal qualities of the Lady which first drew her to him, abstract motherliness, and perhaps also the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose statue dominates the monastery garden at the end of the play. This apotheosis has an educative effect on the Stranger: it reveals to him that whatever progress he has made so far and whatever progress he may yet make are made possible by Woman. It is the old Eve-Mary antithesis: Woman, who has caused him anguish and suffering, is the cause also of his deliverance from anguish and suffering; Woman is truly the beginning and the end for Man.

The Lady of Parts I and II is based mainly on Frida Uhl, to whom Strindberg was married during the period of the *Inferno* crisis, although in many respects she is a composite of his first two wives. The Lady of Part III, although ostensibly the same character, is based mainly on Harriet Bosse, who became Strindberg's third wife and left him on two separate occasions (including the famous "forty days" described in *Ockulta dagboken*) during the composition of the play: the last attempt at marital happiness and its failure described in scenes v and vi. Siri von Essen also makes a brief appearance in scene vi as the Woman (the Stranger's first wife) who comes to look at the house after that attempt has failed. The *Till Damaskus* trilogy is, then, Strindberg's attempt to come to terms with all three of

his marriages, at a time when the third was already showing serious signs of failure.

The reasons for the failure of the attempt at marital happiness in Part III are similar to those given by Laura for the failure of her marriage in *Fadren*:

Minns du att det var som din andra mor jag först inträdde i ditt liv. Din stora starka kropp saknade nerver, och du var ett jättebarn, som antingen kommit för tidigt till världen eller kanske icke var önskad.

....
... [jag] älskade ... dig som mitt barn. Men vet du, du såg det nog, varje gång dina känslor ändrade natur och du stod fram som min älskare, så blygdes jag, och din omfamning var mig en fröjd, som följdes av samvetsagg såsom om blodet känt skam. Modren blev älskarinna, hu!

....
... däri låg misstaget. Modren var din vän, ser du, men kvinnan var din fiende, och kärleken mellan könen är strid....⁸

This is related to the seasonal cycle. As the seasons change, so does the male-female relationship (not

⁸ *Skrifter*, XII, 48 (II, v):

Remember, it was as your second mother that I first came into your life. Your big strong body lacked nerve, and you were an overgrown child, who had either come into the world too early or had perhaps been unwanted.

....
... I loved you as my child. But you know, surely you noticed, that every time your feelings changed their nature and you stood before me as my lover, I was ashamed, and the joy I felt at your embrace was followed by a prick of conscience, as if my blood felt shame. The mother became the mistress -- ugh!

....
... therein was your mistake. The mother was your friend, you see, but the woman was your enemy, and love between the sexes is strife....

only during the course of each life, but also during the course of each relationship in that life): mother-son, bride-groom, temptress-victim, mourner-deceased; as the Tempter puts it when he describes love:

En ettårig planta, som blommar i förlovingen, sätter frö i äktenskapet och sedan böjer sig mot jorden att vissna och dö!⁹

or, in the words of the same character, when he sees a newlywed couple in the final scene: "Adam och Eva i Paradiset, som om åtta dar är ett helvete, och om fjorton dagar åter ett paradis ..."¹⁰

And so, at last, the Stranger enters the garden of innocence, the monastery that has been the object of his journey to Damascus: into the presence of the western representative of the Mother Goddess, the pure white statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, surrounded with tall white roses. This is innocence, purity, perfection, and here the Stranger finds peace. But it is a peace resembling death more than life. The closing words of the play, read over the Stranger, are from the Mass for the Dead:

CONFESSORN (med ett stort svart bårtäcke):
Herre giv honom den eviga vilan!

⁹ *Skrifter*, XI, 230 (vi):

An annual plant which blossoms at the engagement, goes to seed in marriage, and then bends towards the earth, to wither and die!

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 236 (ix): "Adam and Eve in Paradise, which in a week will be hell, and in a fortnight paradise again ..."

KÖREN: Och det eviga ljuset lyse för honom!
CONFESSORN (höljer Den Okände i bårtäcket):
Vile han i frid!
KÖREN: Amen!¹¹

The symbolic death and (presumably) subsequent resurrection which the Stranger undergoes is parallel to the symbolic death and resurrection of baptism. He is born again, not into Heaven (the colour of the monastery is white, not gold) but into Eden; into innocence rather than positive virtue: he has gained respite from the sorrows and delusions of the world (his meeting with the other monks and his viewing of the monastery's picture gallery have been the final steps in this process) and his slate has been wiped clean, but he has not yet gained the beatific vision. Just as St. Paul's work was not over when he received his revelation on the road to Damascus, the Stranger still has farther to go; he has found comfort and eternal spring, but not final rest. The pilgrimage continues and ends in Stora landsvägen.

¹¹ Skrifter, XI, 237 (ix):

THE CONFESSOR (holding a large black funeral pall): Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord!

THE CHOIR: And let perpetual light shine upon him!

THE CONFESSOR (wraps the Stranger in the pall): May he rest in peace!

THE CHOIR: Amen!

Chapter 65

Engelbrekt

Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson (c. 1400-36) was a Swedish folk hero, who ruled Sweden as Rikshövitsman (National Commander, a title given the elected head of state, but lacking the prestige of King or of Riksförståndare: Regent; an equivalent in English history might be the title Lord Protector given to Oliver Cromwell), for nine months in 1435. Opposed by the great feudal lords of the country, Engelbrekt's political significance is really quite minimal, but he has become a symbol of the Swedish will for freedom from foreign domination and for the rights of the common people against the aristocracy. He rose to power through a popular uprising, and has become a popular hero. As such, he fits Strindberg's conception of history, and receives a very sympathetic treatment in the play Strindberg wrote about him.

In the chronology of the events portrayed, Engelbrekt¹ (1901) comes between *Folkungasagan* (1899) and *Siste riddaren* (1908). Albrekt of Mecklenburg, who stood waiting at the city gates at the end of *Folkungasagan*, was King of Sweden from 1365 to 1389, when he was defeated by Margareta of Denmark (the widow of

¹ *Skrifter*, X, 185-212.

Håkan Magnusson). As Håkan's wife, Margareta had been queen of both Norway (1363-80) and Sweden (1363-65), and she had been a claimant in her own right to the Danish throne. Her son, Olof Håkansson (a Folkung in the direct line), was elected King of Denmark in 1376 (at the age of five-and-a-half) and became King of Norway four years later on his father's death, in both cases with his mother as regent. It was in this capacity that she advanced his claim, as heir of the Folkungs, to the Swedish throne as well: Olof claimed the Swedish crown from 1385 until his death in 1387. This would make Olof the last Folkung to sit on the Swedish throne, were it not for the fact that Albrekt of Mecklenburg was still occupying it at the time! In 1388 Margareta adopted Erik of Pomerania,² who had some Folkung blood (his real mother was the daughter of Magnus Eriksson's nephew). That year he became co-ruler of Norway (with Margareta). The following year, on the defeat of Albrekt of Mecklenburg, Margareta became Regent of Sweden, and in 1396 (when he was fourteen) Erik of Pomerania became King of Sweden and King of Denmark, again with Margareta as regent. He was declared of age in 1400, but did not really enjoy sole power in any of his three kingdoms until his mother's

² Pomerania was a province of Prussia on the Baltic. Since 1945 it has been divided between East Germany and Poland. Its capital city was Danzig (now Gdansk). In Pomerania Erik was known as Bogislav.

death (of the plague) in 1412. (Ohlmarks, 78-87)

Margareta's principal achievement was the founding, in 1397, of the Kalmar Union, by which the three Scandinavian countries were to remain separate and equal entities, but were to be governed jointly, by a common hereditary (and absolute) monarch. The Union was sealed by the crowning in Kalmar (in southeast Sweden), on June 17, 1397, of Erik of Pomerania as king of all three nations. The Union lasted until it was finally given its death-blow by Gustav Vasa in 1523. Engelbrekt's two uprisings against it, in 1434 and in 1436, foreshadowed this eventual success of the Swedes in becoming once more masters in their own house. After the success of the first (Erik was declared deposed in Sweden toward the end of 1434), Engelbrekt was elected Rikshövitsman, but Erik regained power after only nine months, and Engelbrekt led a second uprising against him, which was also successful. This time, however, Engelbrekt was bypassed in the election of a leader, and Karl Knutsson Bonde became Rikshövitsman: he later became Regent (1438) and King (1448-57, 1464-65, and 1467-70).

Engelbrekt follows Engelbrekt's career from before the first uprising (Strindberg makes him a man of fifty, but modern historians estimate his age at ten to fifteen years younger than that in 1434) until his death on April 27, 1436. Since very little is known of

Engelbrekt's life, apart from his accomplishments, Strindberg considered himself free to invent whatever was needed to turn the folk hero into a flesh-and-blood man. He has cast his play into the form of a tragedy, interweaving scenes from his hero's private, domestic, and public life to present a rounded portrait of a man who acted always in what he considered to be the best interests of his nation, often at great personal cost: a man who was God's instrument in advancing Sweden along the path of progress, and who was destroyed in the process. Strindberg's Engelbrekt has been given a Danish wife (intermarriage was encouraged among the three partner nations of the Union, and complicated attempts to dissolve it), a son who considers himself more Danish than Swedish (and who consequently opposes his father's secessionist plans), and a daughter who is romantically entangled with the son of his enemy, Måns Bengtsson Natt och Dag. He has also been given a tragic flaw, hubris, to explain his downfall, and Natt och Dag has been supplied with a motive for killing him. Strindberg portrays him as close to Magnus Eriksson in temperament: he is basically a good man. There is even a physical link between the two plays (which are separated historically by seventy years): Bishop Styrbjörn, who played a part in the downfall of Magnus Eriksson, was Engelbrekt's godfather, and, a very old man indeed by this time, is one of his closest friends and his

advisor on matters both spiritual and political (not that the bishop is aware of a difference). St. Birgitta is said to have prophesied great things for Engelbrekt on the occasion of his baptism. There is no deflating of heroes here; Strindberg wished to add to the legend, not detract from it:

Engelbrekt är ett av Sveriges vackraste minnen, och jag ansåg mig böra hålla karaktären så högt och så rent som Schiller gjort med sin Vilhelm Tell.³

At the beginning of the play Engelbrekt is portrayed as a strong proponent of the Union, which he finds based on sound ideals, even if in practice there are sometimes abuses. He has exemplified the idealism of the union in his own family, by taking a Danish wife and by allowing his son to serve as a squire in Denmark. Nevertheless, he becomes increasingly disenchanted as evidence mounts that Sweden, far from being an equal partner, has been relegated to a very minor rôle in the Union, from which Denmark benefits far more than the other two countries. That situation is the very first thing which confronts the audience when the curtain rises, through the symbolism of heraldry:

Förgrunden en landsväg. Till höger en slagbom med bomvaktarens stuga i danska färgerna och med Pommerns grip. Mitt på scenen ett

³ Samlade skrifter, L, 245 (Öppna brev):

Engelbrekt is one of Sweden's most beautiful memories, and I thought I should keep his character as high and as pure as Schiller has done with his William Tell.

milmärke med de tre riksvapnen målade: Danmark = krönte blåa tre leopardiserade lejon; Sveriges = tre kronor; Norges = ett lejon med yxa.⁴

This is not in Denmark, nor even in southern Sweden, but near Engelbrekt's house in Dalarna, the very heart-land of Sweden! The toll-booth represents the power of the state, and it is made clear that the state is conceived of not as pan-Scandinavian but as Pomeranian and Danish! Whatever the arrangement of the three coats-of-arms on the milestone, left-to-right or top-to-bottom, Denmark has pride of place.

Act II takes place at the castle of Jens (also known by the diminutive, Jösse) Eriksen, the Danish bailiff, at a party he is giving to celebrate St. Margaret's Day (June 10). The party is in fact an orgy, and the participants all Danes, who behave very much as conquerors in an occupied country, rather than as equal partners. The Swedes present (Engelbrekt among them)

⁴ *Skrifter*, X, 187:

In the foreground, a highway. To the left, a toll-gate, with the tollkeeper's hut, painted in the Danish colours [red and white] and bearing the griffin of Pomerania. At stage centre, a milestone, painted with the three national coats of arms: Denmark's three crowned leopardised lions,* Sweden's three crowns, and Norway's axe-bearing lion.

* In heraldry lion-leopardé is another term for a lion passant-guardant: "walking past, full-faced, right leg lifted, and tail reflexed over back" (Rothery, 35, 39).

are both shocked and disgusted, and take no part in the festivities. Again, the arrangement of heraldic devices indicates the state of the Union. In the castle garden, where the Swedes have isolated themselves from the carousing, is an ornate Roman well:

Engelbrekt står barhuvad vid brunnen och betraktar det målade vapnet ovanför: överst en krönt röd grip i silverfält (Pommern); därunder en stor sköld med Danmarks vapen: tre blåa "leopardiserade" lejon på guld; därjämte i miniatyr Sveriges vapen, tre kronor i guld på blå botten, samt Norges vapen, ett stående lejon i guld med silverbila på röd botten.⁵

Erik Puke, the man who has come to enlist Engelbrekt's leadership of a struggle against the Union, points out the significance of this arrangement, in case it should have escaped Engelbrekt's (or the audience's) attention:

Där har du din union, Engelbrekt, i levande bild. Pommerska gripen överst, Danmarks blå

⁵ Skrifter, X, 195:

Engelbrekt, bare-headed, stands by the well, looking at the painted crest which surmounts it: at the top, a crowned red griffin on a silver ground (Pomerania); below that, a large shield with the coat-of-arms of Denmark (three blue "leopardised" lions on a gold ground); on either side of that, in miniature, the coats-of-arms of Sweden (three gold crowns on a blue ground) and of Norway (a lion rampant in gold holding a silver broad-axe, on a red ground).

lejon i mitten, under: Sverige och Norge i
utkanten!⁶

Later in the act, Engelbrekt confronts the Danish bailiff and voices his discontent with this state of affairs. He makes it clear that his principal grievance against the Union is not that it has given rise to abuses (the appointment of Danish bishops to Swedish sees, the imposition of taxes perceived as unfair, etc.) -- these things can be corrected within the framework of the Union -- but the very real inequality of the partners. His charge refers to the heraldic devices in the garden:

.... Jens Eriksen, det är icke frågan om biskopen är en dravelsman eller ej, ty han kan stickas bort; det rör sig icke heller om I tar tull på landsvägen, pålar andras gårdsfolk eller lägger skatter på svenska gruvor, det skall rikets råd döma bort! Men det är frågan om detta ... (Pekar på sköldarne ovan brunnen.) ... om föreningsvapnet, om pommeriska gripen skall spänna klorna i lejonen och om de svenska kronor skola ligga under danska lejonen i stället för vid sidan!⁷

⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 195:

There you have a vivid picture of your Union, Engelbrekt: the Pomeranian griffin over everything, Denmark's blue lions in the middle, just below it, with Sweden and Norway on the fringe!

⁷ *Ibid.*, 198-99:

.... Jens Eriksen, it isn't a question of whether or not the bishop is a ne'er-do-well, for he can be got rid of; nor is it a question of your charging a toll on the highway and punishing the farm hands of others for not paying, or of your imposing taxes on Swedish mines: the National Council can disallow those measures! It is, rather, a question of this ... (points to the crests above

In using heraldry in order to make the point that Engelbrekt's objections to the Union were abstract and philosophical rather than motivated by self-interest or gain, Strindberg is interested in the national symbols primarily as just that: symbols for the nations they represent. Nevertheless, the beasts and/or artifacts on the coats-of-arms are singularly appropriate to the circumstances of the play. The griffin, heraldic beast of Pomerania, is an ambivalent symbol, with some writers associating it with Christ (the eagle, king of the air, and the lion, king of the earth, combined: Lord of Heaven and Earth) and others just as persuasively with the Devil, Antichrist, or the persecution of Christians (both eagle and lion are beasts of prey, their combination is against nature, etc.):⁸ a fitting symbol for a king who could be a force for good (as indicated by Engelbrekt's expression of confidence in him early in the play: "... jag vet ... att konungen har god vilja."⁹) or for evil (Bishop Styrbjörn's opinion of

—

the well) ... of the coat-of-arms of the Union: whether the Pomeranian griffin should sink its claws into the lions, and whether the Swedish crowns should lie below the Danish lions instead of beside them!

⁸ Vide Borges, 73-75; Cirlot, 128; Cooper, 51; Ferguson, 20; Meurice, 90.

⁹ *Skrifter*, X, 190: "... I ... know that the king means well."

him: "Nu skola griparne utrotas från jorden...."¹⁰)! Griffins are described as having particularly powerful claws,¹¹ which strengthens the predatory image and lends particular force to Engelbrekt's conceit of the griffin sinking its claws into the Danish lions! In heraldry, they are regarded as symbols of vigilance (Rothery, 332). Both lions and crowns are symbols of royal power, and can be seen in this context as expressions of national sovereignty, threatened by the rapaciousness of the griffin!

Engelbrekt's dethroning of Erik of Pomerania in Sweden is prefigured symbolically when, immediately after hearing his grievance, Jens Eriksen tries to arrest him and then to have him shot for resisting arrest. Eriksen's archers are Swedish, and Engelbrekt is soon able to dissuade them from attacking a fellow Swede who is seeking justice for Sweden. Indeed, he persuades the best archer among them, one Nigels, to topple instead the symbol of oppression:

ENGELBREKT: ... vid allt vad oss är kärt,
vid land och strand, för far och mor, för hus
och hård ... skjut ner den gripen!

NIGELS (tre steg fram, skjuter på gripen

¹⁰ *Skrifter*, X, 201 (Act II): "The griffins should now be eradicated from the earth...."

¹¹ Vide Borges (74), who cites Ch. 85 of Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*.

ovan brunnen; gripen träffas och faller ner med ett brak):¹²

Engelbrekt realizes what must be done now: the foreign king must be unseated! It is to be a patriotic struggle, and another piece of heraldry is brought into play to symbolize this: the rebels will march under the banner of St. Erik, patron saint of Sweden,¹³ which is fetched from Uppsala for the occasion. During the second uprising, when the banner has been captured, Engelbrekt himself must fill its symbolic function:

ERIK PUKE: Du får icke vara trött, du har upphört vara en enskild man, du är en tanke, ett banér, sedan de konungske togo Sankt Eriks!¹⁴

¹² Skrifter, X, 199 (Act II):

ENGELBREKT: ... by all we hold dear, by country and coast, for father and mother, for house and hearth ... shoot down the griffin!

NIGELS (takes three steps forward and shoots at the griffin above the well; the griffin is hit and falls down with a crash):
....

¹³ St. Erik was King of Sweden 1150-1160. During an expedition to Finland in 1157 he is said to have been so grieved that the souls of the Finns who fell in battle were damned because they had not received the faith, that he sent St. Henrik, Bishop of Uppsala, to bring Christianity to Finland. He was surprised by assassins while attending Mass. He was proclaimed Sweden's patron saint in 1170 by his son, King Knut Eriksson (reigned 1169-75). His relics are preserved in Uppsala Cathedral, and his feast day is observed on May 18.

¹⁴ Skrifter, X, 206 (Act III):

ERIK PUKE: You can't get tired: you've ceased to be a private person; you're a thought, a banner, since the royalists have taken St. Erik's!

It is a function he fills unwillingly. He spends most of the first two acts of the play resisting the entreaties of those who surround him not only to lead but even to join their cause. He has supported the Union, and takes up arms against it only when he sees there is no other way to preserve Sweden's freedom and dignity. Like Magnus Eriksson in *Folkungasagan*, he is given a task he did not seek, and although he performs it, he does not relish doing so. The destruction of the Union is the destruction of all that he has stood for: the destruction, then, of part of himself. This is symbolized through the break-up of his family: his wife leaves him to return to Denmark, and he must come between his daughter and her happiness when her suitor's father goes over to the royalist side in the second uprising. Most of all, it is symbolized in the person of his son, Karl, who, with his pan-Scandinavian idealism and unwavering loyalty to the King, represents Engelbrekt's past: the youth which necessity has forced him to betray. At the end of Act I Engelbrekt, still reasonably confident that the Union can be corrected from within, extracts from his son a promise which is rigourously kept, but which tragically assures that father and son will become enemies:

ENGELBREKT: Vill du blott lova en sak:
att vad som än sker, vilka stormar än väckas,
bliv aldrig drottsvikare, och rör icke vid
föreningen, som din far offrat ett långt liv.

KARL: Jag drottsvikare? Aldrig, så sant mig

Gud hjälpe och Erik Helig, konung!¹⁵

It is ironic that Karl swears to defend the King by the same saint under whose banner his father marches against him. St. Erik is perhaps a more appropriate patron for Engelbrekt than for Erik of Pomerania: he was King of Sweden as Erik is, but he was Swedish!

At any rate, Karl takes up arms against his father in the royalist cause; as if that were not enough, he throws in with Måns Bengtsson Natt och Dag, traitor to Engelbrekt's cause and his personal enemy! This deeply grieves Engelbrekt, but he realizes that Karl has followed his own conscience as he has followed his, and that his sorrow is as much for his own vanished youth as for present ills:

KARL: Du tog min ed en gång att jag aldrig skulle bli drottsvikare, aldrig bära hand på föreningen, som du ägnat ditt liv ... Jag har hållit min ed.

ENGELBREKT: Du har gjort rätt! Och du har rätt! ... (Reser sig.) Men jag har icke orätt, vid Gud! Ödet har bundit mina händer -- lindat snaran om min hals, och jag nödgas resa mig mot det förra -- mot mig själv --

¹⁵ Skrifter, X, 194:

ENGELBREKT: Just promise me one thing: that whatever happens, whatever storms are stirred up, you will never betray the King, and never meddle with the Union, to which your father has devoted a long life.

KARL: Me betray the King? Never, so help me God and St. Erik, King!

bryta ner mitt eget verk, men jag har befriat mitt land från våldsverkare och dravelsmän.¹⁶

What Engelbrekt here calls fate is elsewhere in the play identified as Providence or as God. For Engelbrekt is the instrument of the Lord; the fact that he is an unwilling instrument does not detract from his mission nor his ability to perform it. His prophet, the man who sees this most clearly and who is able to persuade him that it is indeed so, is Bishop Styrbjörn, who quickly sees the biblical parallels to the situation. In his reluctance, Engelbrekt is like the prophet Jonah, whom God had chosen for a task he did not particularly relish, and who tried to escape his destiny until he was made to realize that there was no escape:

BISKOP STYRBJÖRN: Minns profeten Jona som ville sticka sig undan, när Herren kallade! Han ville dölja sig i havets djup, men han drogs vid öronen och ställdes på sin plats!

ENGELBREKT: Och om han toge skada till sin själ ...

BISKOP STYRBJÖRN: "O människa, ho äst du,

¹⁶ *Skrifter*, X, 205 (Act III):

KARL: You once made me promise that I would never betray the King, never raise a hand against the Union, to which you had devoted your life ... I have kept my promise.

ENGELBREKT: You did right! And you are right! ... (Rises.) But I'm not wrong, by God! Fate has tied my hands -- set the snare around my neck, and I was compelled to rise against the past -- against myself -- to break down my own work, but I have freed my country from men of violence and wastrels.

som vill träta med Gud!"¹⁷

Engelbrekt protests that he is not the man the people need to lead the uprising, saying he is no Gideon,¹⁸ who delivered Israel with an army of only three hundred. Bishop Styrbjörn agrees he is not Gideon, but he has cast Engelbrekt in the rôle of a biblical figure who had an even more onerous task, the routing of a firmly entrenched enemy:

ENGELBREKT: Hören vänner och I, gott folk!
Jag är icke den man I söker! Jag är ingen
Gideon ...

¹⁷ Skrifter, X, 201 (Act II):

BISHOP STYRBJÖRN: Remember the prophet Jonah, who wanted to slink away when the Lord called! He tried to hide himself in the depths of the sea, but he was pulled up by the ears and set in his place!*

ENGELBREKT: And if he had thereby harmed his soul ...

BISHOP STYRBJÖRN: "Oh man, who art thou, that thou wouldst bargain with God!"**

* Jonah 1 and 2. The other two chapters of this short book prefigure the sense of disappointment and bitterness Engelbrekt experiences when, after he has performed his task, things do not go as he had expected at the election.

** I have been unable to locate the source of this quotation; it is not from the Book of Jonah. As my translation indicates, the Swedish of the quotation is archaic.

¹⁸ Gideon's story is told in Judges 6-8.

BISKOP STYRBJÖRN: Josua är du, Herrans
Josua, för vilken murarne ramlat ...¹⁹

Joshua's conquest of Canaan made it possible for the Israelites to occupy the Promised Land: Sweden's destiny as a free and sovereign nation!

Later, when Engelbrekt discovers that his son neither understands nor approves of what he has done, and has in fact joined the forces opposing him, he compares himself to another biblical figure, the patriarch Abraham, who was also chosen for a great mission, but who nevertheless was called upon to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22): "Son mot far, hustru mot man ... Isak skulle offras ..."²⁰ Engelbrekt ought to have remembered the end of the story: although Abraham was indeed called upon to sacrifice his son, Isaac was, in fact, spared: Karl too eventually returns to home and family, and his father is allowed to see that the son he thought lost is found again!

History tells us that Engelbrekt's uprisings did not, in fact, lead his people into the Promised Land (the advance was only temporary): that task was

¹⁹ Skrifter, X, 204 (Act II):

ENGELBREKT: Listen, friends, and you, good people! I'm not the man you seek! I'm no Gideon ...

BISHOP STYRBJÖRN: Joshua is who you are: the Lord's Joshua, before whom the walls collapsed ...

²⁰ Ibid., 205 (Act III): "Son against father, wife against husband ... Isaac was to be sacrificed ..."

reserved for another. After Engelbrekt has been denied in the election, and with his own death fast approaching, the ancient bishop realizes that he was mistaken: Engelbrekt is not Joshua, but Moses, who was allowed to look on the Promised Land but not to enter it:

.... Jag följde dig då du som Mose drog Israels barn omkring i öknen ... Vi fingo endast skåda Canan, men aldrig draga därin! Men så kan du säga din son, och de unga där: "Vi vore Faraos trälarna i Egypten; och Herren forde oss utur Egypten med mäktig hand!"²¹

This is apparently enough for the ancient bishop, who dies happily, with the *Nunc dimittis* on his lips:

Herre, nu låter din tjänare fara i frid! Gud och Sankt Erik konung skydde er unge, Sve-

²¹ Skriffter, X, 210 (Act IV):

.... I followed you when you, like Moses, led the Children of Israel around in the desert ... We were only allowed to look on Canaan, but never to enter it! But you can tell your son and those youngsters this: "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord delivered us from Egypt with a mighty hand!"*

The quotation is a fairly frequent Old Testament formula, usually invoked to recall the listener to his duty to love and serve God. A version close to the wording here is found in Deuteronomy 5:15, for instance, where it forms part of a recapitulation of the Ten Commandments:

Remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that Yahweh your God brought you out from there with mighty hand and outstretched arm.... (Jerusalem Bible)

rige, mitt fosterland, och Engelbrekt, min hjälte! (Dör.)²²

What the bishop has not mentioned is that Moses was denied entry into the Promised Land because he had sinned. But the parallel holds up: Engelbrekt too is denied entry into the Promised Land (symbolized by the Swedish crown: Engelbrekt is denied both the right to wear it himself and to see it worn once again by a Swede), although he has led his people up to the edge of it, because he too has sinned; having lost everything dear to him, he begins to covet the crown. What he entered with high idealism and philosophical rationalism has become, through hubris, a quest for personal recognition and gain; he even persuades himself he has had a prophetic vision, in which the crown has been promised him:

... jag har haft en dröm; Jag var på ett skepp, det var storm ... jag stod i fören

²² *Skrifter*, X, 210 (Act IV):

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace...."* God and St. Erik, King, protect you youngsters, Sweden, land of my birth, and Engelbrekt, my hero! (He dies.)

* Luke 2:29. The rest of the Nunc dimittis is worth quoting, as an indication of just how far Bishop Styrbjörn believes Engelbrekt to have succeeded:

... according to thy word; For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel (Luke 2: 29-32. King James translation).

och såg utåt ... vattnet ... men vattnet
 blommade just då, så att vi fördades som
 genom en gata av guld ... då kom ett litet
 flickebarn på vattnet gående; och när hon
 fick se mig, pekade hon och sade: Se kronan!
...²³

This is not to be. Physically ill, emotionally torn apart by the dispersal of his family, and full of self-doubts over his betrayal of King and Union, Engelbrekt must now go through the humiliation of realizing that he has allowed himself to be filled with delusions of grandeur; his defeat at the election of Rikshövitsman and his exposure to the ingratitude of the youth who now surround him soon follow this revelation of his vanity. His death follows quickly.

Here (in Engelbrekt's death) the main plot and the sub-plot (the love between his daughter Ingeborg and Harald Månsson Natt och Dag) come together. When the first uprising begins, Ingeborg persuades Harald not to participate, but to remain by her side. When that uprising ends successfully, Harald is ashamed of not having helped liberate his country (he compares himself to Hercules, forced by Omphale to spin wool), and

²³ Skrifter, X, 209 (Act IV):

... I've had a dream; I was on a ship, there was a storm ... I stood in the prow and looked out over ... water ... but the water swelled just then, so that we were carried as if through a street of gold ... then a little girl appeared, walking on the water; and when she caught sight of me, she pointed and said: "Behold the crown!"

Ingeborg feels his shame. At the outbreak of the second uprising she persuades him that he has a chance to redeem himself, and sends him off to join his father, unaware that Måns Natt och Dag has changed sides. Nevertheless, when all is over, Harald believes that Ingeborg will marry him. His father is strongly opposed to this marriage, and reveals to him the secret source of his enmity for Engelbrekt: when they were both much younger, Engelbrekt had stolen Natt och Dag's sweetheart, and he has never forgiven him. This does not dissuade Harald from his own romantic intentions, and Natt och Dag is apparently convinced that both Ingeborg and Engelbrekt will overlook the fact that Harald fought against her father (had not Engelbrekt's own son done the same?). But Natt och Dag is determined the marriage will not take place; by killing Engelbrekt he will not only finally settle his own grievance against him, but surely Ingeborg will not then marry the son of her father's murderer! And so the fatal arrow is fired. Nemesis strikes down Engelbrekt the good.

Because Engelbrekt is basically good, and because he has performed the mission forced upon him, he is, however, allowed a hero's death: before he dies he is allowed to see that his home has not been burned down (as he had rashly commanded), and that all the members of his family -- wife, son, and daughter -- are reunited within it. Order is restored on the domestic

level. On the national level, he has also been allowed a glimpse of the Promised Land, although he is unaware of it: Karl Knutsson, who won the election to Rikshövitsman, eventually became king, and Sweden's crown was once more worn by a Swede!

His fate, to be an instrument which is cast aside once the job is done, is foreshadowed in the first act: Harald has just returned from France, where he has been studying, and where he has witnessed the burning of St. Joan of Arc. When he relates the story to Engelbrekt's family, Ingeborg protests against treatment she considers unfair. The bishop's reply reveals that his political judgements are not always infallible, and also contains an indication of the fate awaiting Engelbrekt: he is not cast on the fire, but he is cast aside like a broken reed:

INGEBORG: Hur kan den gode Guden så löna en ädel handling?

BISKOP STYRBJÖRN: Häda icke, barn! Det var törhända försynens vilja att [Frankrike och England] skulle bli till ett ... och den som går emot försynen, han blir bruten som en rö och kastad på elden ...²⁴

²⁴ Skrifter, X, 192 (Act I):

INGEBORG: How can the good God so reward a noble action?

BISHOP STYRBJÖRN: Don't blaspheme, child! It was perhaps the will of Providence that [France and England] should be united ... and he who opposes Providence is broken like a reed and cast upon the fire ...

As we have seen, Bishop Styrbjörn sees Engelbrekt not as an opponent of Providence, but as its instrument. Despite what he says here, that is what Joan of Arc turned out to have been as well: both were instruments of Providence and both were cast aside when their tasks were accomplished. Ingeborg and her father both seem to see the similarity when she later reminds him of the fate of St. Joan:

INGEBORG: Minns jungfrun från Domremy. Hon blev bränd levande efter att ha befriat sitt land.

ENGELBREKT: Skall jag brännas också? ...
....²⁵

The fire, although very real in the case of St. Joan, is in Engelbrekt's case symbolic of destruction in general. Although his home is spared the flames, he himself is destroyed.

By far the most effective use of fire symbolism in the play is in the death of the corrupt Danish archbishop, Arent Clementsen, in Act II. Clementsen has fallen asleep in a drunken stupor in Jens Eriksen's castle. When he awakes to find the castle on fire, he does not remember where he is and thinks himself at the gates of Hell. His speech refers to three types of fire

²⁵ Skrifter, X, 204 (Act III):

INGEBORG: Remember the maid from Domremy. She was burned alive after having liberated her country.

ENGELBREKT: Shall I also be burned? ...
....

symbolism, all brought together in his death: the earthly fire (sexual passion), the purgatorial (repentance, purification), and the infernal (destruction):

ARENT CLEMENTSEN (som sovit på trappan, vaknar nu ...): ... Jag tror jag har sovit! Och jag drömde om eldsvåda ... det betyder kärlek! (Skriker.) Kvinnor! Jag vill ha kvinnor! ... (Får sikte på stora järnporten, på vilken nu en glödröd rund fläck synes.) ... Jag tror att solen redan gått upp ... -- (Nalkas porten.)-- men månen skiner ännu ... Är det solen eller är det icke? ... (Paus.) Nej, det är en ... glödande port! (Ryter.) Helvetets port! (Rygger och söker en utgång, men i köksdörren synes också ett rött sken.) Och denna hetta! Var är jag kommen? (Irrar omkring gården.) Jag tar eld! Jag brinner opp! (Lägre.) Som en kättare på bålet! (Lägre.) Som Johan Huss ... (Ryter.) Vad har jag gjort? Vad jag kunnat; och det onda kom icke från mig utan från mitt kött -- och det har jag ej gjort själv. Ho ville mig förlissa ifrån denna syndens kropp, då jag bad, bad, som barn, som ung, som man, som gammal? Ingen? ... Jag hatade detta köttsfängelse, där min ande satt fången, jag gisslade det och pinade det, jag hade stunder då jag längtade att få komma i elden och känna hur anden lyfte mot höjden som den vita falaskan efter den sura veden! Är detta jag, jag, denna svettiga illaluktande köttmassa, med läggar, sidor, bogar ... och detta kött har min själ hatat och hatar än! Jag hatar dig, kropp, som vågar bära mitt namn, som mänskorna förväxlat med Arent Clementsen ... Du var min fiende, du förnedrade mig, du, du och ingen annan! Men nu skall jag hämnas, jag skall pina dig, jag skall njuta av din pina och sedan ... frihet! ... O Herre Jesus annamma min anda och må min kropp bliva till jord igen, varav han kommen är! (Han går med armarne i kors över bröstet in i det brinnande köket.)²⁶

²⁶ Skrifter, X, 199-200:

ARENT CLEMENTSEN (who has been sleeping on the steps, wakes up now ...): ... I think I've been asleep! And I dreamed of a raging fire ... that means love! (He shouts:) Women! I want women! ... (Catches sight of the large iron door, on which a round patch of

Arent Clementsen had been one of the chief grievances the Swedes had against the Union. The fact

—

glowing red can now be seen.) ... I think the sun has already risen ... -- (Approaches the door.) -- but the moon's still shining ... Is that the sun or isn't it? ... (Pause.) No, it's a ... fiery portal! (He roars.) The gate of Hell! (He shrinks back and looks for a way out, but a red glow is also seen through the door leading to the kitchen.) And such heat! Where have I come to? (He wanders around the courtyard.) I'm catching fire! I'm burning up! (Lower.) Like a heretic at the stake! (Lower.) Like John Huss!* ... (Roars.) What have I done? Whatever I could; but the evil came from my flesh and not from me -- and I myself am not responsible. Who will deliver me from this sinful body, as I have prayed: prayed as a child, as a youth, as an adult, and as an old man? Nobody? ... I hated this prison of flesh, in which my spirit sat imprisoned, I scourged it and tormented it; there were times when I yearned to enter the fire and feel my spirit rise toward the heights like the white ash from wormwood embers! Is this me? Am I this sweaty, foul-smelling mass of flesh, with hocks, flanks, shoulders ... and this flesh my soul has hated and still hates! I hate you, body, which dares to bear my name, which people mistake for Arent Clementsen ... You were my enemy, you pulled me down, you, you and nobody else! But now I'll take my revenge, I'll torture you, I'll rejoice in your torment, and then ... freedom! ... Oh Lord Jesus, receive my spirit and may my body return to dust, from whence it came! (He walks with his arms crossed over his chest into the burning kitchen.)

* John Huss (or Jan Hus) was burned at the stake as a heretic in 1415. The Hussite Rebellion, which began in 1419, lasted until 1434: the year of Engelbrekt's first uprising.

that Strindberg allows him the grace of contrition before he goes to his death is characteristic of the fairness with which the Danes are treated in the play; they are not seen as evil men, but rather as the representatives of an unjust political system. When Harald feels he has been disgraced through his agreement not to take up arms in the struggle, he quotes a few lines of a song. The words apply to his own emotional state, but they seem also to refer back to Arent Clementsen's death, and forward to the unhonoured Engelbrekt:

"Bättre är dö
i elden röda
än ärelös leva ..."²⁷

Indeed, Engelbrekt paraphrases the same words almost immediately after hearing that Karl Knutsson Bonde has beat him in the election, but omitting the reference to fire: "Bättre dö än ärelös leva! ..."²⁸ He does die, but not by fire, and his home also is spared the flames to which he had consigned it. For the flames of annihilation are not for Engelbrekt: the love and unity of his family triumphs and survives his death, as does his memory. And the honour denied him in life has grown with the passing of time.

²⁷ *Skrifter*, X, 203 (Act II):

"Better to die
in the red fire
than to live without honour ..."

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 209 (Act IV): "Better to die than to live without honour! ..."

The pattern of the play is symbolic in another, larger sense. In 1901, when it was written, one of the hottest political issues was the fate of the union between Sweden and Norway, which had existed since 1814²⁹ and was then nearing its end. Strindberg was convinced that that union too ought to end as quickly and as honorably as possible, and saw the Norwegians as in the same position in respect to that union as the Swedes had occupied in his play. He was married to the Norwegian actress, Harriet Bosse, so shared another characteristic with his hero! Perhaps a play reminding Swedes of how they had suffered under a similar union, and of the value Swedes have always placed on national sovereignty might help lead Norway into its Promised Land! That union ended June 7, 1905.

²⁹ The Kalmar Union was dissolved insofar as Sweden was concerned in 1523, when Gustav Vasa pulled Sweden out of it. But union between Denmark and Norway continued until 1814, when Denmark ceded Norway to Sweden!

Chapter 66

Kristina

The title rôle in *Kristina*,¹ 1901 was created for Harriet Bosse. It is the most popular of Strindberg's historical plays, and the least historically accurate.

Kristina (1626-89) was Queen of Sweden from 1632 to 1654. A great-granddaughter of Gustav Vasa, she succeeded her father, Gustav II Adolf, to the throne, and on her abdication was succeeded by her cousin, Karl X Gustav. A great patroness of the arts and of all forms of learning (she persuaded Descartes to live in Stockholm, for instance), and generous to a fault in rewarding loyalty and service, she was nevertheless inept at the art of governing, and her reign was an unfortunate one for Sweden. Upon her abdication, she converted to Catholicism and went to live in Rome, where she continued to lead a colourful life. She never married.

To Strindberg, one of the principal reasons for her failure as a monarch was her sex. Like Miss Julie, she had been raised as a man, and indeed had herself crowned King (not Queen) of Sweden. She tries to suppress her female nature, but is unable to do so. Since that nature is incompatible with her duties as a monarch, her reign is very weak indeed; when her female

¹ *Samlade verk*, XLVIII, 7-143.

nature is finally fully revealed in her love for Klas Tott (great-grandson of Erik XIV), the throne no longer has any hold on her, and she abdicates. Strindberg's treatment of her is similar to that he gives Erik XIV: both are weak monarchs, not through any fault of their own but rather because their natures are such that they were altogether unfitted for the job of ruling. He is thus able to view them both sympathetically, while in no way minimizing the shortcomings of their reigns.

One of the links between Kristina and Erik XIV is the child symbol, which reinforces the point that neither of them was suited for the throne. Stage directions often indicate that she is to deliver a line "barnsligt" (childishly), and she is twice said to conduct the affairs of the country and of her court as if she were playing with dolls. She reverts to childhood not only in the presence of her mother, but also in that of her favorite, Magnus de la Gardie (1622-86). It is he who most impresses upon her the extent to which she is a child in an adult world:

Snälla barn, du har lekt ... men det får du inte längre. Lilla Kerstin är död för länge sen, men du går och gräver opp henne ...²

² Samlade verk, XLVIII, 98 (III):

Dear child, you've been playing ... but you can't do that any more. Little Kerstin* has been dead for a long time, but you keep digging her up ...

* Kerstin is a diminutive of Kristina; de la Gardie's point is that Kristina's childhood is over.

Appropriately, one of the principle symbols is playing (both at games and acting): Kristina, in denying her own nature in order to be a monarch, is an actress: a player-Queen. This symbolism is introduced very early: as the major characters file on stage to attend a memorial service, Allerts introduces them for the benefit of a small group of visitors (and of the audience). He compares them to the pieces in a game of chess: "Snart äro pjäserna uppställda -- -- -- och då börjar spelet...."³ Kristina is not the Queen on the chessboard, but the player, for it is she who amuses herself by playing with the fates of those around her as if they were so many pawns, or dolls:

DE LA GARDIE (...): Arma Kerstin, du har kommit in i -- något som inte passar dig!

KRISTINA: Ja, det stramar! (Turnerar.) Men det är intressant! (Barnsligt.) Och det är roligt ibland!

DE LA GARDIE: Att leka med dockor!

KRISTINA: Just det! Stora dockor!⁴

³ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 23 (I): "The pieces will soon be in position -- -- -- and then the game will begin...."

⁴ Ibid., 36 (I):

DE LA GARDIE (...): Poor Kerstin! you've got yourself into -- something that doesn't suit you!

KRISTINA: Yes, it's a tight spot! (Alters her mood.) But it's interesting! (Childishly.) And sometimes it's fun!

DE LA GARDIE: Playing with dolls!

KRISTINA: That's right! Big dolls!

But is she not after all, a chess-piece like the rest? At the end of the play there is an indication that even she, so skillful in manipulating the lives of others, has been manipulated in a game of chess played by the gods (the closest Strindberg comes to involving the powers in this play; as he moves towards *En blå bok*, he finds them less and less useful or satisfactory as explanations of ill fortune): "Stackars vi! När Gudarne leka, få mänskobarnen gråta!"⁵

Part of Kristina's problem with Oxenstjerna,⁶ her most experienced and skillful advisor, is that she tries to play with him too. He has been in charge of her education (and must therefore accept part of the blame for what she has become), and is far more concerned with the needs of the country than with satisfying the whims of this child-queen. Her failure to realize this contributes to the collapse of her reign: "Vad hade du med lejonet att leka?"⁷ de la Gardie exasperates after she has tangled with Oxenstjerna.

In Act III Kristina the actress appears. She wears two theatrical costumes in this act, both very signifi-

⁵ *Samlade verk*, XLVIII, 134 (IV): "Poor us! When the Gods play, the children of men must weep!"

⁶ Axel Oxenstjerna (1583-1654), nobleman and diplomat, one of the leading members of the committee of regency during Kristina's minority (1632-44) and Chancellor of the Realm, 1612-48.

⁷ *Samlade verk*, XLVIII, 57 (II): "You shouldn't have tried to play with the lion!"

cant in terms of Strindberg's symbolism. At the beginning of the act she enters wearing an Amazon costume: dressed, in other words, as a woman who has usurped a traditional male rôle, every bit as unnatural as Hercules dressed in woman's clothing and serving Omphale. The Amazon costume gives way to a Pandora costume: the woman who assumes a male rôle becomes the source of all the world's afflictions and sorrows. Pandora is also the classical equivalent of Eve, and thus also represents all of womankind. By appearing as Pandora, then, Kristina signals her responsibility for all of Sweden's woes during her reign, and also identifies herself very strongly with her sex, indicating that the inadequacies of her reign were not her own fault as a person, but simply the inevitable result of the fact that she was, like the Amazon, a woman trying to do a man's job! But all of life is a play to Kristina, and she the leading lady; unfortunately, the rôle she has chosen does not include a happy ending:

KRISTINA (...): Holm! jag är led på
den här komedin!

HOLM (tiger).

KRISTINA (liksom för sig själv): Det är nog
sista akten som går!⁸

⁸ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 71 (III):

KRISTINA (...): Holm! I'm tired of
this comedy!

HOLM (remains silent).

KRISTINA (as if to herself): I'm sure this
is the last act!

Kristina ceases to be the player and becomes a pawn when the game is love. She is having an affair with Pimentelli, the Spanish ambassador, and has obviously had a close liaison with de la Gardie, but both of these relationships she has been able to control, using both men as playthings: available when she wants to amuse herself with them, but easily discarded. When she loses her heart to Klas Tott, however, she loses her head as well, and the tables are turned; she is now playing a serious game for high stakes, and she loses. She has always played with others' emotions; now she learns what it is like to have another play with hers.

That this game is indeed serious is underlined in a conversation between Tott and de la Gardie, the new suitor and the rejected favorite:

TOTT: Tror du hon leker med mig?

DE LA GARDIE: Leker? Kan en kvinna göra annat? Kärleken är väl en lek!

TOTT: Leka med himmel och helvete, det är farlig lek!

DE LA GARDIE: Det finns de som dö!⁹

There is a three-level play on words here: the last syllable of the word kärlek (love) is the word lek (game). The adjective kär, which remains, means dear:

⁹ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 74-75 (III):

TOTT: Do you think she's playing with me?

DE LA GARDIE: Playing? Can a woman do anything else? Love is a game, after all!

TOTT: It's a dangerous game that's played with heaven and hell at stake!

DE LA GARDIE: Some people die of it!

in both senses of the word! This is the point of the following exchange between Kristina and de la Gardie:

DE LA GARDIE: Vänta en gång får du känna ... ja, det får du, du som alla vilka lekt med den naturkraft, skaparmakten, som har sina källor vid världsträdets rötter ...

KRISTINA (spotskt, hånande): Vad kan det vara?

DE LA GARDIE: Kär-leken! Men det vet du inte vad det är!

KRISTINA: Det är väl en lek, som man alltså icke bör ta allvarligt, (skanderar) "och den som sig i leken ger, får leken tåla"....¹⁰

But Kristina forgets that love is a game when she falls in love with Tott, and her world shatters when she discovers that he is not willing to marry her without the crown: the stakes for which he has been playing. With that realization, Kristina stops playing the child, stops playing rôles, and stops playing games, for she has lost her innocence (the significance of her feeling of nakedness at the end of the play: Eve after the Fall). Game time is over; she has become a woman, and from now on she will act as a woman. The game ends

¹⁰ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 80-81 (III):

DE LA GARDIE: Just wait, you'll find out ... yes, you'll find out, as everyone does who has dallied with the force of nature, the creative power, which springs from the roots of the Tree of Life ...

KRISTINA (scornfully mocking): Whatever can that be?

DE LA GARDIE: The love-game! But you wouldn't know what that is!

KRISTINA: I suppose it's a game and therefore shouldn't be taken seriously! (Recites:) "... and he who joins the game, must play by the rules of the game..."

in a tie: Kristina loses Tott and he loses his dreams of the throne.

Kristina's relationships with Tott and de la Gardie are further clarified by symbolism drawn from the Pandora-Prometheus myth. Kristina as Pandora is discussed above. Prometheus is de la Gardie, as he makes clear in a reference to the wife Kristina has compelled him to marry: "Då får jag väl gå hem -- till min -- maka -- min gam och låta hacka min lever!"¹¹ This would seem to be contradicted by Kristina's identification of Tott as Prometheus at one point, when she thus apostrophizes him:

Prometheus, ljusbringare, som tog från de rika Gudarne och skänkte åt de fattiga människorna all slags färdigheter, konster och skönhet!¹²

It must be assumed that Kristina is here deluded by love for Tott (for whom identification with another light-bringer, Lucifer, might be more apt), for de la Gardie is a more appropriate Prometheus figure: it is he who is concerned with the fate of mankind (i.e., the Swedish people), and it is he who must suffer for this concern. Tott is much more appropriately identified

¹¹ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 121 (IV): Then I suppose I must go home -- to my -- wife -- my vulture, and allow my liver to be pecked!"

¹² Ibid., 125 (IV):

Prometheus, bringer of light, who took from the rich Gods and provided poor man with all manner of skill, art, and beauty!

with Prometheus' brother Epimetheus, as even Kristina recognizes: "Ve! jag kommer att bringa dig olycka ... Epimetheus!"¹³ In the myth, Epimetheus marries Pandora, and if this does not happen in fact, it is at least the intention of both until the possibility of losing the crown intervenes. Kristina calls Tott Prometheus only once, but later, as a cue for the pageant she has planned, she again designates him Epimetheus: "Nu Pafos hyllning ger, åt Epimetheus som Pandora fick!"¹⁴ Paphos was the centre of the worship of Aphrodite on the island of Cyprus, and Aphrodite had endowed Pandora with the gift of beauty; the speech asserts that as her husband Tott will also receive tribute from the goddess of love. This is not, unfortunately, the kind of tribute Tott seeks. The pageant Kristina has arranged for his entertainment (in which, apparently, Aphrodite was to pay him homage) turns out (to her dismay as well as his) to be one of misery, as Kristina's discontented subjects fill the stage (an effect also used in Carl XII): a symbolic reenactment of Pandora's opening of the casket!

¹³ *Samlade verk*, XLVIII, 97 (III): "Alas! I'll bring you misfortune ... Epimetheus!"

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 130 (IV): "Now Paphos renders tribute to Epimetheus who received Pandora!"

Once Kristina has made her decision to abandon the throne, Tott's hopes are shattered, and he expresses his bitterness in terms of the Pandora symbolism:

Pandora! Har du något kvar i asken? Du sade det "trofasta" hoppet, men i texten står, det "bedrägliga" hoppet! Jag ville icke rätta dig, du var så skön när du sade det!¹⁵

This refers to an earlier exchange, in which Kristina and Tott rehearsed the Pandora-Epimetheus story. While it expresses Tott's feeling of disappointment and betrayal, it is not quite accurate; it was he, not she, who described hope as faithful (i.e., likely to be realized) rather than deceitful:

KRISTINA: All världens olyckor gömde han i det försåtliga bröllopsskrinet, och med kvinnan kommo onda tider.

TOTT: Och goda genom det onda! Men i botten på skrinet lade han den oförgängliga gåvan som sist, nej aldrig sviker, hoppet det trofasta hoppet!¹⁶

Tott has persuaded himself that his ambitions will be realized; Kristina has encouraged his love, but prom-

¹⁵ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 134 (IV):

Pandora! Have you anything left in your casket? You said "faithful" hope, but in the text it's "deceitful" hope! I didn't want to correct you, you were so beautiful when you said it!

¹⁶ Ibid., 125 (IV):

KRISTINA: He hid all the world's miseries in the treacherous marriage chest, and with woman came evil times.

TOTT: And good as the result of evil! For in the bottom of the chest he laid the imperishable gift which will fail us last -- no, never: hope, faithful hope!

ised him only hard times! If he has been deceived, it is a case of self-deception.

Part of his delusion is that Pandora's casket, which she will willingly open to him, contains, not all the miseries of the world, but power and prestige. The casket indeed contains the crown, but for Kristina the crown is synonymous with misfortune and unhappiness: its responsibilities are the cause of her failures, and she, as the embodiment of the crown, is responsible for the discontent and suffering in the country:

DE LA GARDIE: Vad bär du i skrinet! Pandora?

KRISTINA (öppnar och visar en kunglig krona): Alla världens olyckor, inneslutna i en!

DE LA GARDIE: Det är väl aldrig -- regalien!

KRISTINA: Bara papper, kära du!¹⁷

Kristina wants to get rid of the crown, to open Pandora's box and throw away its contents; Tott wants to find it remaining at the bottom of the casket when all hardship has gone. It is obvious their goals conflict.

When Kristina tells Tott she wants to marry him, he refuses, saying that the crown stands between them.

¹⁷ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 117-18 (IV):

DE LA GARDIE: What's in your casket, Pandora?

KRISTINA (opens it and reveals a royal crown): All the miseries of the world rolled into one!

DE LA GARDIE: Surely that can't be -- the state crown!

KRISTINA: Only papier-mâché, my dear!

This is Kristina's opening to raise him to her level, something certainly within her power. She misinterprets his remark, however, and symbolically reenacts her abdication (which she has already signed):

KRISTINA (...): Jag vill bli din maka!

TOTT: Det kan icke ske!

KRISTINA: Vad står emellan oss?

TOTT: En krona....

....
KRISTINA: Välan! -- -- -- (Går till skrinet, tar fram kronan och lägger den på offerelden.) Tag mitt offer, du största, enda man, jag råkat, och som gjort mig till kvinna!

TOTT: Jag kan icke ta ditt offer!¹⁸

There are many similarities between Kristina and Miss Julie, who had also been raised as a man and who also fell in love below her station. It is no coincidence, then, that Kristina makes use of Fröken Julie's symbolism of rising and falling. For much of the play, Kristina soars above the other characters while Tott watches in admiration and envy from below:

¹⁸ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 127 (IV):

KRISTINA (...): I want to become your wife!

TOTT: That can't happen!

KRISTINA: What stands between us?

TOTT: A crown....

....
KRISTINA: Well then! -- -- -- (Goes to the casket, takes out the crown, and places it on the sacrificial fire.) Accept my sacrifice, you greatest and only man I have ever met, you who have made a woman of me!

TOTT: I can't accept your sacrifice!

... det är en örninna, född i luften av luft,
därför har hon svårt att andas här nere! --
-- -- Kunde jag bara följa hennes flykt!¹⁹

The wings of Tott's love, or rather, as it turns out, the wings of his ambition, soon lift him to poetic heights, however, raising him above even Kristina (or so it seems to her): "Claes, du är för högt oppe, jag ser dig inte -- Kom ner!"²⁰ and: "Barn lilla, håll dig nere vid marken -- -- -- Kerstin kan inte flyga! ..."²¹

Paradoxically, each sees himself as earthbound, and each sees in the other a chance to soar. But Tott must remain firmly anchored to the ground in order for Kristina to fly (i.e., fulfill herself as a woman, through love); the fact that he wants only to soar is another indication that their expectations of each other cannot be reconciled:

KRISTINA: Minns du pappersdraken ... så
länge snöret binder honom vid jorden, stiger
han; släpp snöret och han sjunker! -- -- --
TOTT (går på i extas): Det är jag som bin-

¹⁹ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 75 (III):

... she's an eagle, born in the air and of
the air; that's why she has difficulty
breathing down here! -- -- -- If only I could
follow her flight!

²⁰ Ibid., 94 (III): "Klas, you are too high up; I
can't see you -- Come down!"

²¹ Ibid., 97 (III): "Little child, stay close to
the ground -- -- -- Kerstin can't fly!"

der dig vid jorden, men du skall lyfta mig
...²²

As it happens, they cut each other's string: when she renounces the crown his ambitions come crashing to earth, and when she discovers that his love has been false, she experiences humiliation for the first time and has a feeling of sinking or falling:

... jag, jag sjunker, ner, ner, ner, sedan du väckte mig. Varför skulle du väcka sömn-
 gångerskan som gick så nött på takrännan utan
 att falla, utan att solka en fäll?²³

She also feels naked, for she has lost her innocence, and cold, for she feels deserted by God.

Waking from sleep or from sleepwalking is a symbol for the shattering of illusion, the end of a dream, connecting Kristina to the play which follows it, Ett drömspel. Kristina and Tott have woven each other's dreams, and they also shatter each other's dreams. If Kristina has her rude awakening, so does Tott: "... jag

²² Samlade verk, XLVIII, 95 (III):

KRISTINA: Remember the kite? ... as long as the string ties it to the ground, it climbs; release the string and it falls to earth! --
 -- --

TOTT (ecstatically): I'm the one who binds you to the ground, but you'll raise me up ...

²³ Ibid., 133 (IV):

... I, I'm sinking, down, down, down, since you woke me. Why did you have to wake the sleepwalker, who was walking so daintily along the roof gutter, without falling, without soiling her train?

känner som om jag vaknade ur en lång sömn! (Ser sig om.) Vad är det här för gyckel!"²⁴

As he frequently does, Strindberg supports his characterizations with animal symbols. On this level of symbolism too, the relationship between Tott and Kristina is doomed from the start. He has himself compared the Queen to an eagle: a noble bird of prey, and yet he woos her as if she were a dove. Even if she seems to respond as if she were indeed a dove, she is a much more regal bird, master of the air, as even he once realized: "Jag var på balletten i går och jag tyckte drottningen betraktade mig med ögon mera av en hök än av en duva!"²⁵ He, on the other hand, is one of the lesser birds, and susceptible to being trapped:

DE LA GARDIE: Tott kan älska, han! Och ändå har han rykte vara misogyn.

TOTT: Kvinnohatare! Det är jag ännu, men Kristina är ingen kvinna! För övrigt är hon själv kvinnohatare, som du vet! Så att där är vi ense också!

DE LA GARDIE: Akta dig för hennes påstådda kvinnohat; det är bara limstången som hon tar småfåglar med!²⁶

²⁴ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 130 (IV): "... I feel as if I've awakened from a long sleep! (Looks around.) What kind of a dirty trick is this!"

²⁵ Ibid., 19 (I): "I was at the ballet yesterday, and I thought the Queen watched me with eyes more like a hawk's than a dove's!"

²⁶ Ibid., 76-77 (III):

DE LA GARDIE: Tott certainly knows how to love! And yet he's reputed to be a misogynist.

TOTT: A woman-hater! I still am, but Kristina is no woman! Besides, she's a woman-hater herself. as you know! So we agree on

That Tott believes in Kristina's misogyny, not realizing that she is desperately struggling to be a woman herself, indicates that he is just such a small bird, that he is at her mercy rather than vice-versa, and that Kristina is, or will become, both greater and freer than he.

Two other characters who have bird symbols are Bourdelot, Kristina's French physician, who is generally credited with altering her views for the worse; and her sober and pedantic Chancellor, Oxenstjerna. Kristina obviously prefers the more libertine philosophy of the former:

Bourdelot är större, friare; han sväver som en glada över fält och bryn, men Oxenstierna står som en stork vid rätthålet.²⁷

The stork, incidentally, is a particularly apt symbol for Oxenstjerna, since in former days it was dedicated to Juno, who, under the title Juno Moneta, governed finances!

Others do not share Kristina's high opinion of Bourdelot, probably because of the disastrous effects

that too!

DE LA GARDIE: Beware her professed misogyny; it's only the lime twig she uses to capture small birds.

²⁷ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 42 (I):

Bourdelot is greater, freer; he soars like a kite [the bird, not the toy] over field and horizon, but Oxenstjerna stands like a stork watching a rat-hole.

his counsels have had on the country, and choose for him an animal symbol instead: "Bourdelot -- franska läkaren -- Drottningens markatta som grinar åt allting ..."²⁸ By the end of the third act, Kristina has formed the same opinion of him; when Bourdelot is announced, she directs de la Gardie: "Kör ut honom! Det är en apa, och ingen människa!"²⁹ This anticipates *En blå bok*, where Strindberg characterizes the philosophy of so-called freethinkers as *ap-moralen* (the ape morality).

The spiritual evolution suggested by her reassessment of Bourdelot is also emphasized by the colour symbolism: at her first entrance, Kristina is dressed in the black of full mourning, but when she enters in the final act she is dressed in the head-to-foot white of the Pandora costume. Tott, despite his shortsightedness in other aspects of their relationship, has foreseen the significance of this change: "Du, den rena, den Snövit, ty det är du längst in i själen...."³⁰ The pattern is a familiar one in Strindberg: from disorder, through love and suffering, to purification.

²⁸ *Samlade verk*, XLVIII, 20 (I): "Bourdelot -- the French doctor -- the Queen's pet monkey, who grins at everything ..."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 100: "Get rid of him! He's an ape, not a man!"

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 97 (III): "You, the pure, the Snow-white, for that's what you are, deep down in your soul...."

Kristina's love for Tott is not selfless: although willing to sacrifice the crown for him (much to his dismay!), that fits in with her other plans, and she hopes to achieve through him her own fulfillment as a woman. In this sense she is a vampire, feeding on his vitality. Tott notices this, although he does not realize its implications (which work against his own ambitions), and refers to it twice: "När du tagit min själ, sitter här endast en livlös kropp ...;"³¹ and, much more graphically suggesting the vampire:

KRISTINA: (Hon kysser honom på munnen.)

TOTT (raglar, blyg): Du gav något och du tog något! Vad du gav vet jag inte, men du tog min ande ... Kristina, döda mig icke, jag är så ung!³²

These are the major symbols of the play. There are one or two minor ones which appear only briefly. Such is Kristina's rapier, which symbolizes her position as defender of the Lutheran faith. This position stands in the way of her conversion to Catholicism, and the

³¹ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 95 (III): "Since you have taken my soul, nothing remains here but a lifeless body ..."

³² Ibid., 110 (III):

KRISTINA: (She kisses him on the mouth.)

TOTT (staggers; shyly): You gave something, and you took something! What you gave, I don't know, but you took my soul ... Kristina, don't kill me; I'm so young!

breaking of the rapier signifies her decision to follow her conscience and let the pieces fall where they may:

MARIA ELEONORA: ... jag ... menar slutligen att var och en blir salig på sin tro!

KRISTINA (springer upp med ett kattsprång): Tack för det ordet, mamma!

MARIA ELEONORA (...).

KRISTINA (tar värjan och bryter sönder den över knä't): Slut!³³

Such also is the allusion to Pygmalion's image, which expresses Kristina's desire to become a woman through her relationship with Tott:

TOTT: Jag älskar dig som ett verk av konsten, jag vill se dig, men icke röra vid dig!

KRISTINA: Rör mig, jag är av jordens lera, och under dina händer skall jag skapas ut till ett stort odödligt verk av konsten.³⁴

The ending of the play is rather ambiguous. It seems to end in defeat for both Kristina and Tott, although we know from history that, although she never married, Kristina went on to lead a very interesting and presumably fulfilling life. The ambiguous ending is

³³ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 112-13 (III):

MARIA ELEONORA: ... I ... think that in the end everyone is saved by his own faith!

KRISTINA (leaps up like a cat): Thank you for those words, mamma!

MARIA ELEONORA (...).

KRISTINA (takes the rapier and breaks it into pieces over her knee): Finished!

³⁴ Ibid., 126 (IV):

TOTT: I love you as a work of art: I want to look at you, but not touch you!

KRISTINA: Touch me! I am made of the earth's clay, and in your hands I shall be moulded into a great immortal work of art.

indicative of Strindberg's own ambivalent attitude towards her: attracted by her strong and colourful personality, a woman capable finally of taking her destiny into her own hands, he was also aware that her reign was not a happy one for Sweden, and was repelled by what he considered the unnatural aspects of her character. From her story, however, he has created what is perhaps the most memorable of his history plays.

Chapter 67

Ett drömspel

The main body of *Ett drömspel*¹ (*A Dream Play*), Strindberg's own favorite among his works ("... mitt mest älskade drama"²) was written in 1901; and the Prologue ("*Förspel*") followed in 1906. It develops techniques explored as early as *Lycko-Pers resa* (1882) and in works such as the *Till Damaskus* trilogy (1898-1901) and *Svanevit* (1901); and its heroine, the compassionate Indra's Daughter, is clearly related to Eleonora in *Påsk* (1900).³

Besides being based on the loosely structured, constantly changing, and highly symbolic elements of the dream, the play owes not a little to the teachings of Indian religion. Its theme, the search for meaning in a world of sin and suffering, is familiar from the *Till Damaskus* plays; indeed, it has been suggested that *Ett drömspel* might well have been called *Till Damaskus IV* (Ollén, 438), and in his brief foreword ("*Erinran*")

¹ *Samlade verk*, XLVI.

² *Brev*, 229 (from a letter to Emil Schering dated April 17, 1907): "... my most beloved drama...."

³ Both rôles were created for Harriet Bosse.

Strindberg refers to *Till Damaskus* as "... [mitt] förra Drömspel...."⁴

The two most conspicuous symbols in the play are the growing castle which bursts into bloom at the end, and the door behind which the secret of the universe is thought to be hidden. The castle is a symbol of the spiritual life. Since it is growing, or rising from the earth, it is a symbol more specifically of spiritual development, an interpretation confirmed by the circumstance that the chrysanthemum (symbol of spiritual attainment) which blooms from the castle turret at the end of the play, is only a bud at the beginning and, as the climax of the play approaches, is described as "... en Krysantemum-knopp färdig att slå ut...."⁵ That the Officer is a prisoner of the castle at the beginning of the play signifies his inexperience of the ways of the physical world: he cannot yet rise above the world because he does not know what it is.

The other conspicuous symbol, the door thought to hide the secret of the universe, is pierced by a hole shaped like a four-leaf clover. This indicates that we are to look for the secret of the physical rather than the spiritual universe, for the fourfold nature of the

⁴ *Samlade verk*, XLVI, 7: "... [my] previous Dream Play...."

⁵ *Ibid.*, 113 (III, xx): "... a Chrysanthemum bud ready to bloom."

hole is symbolic of the earth, the material world. When the door is opened, it reveals its secret -- nothing:

LORDKANSLERN: Vad doldes bakom dörren?

DEKANUS FÖR TEOLOGISKA FAKULTETEN: Intet!

Det är världsgåtans lösning! -- -- -- Av intet skapade Gud i begynnelsen himmel och jord.

DEKANUS FÖR FILOSOFISKA FAKULTETEN: Av intet blir intet.⁶

Both deans are right. The secret of the universe is nothing, for the universe was created from nothing. The comment of the Dean of Philosophy, far from contradicting the explanation of the Dean of Theology (as he no doubt intends), completes it: the universe was created from nothing and it remains nothing. The secret of the door then, introduces a theme stated explicitly by Indra's Daughter, when she explains the mystery of the universe before reascending to heaven: the world and all it contains is an illusion. Those who witness the opening of the door are indeed victims of a hoax, but not in the way they believe: their deception is that they believe the illusory world to be reality. Nevertheless, Indra's daughter tells them that they have

⁶ Samlade verk, XLVI, 107 (III, xv):

THE LORD CHANCELLOR: What was hidden behind the door?

DEAN OF THEOLOGY: Nothing! That's the solution to the mystery of the universe! -- -- -- In the beginning, God created heaven and earth from nothing.

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY: Nothing comes of nothing.

understood what they have seen, for all of their interpretations and/or reactions are in fact correct:

DEKANUS FÖR MEDICINSKA FAKULTETEN: Där är
ju intet.

DOTTERN: Du sade't. -- Men du förstod det
intet!⁷

There is an ambiguity in Indra's Daughter's remark: "du förstod det intet" (literally, "you understood the nothing") varies by only one letter from "du förstod det inte" ("you did not understand it"), a difference which might be missed when the line is spoken, and one which has betrayed several translators.⁸

The illusory nature of existence is also pointed to by the landing net and green fishing creel of the Bill-Poster. All his life he has dreamed of owning such objects, and finally, at the age of fifty, he acquires them. Far from being content, however, he feels only disappointment:

OFFICERN: Har det fiskat bra?

AFFISCHÖREN: Jo, då! Sommaren var varm och
lite lång ... häven var nog så bra, men inte
så som jag hade tänkt mig!

⁷ Samlade verk, XLVI, 109 (III, xvi):

DEAN OF MEDICINE: Surely there's nothing
there.

THE DAUGHTER: You said it. -- But you
understood nothing.

⁸ Sprigge (in Strindberg, *Twelve Plays*, 582): "... you have not understood it;" Johnson (in Strindberg, *A Dream Play and Four Chamber Plays*, 79): "... you didn't understand that nothing;" Sprinchorn (in Strindberg, *A Dream Play*, 127): "... you understood it not at all." I have tried to preserve the ambiguity in the translation I have suggested above.

OFFICERN (accentuerar): Inte så som jag hade tänkt mig! -- -- -- Det är utmärkt sagt! Ingenting är som jag hade tänkt mig! ... därför att tanken är mer än gärningen -- högre än saken ...⁹

A few lines later, Indra's Daughter explains the Bill-Poster's disappointment to him:

DOTTERN: Vad var det för fel på häven?

AFFISCHÖREN: Fel? Ja, det var inte egentligen något fel ... men den var inte som jag hade tänkt mig den, och därför blev fröjden inte så stor ...

DOTTERN: Hur hade ni tänkt er häven?

AFFISCHÖREN: Hur? -- -- -- Det kan jag inte säga ...

DOTTERN: Låt mig säga't!-- -- -- Ni hade tänkt er den så som den inte var! Grön skulle den vara, men inte det gröna!

AFFISCHÖREN: Ni vet det, ni, fru! Ni vet allt....¹⁰

⁹ Samlade verk, XLVI, 28 (I, xviii):

THE OFFICER: Was the fishing good?

THE BILL-POSTER: Oh, yes! The summer was hot and a little long ... and the landing net was quite good, but not just as I'd imagined it!

THE OFFICER (stresses the words): "Not just as I'd imagined it!" -- -- -- That's remarkably well put! Nothing is as I'd imagined it! ... because the thought is greater than the deed -- superior to the thing ...

¹⁰ Ibid., 28-29 (I, xviii):

THE DAUGHTER: What was wrong with the landing net?

THE BILL-POSTER: Wrong? Well, there was nothing actually wrong ... but it wasn't as I'd imagined it, and so my pleasure wasn't that great ...

THE DAUGHTER: How had you imagined the net?

THE BILL-POSTER: How? -- -- -- I can't say ...

THE DAUGHTER: Let me say! -- -- -- You'd imagined it exactly as it wasn't! It was to have been green, but not that green!

THE BILL-POSTER: You know how it is, you do, ma'am! You know everything....

In other words, the dream was more real, more satisfactory, than the reality; reality is but a poor reflection of the perfection we can conceive in our dreams. We are dealing here with Plato's ideal forms, which suggest another existence which this one only imitates!

The other extended symbol in the play is the hairpin. After an experiment with marriage, in which reality again falls far short of the ideal, Agnes (a.k.a. Indra's Daughter)¹¹ leaves with the Officer. Her husband, the Lawyer, finds the floor strewn with hairpins, and these banal objects become charged with metaphysical significance. It soon becomes evident that the hairpin is a symbol of marriage ("... and the two shall be one flesh"):

ADVOKATEN: Se på den här! Det är två skalmar, men en nål! Det är två, men det är en! Rätar jag ut den, så är det ett enda stycke! Böjer jag det, är det två, utan att upphöra vara ett! Det betyder: de tu äro ett! Men bryter jag av -- här! Då äro de tu tu!

(Bryter hårnålen och kastar bitarne.)

OFFICERN: Allt detta har han sett! ... Men innan man kan bryta, måste skalmarne divergera! Konvergera de, så håller det!

ADVOKATEN: Och äro de parallella -- så råkas de aldrig -- det varken bär eller brister.

OFFICERN: Hårnålen är det fullkomligaste av

¹¹ The name Agnes suggests both Christ (Agnus Dei) and the Hindu fire god, Agni: both associations connected with sacrifice.

alla skapade ting! En rät linje som är lika
med två parallella!¹²

This is Strindberg's tribute to marriage: never living up to the ideal (not just as one had imagined it) but still the highest earthly perfection. If existence is but a dream, so is our suffering, and it is then only striving towards the ideal that matters.

The relation between suffering and the ideal is underlined in Indra's Daughter's explanation of the universe:

... för att befrias ur jordämnet, söker Bra-
mas avkomlingar försakelsen och lidandet ...
Där har du lidandet såsom befriaren ... Men
denna trängtan till lidandet råkar i strid
med begäret att njuta, eller Kärleken ...
förstår du än vad Kärleken är, med dess hög-

¹² Samlade verk, XLVI, 53 (II, iv):

THE LAWYER: Look at this! There are two prongs, but only one pin! It's two, but it's one! If I straighten it out, it's a single piece! If I bend it, it's two, without ceasing to be one! That means: the two are one! But if I break it -- like this! The two are two!

(Breaks the hairpin and throws away the pieces.)

THE OFFICER: He's seen all this! ... But before it can be broken, the prongs must diverge! If they converge, it will hold!

THE LAWYER: And if they're parallel -- so they never meet -- it neither wears nor breaks.

THE OFFICER: The hairpin is the most perfect of all created things! A straight line which makes two parallels!

sta fröjder i de största lidanden, det ljuvaste i det bittraste!¹³

Strindberg has adopted some facets of Indian religion because he finds there a metaphysical system which seems to reconcile the suffering world of reality with the ideal (i.e., the material with the spiritual) by viewing the real rather than the ideal as an illusion:

I tidernas morgon innan Solen lyste, gick Brama, den gudomliga urkraften, och lät förleda sig av Maja världsmo-
dern, till att föröka sig. Detta det gudomliga urämnets beröring med jordämnet var himlens Syndafall. Världen, livet och människorna äro sålunda endast ett fantom, ett sken, en drömbild
...¹⁴

In the Hindu system, Brahma is the Absolute, the creator of the universe, and chief of the gods. Maya is not a goddess, but the concept of illusion, that which prevents man from realizing his identity with Brahma

¹³ Samlade verk, XLVI, 115-16 (III, xxi):

... in order to free themselves from the material of earth, the offspring of Brahma seek privation and suffering ... There you have suffering as a deliverer ... But this compulsion to suffering comes into conflict with the desire for pleasure, or Love ... Do you understand yet what Love is, which finds its highest joys in the greatest suffering, the sweetest in the most bitter!

¹⁴ Ibid., 115:

At the dawn of time, before the Sun shone, Brahma, the divine primal force, let himself be seduced by Maya, the mother of the world, in order to propagate himself. This contact between the divine primal substance and the substance of earth was heaven's Original Sin. The world, life, and mankind are thus only a phantom, a semblance, a dream image ...

(illusion, then, is the mother of the world and everything in it). Man, born of the union between these two principles, has as his end to escape from the world of illusion and reunite himself with the absolute.

Indra, on the other hand, is the chief god of the Hindu pantheon of lesser deities (i.e., under the three principal gods: Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu), the god of heaven and ruler over thunder, lightning, and storm. It is as god of heaven that he appears in *Ett drömspel*; Strindberg associates him with God the Father:

DIKTAREN: Hör du! Var det icke Indra som en gång sände sin Son hit ner för att höra mänsklighetens klagomål?

DOTTERN: Jo, det var!¹⁵

If Indra is to be associated with God the Father, Indra's Daughter is associated with God the Son: she stands in the same father-child relationship to the deity, has come to earth on a mission similar to that the Poet ascribes to Christ, and is indeed threatened with the same fate:

DEKANUS FÖR JURIDISKA FAKULTETEN: Alla rätt-tänkande människor ha dömt dig! -- Gå i frid med din vinning! Eljes ...

DOTTERN: Min vinning? -- Eljes? Eljes vad?

DEKANUS FÖR JURIDISKA FAKULTETEN: Eljes blir du stenad.

¹⁵ Samlade verk, XLVI, 114-15 (III, xxi):

THE POET: Listen! Wasn't it Indra who once sent his Son down here to hear the complaints of mankind?

THE DAUGHTER: Yes, it was!

DIKTAREN: Eller korsfäst!¹⁶

The association of Indra's Daughter with Christ is strengthened by the Quarantine Officer:

OFFICERN: (Halvhögt.) Det är ju Indras egen dotter!

KARANTÄNMÄSTAREN: Indras? Jag trodde det var Waruna själv! ...¹⁷

Varuna, in early Hindu mythology, was lord of the universe and, together with Indra, the greatest of the gods. It is here suggested, then, that Indra's Daughter is equal in power and glory with him, just as God the Son is equal in all respects to the Father. In later Hinduism, Varuna becomes a sea god, another possible identification with Christ, who appears in *Ett drömspel* walking upon the water:

DOTTERN: Vem kommer därute?

DIKTAREN: Gångande på Vattnet? Det är bara en som går på vattnet -- Petrus, hälleberget är det inte, ty han sjönk som en sten ...
(Ett vitt sken synes utpå havet.)

BESÄTTNINGEN: Krist Kyrie!

DOTTERN: Är detta Han?

¹⁶ Samlade verk, XLVI, 106 (III, xiii):

DEAN OF LAW: All right-thinking people have condemned you! -- Go in peace, with your profits! Or else ...

THE DAUGHTER: My profits? -- Or else? Or else what?

DEAN OF LAW: Or else you will be stoned.

THE POET: Or crucified!

¹⁷ Ibid., 55 (II, v):

THE OFFICER: (In an undertone.) That's Indra's own daughter, you know!

THE QUARANTINE OFFICER: Indra's? I thought it was Varuna in person! ...

DIKTAREN: Det är han, den Korsfäste ...¹⁸

Indra's Daughter, then, is not Christ; she is rather, like Eleonora in Påsk, or like Dante's Beatrice, a Christ-bearing image, one of Swedenborg's higher beings who comes down to earth to help mankind in its suffering. This addresses another theme of the religious plays (especially Advent and Påsk); such help is necessary because men continue to suffer even after Christ has suffered for them (they have not accepted the vicarious sacrifice):

DOTTERN: Hur blev han mottagen?

DIKTAREN: Hur fyllde han sin mission? för att svara med en fråga.

DOTTERN: För att svara med en annan ...
Blev icke människans ställning förbättrad efter hans besök på jorden? Svara sanningsenligt!

DIKTAREN: Förbättrad? -- Jo, litet! Mycket litet!¹⁹

¹⁸ Samlade verk, XLVI, 97 (III, v):

THE DAUGHTER: Who's that approaching out there?

THE POET: Walking on the Water? There's only one who walks on water -- it isn't Peter, the rock, for he sank like a stone ...
(A white glow is seen out at sea.)

THE CREW: Christ Kyrie [i.e., Christ Lord]!

THE DAUGHTER: Is this He?

THE POET: It's he, the Crucified ...

¹⁹ Ibid., 115 (III, xxi):

THE DAUGHTER: How was he [i.e., Indra's son; Christ) received?

THE POET: How did he succeed in his mission? to answer with a question.

THE DAUGHTER: To answer with another: Wasn't mankind's lot improved after his visit to earth? Answer truthfully!

THE POET: Improved? -- Yes, slightly! Very slightly!

As in the Epilogue to the verse *Mäster Olof* and in *Inferno's* "Coram Populo", there seems to be a deity superior to the Christian Godhead: Brahma is a greater god than Indra and Varuna. But Brahma is an abstraction (the Absolute), as Maya (Illusion) is; he seems to correspond to the Platonic ideals; the idea of the divine or of perfection; the divine spirit which the Godhead incarnates.

The Prologue (1906) is played against a backdrop of stars: "Stjärnbilderna Lejonet, Jungfrun och Vågen synas, och mellan dem står Planeten Jupiter med starkt sken."²⁰ Few if any in the audience would be able to identify these constellations or recognize Jupiter, yet Strindberg has a reason for specifying them. Leo represents the feelings and emotions, Jupiter judgement and the will; Virgo represents duality and Libra equilibrium. The message, then, is that equilibrium is to be established out of the duality of human existence (the need to suffer vs. the urge to love) by balancing the feelings and emotions against judgement and the will: intellect and spirit must be in harmony.

In much of the play, flowers are used mainly as an indication of the passing of time (hence, also as a symbol of the transitoriness of existence):

²⁰ *Samlade verk*, XLVI, 161: "The constellations of Leo, Virgo, and Libra are seen; among them, the planet Jupiter shines brightly."

(Det blir kolmörkt på scenen. Därunder förändras sceneriet: så att linden sedan står avlövad, Den blå stormhatten är snart vissnad; och när det blir dager igen synes det gröna i gångens perspektiv höstbrunt.)²¹

The withering bouquet which the Officer carries during his prolonged courting of the elusive Victoria can be viewed in the same way, but is also symbolic of his own physical deterioration as the years pass in his fruitless pursuit of an ideal. Further, this bouquet symbolizes the progress of love from pure joy to total suffering: "OFFICERN (kommer ut.... Rosenbuketten avfallen så att bara kvistarne synas.):"²²

The monkshood is probably the blue flower of mythology, symbolic of the soul or of the mystical, romantic, and lyrical aspects of life. This one grows among the greenery at the end of the alley where the Officer woos his Victoria, it withers as his hopes wither, and finally, at the very end of the play, when Indra's Daughter enters the flaming castle to rejoin her

²¹ Samlade verk, XLVI, 27 (I, xviii):

(The stage becomes pitch-black. During the blackout, the scenery is altered: the linden tree loses its leaves; the blue monkshood soon withers; and, when the lights come back up, the greenery at the end of the path has turned an autumnal brown.)

²² Idem.: "THE OFFICER (comes out.... The bouquet of roses is so thin and worn that only the twigs remain.*):"

* I.e., it has become a bouquet of thorns.

heavenly father, the ground before the castle is covered with these same flowers.

Ett drömspel again asks a question first posed in Dödsdansen II: how it is possible that beautiful flowers can rise from filth. Here the answer is related to the delicate flower symbolism of Påsk:

DOTTERN: Säg far, varför växer blommorna upp ur smuts?

GLASMÄSTAREN (fromt): Därför att de icke trivas i smutsen, skynda de så fort de kunna upp i ljuset, för att blomma och dö!²³

Successful Swedish doctoral candidates are crowned with a laurel wreath; when the Lawyer is refused this reward, Indra's Daughter presents him with a wreath she feels is more appropriate: "Barn! -- Kom skall du få en krans av mig -- -- -- en som klär dig bättre! (Lägger en törnekrona på hans huvud.)"²⁴ In the shifting symbolism of the dream, the Lawyer becomes a Christ-figure, and victory (the laurel), like love (the Officer's bouquet), is changed to suffering (thorns).

As a Christ-figure, however, the Lawyer stands in the same relation to Indra's Daughter as Elis does to

²³ Samlade verk, XLVI, 10 (I, i):

THE DAUGHTER: Tell me, father, why do the flowers rise up from dirt?

THE GLAZIER (reverently): Because they aren't happy in the dirt, they push up into the light as fast as they can, in order to bloom and die!

²⁴ Ibid., 40 (I, xxix): "Come, child! -- I'll give you a wreath -- -- -- one that suits you better! (She places a crown of thorns on his head.)"

Eleonora in Påsk. Earlier, the sins of humanity are caught up in the shawl Indra's Daughter inherits from the theatre Concièrge, a sort of female father-confessor, who collects the sins which Indra's Daughter then willingly bears. The Lawyer, however, will not allow her to assume his sufferings, and so, like Elis, and like the Stranger in Till Damaskus, he must bear them himself (becoming, in this respect, his own Christ):

ADVOKATEN (...): Säg min syster, får jag denna schalen -- -- -- jag skall upphänga den härinne tills jag får eld i kakelugnen; då skall jag bränna den med alla dess sorger och eländen -- -- --

DOTTERN: Inte än, min broder, jag vill ha den riktigt full först, och jag önskar framför allt få uppsamla dina smärtor, dina mottagna förtroenden om brott, laster, orätt fånget, baktal, smädelser ...

ADVOKATEN: Lilla vän, då räckte icke din schal!²⁵

The Lawyer here misses his chance for redemption, for Indra's Daughter, in symbolism derived from the Apocalypse (7:13-15), soon obtains remission of all the sins she literally has taken upon her shoulders: "DOTTERN

²⁵ Samlade verk, XLVI, 34 (I, xxvi):

THE LAWYER: Listen, sister, let me take this shawl -- -- -- I'll hang it up in here until I have a fire in the stove, and then I'll burn it, with all its sorrows and miseries -- -- --

THE DAUGHTER: Not yet, brother; I want it to be really full first, and above all I want to collect in it your pains, the confidences you have received of crimes, vices, illegal expropriation, slander, defamation of character ...

THE LAWYER: Little friend, your shawl wouldn't be big enough for that!

(in, med en vit slöja över huvud och axlar): Ser du, nu har jag tvättat schalen -- -- --"26

Colour symbolism is important in the play, particularly the black and white symbolism which contrasts sinfulness to innocence, as in the passage just cited. In the setting which opens the play proper (i.e., after the Prologue), all of life's colours are displayed:

Fonden föreställer en skog av jättestora
Stockrosor i blom; vita, skära, purpurroda,
svavelgula, violetta över vilkas toppar synes
det förgyllda taket av ett slott....27

Hollyhocks represent fecundity (F.W.L.), and here they appear in the white of purity or innocence, the deep red of love and suffering, the pink which unites the two, the yellow of intuition, and the violet of penance, all surmounted by the gold of perfection.

Colour is also used symbolically in the appearance of the characters. The Officer's hair turns grey during his long wait for Victoria, indicating not only the passing of time, but the sapping of vitality which the wait entails. The Lawyer appears as one who is dead: "[Advokatens] utseende vittnar om oerhörda lidanden;

26 Samlade verk, XLVI, 38 (I, xxix): "THE DAUGHTER (in, with a white veil over her head and shoulders): Look, I've washed the shawl now -- -- --"

27 Ibid., 9 (I, i):

The background presents a forest of gigantic hollyhocks in flower: white, pink, crimson, sulphur-yellow, violet; over their tops can be seen the gilded roof of a castle....

det är kalkvitt med fåror, och skuggorna äro likvioletta...."²⁸ Further testimony to his state is found in his hands, which are completely black and, like Lady Macbeth's, can never be cleansed. Similarly, the Quarantine Officer at Skamsund (literally, Shame Sound) goes about with a black face, ostensibly in preparation for a masquerade ball, but actually in token of his sinfulness (associating him with Satan, the Prince of Darkness). He is not in fact so sinful as he looks, but finds the exaggeration useful:

OFFICERN: Vad har du haft för dig, då?

KARANTÄNMÄSTAREN: Talar jag om'et, så säges det att jag skryter, förtiger jag, kallas jag hycklare!

OFFICERN: Det är därför du svärtat dig i ansiktet?

KARANTÄNMÄSTAREN: Ja! Lite svartare än jag är!²⁹

Skamsund itself is presented in the colours of Strindberg's hell:

(... man ser till höger i förgrunden brända

²⁸ Samlade verk, XLVI, 34 (I, xxvi): "[The Lawyer's] face bears witness to immense suffering: it is chalk-white and furrowed, and the shadows are a corpse-like purple...."

²⁹ Ibid., 57-58 (II, v):

THE OFFICER: What happened to you, then?

THE QUARANTINE OFFICER: If I speak of it, they say I'm boasting; if I hold my tongue, I'm called a hypocrite!

THE OFFICER: And that's why you've blackened your face?

THE QUARANTINE OFFICER: Yes! A little blacker than I am!

berg med röd ljung och svarta-vita stubbar
 efter skogseld; röda svinstior och uthus.
)³⁰

The objects themselves confirm the colour symbolism: the charred mountain-side, burnt-out stumps, and the presence of pigs (closely associated with Satan because of the cloven hoof) all suggest Hell. In the language of flowers, heather bears the message "Suffer and hope!" (Nielsen, 5/10), which indicates that the Hell is Swedenborgian.

Fagervik (literally, Fair Bay), on the other hand, is symbolically presented as a place of peace: there the dominant colours are the yellow of the wooden building and the white of the boats in the harbour. Both places are discussed at greater length in the chapter on *Fagervik och Skamsund*; what is important about them in *Ett drömspel* is that they represent the earthly inferno and the earthly paradise. Both prove unsatisfactory: mere illusion; neither true suffering nor true bliss are possible on earth, but belong instead to the realm of the spirit.

The use of music is particularly effective in this play. After Indra's Daughter has placed the crown of thorns on the Lawyer, she sits down to play an organ,

³⁰ *Samlade verk*, XLVI, 54 (II, v):

(... to the right in the foreground are seen burnt mountains, with red heather and the black-and-white stumps left by a forest fire; red pig sties and out-buildings.)

with unexpected results: "(Hon sätter sig vid orgeln; och spelar ett 'Kyrie'; men i stället för orgeltoner höras mänskoröster.)"³¹ The variation on the Kyrie ends with a paraphrase of the opening words of the *De profundis* (Psalm 130: Vulgate 129), a fitting summation of the play's view of earth-bound man's condition: "Ur djupen ropa vi...." ("Out of the depths we cry...."). The depths are earth itself: "Det är synd om människorna" ("Mankind is to be pitied"), as Indra's Daughter laments over and over again in the play. The appearance of Christ on the water is also accompanied by a sung Kyrie, and unspecified music is heard as Indra's Daughter enters the castle at the end of the play.

Ett drömspel contains elements from many of Strindberg's previous works. Some of these repeated themes and fragments have already been mentioned. To name but a few more, the death wish expressed by the character identified only as Han (He) at the height of his happiness mirrors that expressed by the heroes of *Han och Hon*, *Till Damaskus I*, and *Brott och brott* at similar moments; the brief attempt to find happiness in marriage by Agnes and the Lawyer could occur in any of Strindberg's marriage plays, and parallels *Till Damaskus III*; the Officer's destruction of *The Swiss Family*

³¹ *Samlade verk*, XLVI, 40 (I, xxix): "She sits down at the organ and plays a Kyrie; but instead of organ sounds, human voices are heard.)"

Robinson is also attributed to the Stranger in Till Damaskus III; the Concièrge's needlework links her to the Lady of the Till Damaskus trilogy; the Dödsdansen plays are also set in a quarantine station; and the use of sulphur there links the play to Strindberg's alchemical studies. It is more than just a composite of what has gone before, however, for it suggests a solution to the problems raised by earlier works. That solution is that there really is no problem: earthly life is a dream, an illusion, of no significance whatsoever, except insofar as it points the way to the life of the spirit, which is reality.

In November 1901, as Strindberg was finishing *Ett drömspel*, he reviewed his sources of information on Hinduism. An entry in his diary (*Ockulta dagboken*) throws light on Indra's Daughter's explanation of the mystery of the universe, and on the meaning of the play as a whole:

18 november.

Läser om Indiska Religionens läror.

Hela världen blott ett sken (= Bosch eller relativ intighet.) Den gudomliga Urkraften (Mahan-Atma, Tad, Aum, Brama) lät förföra sig av Maya eller Alstringsdriften.

Häri genom försyndade det Gudomliga Urämet sig emot sig själv. (Kärleken är synd; därför äro kärlekskval det största helvete som finns). Världen är sålunda till endast genom en synd om den ens är till -- ty den är endast en drömbild, (Därför mitt Drömspel en bild av livet), ett fantom vars tillintetgörande är Askesens uppgift. Men denna uppgift råkar i strid med kärleksdriften, och slutsumman är ett oupphörligt vacklande mellan vällusttummel och botgörarkval.

Detta synes vara världsgåtans lösning!

....
Nu gav mig den "Indiska Religionen" förklaringen på mitt Drömspel och betydelsen av Indras Dotter. Dörrens Hemlighet = Intet.³²

Some further insights into Ett drömspel are contained in the chapter dealing with the collection *Efterslätter (Second Harvest)*.

³² Ockulta dagboken, 59-60:

November 18.

Rereading the teachings of Indian religion.

The whole world only a semblance (= bosh, or relative emptiness). The divine Primal Force (Atman, Tad, Om, Brahma) allowed itself to be seduced by Maya, or the Procreative Urge.

Thereby the Divine Primal Force sinned against itself (love is sin; that is why the anguish of love is the greatest hell there is). The world exists, then, only through sin, if it exists at all -- for it is only a dream-image (and so my Dream Play is a representation of life), a phantom, the annihilation of which is the task of Asceticism. But this task enters into conflict with the love instinct, and the end result is an unceasing vacillation between the tumult of pleasure and the anguish of penance.

This seems to be the solution to the mystery of the universe!

....
Indian Religion now gave me an explanation of my Dream Play, and the meaning of Indra's Daughter. The Secret of the Door = Nothing.

Chapter 68

Fagervik och Skamsund

*Fagervik och Skamsund*¹ (*Fagervik and Skamsund*, 1902) is a collection of related short stories with the same theme and making use of the same symbols. One of them, "Karantänmästarns andra berättelse"² ("The Quarantine Officer's Second Tale") is in part identical with *Klostret* (1902), but is less admittedly autobiographical (the hero of *Klostret* is engaged in alchemical experiments, for example, whereas in *Fagervik och Skamsund* it is historical research which occupies him). *Klostret* was not published until 1919, and not in its complete form until 1966, so the version of the story in *Fagervik och Skamsund* was the only one known during Strindberg's lifetime. It was written earlier (1898) than the other stories, but shares their principal theme: constant vacillation between the poles of human existence: pleasure and suffering, the spiritual and the physical, Gerizim and Ebal, *Fagervik* (literally, Fair Bay) and *Skamsund* (Shame Sound).

Although *Fagervik* and *Skamsund* are based on real places (the islands of Furusund and Skarmsund in the Stockholm archipelago) their importance lies elsewhere:

¹ *Skrifter*, V, 5-136.

² *Ibid.*, 67-130.

as symbols of forces active in the lives of human beings. The introductory section of the book presents detailed descriptions of both places, which appear as they did in *Ett drömspel*, but with more richness of detail than is possible within the confines of stage directions. The principal features remain the same, however: Skamsund is an ugly island with red wooden cabins, mountains covered with the blackened stumps and white ashes left by a forest fire, and red pig sties, the whole dominated by the black quarantine station; Fagervik is covered with trees and multi-coloured houses, and its main features are a music pavilion, a bowling green, a summer theatre, and a harbour full of boats with white sails. Two features of Skamsund not pointed out in *Ett drömspel* are the chapel house (belonging to the pietists): "... grått, rätlinjigt, strävt...;"³ and the house of the master pilot, the one spot of cheer on an otherwise gloomy island:

I en dalsänka, där litet matjord samlat sig, vilar på stenfot ett ljusgrönt större hus, med vita fönsterkarmar och blommiga gardiner; det är det ende leende, som denna ö tillåter sig. Där bor den gode lotsåldermannen, som skaffar vägvisare och sköter en liten ledfyr.⁴

³ *Skrifter*, V, 7: "... grey, rectilinear, stern...."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7:

In a depression where a little topsoil has collected, a larger, light green house rests on a stone foundation. It has white window-frames and flowered curtains, and is the only smile the island shows.

The first story, "En barnsaga"⁵ ("A Children's Story"), deals with Torkel, whose father, Öman (literally, island man) is a pilot who loses his job and eventually his possessions to drink and is last seen drifting out to sea. Torkel is not like his father, having been brought up to be good and honest in all he does. He knows many pleasant places on Skamsund, but from the first moment he sets eyes on Fagervik he can think of nothing but to go there to live. His first sight of Fagervik is from atop a mountain on Skamsund, and even as he is filled with wonder and longing, he is warned that Fagervik is not what it seems, nor Skamsund either, for that matter. The warning is clothed in the symbolism of Ebal and Gerizim:

-- Nå min gosse, hördes en röst bakifrån en tall; vad ser du på det landet Ebal? Det lockar dig som synden ... Vet du vad Ebal är? Har du inte läst skriften om Ebal och Garizim? Förbannelsens berg och välsignelsens? ... Här står du och jag på Garizim, det är välsignelsens berg, och däröver som du tror är Canans land, där ligger förbannelsens berg, ty där lever i sus och dus, som om ingen morgondag funnes. Ja, så är det!⁶

There lives the good master pilot, who arranges for guides and tends a little beacon.

⁵ Skrifter, V, 11-37.

⁶ Ibid., 17:

"Well lad," said a voice from behind a fir tree, "what do you see in the land of Ebal? It tempts you like sin ... Do you know what Ebal is? Haven't you read about Ebal and Gerizim in Scripture? The mountain of curses and that of blessings? ... You and I stand here on Gerizim the mountain of blessings

After his father has disappeared and he has spent a miserable period working at the quarantine station, Torkel makes his way to Fagervik, where his honesty soon gets him a job working in a large inn. At first all goes well, but he has not forgotten the warning from the mountain on Skamsund, even though he has not yet experienced anything to confirm it:

... när han vaknade ... och såg solen skina på de stora lindarne utanför och hörde fåglarne kvittra och bien sjunga, då tänkte han på vaktmästar Vickbergs ord, att här på sidan låg det berget Ebal, förbannelsens berg, där synden bodde och de ogudaktiga; och då visste han icke vad han skulle tro.⁷

The warning proves prophetic soon enough: Torkel is accused of a wrong of which he is completely innocent (placing him firmly in the company of Strindberg heroes), and he quickly becomes aware that Fagervik is indeed an evil place, fair on the outside, but rotten underneath:

—
and yonder, which you believe to be the Land of Canaan, is the mountain of curses, for there life is just a whirl of pleasures, as if there were no tomorrow. Yes, that's how it is!"

⁷ Skrifter, V, 30:

... when he awoke ... and saw the sun shining on the linden trees outside and heard the birds twittering and the bees humming, he thought of Commissionaire Vickberg's words, that on this side lay Mount Ebal, the mountain of curses, where sin and the ungodly dwelt, and he did not know what to think.

Och nu mörknade det omkring honom, allt-
ing blev strävt och fult; allt ont han sett
och hört men hållit ifrån sig, trängde sig nu
på honom. Och han såg att människorna här på
stranden visst icke voro bättre än de därö-
ver; de buro endast finare kläder som doldes
smutsigt inunder, och de voro egentligen här
för att tvätta sig. Han erinrade Vickbergs
ord däruppe på berget och här var Ebal, där
synden bodde. Det stämde, ty här arbetade
ingen av herrskaperna, utan de levde i sus
och dus som förlorade sonen....⁸

Through his own efforts and the kindness of a
naval officer for whom he performs a service, Torkel
gets a chance to leave Fagervik behind as well, and go
to sea. He is last seen sailing off in the direction of
Stockholm, presumably to live happily ever after.

Skipping over the quarantine officer's two tales
for the moment, we come to the story "De yttersta och
de främsta"⁹ ("The Outermost and the Foremost"). The
story concerns an artist who lives on Skamsund, but
because of his fame and prestige is accepted into the
best circles on Fagervik. One evening he is attending a

⁸ Skrifter, V, 31-32:

And now it grew dark around him, every-
thing became coarse and ugly, and all the
evil he had seen and heard but kept at a dis-
tance now closed in on him. And he saw that
people on this shore were certainly no better
than those on the other; they only wore finer
clothes, but were dirty underneath, and were
really here to cleanse themselves! He remem-
bered Vickberg's words up there on the moun-
tain, that this was Ebal, the abode of sin.
It tallied, for none of the company here
worked, but lived a life of wild pleasure,
like the prodigal son....

⁹ Ibid., 131-33.

ball there and discovers three servant girls looking on with stars in their eyes. Having come from the servant class himself, he can remember how they feel, and invites one of them to dance with him. This act of kindness is a social faux-pas: the girl is humiliated and his conduct is severely criticized. He returns to Skamsund, never to visit Fagervik again, and his closing reflections repeat the symbolism of "En barnsaga", throwing some light on Torkel's going to sea at the end of that story:

Men artisten stannade på Skamsund och satte aldrig fot mer i Fagervik.

Fagert är det nog, menade han, men det är bara på ytan! Och jag undrar var man har mest att skämmas för! Ebal är icke Garizim, men det är frågan, var välsignelseberget ligger, om det kanske icke ligger mitt i sundet!¹⁰

In the last story, "De kvarlätne"¹¹ ("Those Who Remain Behind"), an older resident of Skamsund tells of how he tried to win fame and success in Stockholm but, finding the experience not exactly as he had imagined it would be, returned to Skamsund: without fame, with-

¹⁰ Skrifter, V, 133:

But the artist stayed on Skamsund and never again set foot on Fagervik.

"It's fair indeed," he thought, "but that's only on the surface! And I wonder which place has most to be ashamed of! Ebal isn't Gerizim, but the question is, where is the mountain of blessings located if not, perhaps, in the middle of the sound!"

¹¹ Ibid., 134-36.

out riches, without servants, and without friends, but also without illusions and the constant deception and disappointment he found in the city. The old friend to whom he tells his story is much cheered by it, for he never had the courage to leave Skamsund, much as he would have liked to do so, and is heartened to hear that those who remain behind are perhaps better off than those who leave:

-- Jag avundas dig, som aldrig inlåtit dig på ärans kapplöpningsbana! Ajö!

-- Ajö! Tack för det sista ordet, ty det frälste mig! Jag var nämligen också en äre-girig, men fruktade att inlåta mig! Därför stannade jag i Ebal!¹²

This, the last sentence in Fagervik och Skamsund, comes as a surprise: Ebal is here identified with Skamsund, whereas in the other stories it is Fagervik. Neither place, in fact, is at all as one imagined it: the earthly paradise of Fagervik is just an illusion, and the dismal, oppressive, sober nature of Skamsund, the earthly inferno, is also an illusion. If its blessings seem rather niggardly and unsatisfactory, that is all we can expect on earth, which is, after all, a vale of

¹² Skrifter, V, 136:

"I envy you, who never got caught up in the rat race! Farewell!"

"Farewell! Thank you for saying that, for it has comforted me! For indeed I too was ambitious, but I was afraid to launch out! And so I remained in Ebal!"

sorrow. Gerizim, where true blessings are found, lies in the sea, symbol of the afterlife.

The two stories called "Karantänmästarns berättelser" ("The Quarantine Officer's Tales"), which form the middle portion and indeed the bulk of the book, do not make explicit use of the Fagervik-Skamsund, Ebal-Gerizim symbolism. Framed as they are by the other three stories in the book, however, they share implicitly in this symbolism, which both illuminates them and is illustrated by them.

The stories are told on Skamsund and map out the shoals and havens of married life: mostly, as one would expect of Strindberg, the shoals. Briefly, they concern two men (or perhaps two marriages of the same man) who enter into marriage (Fagervik) and find that, far from being as they had imagined it, it is a bitter, painful, humiliating, and unbearable disappointment. This is true for both husband and wife, as is demonstrated by a passage from the first tale which is strongly reminiscent of the comment in Giftas that a man marries to acquire a home, a woman to escape from one:

Han hade uppnått förverkligandet av sin ungdomsdröm om en maka och ett hem, och under åtta dagar tycktes den unga frun även fått sin dröm sannad. Men på den nionde dagen ville hon ut.¹³

¹³ Skrifter, V, 53:

His youthful dream of a wife and a home had been realized, and for eight days his young spouse also seemed to have had her dream fulfilled. But on the ninth day she

The closest the first tale comes to explicit use of the Fagervik-Skamsund symbolism is a passage in which the husband gains temporary release from the bitterness which has been building up inside him. Significantly, the sea plays a large rôle in this release:

Han befann sig nere vid hamnen och fick syn på badhuset ... just vad han längtade efter. Och snart hade han kastat sig på huvet i havet; sam ut, långt ut mot mörkret. Hans av myggstick och bränn-nässlor pinade själ fick svalka, och han kände hur han lämnade ett kölvatten av smuts efter sig.

När han var klädd, kände han endast en oändlig sorg; sorgen över det förlorade paradiset. Och därmed var all bitterhet borta.¹⁴

Compare this to a passage from the second tale, in which a desire to plunge headlong into the sea is frustrated:

Nu skulle havets närhet ha tyckts kunna släcka branden, men även det var nu utstuderat i stil med det andra. Han brukade nämligen alltifrån ungdomen vid badning kasta sig med huvudet förut, emedan han ej kunde krypa i vattnet. Och även här spelade en viss ohygglig, återkommande dröm sitt elaka spel.

wanted to go out.

¹⁴ Skrifter, V, 52-53:

He found himself down by the harbour, and caught sight of the bath-house: just what he yearned for. And before long he had thrown himself headlong into the sea and swam out, far out towards the darkness. His soul, tormented with mosquito bites and nettle stings, was refreshed, and he felt he was leaving a wake of dirt behind him.

When he had dressed, he was aware only of a bottomless sorrow: sorrow over the lost paradise. And with that feeling, all bitterness vanished.

Han plägade nämligen drömma att han var upphettad och måste i sjön; sjön var det, men så grund att han ej kunde hoppa i och när han kröp ut var det ännu så grunt att han icke kunde doppa huvet.¹⁵

This major strain of symbolism -- Fagervik as the pleasures of life, Skamsund as its sorrows, and the sea as the only true source of blessings -- is reinforced by other symbols in the book. Skamsund, for instance, is red, white, and black; Fagervik rose, gold, and green. The flowers on Fagervik are many-coloured, lush, and the vegetation green; Skamsund's flowers are stained red and black from the foul emissions of the quarantine station. The trees on Skamsund, after the forest fire, are the hardy, rigidly perpendicular fir and spruce, while Fagervik is covered with elms, fruit trees, aged oaks, and birches. Most important, perhaps, Skamsund is covered with heather ("Suffer and hope!"), Fagervik with roses:

¹⁵ *Skrifter*, V, 97:

One would have thought that the nearby sea would be able to extinguish this burning, but even that was cunningly arranged along the same lines as everything else. It had, you see, been his custom from youth to dive in headfirst when swimming, since he could not enter the water slowly. And now a certain dreadful recurrent dream exercised its evil influence. He often dreamt, in fact, that he was overheated and had to go swimming; the sea was there, but was so shallow that he could not dive in, and when he waded out it was still so shallow that he could not duck his head under.

Det var rosornas tid och ur buskarne välldde blommorna fram, öste sig ut över varandra som vatten över en överfylld bergbäck.¹⁶

By far the most powerful symbol in the book is that of the two trees known as the siblings, which cause Torkel to think that Fagervik, like Sodom and Gomorrah, might be destroyed for its sins. The two trees, one hardwood and one soft, growing, as it were, in the same body, can be compared to self-discipline and the desire for pleasure or, in terms of *Ett drömspel*, the need to suffer and the desire for love. Even if the will appears to have the upper hand, the constant friction between the two can lead to destruction:

Där stodo två träd invid varandra; en gammal ek och en gammal asp. Aspen hade i sin ungdom kommit för nära den starka eken, och där hade nog kämpats i årtionden om platsen. Slutligen hade eken rätt, men den mjukare aspen hade skjutit upp, alldeles tätt utmed sin farliga granne, så tätt att han genom gnidningen karvat ut en skåra, där han dolt sin stam. I dag blåste det och de båda medtävlarna skrubgade sig mot varandra, så att det gnisslade och knakade. Torkel kände väl de två syskonen som de kallades och han hade hört deras hårdhänta smekningar på långt håll. När han nalkats de, flög det honom i tankarne ett minne ur en bok om vildar, huru

¹⁶ *Skrifter*, V, 28:

Roses were in season, and the flowers spilled from the bushes, streaming out over each other like water from a glutton mountain stream.

dessas plåga göra eld genom att gnida ett hårt trästycke mot ett mjukt.¹⁷

This is the danger of Fagervik: that the constant struggle between man's need to suffer and his desire for pleasure will bring about destruction, driving the inhabitants out to sea and, incidentally, bringing comfort to the inhabitants of Skamsund:

Han satte sig på en stubbe och såg på. Först med en längtan att få se eld och rök slå ut, ty Fagervik kunde gärna brinna, då det hela blott var satans bländverk; och blev det lika vitbränt som Skamsund, så kunde man bo däröver och ha det drägligt, sen intet förlovat land låg här och lockade och oroade ...¹⁸

¹⁷ Skrifter, V, 33:

There stood two trees up against each other: an aged oak and an aged aspen. In its youth, the aspen had come too close to the mighty oak, and they must have struggled for possession of the place for decades. Finally the oak prevailed, but the softer aspen had grown up tight against its imposing neighbour: so tight that through friction it had carved out a hollow, in which it hid its trunk. It was windy today, and the two rivals grated against each other, creaking and knocking. Torkel was quite familiar with the two siblings, as they were called, and had heard their heavy-handed caresses from a distance. When he drew near them, he suddenly remembered reading in a book about savages that they make fire by rubbing a piece of hard wood against a piece of soft.

¹⁸ Ibid., 34:

He sat down on a stump and watched. At first, he longed to see fire and smoke break out, for he would gladly watch Fagervik burn, since it was nothing but an illusion created by Satan; and if it were burnt white like Skamsund, one could find life over there tolerable, for then there would be no promised land over here to entice and unsettle one ...

Plant symbolism in the manner of Påsk is used in "Karantänmästarns första berättelse"¹⁹ ("The Quarantine Officer's First Tale"), in which the wife is compared to a delicate flower which the husband is incapable of caring for, and is indeed slowly killing:

Han hade skövlat hennes ungdom, han hade stängt in henne, han hade ryckt upp ungdomsglädjen med rötterna. Han ägde icke ljuset som denna späda blomma fordrade, och hon tvinade under hans hand.²⁰

Animals are used in much the same way as plants: Skamsund's animal life consists of swine, whose cries at feeding time make the mountain seem in the agonies of childbirth. The birds there are scavengers: morgansers, scoters, and gulls; while those on Fagervik are both more colourful and more melodious: bullfinches and doves. Most significant, there are no snakes on Fagervik, whereas Skamsund is overrun with them.

In addition, there are two references to the scapegoat: one in "En barnsaga", and one in the quarantine officer's first tale, where the unhappy couple make fate their scapegoat. In "En barnsaga", Öman is the scapegoat for all of Skamsund. In this function, he

¹⁹ Skrifter, V, 46-67.

²⁰ Ibid., 55:

He had ruined her youth, he had shut her in, he had torn up her youthful joy by the roots. He did not possess the light this delicate flower required, and she languished under his hand.

is compared to the biblical Jonah: just as Jonah was deemed the cause of the storm at sea, Öman is blamed for every misfortune that occurs on the island. His disappearance at sea is, then, a kind of ritual cleansing of the whole community.

Torkel's going to sea is quite different: he is escaping the eternal conflict between the need to suffer and the desire for pleasure, and is going towards true happiness. The naval officer, who helps him do so, is none other than Christ, identified through his habit of writing in the sand as he talks:

... han tog Torkel i armen och förde honom in i trädgården. Där satte han sig på en bänk och började tala, under det han ritade i sanden.²¹

Despite the experience of the narrator in "De kvarlätne", then, it is possible to escape the constant struggle symbolized by Fagervik and Skamsund. In the meantime, Skamsund (asceticism) is a better preparation for deliverance than Fagervik (the endless search for pleasure). The struggle between asceticism and hedonism is endless on earth but, even though one seems to be making no progress whatsoever, the effort to escape from that struggle is itself worthwhile and holy, and

²¹ Skrifter, V, 35:

... he took Torkel by the arm and led him into the garden. There he sat down on a bench and began to speak, while drawing in the sand.

the austere pietists may be on the right track after all. If there is such a thing as a universal truth in all religions, pietism and Buddhism seem to confirm each other:

Läseriet är ... ett slags europeisk Buddhism. De betrakta båda världen som en oren materia i vilken själen pinas. Därför söka de motverka materien, och det har de inte orätt i. Att de inte lyckas, är ju klart, men själva kampen är aktningsvärd. Att de förefalla som hycklare ligger däri att de aldrig nå upp till sina syften eller läror, så att levernet alltid blir på efterkälken efter läran.²²

As in *Ett drömspel*, Indian religion is used to interpret and support Christianity, to which Strindberg was now firmly committed; if his own creed is rather eclectic, he had been raised by his mother as a pietist, and here indicates his respect for their approach to spirituality. The grey chapel on Skamsund is not the white monastery of Till Damaskus III, but it is at least an intermediate step between it and the black quarantine station, where patients are purged of "unclean matter" with the aid of sulphur.

²² Skrifter, V, 41 ("Karantänmästarns berättelser"):

Pietism is ... a kind of European Buddhism. Both regard the world as unclean matter, in which the soul is tormented. And so they try to overcome the material, and they are not wrong in doing so. That they do not succeed is obvious, of course, but the struggle itself deserves respect. That they appear to be hypocrites lies in the fact that they never measure up to their goals or doctrines, so practice is always outstripped by creed.

The point is that while earthly suffering (Skamsund) is just as illusory as earthly joy (Fagervik) -- a point already made in *Ett drömspel* -- the former at least opens one to the possibility of and hope in something better. Fagervik, on the other hand, can only produce true happiness through disillusionment: one must, like Torkel, see beyond its inviting surface to the rotten core before one even desires to seek fulfillment elsewhere. The danger of Skamsund is despair; that of Fagervik is total annihilation. The former danger, like the latter, can be avoided through a realization that all is illusion:

Vad som ... gjorde att han aldrig fullt kunde nedtryckas av en sorg, var det, att han hyste en dunkel åsikt att livet saknade full realitet, var ett drömstadium....²³

The meaning of Fagervik och Skamsund, then, is essentially the same as that of *Ett drömspel*. Indeed, it is in the nature of an appendix to the play, picking up a group of its symbols and, in the greater scope of prose fiction, developing them, illustrating how the ideas presented in the play are realized in human lives, particularly, with the quarantine officer's tales, within the institution of marriage. As such, it

²³ *Skrifter*, V, 110 ("Karantänmästarns andra berättelse"):

What prevented him ... from getting completely dejected by a sorrow was that he had a vague suspicion that life lacked full reality, that it was a phase in a dream....

offers a means whereby the marriage plays (particularly the post-Inferno ones, such as *Dödsdansen*) can be integrated into the religious awareness which dominated Strindberg's outlook after *Inferno*: marriage was Strindberg's own personal Fagervik. And his Skamsund.

Chapter 69

Klostret

Klostret¹ (*The Cloister*, 1902) did not appear during Strindberg's lifetime. Originally planned as a two-part work, of which the present text -- which is identical, in parts, with "Karantänmästarns andra berättelse" in *Fagervik och Skamsund* -- would have formed the first part, portions of the suppressed manuscript were published in the collection *Samlade otryckta skrifter* (*Collected Unpublished Works*, 1919), but the entire work was not published until 1966.

Klostret records Strindberg's courtship of and the early days of his marriage to his second wife, Frida Uhl. In the chronological order of events covered in his autobiographical works, it fits between *Le plaidoyer d'un fou* and *Inferno*.

Like all the works dealing with marriage, Klostret is rich in animal symbolism. A particularly apt symbol, so perfectly does it capture the atmosphere of the marriage dramas, is that of animals in a cage: "Han skulle hädnefter vara inspärrad med sin plågoande i samma bur...."² The woman who becomes his wife is early asso-

¹ The text cited is the Bjurström edition (Stockholm, 1966).

² Klostret, 77 (III): "He would henceforth be locked up with his tormenting spirit in the same cage...."

ciated with the Beauty and the Beast story, but it would seem that she plays (or is capable of playing) both rôles:

När han tänkte tillbaka på det ögonblick då ur pälsens djurskinn den ungdomliga skönheten krupit fram, fann han däri något hemskt, olycksbådande.³

And yet, when he is unfaithful to her (although they are not yet married), she is a lamb which has been thrown to the wolves: "Nu hade han kastat sitt lamm för varginnan, och denna slet sönder bytet, under det han såg på."⁴ In a scene of temporary reconciliation shortly after their marriage, she is the epitome of contented domesticity: "... iklädd en sidenkjol låg hon hoprullad som en angorakatt...."⁵ A particularly effective use of animal symbolism occurs during a passage discussing the author's profession (particularly his habit of writing "from life"): the wife becomes a laboratory animal upon whom he practices vivisection in order to feed his art:

-- Vilken sysselsättning: att sitta och slå sina medmänniskor och sedan bjuda ut

³ Klostret, 42 (II):

When he thought back on the moment when the youthful beauty had crept forth from the animal skin of the fur coat, he found it rather horrifying, boding misfortune.

⁴ Ibid., 53 (II): "Now he had thrown his lamb to the she-wolf, and she tore the victim apart while he looked on."

⁵ Ibid., 73 (III): "... wearing a silk skirt, she lay rolled up like an angora cat...."

skinnen med anspråk på att de skola köpa dem. Jägarn lik som i sin hungersnöd hugger svansen av hunden, äter själv köttet, och ger hunden ben, sina ben. Gå och spionera ut människors hemligheter, förråda sin bästa vanskötsel, begagna sin hustru som vivisektionsskanin, fara fram som en kroat, hugga ner, skända och bränna och sälja. Fy fan!⁶

There is more than a hint here of one of the sources of friction in the marriage, but that is only one side of the story; the other is that the wife is strong-minded and domineering, slowly sapping his creative vitality, a vampire in other words: "Han kände vampyren som slagit fast på hans själ och övervakade till och med hans tankar."⁷ The vampire symbol is supported by its botanical equivalent, the parasitic plant: "... han kände huru ett nätverk av fina sugrötter klängde sig ut från hennes väsen och flätade sig in i hans...."⁸

⁶ Klostret, 130 (V):

"What an occupation: to sit and flay your fellow humans and then to auction off the skins, expecting them to buy them. Like the hunter who, in his hunger, chops off his dog's tail, eats the flesh himself, and gives the dog the bones, its own bones. To go and spy out men's secrets, to expose your best friend's birthmark, to use your wife as a rabbit for vivisection, to carry on like a Croat, to chop down, desecrate, burn, and sell. For shame!"

⁷ Ibid., 79 (III): "He was aware of the vampire who had taken possession of his soul and watched over even his thoughts."

⁸ Ibid., 45 (II): "... he felt how a network of fine fibrous roots crept out of her being and wove themselves into his...."

A symbol which figures in Strindberg's work from at least as early as the autobiographical novel, *Tjänstekvinnans son* (The Son of the Bondswoman, 1886), becoming more and more important through *Inferno*, the pilgrimage plays, and even the history plays, is the curse. At least three biblical curses (or, in Strindberg's hands, expressions of the same curse) are operative in the works: the curse on Cain, the curse of Deuteronomy (that delivered from Mount Ebal), and the curse on Ishmael, Hagar's son. The version that figures in this book is the curse on Ishmael, which was first alluded to in the title of *Tjänstekvinnans son*.⁹ In *Klostret*, Strindberg claims that when he wrote *Tjänstekvinnans son* he was unaware of the biblical allusion contained in the title:

Han hade en gång antagit pseudonymen Tjänstekvinnans Son, utan att tänka på annat än att hans mor tjänat, men flera år efteråt råkade han under arkeologiska studier i Gamla Testamentet få upp historien om Hagar. Och han läste: "Abraham hade två söner: en av tjänstekvinnan, han var född efter köttet, ... Han skall vara en grym man; hans hand emot var man och var mans hand emot honom. Och han skall bo emot alla sina bröder ..."

Och Sara fick se den egyptiska kvinnan Hagars son, den hon Abraham fött hade; att han var en bespottare.

Driv ut tjänstekvinnan med hennes son, ty tjänstekvinnans son skall icke bliva arvinge med den frias son."

⁹ *Skrifter*, VII. *Tjänstekvinnans son* is not treated separately in this dissertation as, despite the highly evocative title, it is singularly devoid of symbolism. References to it, however, are scattered throughout the dissertation (see index).

Hade han vetat detta då han gav sitt signalement, eller hade någon viskat honom denna hans ödes hemlighet? Driv ut honom! -- Ja, så hade det alltid hetat, hela hans liv, ut!" Och därför var han en hård man och en bespottare! Andra menade att därför att han var en sådan så drevs han ut!¹⁰

The way the author has pieced together the story from two chapters in Genesis and from the New Testament Epistle to the Galatians suggests that this was not something he stumbled across by accident, as he would have us believe! In any case, once he has accepted the aptness of the story to his own circumstances, it

¹⁰ Klostret, 10 (I):

He had once adopted the pseudonym "the Son of the Bondswoman", with nothing in mind but that his mother had been a servant, but several years later, while doing archaeological research in the Old Testament, he happened on the story of Hagar. And he read:

"... Abraham had two sons.... ... he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh...." [Galatians 4:22-23.]

"And he will be a wild man: his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." [Genesis 16: 12.]

"And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking." [Genesis 21:9.]

"Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." [Galatians 4: 30. King James translation throughout.]

Had he known this when he so described himself, or had someone whispered this, the secret of his destiny, to him? Cast him out! -- Yes, it had been like that all his life -- out! And that is why he was a hard man and a mocker. Others were of the opinion that he had been driven out because he was that sort of person!

becomes a symbol of the curse under which he feels himself labouring:

... en sådan otur hade han ännu aldrig sett och när andra människor märkte den måste den finnas där. Men det gjorde ingenting, ty otur hade han haft sen han var barn. "Driv ut tjänstekvinnans son!" hörde han i öronen "Hans hand mot alla och allas mot honom."¹¹

This curse dogs him at every step:

Slutligen kom ett ultimatum från de gamla.

-- Barnet döpes katolskt inom tjugofyra timmar eller familjen sändes över Danau.

Alltså: Driv ut tjänstekvinnan och hennes son, återigen.¹²

Even when not specifically referred to, it is felt hovering over him throughout the book. It is recognized both by himself ("Har du sett ett människoöde som mitt! Och var jag kommer för jag olycka och fördärv med

¹¹ Klostret, 107 (III):

... he had never yet seen such misfortune, and when others noticed it, it had to exist. But it made no difference, for he had had bad luck ever since he had been born. "Cast out the son of the bondswoman!" rang in his ears, "His hand against everyone, and everyone's against him."

¹² Ibid., 141 (V):

Finally an ultimatum arrived from the old couple: "The child must be baptized a Catholic within twenty-four hours, or the family will be sent across the Danube."

In other words: "Cast out the bondswoman and her son," once again!

mig!"¹³) and by his wife: "... jag tror på din ärlighet men du är en olycksfågel."¹⁴

In a related symbol reminiscent of the first scene of *Till Damaskus I*, the author feels imprisoned for an offence of which he is unaware:

Han betraktade sig som en fånge, med det hemska tillika, att han ej visste vad han förbrutit, vem som dömt honom eller vem som var hans fångvaktare.¹⁵

This symbol returns in different circumstances, suggesting a connection between seemingly unconnected incidents:

Nu var han på vindskammaren igen och ungskarl, fastän gift. Det var ju som ett straff efter mottagna varningar. Men vad han brutit, det kunde han ej säga!¹⁶

To the symbols of the curse and the prison is joined that of the hunter, linking this work to the first two parts of *Till Damaskus*. The hero's knowledge

¹³ Klostret, 64 (II): "Have you ever seen a human destiny like mine? And wherever I go I carry misfortune and destruction with me!"

¹⁴ Idem.: "... I believe in your honesty, but you're a bird of ill fortune."

¹⁵ Ibid., 83 (III):

He considered himself a prisoner, with the horrible addition that he did not know what crime he had committed, who had sentenced him, or who his jailer was.

¹⁶ Ibid., 88-89:

Now he was in the garret again, and again a bachelor, although married. It seemed like a punishment after repeated warnings. But what he had done wrong, he could not say!

that he is being driven by a curse is manifested in a feeling that he is being hunted (paranoia). The hunter symbol is used most cogently by the mother-in-law:

-- detta är ingen människas fel, inga omständigheters; utan du strider mot en annan som jagar dig, jagar dig tills du blir så trött att du tvingas söka ro på det enda stället där finns ro.¹⁷

The hunter she refers to is God, the hound of heaven, but there are other hunters in the story. The old man (his wife's grandfather) torments the hero during his stay in his home, the larders of which are stocked with an abundance of game ("Den gamle ... var en väldig jägare...."¹⁸), and the hero himself is a hunter in his tormenting of others through his work (the hunter who eats his dog's tail) and in his personal relationships; when he decides to stop persecuting others, he is told: "... du skall göra ingenting, och vila dig efter dina vilda jakter."¹⁹ Thereupon he turns to his alchemical pursuits.

¹⁷ Klostret, 103 (III):

"... that's not anyone's fault or the fault of circumstances, but you are struggling against another, who is hunting you, hunting you until you get so tired you're forced to seek peace in the one place peace can be found."

¹⁸ Ibid., 135 (V): "The old man ... was a formidable hunter...."

¹⁹ Ibid., 134 (V): "... you must not do anything, but rest after your savage hunts."

The function of the hero's sufferings (as embodied in these three symbols) is, as the mother-in-law has outlined in the speech cited above, to force him to seek peace in the only place it can be found or, in the words of Advent, to whip him forth to the foot of the Cross. The foot of the Cross, or the earthly goal of the pilgrimage described in the *Till Damaskus* trilogy, is the monastery of Till Damaskus III. In *Klostret*, the significance of that monastery is explained:

Då längtade han ut, bort, men långt, till ljus och renhet, till frid, kärlek och försoning. Han drömde sin gamla dröm om klostret, där inom murarna han vore skyddad för världens frestelser och smuts, där han kunde glömma och glömmas. Men tron fattades och lydnaden.²⁰

To get around these difficulties, he posits founding a non-confessional, secular monastery, where peace, love, and reconciliation could be found without embarrassing demands. The monastery, in other words, is a symbol; the details of monastic life are unimportant:

Denna idé om klostret hade redan då spökat länge i litteraturen, och man hade talat i Berlin om grundandet av konfessionslösa kloster för de intellektuella som i en tid, då industri och ekonomi trängt sig fram i första

²⁰ *Klostret*, 146 (V):

Then he longed to get out, away, far away, to light and cleanliness, to peace, love, and forgiveness. He dreamt his old dream of the cloister, within the walls of which he would be sheltered from the temptations and filth of the world; where he could forget and be forgotten. But he lacked faith and obedience.

planet, ej kunde finna sig i den atmosfär av materialism som de själv låtit förleda sig predika. Och nu skrev han till sin vän i Paris om grundandet av ett sådant kloster; kastade opp plan för byggnaden; författade regeln och gav detaljer om brödernas samliv och uppgifter. Detta skedde år 1894 i augusti! Målet var uppfostran till übermensch genom askes, meditation, och övandet av vetenskap, litteratur, och konst. Religion nämndes icke, emedan han icke visste vilken religion som skulle komma eller om det skulle vara någon alls.²¹

Once, earlier in the book, the hero enjoyed the qualities of peace, love, and reconciliation, if only

²¹ Klostret, 146-47 (V):

This idea of a cloister had then already haunted literature for a long time, and in Berlin* they had talked of founding nonconfessional cloisters for intellectuals who, at a time when industry and finance had forced their ways into prominence, could not tolerate the materialism which even they had allowed themselves to be enticed into preaching. And now he wrote to his friend in Paris about the founding of such a cloister: drew up plans for the building, wrote the rule, and gave details of the brothers' community life and duties.** This happened in August of the year 1894! The aim was the training of the Übermensch through asceticism, meditation, and the practice of science, literature, and art. Religion was not mentioned, since he did not know what religion would be instituted, if any at all.

* Some of the earlier scenes in the book are set in a Berlin tavern called, ironically enough, The Cloister (but known in Inferno as The Black Pig).

** This letter exists. It was written to Leopold Littmansson (1847-1908) and is discussed in the chapter on Strindberg's letters.

briefly, and then too the symbol of the monastery was used. The couple has just moved into their own little house on the estate of his wife's grandparents:

Deras stuga ... liknade en klosterbyggnad och var klädd med vinstocker.... Han hade fått ett litet rum i form av en verklig munkcell; smalt och långt med ett enda litet fönster på ena kortsidan.²²

This, then, is where the curse is driving him: from a sense of guilt and imprisonment towards the peace, reconciliation, and love symbolized by the monastery. He still has a great way to go before reaching that haven, however; Klostret is followed by Inferno!

The hero's lack of faith has already been noted. If he believes in God at all, it is in the God portrayed in the epilogue to the verse Mäster Olof and "Coram Populo" -- the God of Vengeance rather than the God of Love -- and such a God, he feels, does not deserve his respect:

... sedan han länge letat i minnet uppdök tavlan ur Dantes helvete där gudsmädare ligga utsträckta på het sand; men eftersom han ej

²² Klostret, 138 (V):

Their cottage ... was like a monastery building, and was covered with vines.... He had been given a little room shaped like a real monk's cell: narrow and long, with a single small window in one of the short walls.

trodde sig känna någon god Gud, tyckte han smädelserna kunde vara ogilda.²³

Indeed, the people living near his wife's grandparents (good Austrian Catholics all) call him "the Swedish heretic" and cross themselves whenever they meet him.

He does believe in something, however: a relentless and hostile force, intimately linked to the symbol of the curse. Since the theology of the powers is not developed until the period described in *Inferno*, the term is not used here. Instead, the hostile force is first called Fate, but the quotation marks he places around the term indicate that he is dissatisfied with it: "... 'Ödet' letade alltid ut hans hemliga önskingar för att förrinta dem."²⁴ Gradually he realizes that the force guiding his life is not blind, but conscious and deliberate, and he begins to call it Providence. *Inferno* relates how this term in turn was rejected in favour, ultimately, of "the powers". With the advantage of hindsight, the author realizes now that this was the vague and uncertain beginning of faith in God:

²³ Klostret, 89 (III):

... after he had searched his memory a long time, the picture out of Dante's Hell came to mind, where blasphemers lie spread-eagled on hot sand; but since he did not think he knew any good God, he thought his blasphemies would go unavenged.

²⁴ Ibid., 86 (III): "... 'Fate' always found out his secret desires, in order to annihilate them."

Den sista tidens obegripliga händelser och det djupa lidandet hade kommit honom att ändra ordet Öde till Försyn, därmed antydande att ett medvetet personligt väsende styrde hans bana. Han kallade sig numera Providentialist för att något namn ha, med andra ord: han trodde på Gud utan att nogare kunna angiva vad därmed menades.²⁵

Having arrived at this point, which might be described as a state of readiness for further spiritual development, he embarks on a new career and simultaneously on his spiritual pilgrimage: he forsakes literature for science (i.e., alchemy, the attempt to transform base substances into gold: a symbol, recognized by the alchemists themselves, for the perfection of the soul). Although convinced that he is on the right track ("... han hade aldrig känt sig så väl förr."²⁶), he soon comes into conflict with his wife: if he had been unable to support his family as an author (his wife had robbed him of his inspiration), he is even less able to support them through his alchemical studies and experiments! This leads, as it must, to their parting, and to his continuing on his spiritual pilgrimage, through

²⁵ Klostret, 149 (V):

The incomprehensible events and his deep suffering of late had led him to change the word Fate to Providence, thereby indicating that a conscious personal being was directing his path. He began calling himself a Providentialist for want of any other name; in other words, he believed in God without being able to say more specifically what that meant.

²⁶ Ibid., 138 (V): "... he had never felt so well before."

sulphur and mercury to gold, which is related in
Inferno and the Till Damaskus plays.

Chapter 70

Gustav III

Strindberg's *Kristina* is about an actress who sat on the throne of Sweden; *Gustav III: fyra akter (utan tablåer)*¹ (*Gustav III: Four Acts (with No Internal Scene Changes)*), finished on the one hundred tenth anniversary (March 16, 1902) of the assassination of its title character, is about Sweden's crowned actor.

Gustav III was a thoroughly remarkable man. His reign (1771-92) marks Sweden's golden age, and for most of the social, political, and cultural accomplishments of that age, Gustav was personally responsible. A disciple of Rousseau and Voltaire, he modelled himself on Frederick the Great, and his court on Versailles. He brought about the social revolution in Sweden, wresting power from the nobility and placing it in the hands of the three lower estates. At the same time, with the support of these three estates, he strengthened and extended his own powers; he was an enlightened despot, whose cherished goal was the equality and freedom of his people. Above all, he was a patron of the arts, and literature flourished during his reign. His particular love was the theatre: the founder of the court theatres at Drottningholm and Gripsholm, and of Stockholm's

¹ *Samlade verk*, XLVIII, 145-301.

Royal Opera, he was himself an accomplished playwright and actor.

Strindberg's play deals with events leading up to Gustav's assassination, at a masked ball: the dissension of the nobility, the war with Denmark which was resolved diplomatically (but not before Gustav had raised popular support), and Gustav's plans to have himself proclaimed absolute monarch. It also examines the atmosphere of conspiracy and intrigue which surrounded the court of Gustav III, his arranged marriage to the Danish princess Sophia Magdalena, and, above all, the enigmatic but brilliant character of Gustav himself: the Player King par excellence.

Since the theatre was the dominant passion of Gustav III, Strindberg has made it the principal symbol of his play about him. Gustav is basically an actor playing a rôle, and as he goes about ruling his kingdom, he also assumes the functions of stage manager and director. The conspiracy of the nobility against him can even be regarded as a rebellion of some of the actors against the rôles assigned them. Gustav III is in every sense a theatrical play, and is a perennial favorite on the Swedish stage.

The symbolism of the theatre -- that all the world, and particularly Gustavian Sweden, is a stage, and all the men and women, particularly Gustav III, merely players -- is introduced early in the play as

Holmberg, the bookseller and printer, announces to General Pechlin, Gustav's opponent and a master of intrigue, that the time has come for serious action if Gustav is to be prevented from accomplishing his ends, with the words: "Komedin är slut!"² The comedy is indeed over, and the actors are about to turn their attention to high tragedy.

In the brilliant second act of the play, we see Gustav in action, as he consults with his favorite and advisor, Armfelt, deals with his audiences, tries to overcome a disagreement with his wife, and arranges strategies on various fronts. Throughout he is an actor and clever stage manager: a man who assumes one rôle after another, as the occasion demands. A feature of the audience chamber is a large mirror, to which the King constantly refers: adjusting his dress, assuming fresh expressions before receiving new petitioners, checking his reactions to events which catch him momentarily off-guard, seeking continual reassurance that he looks the part he is playing. For, in his mind, government and theatre are very much the same thing: "... börjar man bara, så fortsätter det sig självt se'n, alldeles som en teaterpjäs."³

² Samlade verk, XLVIII, 158 (I): "The comedy is over!"

³ Ibid., 193 (II): "... if one only makes a beginning, it continues by itself after that, just like a play."

Gustav's plan to suppress the nobility, who have opposed his (illegal) war with Russia, is, like Gustav Vasa, to raise troops in Dalarna -- troops drawn from the people rather than the aristocratic army -- against Denmark. These troops would be personally loyal to him and would help him carry his case against the nobles. He knows the war is about to be terminated diplomatically, through the interventions of England and France, so he must act quickly. Armfelt sees this scheme as nothing more than the plot for a play, something that will not work in reality:

ARMFELT: Hur ville du föra ett krig utan armé, och med upproriska officerare?

KONUNGEN: Jag hade en plan ...

ARMFELT: Till en pjäs?

KONUNGEN: Skäms!

ARMFELT: Det där med Dalkarlarne!

KONUNGEN: Ja!

ARMFELT: Det är en pjäs, om något!

KONUNGEN: Arméns förräderi har upprört dem, och kommer jag personligen ...

ARMFELT: Utklädd? Va? Som Gustav Vasa? ...
Det är maskerad; och det förstår inte Dalkarlarne!⁴

⁴ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 196-97 (II):

ARMFELT: How did you plan to wage a war without an army, and with mutinous officers?

THE KING: I had a plan ...

ARMFELT: For a play?

THE KING: Shame on you!

ARMFELT: The one involving the men from Dalarna?

THE KING: Yes!

ARMFELT: That's a play, if anything!

THE KING: The treason of the army has upset them, and if I go to them in person ...

ARMFELT: Dressed up? Right? As Gustav Vasa? That's a masquerade, and the people of Dalarna don't understand that!

Later in the act the King indeed seems much more interested in the opportunity to wear his Dalarna folk costume than in the success of the plan. But it does work, theatrical though it be!

The person the King is most surprised to see at the Palace, and for whom he is least prepared, is General (also Baron) Pechlin, whom he knows to be plotting against him. He is, however, fully aware (as Strindberg is) of the dramatic possibilities of a confrontation, and resolves to admit him, having first secured an audience for his performance in the person of Liljensparre, the Chief of Police. After resolving that he must on all accounts dominate the action, he indicates his readiness to see Pechlin, significantly, by uttering a stage direction: "Tablå!" ("Curtain!")

Through a clever piece of stage management (he contrives that Schröderheim should believe him to be seeking advice on his own marital difficulties, until it is too late for him to retract what he has said) he persuades Schröderheim, an important Secretary of State, to divorce his wife, who has been supporting the Queen's desire for freedom from her own marriage. He then sends Schröderheim's wife to him to learn her fate, with an appeal to her own love of the theatre:

KONUNGEN: [Elis] har skrivit en ny
pjäs ... med huvudrollen för er!
FRU SCHRÖDERHEIM (glad): Nej! Är den ..?
KONUNGEN: Ja, den är mycket dekolleterad

...⁵

The King has twisted the facts slightly; in fact, it is he who has written the play, and she and Elis both have major parts!

In his subsequent talk with the Queen, he reveals that he thinks of even his major accomplishment, the social revolution, in theatrical terms: he was playing the part of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*:

Jag minns att ni grät, när jag skickade min kammarherre ... för att underrätta er om den lyckade revolutionen -- -- -- då jag spelade Brutus och störtade vadmals-Cesarerna....⁶

At the end of the act, when he has finished his business for the day, Gustav has his Dalarna costume brought in, and Armfelt again tries to persuade him to abandon his plan, in an exchange laden with dramatic irony:

ARMFELT: Det är inte illa hopkommet det där! som pjäs betraktat! (....)

KONUNGEN: Vem vet, kanske det är en pjäs, hela alltsammans!

ARMFELT: Men sista akten, har du den?

KONUNGEN: Den kommer av sig själv!

⁵ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 228 (II):

THE KING: [Elis] has written a new play ... with the principal part for you!

LADY SCHRÖDERHEIM (happy): No! Is it ..?

THE KING: Yes! Very décolletée ...

⁶ Ibid., 232 (II):

I recall that you wept when I sent my chamberlain ... to inform you of the success of the revolution -- -- -- when I played Brutus and overthrew the homespun Caesars....

ARMFELT: Den kommer av sig själv!⁷

The third act demonstrates that not only does the King think of himself as an actor playing a part, he is also so thought of by others. The difference is that in his own eyes his play-acting is artful diplomacy, while in the eyes of his enemies it is treachery:

ANCKARSTRÖM: Skulle du ... tycka mer om att jag hyste sympati för en trolös, infam, komediant, rikets fiende!⁸

Only General Pechlin feels that this tendency in the King is not a bad thing, for it fits in with his own view of the world:

PECHLIN: Jag var på supé i går bland Riksråd och generaler. Där taltes öppet om Konungens revolution, och om kontrarevolutionen, alldeles som om nästa pjäs.

RIBBING: Vilket lättsinne! då det gäller nationens väl eller ve!

PECHLIN: Sådan är tiden, unge vän, och ju

⁷ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 238 (II):

ARMFELT: It's not badly constructed, that! Considered as a play! (....)

THE KING: Who knows: perhaps the whole business is a play!

ARMFELT: But the last act! Do you have that?

KONUNGEN: It will write itself!

ARMFELT: It will write itself!

⁸ Ibid., 241-42:

ANCKARSTRÖM: would you prefer me to feel sympathy for a faithless, infamous actor, the enemy of the realm!

mindre allvar desto bättre!⁹

In a disarming show of bravado, the King makes an appearance at the meeting of conspirators, but leaves when he comes out the worse in a verbal duel with Pechlin, who compares him to the ineffectual Erik XIV: him, who considers himself the worthy successor of Erik's father, Gustav Vasa! Pechlin knows the King well enough to realize that this victory is only temporary, however; Gustav will soon rebound:

KONUNGEN: (Går....)

PECHLIN: Sortien var icke lika lycklig som entrén! Men sådant händer de största skådespelare!¹⁰

In many ways, the final act, set at the masked ball at which the King is assassinated, is the most theatrical of all. It contains the masque, discussed below, in which the King and Lady Schröderheim (disguised as Megaera) converse in impromptu blank verse;

⁹ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 244 (III):

PECHLIN: I had supper yesterday with Councillors and generals. They talked openly of the King's revolution and of the counter-revolution, exactly as if they were discussing the next play.

RIBBING: What irresponsibility! when it's a question of the nation's well-being or ruin!

PECHLIN: Such are the times, young friend, and the less gravity the better!

¹⁰ Ibid., 252 (III):

THE KING: (Exits....)

PECHLIN: The exit wasn't so impressive as the entrance. But such things happen to the best actors!

and it also contains the final defeat of Lady Schröderheim, who has played a part but played it badly, and must now face up to the fact that her career is over:

Jag finns inte mer, och ändå står jag här --
står på min egen grav -- som ett kors på min
egen grav -- och med masken i handen --
demaskerad -- ty, komedin är slut; och ingen
applåderar! (... tar på masken och går....)¹¹

In this act also, Fersen, one of the disaffected gentry but not one of the conspirators, gives a penetrating analysis of the King's character, indicating what amounts to his tragic flaw:

... konungen.... lärdes redan som barn att
ljuga -- i synnerhet under hovets misslyckade
statskupper.... Och sen har han så ljugit
bort sig att han vet inte själv vem han är,
och som han skämtar med allting, kan han icke
skilja på allvar och skämt.¹²

As in *Kristina*, the symbolism of the theatre is closely connected to and interwoven with that of games; card games are a passion second only to the theatre in

¹¹ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 285 (IV):

I no longer exist, and yet I'm standing here
-- standing on my own grave -- like a cross
on my own grave -- and with my mask in my
hand -- unmasked -- for the comedy is over;
and nobody applauds! (... puts on the mask
and goes....)

¹² *Ibid.*, 289 (IV):

... the King.... learned to tell lies when he
was still a child -- especially during the
unsuccessful coups d'état at court.... And
since then he's told so many lies that he
doesn't know himself who he is, and, since he
jokes about everything, he can no longer tell
the difference between seriousness and jest.

Gustav's court. When the characters are not performing like actors on the stage, they are being manipulated like tokens in a game! But games have a built-in disadvantage: given evenly matched players, the outcome is decided by factors other than skill. As Armfelt points out, the time factor is particularly significant: "Den som blir först färdig har vunnit spelet!"¹³ The King is a very skillful player, but Pechlin attributes his successes as much to his disregard for the rules as to his quick intelligence:

Men nu är kungen en rätt skicklig spelare ...
det vill säga! ... ja-ja! just därför att han
aldrig följer reglorna är han så svår -- --
-- och dessutom har han så lätt att lära
...¹⁴

Next in importance to the symbolism of theatre and games is that attached to Julius Caesar. Indeed, they are related: we have already seen that the King views his social revolution as a theatrical performance, in which he played the rôle of Brutus. Strindberg, however, has cast him in a different rôle: that of Caesar himself. The coincidence that both men were assassinated, and both on or about the Ides of March would

¹³ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 200 (II): "Whoever is ready first has won the game!"

¹⁴ Ibid., 245 (III):

But the King happens to be a very skillful player ... that is to say! ... yes, yes! he's so difficult to beat precisely because he never follows the rules -- -- -- and besides, he learns so quickly ...

have been charged with significance for Strindberg, who would see in it confirmation of his theory that "Allt går igen!" ("Everything repeats itself!"). Furthermore, both men had immense popular support; both were opposed by powerful elements, acting from what they considered patriotic reasons; and they had similar ambitions: Caesar, to be crowned king, Gustav to become absolute monarch. There is one difference: the Brutus of Gustav III, Anckarström, is not Caesar's best friend, but a bitter personal enemy; each, however, believes himself acting in the best interests of his country.

The parallel between Caesar and Gustav is drawn most fully in the masque of Act IV, in which the Three Graces and Megaera (one of the Furies) appear before the King:

KONUNGEN (...):
 Bravo! Gracer! -- A bas! Megæra! --
 När valde Skönhet och Behag den vilda hämnden
 till Koryfé vid lantlig fest i gröna lunder,
 ...?
 MEGÆRA (Fru Schröderheim):
 När fursten blev tyrann och härskaren despot!

 MEGÆRA:
 O, Store Caesar, akta dig för Idus Martii!

 MEGÆRA: Tag dig i akt för Idus Martii,
 Caesar!¹⁵

¹⁵ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 264-65 (IV):

THE KING (...):
 Bravo, Graces! -- and à bas, Megaera! --
 When opted Beauty and Delight for wild
 as leader of their rustic feast among green
 ...? Revenge
 groves
 MEGAERA (Ladv Schröderheim):

In the last few lines of the play, moments before his assassination, Gustav himself draws attention to his resemblance to Caesar, and the play closes with a joke -- but one which Gustav ought to have taken seriously:

KONUNGEN: Madame! Jag är född med segerhuva och med Caesars lycka ...

DROTTNINGEN: Caesars lycka ... var det inte någon som hette Brutus?

(Anckarströms ansikte synes på glasrutan i fonden men Drottningen står även nu framför konungen.)

KONUNGEN: Bravo, Madame! Det var verkligen någon som hette Brutus.

DROTTNINGEN: Och så länge Caesar lydde sin drottnings goda råd ...

KONUNGEN: Drottningen är den starkaste pjäsen i spelet och har till uppgift att skydda kungen ... Vill ni icke skydda mig?

DROTTNINGEN: Det gör jag alltid, Sire!

KONUNGEN: Icke alltid! -- -- -- "Var det inte någon som hette Brutus?" -- Det är syperbt! -- Syperbt! Madame! (Räcker Drottningen sin hand att föra henne ut....)¹⁶

When sovereign changed to tyrant, and ruler
to despot!

....

MEGAERA:

Beware, O Greatest Caesar, the Ides of March!

....

MEGAERA: Be careful on the Ides of March,
Caesar!

¹⁶ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 300-301 (IV):

THE KING: Madame! I was born with a caul, and with the luck of Caesar ...

THE QUEEN: The luck of Caesar ... wasn't there someone named Brutus?

(Anckarström's face is seen at the window in the background, but just now the Queen stands between him and the King.)

THE KING: Bravo, Madame! There was indeed someone named Brutus.

THE QUEEN: And as long as Caesar followed the good advice of his queen ...

THE KING: The queen is the strongest piece on the board. and her function is to protect

This highly ironic speech, which closes the play before the actual assassination (a shot is sometimes fired directly the curtain is lowered, or in a final black-out), also completes the game symbolism and the theatre symbolism: Gustav seems not to have realized that the rôles of Caesar and Brutus cannot be doubled!

Animal symbolism is limited. The conspirators, nobles stripped of their power, compare themselves to flayed animals:

OLSSON: ... här råkas vi alla som hos buntmakarn.

NORDSTRÖM: Sen vi mistat huden, ja!¹⁷

Armfelt, however, sees them as pike, which Strindberg considered a lower form of life, envious of those above them on the evolutionary scale (see I havsbandet). He has sent Badin to spy upon them in Holmberg's bookshop, and on his return asks if he has learned anything:

ARMFELT (...): Har du fått några gäddor då?

BADIN: Nääj, krokarne voro icke helt så krokiga som de måtte ...

ARMFELT: Krokar äro i allmänhet icke så

the king ... Don't you want to protect me?

THE QUEEN: I always do, Sire!

THE KING: Not always! -- -- -- "Wasn't there someone named Brutus?" -- That's superb! -- Superb! Madame! (Extends his hand to the Queen in order to lead her out....)

¹⁷ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 169 (I):

OLSSON: ... we all meet here, as at the furrier's.

NORDSTRÖM: After losing our hides, yes!

krokiga som de skulle ...¹⁸

The most extended animal symbols are those the King and Pechlin use for each other, the fox and the goose:

KONUNGEN (leende bittert): Jag vet en räv som trodde sig i trettio långa år ha dragit rättvisan vid näsan, men som slutligen fångades med sin egen svans som fastna i gärsgården ...

PECHLIN: Jag vet en gås ...¹⁹

After Pechlin leaves, the King discovers that a note he had written to remind himself to be careful, has been found by Pechlin and altered in such a way that these two animal symbols make an ironic comment on the make-believe atmosphere of the court:

KONUNGEN (...): Nej, nu är måttet rågat! Han har läst promemorian ... jag har skrivit "räven"; därtill har han med min

¹⁸ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 185 (II):

ARMFELT (...): Did you catch any pike, then?

BADIN: Nah, the hooks weren't quite so well-made as they might have been ...

ARMFELT: In general, hooks aren't so well made as they should be ...

¹⁹ Ibid., 221 (II):

THE KING (smiling bitterly): I know a fox who thought he'd led justice by the nose for thirty long years, but was finally captured by his own tail, which got caught in the fence ...

PECHLIN: I know a goose ...

egen penna tillagt "och gåsen", "fabel"!
²⁰

It is not Pechlin who is most dangerous to the King, however, but the darkly brooding Anckarström. Although the latter has not yet arrived when the King visits the conspirators, he can sense his presence and feels uncomfortable: "Är det en katt i rummet? Det känns så underligt?"²¹ The King leaves almost immediately, and directly he exits, Anckarström enters. As he stalks the King to assassinate him in the final act, his presence is sensed in the same way.

Finally, Schröderheim and his wife, ineffectual pawns in the King's hands, are reduced to the status of harmless insects after he has forced their divorce:

KONUNGEN: Har du sett Schröderheim?

ARMFELT: Han är som en vinterfluga, sen han skildes från frun.

KONUNGEN: Och hon är som geting utan gadd!²²

²⁰ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 222 (II):

THE KING (...): No, that's too much!
 He read the memorandum ... I wrote "The Fox"; with my own pen, he has added "and the Goose: a Fable!"

²¹ Ibid., 251 (III): "Is there a cat in the room? It feels so strange!"

²² Ibid., 262 (IV):

THE KING: Have you seen Schröderheim?

ARMFELT: He's like a winter fly since he separated from his wife!

THE KING: And she's like a wasp without a sting!

The opposed factions in the play each have a goal: the King's is to have himself proclaimed absolute monarch; the conspirators' to prevent him from doing so. As Armfelt points out, success will go to whomever is ready to act first. Time is running out for both sides, particularly for the King. The relentless passing of time, and the sense that for the King it is drawing to a close, is symbolized by clocks, beginning as punctuation to Armfelt's observation: as he finishes speaking, a clock chimes. In the final act, it is revealed that the King has had a warning that his time is running out:

BADIN: ... Konungen ... sov i natt i stora sängkammaren med drabanter i rummet! Och ändå sprang han upp var gång klockan slog! -- Slutligen steg han på en stol och bröt sönder slagverket på uret!²³

So strong is this sense of the passing of time that, not long before the assassination, de Geer, who knows nothing of the plot, is reminded by the King's pacing of the ticking of a clock:

DE GEER: Hör du ett ur som knäpper i rummet intill?

FERSEN: Nej, men jag hör konungens röda

²³ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 286 (IV):

BADIN: ... the King ... slept last night in the large bedchamber, with bodyguards in the room! And still he sprang up every time the clock struck! -- Finally, he stood on a chair and broke the clock's striking mechanism to pieces!

klackar som krossa sandkorn och träda på tiljornas spikhuven!²⁴

One of Gustav III's models is Louis XIV, "le roi-soleil", and another symbol that time is running out for him is the setting or obscuring of the sun. The association is first made (unwittingly) by Horn, a former friend of the King who is deeply troubled at having to join the conspiracy against him. In a lyrical outburst, he expresses his admiration of Gustav's style and his regret that he can no longer bask in his glory:

Se en så vacker solnedgång! Om vi fingo fara
ut på sjön och höra trastens sista sånger
innan dagens konung drar sig in i sin stjärn-
kammare ...²⁵

Schröderheim sees himself and his wife as victims not so much of Gustav, as of the whole series of events through which the King is also losing power; while his position was secure, they basked in his glory, but now that he is declining, they too must suffer:

²⁴ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 293 (IV):

DE GEER: Do you hear a clock ticking in the next room?

FERSEN: No, but I hear the King's red heels crushing grains of sand and treading on the heads of the nails in the floorboards!

²⁵ Ibid., 243 (III):

See how beautiful the sunset is! If only we might go out on the lake and hear the last song of the thrush before the king of the day retires to his starry chamber ...

Gustavs sol går ned ... och vi råka in i skuggan ... det var sol, men det skall ju bli natt ibland! -- -- -- God natt min vän!²⁶

On the day on which the King's career ends, as the atmosphere in the court becomes increasingly tenser, the sun gradually disappears from view. The comedy is over, the sun disappears, and it rains, breaking up the festivities in the palace grounds.

Kristina, like Fröken Julie, had been raised as a man, and this was a source of woe for both of them. Similarly, Gustav III has a good deal of the feminine about him, as a result of his upbringing. This causes difficulties in his marriage, and is symbolized by his hobby of embroidery:

... det kvinnliga hade jag fått genom att för länge uppfostras bland kjolar och vid broderbågen ... det rådde jag icke för!²⁷

Embroidery has gained a symbolic significance for him, and what he says of it recalls the Parcae spinning the thread of life, and the Lady with her needlework in Till Damaskus: "Jag tänker så bra när jag broderar, och

²⁶ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 283 (IV):

Gustav's sun is setting ... and we have fallen into the shadow ... it was sunny, but I suppose it has to be night sometime! -- -- -- Have a good night, my friend!

²⁷ Ibid., 232 (III):

... I'd developed feminine characteristics through having been raised too long among skirts and at the embroidery frame ... I couldn't help that!

så känner jag mig ha trådarne i min hand!"²⁸ This significance is not lost on others, particularly among the conspirators: "ANCKARSTRÖM: Rör inte vid hans trassliga härva; ni fastnar i den!"²⁹

The two marriages in the play, that of the King and Queen, and that of the Schröderheims, are very Strindbergian. The former has many similarities to the marriage dissected in *Fadren*:

KONUNGEN: ... ni grät, när jag skickade min kammarherre ... för att underrätta er om den lyckade revolution.... -- I ett ömt ögonblick erkände ni att era tårar voro missräkningens, då ni icke tilltrott mig om en manlig handling. -- -- -- Från den stunden hatade ni mig, ty det var det kvinnliga hos mig ni älskade.... Ni älskade, men föraktade; ty ni mottog min grannlagenhet som en gärd av aktning, den ni dock föraktade, och när jag uppträdde som jag skulle, enfin som en man, kallade ni det råhet och hatade mig! -- -- -- Jag hade således att välja mellan ert förakt och ert hat, och jag valde slutligen hatet!³⁰

²⁸ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 257-58 (IV): "I think so clearly when I embroider, and feel as if I had all the threads in my hand!"

²⁹ Ibid., 240 (III): "ANCKARSTRÖM: Don't disturb his tangled skein; you'll get caught in it!"

³⁰ Ibid., 232-33 (II):

THE KING: ... you wept when I sent my chamberlain ... to inform you of the success of the revolution.... -- In a tender moment, you confessed you had wept tears of disappointment, for you hadn't believed me capable of a manly action. -- -- -- From that moment, you hated me, for it was the feminine side of me you'd loved.... You'd loved, but despised; for you'd accepted my delicacy as a token of respect which you nevertheless despised, and when I acted as I ought to, enfin as a man, you called it coarseness, and hated me! -- -- -- And so I had to choose between your contempt and your hatred and finally I chose

The marriage of the Schröderheims, which is also on the rocks long before the King forces its termination, is, on the other hand, similar to that examined in Kamraterna:

SCHRÖDERHEIM: Anne-Charlotte! När jag gifte mig med dig, var det för att få en maka och ett hem! Nåväl, vi voro makar i början och jag försummade icke att få ett barn! Då jag satt hos vår dotter, gick du borta, och var aldrig hemma. Och då du förklarat bestämt att du icke ville ha flera barn -- ja, så fann jag mig i det, emedan jag respekterade din frihet -- i det fallet. Men när du ville jag skulle vara din älskare eller vad det skall kallas, då sa jag nej! ty jag hade svurit vara din make.³¹

Notable for their absence in these two analyses of troubled marriages are the symbols usually associated with this theme: vampirism, cannibalism, parasitic plants, and the Omphale myth (although there is a hint of the last in the images of the King at his embroidery frame and Schröderheim's sitting with his daughter

the hatred!

³¹ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 280 (IV):

SCHRÖDERHEIM: Anne-Charlotte! When I married you, it was to obtain a wife and a home! Well, we were husband and wife in the beginning, and I didn't neglect to father a child! Then I sat at home with our daughter, while you went out and were never home. And when you stated definitely that you didn't want any more children -- yes, I went along with it, for I respected your freedom -- in that matter. But when you wanted me to become your lover, or whatever it's called, then I said no! for I'd sworn to be your husband.

while his wife enjoys herself). Strindberg's bitterness over his own unhappy marriages is perhaps mellowing.

There are only two instances of biblical symbolism in the play. The application of the first allusion is rather obscure. The King addresses the words to Anckarström: "Du är dig lik, Jakob! ... Och händerna äro Esaus! fortfarande!"³² Jacob was indeed Anckarström's first name, and perhaps the allusion means only that in Gustav's opinion Anckarström has no right to deny him the power he considers his birthright. The other instance is more straightforward: Lady Schröderheim, on learning she is to be banished from court, compares herself to Eve, banished from Paradise: "Ut ur lustgården! Ner i glömskan!"³³

Finally, at the celebrations on the last day of the King's life, there is an vague reminder of the wedding feast in Erik XIV and of the silent expressionistic tableaux of common people who stand as accusing witnesses in Carl XII and Kristina: the royal park begins to fill mysteriously with commoners:

BADIN: Parken skall utrymmas, för en

³² Samlade verk, XLVIII, 273 (IV): "You haven't changed, Jacob! ... And your hands are Esau's! Still!"

³³ Ibid., 284 (IV): "Out of the pleasure garden! Down into obscurity!"

hop objudna ha på ett hemlighetsfullt sätt
trängt sig in; damer från Stockholms gränder,
herrar i dräkter som antyda förklädnad....³⁴

These people do not serve the same function as in the other plays, however, for they are never actually seen, and they soon disappear when it begins to rain (all but one: Anckarström has no doubt entered the palace grounds under cover of this crowd). This circumstance suggests that they have come to bask in the King's glory (as Horn was unable to do), but when it becomes evident that that glory is disappearing, they flee. Strindberg may also be reminding us, through them, of the existence of a class of people who belong to none of the four estates, and are thus ignored by both Gustav and the conspirators.

This, then, is Strindberg's homage to Gustav III, who, if he were a saint, would certainly have become the patron saint of actors. It is arguably his best history play; it is certainly in every sense his most theatrical!

³⁴ Samlade verk, XLVIII, 285 (IV):

BADIN: The park is to be cleared, for a crowd of uninvited people has forced its way in secretly: women from Stockholm's slums and men in costumes which suggest disguises....

Chapter 71

Näktergalen i Wittenberg

Strindberg thought highly of *Näktergalen i Wittenberg: skådespel i fem akter*¹ (*The Nightingale of Wittenberg: Drama in Five Acts*, 1903), but it has been singularly unsuccessful on the stage: its first performance was not until 1914 (in Berlin), and it was not given in Sweden until three years later; its last performance anywhere was in Gothenburg in 1927 (Ollén, 491-92). Its lack of theatrical success stems mainly from the fact that Strindberg departed from his usual practice in historical plays and chose to dramatize Luther's entire career, from his childhood up to his confinement in the castle of Wartburg, a period of about forty years. This resulted in a huge cast of characters, all of whom, including Luther himself, are of necessity treated superficially, and in no less than fourteen sets; the play is unsatisfactory from the point of view of characterization (thus difficult to act) and extremely unwieldy from the point of view of production: two guarantees of neglect.

This is not to say that it is without interest, however, for the very enormity of its scope, combined with the limits imposed by the theatre, force Strind-

¹ *Samlade verk*, XLIX.

berg to rely heavily on symbolism, and his attraction to Luther -- unscrupulous, untainted by the influence of women (at least in Strindberg's version), and uncompromising even with his parents -- is obvious.

The play abounds in animal symbolism, an expedient dictated by the impossibility of thoroughly examining the personalities involved: the symbols become a kind of shorthand. The general atmosphere of the historical period in which the play opens (Luther lived 1483-1546) is conveyed through the animals to which several of its luminaries are compared. The new pope, Alexander VI Borgia (pope 1492-1503), is "... den största sugga som levat...;"² he presides over a court which lives "... som svin...;"³ and the Dominican monk (later Luther's opponent) Tetzel describes Huss as "... ett execrabelt as...;"⁴ and Savonarola as "... en lushund!"⁵

Most of the animal symbols, however, are applied to Luther himself, and vary according to the stage of his career under consideration and the sympathies of the speaker. He is seen most frequently as a bird, soaring from captivity (the political and religious life of the time) into the heavens. The symbol first

² *Samlade verk*, XLIX, 19 (I, i): "... the greatest sow that ever lived...";

³ *Ibid.*, 22 (I, i): "... like swine...."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 (I, i): "... an execrable ass...."

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 (I, i): "... a mangy cur!"

occurs when he is told by his religious superior that he will be able to leave the monastery, where he has been victimized by the other monks, first to go to Rome, and then to teach in Wittenberg: "STAUPITZ: Alltså, dörren är öppen! Ut fågel, och flyg!"⁶ It is next expressed by the Elector of Saxony, who is curious to see the man behind the reputation: "Låt mig Kse den sällsamma fågeln då, som alla människor talar om."⁷ In the following scene, as Luther's acquaintances gather at his summons before Wittenberg Cathedral, they wonder what is going to happen (he is about to nail his Ninety-Five Theses to the cathedral door) and are sure that whatever it is, it will be of momentous import. Luther is a bird laying the egg of the Reformation:

von HUTTEN: Kluckat har han för ägget,
men värpt har han inte!

SCHURFF: Det kommer nu, och vindägg blir
det ej!⁸

⁶ Samlade verk, XLIX, 84 (III, v*): "STAUPITZ: And so, the door is open! Be off, my bird, and fly!"

* Following Strindberg's own practice in this play, tableaux are numbered i-xiv, disregarding act divisions.

⁷ Ibid., 91 (III, vii): "So let's have a look at this rare bird everyone's talking about."

⁸ Ibid., 98 (III, viii):

von HUTTEN: He's been clucking as if
he were going to lay an egg, but he hasn't
done it yet!

SCHURFF: He's going to do it now, and it
won't be malformed!

Finally, when Luther leaves the Augustinians in order to continue his work in freedom, the symbol his superior first applied to him again emerges:

LUTHER: Den där kåpan började strama
och hindrade armarnes fria rörelse.

STAUPITZ: Du tänker flyga nu?

LUTHER: Jag skall taga morgonrodnadens
vingar och flyga dit där solen går upp!

STAUPITZ: Flyg ensam då! Ingen följer dig!⁹

There follows a scene in the alchemical and necromantic laboratory of Dr. Johannes Faust in Leipzig, in which visions of distant and future events are called forth. The first such vision is of a struggle between a white rose and a red eagle, which, we are told, represent the material and the spiritual universes respectively. The symbols are more specifically linked to the Ghibellines and the Guelphs (the imperial and papal parties respectively) and, on yet a third level, the eagle represents Luther, the champion of the spiritual against the material excesses of the time. In the vision, neither symbol seems winning the struggle, so evenly matched are they, just as, at this point in

⁹ Samlade verk, XLIX, 106 (III, ix):

LUTHER: That habit was beginning to be too tight, and it hindered the free movement of the arms.

STAUPITZ: And now you're planning to fly?

LUTHER: I'll take the wings of the dawn,
and fly to where the sun rises!

STAUPITZ: Fly alone, then! No one follows you!

his career, Luther does not fare well at the hands of his opponents. Two monks who have reason to dislike him refer to him as a goat and as a louse (88: III, ix) and Aleander, papal legate to the Diet of Worms, treats him as if he were a dog:

ALEANDER: Du bits när man klappar dig!

LUTHER: Jag tycker inte om smekningar av flodhästar och glasögonsormar.... ... jag tar inte i ... falska vänner, och när man klappar mig på kinden, så biter jag!¹⁰

Luther is not upset by Aleander's insult and is even able to turn it to his own advantage, because he has already thought of himself in terms of this lowly beast: he had lived as a dog in the monastery, but when he meets Aleander it is as a free creature:

... jag tog svansen mellan benen, drog öronen åt mig och kröp genom hålet. Men hade jag vetat det jag nu vet, skulle aldrig min rygg axlat den svarta kåpan....¹¹

Another animal symbol Luther has applied to himself in the past, the bear, returns to torment him at

¹⁰ Samlade verk, XLIX, 145 (V, xii):

ALEANDER: You bite when you're patted!

LUTHER: I don't like being petted by hippopotami and rattlesnakes.... ... "I'm not taken in by ... false friends, and when I'm patted on the cheek, I bite!

¹¹ Ibid., 105 (III, ix):

... I put my tail between my legs, laid my ears flat, and crept through the hole. But if I'd known what I know now, my back would never have borne the black habit....

Worms, when his guards allow the people to gape and laugh at him:

HÄROLDEN: Stig fram gott folk och se på björnen. Ja så kallar han sig själv när han skriver. Så här skriver han, den gudsmannen: "Alltid skolen I finna Luther som en björn på er väg och som ett lejon på era stigar. På alla sidor skall han störta över er och icke lämna er någon ro...." -- Han är rolig, va?¹²

The bear, symbol of great strength, is here being baited. Later, escaped from his tormentors but exhausted, he is still not free, but has the chance quietly to recoup his strength:

BERLEPSCH: Själv vet han inte om han är fånge eller ej.

HOVMÄSTARN: Det är Den Vise Kurfursten, som ville ha det så. Björnen skulle bindas och svalka sig tills vidare ... han har nog haft gott av de här nio månarne ...¹³

The most obvious concrete symbol in the play also involves animals: the statue of Laocoön and his sons

¹² Samlade verk, XLIX, 139-40 (V, xii):

THE HERALD: Step up, good people, and see the bear. Yes, that's what he calls himself when he writes. Here's what the man of God has written: "You will always find Luther like a bear in your path, and like a lion in your footsteps. On all sides he will cast you down, and he will give you no rest...." -- Amusing, isn't he?

¹³ Ibid., 155 (V, xiv):

BERLEPSCH: He doesn't know himself whether he's a prisoner or not.

THE STEWARD: The Wise Elector wished it like that: the bear should be tethered and allowed to cool down for the time being ... these nine months are sure to have done him good ...

being destroyed by snakes. When this famous group (discovered in Rome in 1506) is first mentioned, it clearly symbolizes the Church, in the grip of the corruption which was destroying it:

DOKTOR JOHANNES: Har herrarne hört det sista från Rom? Man har i Titus' bad -- Titus som utrotade Jerusalem -- funnit en staty som föreställer Laokoon, trojanska prästen ni vet, som ville rädda Troja från den bekanta trähästen och de fientliga krigarne. Till straff sände Apollo två ormar som dödade prästen och hans två söner. Denna staty behagade emellertid de galne romarne, så att de buro den i procession kring gatorna under kyrkklockornas klang.

von HUTTEN: Det skulle man kunna kalla järtecken!

DOKTOR JOHANNES: Ni menar att romarne fått sin trojanska häst inom murarne?

von HUTTEN: Jag hoppas det! Och jag tror att Rom skall utrotas! Roma est delenda!¹⁴

¹⁴ Samlade verk, XLIX, 53 (II, ii):

DR. JOHANNES [FAUST]: Have you gentlemen heard the latest news from Rome? In the Baths of Titus -- Titus who destroyed Jerusalem -- they've found a statue of Laocoön: you know, the Trojan priest who tried to save Troy from the famous wooden horse and the enemy warriors. As a punishment, Apollo sent two serpents, which killed the priest and his two sons. This statue so pleased the foolish Romans, moreover, that they bore it in procession through the streets, to the ringing of the church bells.

von HUTTEN: One could call that an omen!

DR. JOHANNES: You mean that Rome has taken a Trojan horse within its walls?

von HUTTEN: I hope so! And I believe that Rome will be destroyed! Roma est delenda!*

* Rome must be destroyed: a paraphrase of the dictum of Cato the Elder about Carthage.

At this point, Laocoön can also symbolize John Huss (1369?-1415), who warned the Church of the dangers it harboured within its walls, and was rewarded for his pains by death.

In the following act, Luther assumes the rôle of Laocoön (taking over from Huss): as he prepares to rid the Church of its Trojan horse (corruption) and Germany of its (the Church itself), a fresco of the Laocoön group warns him of the difficulties and opposition that await him:

LUTHER (kastar en blick på Laokoonkartongen).

KURFURSTEN: Du ser på prästen där! Akta dig för ormgropen! ...¹⁵

Later in the same act, Laocoön seems to symbolize priestly celibacy: a doctrine openly flouted within the Church and attacked from without. The rôle of Apollo is filled by the poet Ulrich von Hutten, whose celibacy is imposed (he is prevented from marrying by his venereal disease). In his turn, von Hutten is himself a symbol of Germany, and of the Church, both being destroyed from within:

CONSTANTIA (antyder Laokoon): Och denna bild som numera finns över allt. Vem är det?

von HUTTEN: Den bilden har fått många tydingar; den sista är den, att Laokoon, Apollos präst, skulle ha gift sig, och därför dödats av guden.

¹⁵ Samlade verk, XLIX, 93 (III, vii):

LUTHER (glances at the fresco of Laocoön).

THE ELECTOR: You're looking at the priest there! Beware the snake pit!

CONSTANTIA: Då har Apollo aldrig älskat?
von HUTTEN: Han levde ogift, älskade en mö
som hette Daphne men hon förvandlades i sista
stunden till -- en lager. Constantia, lagern
fick jag, dig får jag aldrig!¹⁶

In the final act, the sculptural group again represents Luther, now in confinement:

SCHURFF: Nå, Martin, var är du nu?

LUTHER: I ormgropen!¹⁷

The Laocoön symbol, then, helps unify the play by representing a theme which runs throughout, and by putting the individual tribulations of Huss, Ulrich von Hutten, and of Luther himself into a larger framework, so that what at first may seem unrelated incidents in an overly episodic play become, in fact, illustrations of a central motif: the will to purify oneself of the effects of corruption through struggle and sacrifice. The sculptural group depicts the struggle of Laocoön

¹⁶ Samlade verk, XLIX, 109-10 (III, ix):

CONSTANTIA (indicates Laocoön): And this image that's found everywhere these days: who is it?

von HUTTEN: That image has received many interpretations. The latest is that Laocoön, the priest of Apollo, was about to marry, and was therefore slain by the god.

CONSTANTIA: Was Apollo never in love, then?

von HUTTEN: He lived unmarried, but he loved a maiden named Daphne, who ended up being changed into -- a laurel. I've been given the laurel, Constantia; you, I can never have!

¹⁷ Ibid., 140 (V, xii):

SCHURFF: Well, Martin, where are you now?

LUTHER: In the snake pit!

and his sons, not their deaths!

Another major symbol in the play, lightly touched upon above, is venereal disease, which symbolizes corruption in the Church and in European politics. It is this corruption against which Luther struggles: he is to be the mercury and sulphur which will accomplish the cure of the body politic. Venereal disease is a particularly apt symbol, not only because of its nature, but because, although called *Morbus Gallicus* (the French disease), it is thought to have been spread through Europe by the Roman legions (just as political corruption was thought to have spread from Rome). The symbol is most fully developed in von Hutten's poem:

Min första unga kärlek, jag åt en kvinna gav;
Från Wälskland var hon kommen, och jag blev
 hennes slav,
Hon fick min kraft, i gengäld jag hennes
 svaghet fick;
Och ut ur glädjehuset med sot och sorg jag
 gick.

Nu är jag dömd till döden, men först till
celibat,
Fru Venus av Mercurius skall drivas ut med
hat;
När se'n med svält och svavel min kropp har
lutats ut
Jag med min stav och luta skall vackla mot
mitt slut.

Du mordets svarta ängel, du kom från ruttna
Rom,
Du grävdes upp ur gruset med hädisk hedendom;
Och nu kring tyska landen du drar på rövar-
stråt,
I Thüringen, i Sachsländ är fröjd förbytt i
gråt.

Vak upp I tyske männer, er ungdom asas ner,
Från Wälskland kommer pesten, jag varnar,
varnar er:

Men än den tyska eken skall grönska, gå i
blom --
Hugg av den ruttna roten! Den roten heter
Rom!¹⁸

Like the Laocoön symbol, that of venereal disease can be applied with equal facility to both sides of the conflict, depending on the sympathies of the speaker: to the monks who open the ninth scene (III), it is Lutheranism which is wreaking uncontrollable destruc-

¹⁸ Samlade skrifter, XXXIX, 59 (II, iv):

The first love of my young days, I to a woman
gave;
From Gallia she'd travelled, and I became
her slave;
She took my strength and in return with weak-
ness did me smite,
And I went from the house of love with sorrow
and with blight!

Now I'm doomed to be a dead man, but first a
celibate:
And Venus shall be driven out by Mercury with
hate;
When with hunger and with sulphur my body has
been scoured,
With staff and lute for company, I'll lurch
to my last hour.

O thou, death's blackest angel, you came from
rotten Rome.
You've been dug up from ruins with pagan
heathendom;
And now into our German lands you're stealing
like a thief;
In Thuringia and Saxony all joy is turned to
grief!

Wake up, O German manhood! your youth is in a
snare:
The plague comes out of Gallia, I warn you: O
beware!
Even yet the German oak tree may flourish and
may bloom --
Chop off the root that's rotten! That root is
known as Rome!

tion from within: "Den här Lutherdomen rasar som morbus Gallicus ..."¹⁹ Strindberg, having grown up in the Lutheran tradition, but strongly attracted to Catholicism, can see both sides of the issues involved!

Similar in nature and in meaning to the symbol of venereal disease are those of decay and excrement. The idea of something unhealthy in Germany which must be disposed of is introduced early in the play by the soldier who visits Luther's childhood home: "Det är något ruttet i luften; och får vi inte nytt snart, så reser hela Europa åt helvete."²⁰ Luther's expression of disgust at what he has seen in Rome makes use of excremental symbolism (as the historical Luther was all too wont to do), clearly linked to the symbolism of decay and of venereal disease:

... om jag tvättade mina ögon och mina öron i havets salta vatten skulle de icke bli rena från all den träck jag sett och hört.²¹

The most surprising character in what is, after all, a historical play, is the fictional Dr. Johannes

¹⁹ Samlade verk, XLIX, 102 (III, ix): "This Lutheranism is raging like Morbus Gallicus ..."

²⁰ Ibid., 20 (I, i): "There's something rotten in the air, and if it's not changed soon, all of Europe will go to Hell."

²¹ Ibid., 92-93 (III, viii):

... if I were to bathe my eyes and my ears in the salt water of the sea, I wouldn't be able to cleanse them of all the excrement I've seen and heard.

Faust. He is, in fact, very similar to the character Cartaphilus in the plays *Hellas* and *Lammet och Vilddjuret* (*The Lamb and the Beast*) and Eleazar in *Historiska miniatyrer* (*Historical Miniatures*). Like the Wandering Jew in these works (and in *Himmelrikets nycklar* and *Stora landsvägen*), he has denied Christ (the Faust legend) and is condemned to wander the earth until he has made his peace with Him; indeed, in Dr. Johannes' first scene in the play (I, i), he is referred to simply as *Vandraren* (*The Wanderer*). But he plays a much more active part than the Wandering Jew usually does in Strindberg's works: it is he who places first the Bible and then the works of Huss in Luther's hands; he encourages him in all his struggles; and in fact he proves the only true friend Luther has. This is the good deed that will put an end to his wandering: aiding Luther in the Reformation.

Or is it a good deed? Curiously, Dr. Johannes is constantly associated or identified with the devil, even, on two occasions, by Luther himself. On the earlier occasion, Luther accuses Dr. Johannes of having sold his soul to the devil. Dr. Johannes does not deny this, but rather evades the accusation by making the idea seem ridiculous:

LUTHER: Hör, ha vi sett varann förr?

DOKTOR JOHANNES: Ja, i ert barndomshem!

LUTHER: Jaså, ja, ni som ... ansågs ha sålt er åt fan.

DOKTOR JOHANNES: Densamme! Tror ni det senare?

LUTHER: Ho kan veta't.

DOKTOR JOHANNES: Kan en Ludi magister tro sådant snack? Och behöver djävulen köpa som får så mycket gratis?²²

On the second occasion, Luther dismisses Dr. Johannes with the words Christ addressed to Peter when the latter tried to dissuade Him from fulfilling His mission: "Vade retro, Satanas!"²³

On the other hand, as this allusion indicates, Luther is symbolically associated with Christ. In the opening scene of the play, for instance, there is a parallel to Christ's cursing of the barren fig tree:

MARTIN: ... nöten du slog mig för, har jag återfunnit. Jag kastade den på ell'n och bad Gud förbanna den, att icke något träd skulle växa och bli en människas olycka!²⁴

²² Samlade verk, XLIX, 57 (II, ii):

LUTHER: Listen, have we met before?

DR. JOHANNES: Yes, in your childhood home!

LUTHER: I see, yes: it was you who ... were thought to have sold yourself to the devil.

DR. JOHANNES: The same! Do you still believe that?

LUTHER: Who can say?

DR. JOHANNES: Can a Magister Ludi believe such gossip? And do you think the devil needs to buy when he can get so much for nothing?

²³ Ibid., 79 (III, v): ("Get thee behind me, Satan!": Matthew 16:23. King James translation).

²⁴ Ibid., 37 (I, i):

MARTIN: ... I found the nut you beat me for stealing. I threw it on the fire and asked God to curse it, so that no tree might grow from it and bring misfortune to anyone!*

* Cf. Matthew 21:19.

Later, as the witnesses gather for the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses, there are several Messianic allusions:

MODER LUTHER (...): Min son, din fader och jag hava sökt dig ...

LUTHER: Kvinna, vad haver jag med dig?

FADER LUTHER (fram).

LUTHER: Mina vägar äro icke edra vägar!²⁵

Later in the same scene Luther again quotes Christ, as he predicts the disruption and strife his mission will cause: "Jag är icke kommen att sända frid utan svärdet! Eld och svärd, mord och brand!"²⁶

When Karlstadt begins preaching on his own rather than following Luther, the latter feels betrayed, and again likens himself to Christ:

LUTHER: var är Karlstadt?

AMSDORFF: Han är ute på egen hand.

²⁵ Samlade verk, XLIX, 100 (III, viii):

MOTHER LUTHER (...): "Son.... thy father and I have sought thee...." [Luke 2:48. King James and Douay-Rheims translations.]

LUTHER: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" [John 2:4. King James translation.]

FATHER LUTHER (steps forward).

LUTHER: "... my ways [are] not your ways...." [Isaiah 55:8. Jerusalem Bible.]

²⁶ Ibid., 101: "I came not to send peace but the sword.* Fire and sword, death and destruction!"

* Matthew 10:34. Douay-Rheims translation.

LUTHER: Judas Iskariot!²⁷

As the Diet of Worms draws closer, this identification increases, and Luther knows that the Diet will find him guilty:

von HUTTEN: Vart går du?

LUTHER: Quo vadis? Jag går att korsfästas!²⁸

And indeed as he awaits his trial he is mocked by soldiers, with words similar to those used by Christ's tormentors:

HÄROLDEN (... till Knektarne): Är det judarnes Konung?

BETJÄNTE (skratta).

KNEKT I: Det är kejsarnes kejsare!²⁹

In the penultimate scene, which shows Luther making his peace with his father, he does so in a paraphrase of

²⁷ Samlade verk, XLIX, 131 (IV, xi):

LUTHER: where's Karlstadt?

AMSDORFF: He's out on his own.

LUTHER: Judas Iskariot!

²⁸ Ibid., 132 (IV, xi):

von HUTTEN: Where are you going?

LUTHER: Quo vadis? I'm going to be crucified!

²⁹ Ibid., 138 (V, xii):

THE HERALD (... to the Soldiers): Is this the King of the Jews?

ATTENDANTS (laugh).

FIRST SOLDIER: It's the emperor of emperors!

one of the Seven Last Words from the Cross: "... för-låter dig gör jag, ty du förstår icke bättre!"³⁰

Since Dr. Johannes has usurped the symbolism of Satan, Luther's enemy, the Church, personified in the Pope, is identified with Antichrist, an identification common enough in the polemical writings of self-styled evangelical Protestant sects:

SKOLMÄSTARN: Så har vi ny påve, ja!
Vad sägs om en Borgia?

....
MODER LUTHER: Det skall vara själva Anti-krist....³¹

Symbolically, this is a very interesting, if unorthodox, situation: Christ struggles against Antichrist (who, in Apocalyptic writing, is not contemporary with Christ, but appears somewhat later) and is aided and encouraged in his struggle by -- Satan! who should surely be the ally of Antichrist against Christ rather than vice-versa. It would seem that Strindberg, while admiring the man Luther and acknowledging the need for reform of the papacy and the Church, nevertheless did not quite approve of the Reformation; indeed, he has

³⁰ Samlade verk, XLIX, 152 (V, xiii): "... I forgive you, for you don't know any better!" Cf. Luke 23:34.

³¹ Ibid., 39 (I, i):

THE SCHOOLMASTER: And so we have a new pope! Yes. What do you say to a Borgia?

....
MOTHER LUTHER: He must be the Antichrist himself....

elsewhere referred to it as the work of the devil: causing division and strife rather than the unity and harmony which ought to characterize God's people. Dr. Johannes remains, then, at best an ambiguous figure.

In addition to the biblical allusions cited above, Luther is compared to several Old Testament figures. Some of these associations and their meanings are familiar from Strindberg's other writings, such as the association with Esau: a demonstration of Strindberg's personal attraction to and sympathy for Luther. As seen in *Lammet och Vilddjuret*, Strindberg associates Esau, the disenfranchised son of Isaac, with Ishmael (his uncle), the son of the bondswoman (tjänstekvinnans son), the biblical character with whom he most identifies. When he associates Luther with Esau, it is because he sees parallels between Luther's character and career and his own:

SKOLMÄSTARN: vår goda fru Cotta i Eisenach vill ta Martin till sig och hålla honom i skolan.

MODER LUTHER: Martin? Inte Jakob?

SKOLMÄSTARN: Nej hon tycker mer om Esau än om Jakob, och det kan ingen människa hjälpa.³²

³² Samlade verk, XLIX, 38-39 (I, i):

THE SCHOOLMASTER: the good Mrs. Cotta in Eisenach wants to take Martin in and keep him in school.

MOTHER LUTHER: Martin? Not Jacob?

SKOLMÄSTARN: No, she prefers Esau to Jacob, and nothing can be done about that.

The association with Samuel is more extended and, in terms of the action, more significant. Luther is deeply moved by the story of Samuel when he reads it in the Bible Dr. Johannes places in his hands, and is told that he is to be the Samuel of his own times:

LUTHER (slår upp i boken och läser): -- --
 -- Vad är det här? "Och då piltens Samuel tjänste Herren under Eli var Herrans ord sällsynt på den tiden och var föga profetia" ... Det stämmer! (Läser.) "Och Herren kallade Samuel tredje gången ..." (Läser.) "Och Samuel växte till och Herren var med honom och intet av hans ord föll på hälleberget. Och hela Israel visste att Samuel var en trogen Herrans profet." (Läser.) "Och de filistéer togo Guds ark och satte honom bredvid avguden Dagon ... Och som de den andra morgonen uppstodo, funno de Dagon liggande framstupa på jorden inför Herrans ark." -- Jo, det finns avgudar än, gunås! --

Ja! Det kan inte nekas ... Det är märkvärdigt vad det är likt det som sker nu! Man skulle tro det var skrivet i går! -- -- -- Här skulle nog behövas en Samuel, men var finns den?

DOKTOR JOHANNES (lägger sin hand på Luthers axel): Här sitter han!³³

³³ Samlade verk, XLIX, 54-55 (II, ii):

LUTHER (opens the book and reads): -- -- --
 What's this? "Now the child Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days: there was no manifest vision." [I Samuel 3:1.] ... That fits! (Reads.) "And the Lord called Samuel again the third time." [I Samuel 3:8.] (Reads.) "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him: and not one of his words fell on the ground. And all Israel ... knew that Samuel was a faithful prophet of the Lord." [I Samuel 3:19-20.] (Reads.) "And the Philistines took the ark of God ... and set it by Dagon ... And the next day ... when they rose in the morning they found Dagon lying upon his face on the earth before the ark of the Lord." [I Samuel 4:2,4. Douay-Rheims translation used throughout.] Yes, there are still false gods, goodness knows! --

Luther's question and Dr. Johannes' answer are echoed by Staupitz later in the play, after Luther has been commissioned to teach in the university, and this time Luther agrees that the symbol applies to him, accepting his mission with Samuel's very words:

STAUPITZ: man väntar något av dig, något stort!

LUTHER: Av mig stackare?

STAUPITZ: Ja; av dig! som av den lille stackaren Samuel!

LUTHER: Samuel? -- Det läste jag i biblioteket hos kurfursten! Samuel!

STAUPITZ: Ja!

LUTHER: Det var då detta? Detta? "Här skulle nog behövas en Samuel, men var finns den?"

STAUPITZ: Här finns han!

LUTHER (faller på knä): Ja och Amen, det är så!

STAUPITZ: Men innan du tillträder ditt lärarekall, måste du utföra ett uppdrag, som även innebär en prövning!

LUTHER: Tala Herre, din tjänare hörer.³⁴

—
Yes! It can't be denied ... It's remarkable how it resembles what's happening now! You'd think it had been written yesterday! -- -- A Samuel is needed here, that's for sure; but where is he to be found?

DR. JOHANNES (lays his hand on Luther's shoulder): He's sitting here!

³⁴ Samlade verk, XLIX, 82-83 (III, v):

STAUPITZ: something's expected of you: something great!

LUTHER: Of a wretch like me?

STAUPITZ: Yes, of you! as it was expected of poor little Samuel!

LUTHER: Samuel? -- I read that in the Elector's library! Samuel!

STAUPITZ: Yes!

LUTHER: Was it this, then? This? "A Samuel is needed here, that's for sure; but where is he to be found?"

STAUPITZ: Here he is!

LUTHER (falls to his knees): Yes! Amen: it is so!

STAUPITZ: But before you answer your call

Between these two scenes, when he learns of the death of a friend he had refused to help, Luther paraphrases Psalm 139:7 (Vulgate 138:7): "Vart skall jag fly för din ande, Herre, Evige Gud i himmelen!"³⁵ At the opening of the scene in which he leaves the monastery, still suffering from the abuses of the other monks and seeing no end to this suffering, he again quotes from the Psalms (i.e., identifying himself with David): "Ack Herre huru länge vill du så platt förgäta mig!"³⁶

In the final scene of the play, mention is made of an abortive attempt to discredit Luther by tempting him to succumb to the pleasures of the flesh. This idea of destroying a man's career through his infatuation with a woman suggests, of course, the story of Samson and Delilah:

BERLEPSCH: Har ni hört ett vilt förslag av

—
as a teacher, you must perform a task, which even amounts to a test!

LUTHER: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." [I Samuel 3:10. Douay-Rheims translation.]

³⁵ Samlade verk, XLIX, 63 (II, iii): "'Whither shall I go from thy spirit?'"* Lord, Eternal God in Heaven!"

* King James translation.

³⁶ Ibid., 77 (III, v): "How long, O Lord? Will you utterly forget me?" [Psalm 13: 1 (Vulgate 12:1). Confraternity of Christian Doctrine translation.]

de påvlige: att skicka en Delila på Simson?

HOVMÄSTARN: På den! Han skulle nog reda sig med ett halvt dussin.³⁷

Luther is a Strindbergian hero, not susceptible to the wiles of woman, a tower of strength: if he goes under, it will be as the classical equivalent to Samson, Hercules, himself igniting his own funeral pyre.

He has accomplished much, but inside the castle of Wartburg he is unaware of the success his movement has had; like Moses, he will not live to enjoy the promised land, but that land will be reached by his followers. Also like Moses, his mission and his belief that it will be accomplished fill him with a profound inner vision:

BERLEPSCH: Om han visste sin makt, den mannen, om han visste vad han uträttat redan!

HOVMÄSTARN: Han tycks ana det ibland, och då liknar han Moses när den ville se Gud.³⁸

Earlier in the scene we are told that at this period Luther suffers from visions, and sounds are often heard coming from his room, at times as if he

³⁷ Samlade verk, XLIX, 156 (V, xiv):

BERLEPSCH: Have you heard of a wild suggestion by the papists to send a Delilah to Samson?

THE STEWARD: To him! He'd survive if they sent a half-dozen, he would!

³⁸ Ibid., 156 (V, xiv):

BERLEPSCH: If that man only knew his power, if he only knew what he has achieved already!

THE STEWARD: He seems to suspect it at times; and then he resembles Moses, when he wished to see God.

were talking with someone, at other times as if a violent struggle were going on (Jacob wrestling with God). The final piece of Biblical symbolism links these occurrences to another Old Testament hero with whom Strindberg also felt strong affinities: Job. The Wartburg period, then, is a test of Luther's faith and a lesson to him in humility:

LUTHER: ... jag läser Job! -- "Är jag ett hav eller en valfisk att du så förvarar mig. Ty jag tänkte: min säng skall trösta mig; mitt läger skall lisa mig. Men när jag talar med mig själv, så förskräcker du mig med drömmar och gör mig förfarelse; att min själ önskar sig vara hängd och mina ben döden!"³⁹

Luther survives the test and learns the lesson: "Gud är stor, Gud är stor och nådig, och jag är ett snavs!"⁴⁰

This is indeed a victory of faith for Luther, for until this final scene his attitudes towards God have been closer to Strindberg's during the Inferno period than to those one would expect of a man of faith and a great religious reformer. He enters the monastery more as an escape from the world than as an act of devotion,

³⁹ Samlade verk, XLIX, 157 (V, xiv):

MARTIN LUTHER: ... I'm reading the Book of Job! -- "Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou hast enclosed me in a prison? If I say: My bed shall comfort me, and I shall be relieved speaking with myself on my couch: Thou wilt frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions. So that my soul rather chooseth hanging: and my bones death." [Job 7:12-15. Douay-Rheims translation.]

⁴⁰ Ibid., 162 (V, xiv): "God is great! God is great and gracious, and I am a worm!"

and the indignities he suffers there produce in him thoughts which echo the tormented hero of *Inferno*:

Jag tror att jag är kättare, och således en fördömd! Jag är fördömd, förbannad, och Gud har förkastat mig, vänt mig ryggen eller sover han! Sover du Gud eller gör du narri med oss! ...⁴¹

Before the Diet of Worms, he again feels abandoned by God:

Om Gud överger [vår stora sak], så är den åt helvete, och då går jag med huvudet före in i brasan. Varför skall jag försvara honom, när han inte vill försvara mig?⁴²

It is only in the final scene of the play, when he has had time to recover his physical and spiritual forces, and to reflect on his career and his relation to God, that his faith triumphs. When he has given up hope, God Himself, it seems, has taken over: there is a new pope in Rome, Adrian VI (pope 1522-23), who is sympathetic to Luther's criticisms of the Church, his work is everywhere being achieved, and the Elector has summoned him to preach against those who are distorting his

⁴¹ Samlade verk, XLIX, 79 (III, v):

I believe I'm a heretic, and consequently condemned. I'm condemned, accursed, and God has cast me aside, turned His back on me, or else is sleeping. Are you sleeping, God, or are you making fools of us? ...

⁴² *Ibid.*, 142 (V, xii):

If God has abandoned [our great cause], it will go to Hell, and in that case I go head-first into the fire. Why should I stand up for Him when He won't stand up for me?

teachings. This convinces him that the hand of God is everywhere, and that he is no more than an instrument of His will. Luther, who so far has been driven on by his own dynamism, is content to accept this rôle: "Gud styrer! Gud styrer och vi äro bara Hans-Wurstar och Polichineller!"⁴³ This spiritual development closely parallels Strindberg's own, making *Näktergalen i Wittenberg* the most personal of the historical plays; pity it is among the feeblest dramatically.

⁴³ *Samlade verk*, XLIX, 162 (V, xiv): "God directs! God directs and we are only [puppets]!"

Chapter 72

World Historical Plays

In the spring of 1903, Strindberg wrote a series of articles for the newspaper *Svenska dagbladet*,¹ in which he developed a theory of history as the product of a conscious will which directs all things: the Will of God. Feeling that his interpretation of history could be the basis of a series of dramas dealing with world history, he began working on such a series. The first three plays of the projected fifteen (of which the recently finished *Näktergalen i Wittenberg* was to form the eleventh) were completed before the project was abandoned. The stage history of the four plays that got written proves that to have been a wise decision. The project was realized in the collection of short fictionalized historical sketches entitled *Historiska miniatyrer* (1905).

The first of the world historical plays, *Genom öknar till arvland, eller Moses*² (*Through the Wilderness to the Promised Land, or Moses*: hereafter cited as *Moses*), is also the least noteworthy, little more than

¹ "Världshistoriens mystik" ("The Mystery of World History") *Samlade skrifter*, LIV, 337-401; see the chapter on *Efterslätter*.

² *Samlade otryckta skrifter*, I, 7-56.

a dramatized paraphrase of the biblical story. The play has had only one production (Hanover, 1923).

Even insofar as symbolism is concerned, there is little in *Moses* to comment upon except the reading out by two choruses of elders of the blessings from Mount Gerizim and the curses from Mount Ebal, linking this obscure play to the pilgrimage plays (an obvious enough connection, given the theme of *Moses*) and perhaps even to the dream play associations suggested by the related Fagervik-Skamsund symbols.

The second of the plays, *Hellas, eller Sokrates*³ (*Hellas, or Socrates*: generally cited as *Sokrates*), was written in October, 1903. Like *Moses*, it lacks dramatic interest, but it is much more interesting in other respects. Following his practice in the Swedish history plays, Strindberg sets *Sokrates* at a moment of crisis: at her height politically, artistically, and philosophically, Athens is nevertheless about to topple.

In keeping with Strindberg's religious interpretation of history, the fall of Athenian civilization coincides with the death of the classical gods, as their worship gives way to Christianity. Socrates both foresees and assists this process. The play opens at the foot of the recently completed Parthenon, atop which Phidias' statue of Athena stands gleaming in the

³ *Samlade otryckta skrifter*, I, 57-138.

setting sun (itself a symbol of decline). The conversation gets round to the reality of the goddess represented by the statue, and Socrates elicits from Phidias the confession that as far as he is concerned she exists only in his imagination:

SOKRATES: När du gjort Athena däruppe på Parthenon, har du gjort Athena då?
 FIDIAS: Jag har gjort hennes bild.
 SOKRATES: Rätt! Du har gjort hennes bild; efter vilken förebild?
 FIDIAS: Efter min inre!
 SOKRATES: Alltså icke efter en yttre! Har du icke sett gudinnan med dina ögon?
 FIDIAS: Icke med mina yttre ögon!
 SOKRATES: Finns hon då, utom dig eller inom dig?
 FIDIAS: Om ingen lyssnar på oss, skulle jag svara: hon finns icke utom mig, alltså finns hon icke.⁴

This skepticism towards the gods is general in the group surrounding Socrates, and signals the death of the old religion. All that remains before the new faith

⁴ Samlade otryckta skrifter, I, 61-62 (i: I have normalized the Swedish spelling):

SOKRATES: When you created Athena up there on the Parthenon, did you also create Athena?
 PHIDIAS: I fashioned her likeness.
 SOKRATES: Right! You fashioned her likeness, but after what model?
 PHIDIAS: After my inner conception of her!
 SOKRATES: Not after any external model, then! Haven't you seen the goddess with your eyes?
 PHIDIAS: Not with my external eyes!
 SOKRATES: Does she exist, then, outside or inside of you?
 PHIDIAS: If nobody were listening, I'd answer that she doesn't exist outside of me, and therefore she doesn't exist.

can assume its place is for Zeus himself to be overthrown:

EURIPIDES: Vad bryr mig garvarn, mig som icke räddes Statens gudar? Dessa gudar om vilkas undergång vår Aeschylus redan längesen har siat. Säger icke hans Prometheus att Olympiern skall störtas av hans son som skall födas av en ung kvinna?

SOKRATES: Helt visst!⁵

The reference is to a prophecy made by Prometheus that Thetis, a sea-nymph in whom Zeus is amorously interested, will bear a son who will become greater than his father. In order to forestall this catastrophe, Zeus marries her to a mortal, to whom she bears Achilles, who indeed becomes greater than his (mortal) father. In Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound*, however, Thetis is not named, and Strindberg suggests that the prophecy might in fact refer to the birth of Christ, Whose religion would overthrow the classical religions among which it arose.

Alcibiades is the Hercules figure in the play, with the aspirations and potential of a superman: "Alkibiades är av hjälteätt...."⁶ After an earthquake,

⁵ Samlade otryckta skrifter, I, 63 (i):

EURIPIDES: What do I care for the tanner, who am not even afraid of the state gods? Those gods whose extinction was foretold long ago by our Aeschylus: doesn't his Prometheus say the Olympian will be overthrown by his son, who will be born of a young woman?

SOKRATES: Quite so!

⁶ Ibid., 65 (i): "Alcibiades comes from a race of heroes...."

he looks forward to the overthrow of the gods, believing that he will replace them himself; they are to be replaced, however, by One Higher than he:

Må alltet ramla ifrån Pindos upp till Kaukasus. Då blir Prometheus lös och skänker åter eld åt frusna människor. Och Zeus går ned till Hades, Pallas säljer sig åt löpska ynglingar, Apollon krossar lyran för att flicka skor. Då löper Ares från sin stridshingst för att vakta får. På spillrorna av jordens härligheter står Alkibiades allena.⁷

That Zeus is to be overthrown by Christ is made explicit in an exchange between the Roman Lucillus and Cartaphilus, the Wandering Jew (the exchange is incorporated into *Historiska miniatyrer*, and is discussed in detail in the chapter dealing with that work, as is the Wandering Jew). They refer to the promise of the Cumaeen Sibyl and the promise to Abraham (also discussed in detail in the chapter dealing with *Historiska miniatyrer*), both of which are fulfilled in Christ. These two symbolic characters proclaim Strindberg's theme that history moves steadily towards Christ's triumph on earth: it is they who suggest answers to "the

⁷ *Samlade otryckta skrifter*, I, 80 (ii):

May the whole works collapse from Pindos to the Caucasus. Then Prometheus will be freed and again give fire to frozen mankind. And Zeus will descend to Hades, Pallas sell herself to randy youths, Apollo smash his lyre and become a cobbler. Then Ares will flee his battle stallion and become a shepherd. On the ruins of the earth's glories, Alcibiades stands alone.

mystery of world history", answers which other characters also glimpse, but less distinctly.

Strindberg has referred elsewhere to the account in Acts 17 of how St. Paul found in Athens an altar dedicated to the Unknown God and used this circumstance to demonstrate to the Athenians that in fact they already recognized the God he preached. Although Sokrates is set some four and one-half centuries earlier than the biblical account (Socrates died in 399 B.C.), we are meant to automatically associate the temple of the Unknown God in the play with the Christian Godhead:

SOKRATES: Detta är den okände gudens tempel. Vem är den Okände, Platon?

PLATON: Eftersom han är okänd, känner ingen honom.

....
KRITON: Han kan vara känd av andra folk fastän okänd av oss.⁸

The association is strengthened by the confusion of the names Adonis and Adonai, and by similarities between Cybele, the mother of the gods, and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God (see the chapter on *Historiska miniatyrer*).

⁸ Samlade otryckta skrifter, I, 131-32 (xviii):

SOKRATES: This is the temple of the unknown god! Who is the Unknown, Plato?

PLATO: Since he is unknown, nobody knows him.

....
CRITO: He may be known to other peoples, although unknown to us.

The death of the classical deities is mirrored in the play by the deaths of Pericles, Socrates, Athens, and indeed the whole civilization which Athens represents. The atmosphere is one of sickness, death, and decay, all of which are embodied in the plague, which hangs over the action: "Demagogerna ha rört träsket, så att det stinker, och därför ha vi pesten också, pesten på agorån och pesten i Piraeus."⁹

At a dinner at Alcibiades', the position of honour is occupied by a skeleton, which represents Athens:

-- Så där ser Athen ut vid det här laget!
Köttet har Perserkonungen, Sparta och Kleon
gnagit! Ögonen ha bundsförvanterna rivit,
tänderna ha medborgarne tagit ut. -- -- --¹⁰

Significantly, the skeleton also serves as an omen of the death of Pericles, by seeming to beckon to him when it is moved by the beginning of the earthquake. The age of Pericles is the Golden Age of Athens; their

⁹ Samlade otryckta skrifter, I, 64 (i):

The demagogues have stirred up the swamp until it stinks, and so we have the plague as well: the plague in the agora and the plague in Piraeus.

¹⁰ Ibid., 77 (ii):

-- That's how Athens looks by now! The flesh has been gnawed away by the Persian king, Sparta, and Cleon! The eyes have been torn out by our allies, and the teeth have been knocked out by the citizens. -- -- --

destinies are intertwined: "PERIKLES: Min själ är sjuk; när staten lider är jag sjuk ..."¹¹

Finally, there is a brief reference to Zoroastrianism, presumably as a religion somewhere between Greek pantheism and Christian monotheism (indeed, it bears many similarities to the Christian heresy of Manichaeism), and as one that also points forward to Christ, in its reference to salvation through suffering:

TISSAFERNES: Känner du Zoro-Aster?

ALKIBIADES: För att vara Er angenäm skulle jag önska ha känt honom från min barndom.

TISSAFERNES: Då hade du kunnat skilja på gott och ont, på ljus och mörker, på Ormuzd och Ahriman. Och du skulle ha levat i hoppet om ljusets seger -- och om en all-försoning genom lidandet!¹²

The material from Sokrates is the basis for three of the sketches in *Historiska miniatyrer*: "Hemicykeln i Athen" ("The Hemicycle in Athens"), "Alkibiades"

¹¹ Samlade otryckta skrifter, I, 81 (iii): "PERICLES: My soul is sick; when Athens suffers, I am sick ..."

¹² Ibid., 114-15 (xii):

TISSAFERNES: Do you know Zoroaster?

ALCIBIADES: To please you, I wish I'd known him from childhood.

TISSAFERNES: Then you'd have been able to distinguish between good and evil, between light and darkness, between Ormuzd and Ahriman*. And you'd live in the hope that light would conquer -- and of a general redemption through suffering!

* Respectively, the chief good and evil spirits of Zoroastrianism.

("Alcibiades"), and "Sokrates" ("Socrates"). Most of the play's symbols are more developed there, and in the context (an overview of world history) for which they were intended; consequently, my discussion of these three sketches constitutes a more detailed discussion of the play.

The last play of the projected series to be written was *Lammet och Vilddjuret, eller Kristus*¹³ (The Lamb and the Beast, or Christ), which was finished in early November, 1903. The play is in three parts: the first is an introduction, picking up themes from Sokrates; the second briefly recounts the life of Christ, although He is never seen (except very briefly at the end of Part I, when He is carried across the stage as an infant: the Flight into Egypt); and the third shows Christianity emerging victorious from the persecutions of the Roman emperors Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.

The animal symbolism of the title is obvious and is drawn from the Apocalypse: the lamb is Christ, the Lamb of God, and the beast is the Antichrist, here embodied in the persons of the three Roman emperors mentioned above. Strindberg's introduction of the lamb symbol is subtle; it comes not as a biblical reference, but as a figure of speech:

KAIPHAS: offret skall vara rent för
att behaga Herren! Ischarioth! är Galiléern
ren?

¹³ *Samlade otryckta skrifter*, I, 139-93.

JUDAS: Ren som ett lamm!¹⁴

The only other animals in the play are the ravens that gather around the dying Nero in the final scene. He thinks they have come to mourn him, but they wish merely to feast on his carrion; even in death he suffers from illusion. In this respect, he is like mankind in general and is thus worthy of Indra's Daughter's sympathy, which he applies to himself: "Se mitt blod flyter i dammen och korparne samlas att gråta ... Det är synd om Nero."¹⁵

The play opens with the birth of Christ, four centuries after the death of Socrates, which closed the previous play. The final scene in Part I picks up the themes of Sokrates with a dialogue between two characters who also appeared in that play: the Roman Lucillus and Cartaphilus, the Wandering Jew. In the intervening four centuries, the destiny of the world seems to have been placed more and more in the hands of Rome rather than of Israel. Despite Lucillus' jeers, Cartaphilus' faith that salvation will come through Israel is justi-

¹⁴ Samlade otryckta skrifter, I, 157 (II, vi):

CAIAPHAS: the victim must be pure if
the sacrifice is to please the Lord!
Iscaiot! is the Gallilean pure?

JUDAS: Pure as a lamb!

¹⁵ Ibid., 193 (III, xv): "Look, my blood spreads in the pond, and the ravens gather to weep ... Nero is to be pitied."

fied (in a tableau which he possibly does not see and certainly does not comprehend):

LUCILLUS: Farväl, Israels barn. Nu är du
Romersk undersåte, var du nöjd med fräls-
ningen från Rom, någon annan känna vi icke!
(Går.)

*

KARTAFILOS (gör en tyst bön).

*

JOSEF, MARIA (med barnet vandra förbi).¹⁶

After this introduction, the promises to Rome and Israel (which are the same promise: see the chapter on Historiska miniatyrer) work themselves out in terms of the lamb and beast symbolism: i.e., the Lamb is the force which is to conquer, the beast that which must be overcome. The first instance in which the promise is seen fulfilling itself is the death of Caligula. Two elements are cleverly juxtaposed to convey a tacit message:

CALIGULA: ... jag skall kyssa din fot, om
du låter mig leva!

CHAEREA: Kyss den då jag trampar ihjäl dig,
ruttna as!

(Han trampar sönder Caligula, och går.)

*

SÅNG (nerifrån Katakomberna):
Ära vare Gud i höjden
Frid på jorden

¹⁶ Samlade otryckta skrifter, I, 147 (I, iii):

LUCILLUS: Farewell, child of Israel. You're
a Roman subject now; you'd best be satisfied
with the salvation Rome gives! We know no
other! (He goes.)

*

CARTAPHILUS: (prays silently).

*

JOSEPH AND MARY (wander by with the Child).

Och mänskorna en god vilje.¹⁷

When Caligula is succeeded by Claudius, Lucillus (now a Christian) begins to despair, but is assured that all is going according to the divine plan:

LUCILLUS: Detta är världens herre, hur skall då världen se ut? Detta är det andra vilddjuret, skall då lammet förgås?

NARCISSUS: Nej, lammet skall besegra vilddjuret!¹⁸

Finally, after the death of the third beast, Nero, the final line of the play announces the triumph of the Lamb; this is not the fulfillment of the promise, but now nothing stands in the way:

NERO: Den siste av Caesars Augustus' ätt, den siste Romaren är död! Vem skall nu ärva tronen?

¹⁷ Samlade otryckta skrifter, I, 177 (III, xi):

CALIGULA: ... I'll kiss your foot if you let me live!

CHAEREA: Kiss it while I trample you to death then, you rotten carcass! (He tramples Caligula to death, and leaves.)

*

SONG (rising from the Catacombs):
Glory be to God in the highest;
Peace on earth,
Good will towards men.

¹⁸ Ibid., 181 (III, xii):

LUCILLUS: If this is the master of the world, what must the world be like? This is the second beast; will the Lamb then be vanquished?

NARCISSUS: No, the Lamb will conquer the beast!

PHAON: Det skall Galiléern!¹⁹

Because He is never seen (at least, as an adult), Christ remains a rather shadowy figure, although one of His characteristics, love of solitude, suggests that He is a Strindbergian *Übermensch* (see *I havsbandet*):

PILATUS: Har du sett den man som kallas Jesus?

....

KARTAFILOS: Många tala om honom, men endast några få se honom, ty han undviker hopen; går ofta i öknar och ensamheten.²⁰

Christ has supplanted Hercules as Strindberg's ideal model for humanity!

Pilate later reports a rumour that Jesus was raised in Heliopolis. Although there is no evidence for this, it is possible (the Flight into Egypt may have been to there), and symbolically it is very appropriate, for it links Christ with Helios (Ra) the sun god, who, like Adonis in *Sokrates*, was closely associated

¹⁹ *Samlade otryckta skrifter*, I, 193 (III, xv):

NERO: The last of Augustus Caesar's descendants, the last Roman, is dead! Who will inherit the throne now?

PHAON: The Gallilean!

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 150 (II, iv):

PILATE: Have you seen this man they call Jesus?

....

CARTAPHILUS: Many speak of him, but only a few have seen him, for he avoids the multitude, and often goes out into the desert to be alone.

with vegetation and the consequent death and resurrection pattern, and with the sun itself.

In theogony, the Sun represents the moment (surpassing all others in the succession of celestial dynasties) when the heroic principle shines at its brightest. Thus, after Uranus, Saturn and Jupiter, comes Helios Apollo. On occasion, the Sun appears as the direct son and heir of the god of heaven.... (Cirlot, 302.)

The association of Christ with Heliopolis, then, reinforces the theme of the old religions' giving way to the new, and perhaps suggests as well that the worship of the sun (centred in Heliopolis) was another indication of the striving of history towards Christianity.

The biblical accounts of the meeting of chief priests and elders which decided that Jesus ought to die do not go into detail. The fullest report is in John 11: 47-53, which seems to suggest that the motive for seeking Jesus' death was political: if the Jewish nation came to believe in Him, the Temple and Jerusalem and indeed the whole nation would be left defenceless before the Romans. Strindberg makes the motive religious as well as political: Christ is to be a human sacrifice, a scapegoat to atone for the sin forced on the Jews by the Romans:

KAIPHAS: Då vi icke kunna undgå styggelsen, att kejsarbilden reses i det Allraheligaste, och då folket skall förgås i uppröret, är oss bättre att vi bringa Herranom vårt offer och att en dör för folket!

ANNAS: Ett utomordentligt försoningsoffer

är oss av nöden och då Påska stundar, låtom
oss offra Galiléern.²¹

Christ's death is presented symbolically, as a tableau: "Man ser endast skuggan av de tre korsen på en vit kalk-klippa."²² One is reminded of the scene in *Till Damaskus I* in which the masts of three beached boats in the background resemble three crosses against the sky.

Strindberg has departed slightly from the biblical accounts of the preparations for the Last Supper. In the two gospels which provide detail of the incident (Mark and Luke), the disciples are instructed to go into Jerusalem, look for a man carrying a pitcher of water, and follow him home, where his master will direct them to a room in which they will be allowed to celebrate the Passover. In Strindberg's dramatization, it is the man with the water pitcher himself who shows the disciples to the room. It is possible that Strindberg is drawing attention to the man as Aquarius (the

²¹ *Samlade otryckta skrifter*, I, 157 (II, vi):

CAIAPHAS: Since we can't avoid the abomination of having the Emperor's image set up in the Holy of Holies, and since the nation would be defeated in an uprising, it's best for us to make a sacrifice to the Lord, and let one man die for the people!

ANNAS: An exceptional sin-offering is what we need and, as Passover is at hand, let us sacrifice the Gallilean.

²² *Ibid.*, 169 (II, x): "Only the shadows of the three crosses against a white limestone cliff can be seen."

water-bearer), whose symbolic function it is to herald the end of one era and the beginning of another.

Having carried his cycle of world historical plays from the liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt to the redemption of mankind, and having demonstrated the evolution of history towards the spread of Christianity, Strindberg abandoned the project, at least in dramatic form. Although not outstanding successes on the stage, the three world historical plays are nevertheless interesting for the way in which they embody the themes of their author. Interestingly enough, the sketches in *Historiska miniatyrer*, which realizes the project in another medium, are exceptionally dramatic in form, relying on dialogue more than narration to achieve their ends.

Chapter 73

Götiska rummen

*Götiska rummen: släktöden från sekelskiftet*¹ (*The Gothic Rooms: The Fortunes of a Family at the Turn of the Century*, 1904) relates the fortunes of Dr. Henrik Borg, his brother Gustav, their wives, children, and sundry other family connections. The title is a link to Strindberg's first novel, *Röda rummet*, for the two titles refer to the same place: what had been the Red Room in Berns Salonger had been remodelled in the years between the two novels, and divided into a series of smaller rooms, which became known as the Gothic Rooms.

Götiska rummen is a sequel to *Röda rummet*, twenty-five years later, in several ways. The central figure, Dr. Borg, was a minor figure in *Röda rummet* (and will appear again in *Svarta fanor: Black Banners*), a member of the bohemian group surrounding the hero, Arvid Falk. The changes to the Red Room are symbolic of those in his own life: no longer a self-possessed young man-about-town, he now finds himself leading the fragmented existence of a family man! Falk, who is based on Strindberg himself, is, in turn, a minor character in *Götiska rummen*. Most important, *Götiska rummen* is an examination of the liberalism of *Röda rummet*: Strind-

¹ *Skrifter*, IV, 5-182.

berg weighs the social and political accomplishments of the 1880s and finds them wanting, providing justification for his own conversion to social democracy.²

The novel relates how Dr. Borg's brother, Gustav, loses his job as a newspaper editor, is succeeded in it by his own son, Holger, and is divorced by his wife, Brita (who, however, dies before the proceedings are finalized). Dr. Borg is behind both the change-over in editors and the divorce, which he has encouraged Brita to pursue. Two other of Gustav's children provide subplots to the book: Anders, a poor tenant farmer on land owned by his uncle (Brita's brother, the pastor of Storö in the Stockholm archipelago); and Ester, a medical student who has a love-hate relationship with a young count, Max (who also appears in *Svarta fanor*). At the close of the novel Dr. Borg, who has also been divorced during its course, is preparing to marry for the third time, Gustav is a much altered man after the death of his wife, Anders and his family have decided to emigrate to America, Holger has served three months in prison for publishing an attack on the monarchy and has emerged a changed man, and Ester and Max, who have decided that neither of them could endure marriage to

² Strindberg's relation to the politics of his time is discussed in Myrdal. Of particular interest is the section of the article (23-25) dealing with *Götiska rummen*.

the other, discover that neither of them can endure separation from the other either.

This is a novel largely concerned with marriage and the relations between the sexes, but the cluster of symbols (vampirism-cannibalism-parasitism) generally associated with these themes in Strindberg's writing plays a very small part in it: a tendency also noted in his treatment of the marriages in *Gustav III*. There are, however, two occurrences of the plant parasite symbol. The first is in relation to Dr. Borg and his wife, Dagmar (a Norwegian and a feminist):

Ockultisterna säga att de alstra halvandliga substrat ini varandra, vilka äga ett slags väsenlik tillvaro; andra mena, att mannens och kvinnans själar växa i varandra med sugrötter, och att de egentligen leva i beständig omfamning....³

The other is in relation to Ester and Max:

-- Vet du jag tror att själarne leva så oberoende av kropparne, att de kunna sätta skott i andras bark, och leva saprofytiskt på främmande. Laven, som växer på träd och sten, är ett samliv av en alg och en svamp, ett bolag som kallas symbios.⁴

³ *Skrifter*, IV, 108 (XII):

The occultists say that they engender half-spiritual substrata, which have a kind of material existence, in each other; others think that the souls of men and women send fibrous roots into each other, and that they really do live constantly entwined....

⁴ *Ibid.*, 154 (XVII):

".... You know, I think that souls live so independently of bodies that they can put out shoots into the bark of others, and live saprophagously on foreign hosts. Lichen, which grows on trees and stones is formed by

This reflection (made by Max) provides a symbolic link between the two generations, pointing out the essential identity of their conflicts. Neither couple has a satisfactory relationship, not so much because of their own personalities or external circumstances, as because relations between the sexes are by nature parasitic: the two parties prey on each other (like vampires or cannibals, in fact). The perfect marriage (symbiosis), in which one gives as much as one receives, is difficult to achieve!

The books must balance, in other words, if there is to be harmony, and they must balance for each partner (the debit and credit symbolism). The difficulty in achieving this is expressed in the symbolism of rising and falling (the Wheel of Fortune): as one party rises, the other falls, and is bound to resent it. Just as the parasite symbolism provides a link between Dr. Borg and his niece, so the rising and falling symbolism provides one between Dr. Borg and his brother. Both are involved in divorces, and each attributes his unsuccessful marriage to the exaltation of woman, with its necessary corollary, the abasement of man. Gustav is the first to point this out, at the hearing of Brita's divorce petition before the church council:

—

an alga and a fungus sharing an existence, a partnership which is called symbiosis."

... det ingår i mannens kärlek att han ställer [kvinnan] över sig, och även över andra. Men nu sattes detta i system, och mannen abdikerade.⁵

Dr. Borg's statement of the same view is much stronger, and one hears behind it the voice of Strindberg himself, particularly in the attack on Ibsen and Björnson incorporated into his remarks:

Det hade gått an med denna kvinnoskålspoesi, om icke den varit åtföljd av mannens självförnedring. Män njöto av att förnedra sig, att leda i bevis det mannen var ett lägre djur, och när de gamla narrarne Ibsen och Björnson rent ut förklarade att samhället endast kunde räddas genom kvinnans uppsättande och mannens avsättande, då var dårska-pen på kulmen.⁶

Related to this symbolism of rising and falling is the ambiguous nature of love: a spiritual ideal which finds expression in sensuality, the two aspects of its nature seeming forever irreconcilable: "Brunst och hat! se där är kärleken, det högsta, som det skulle vara,

⁵ Skrifter, IV, 96 (X):

... it's characteristic of a man's love that he places [the woman] ahead of himself, and even ahead of others. But now that this has become a matter of course, man has abdicated.

⁶ Ibid., 108 (XII):

This poetry celebrating woman would have been all right if it hadn't been accompanied by man's self-abasement. Man enjoyed degrading himself, demonstrating that he was a baser animal, and when the old fools Ibsen and Björnson came right out and asserted that society could only be saved through elevating woman and deposing man, the folly was at its height.

och tillhör ändock de lägsta regionerna."⁷ Or, more starkly expressed: "Vi uppföra oss ... som djur, vi kyssas med samma mun, som lägger in maten, och vi älska med avföringsorganen!"⁸ This paradoxical nature of love is a result of the dual nature of man, having bodies, in common with the animals, and souls, in common with higher beings:

Darwinisterna ha nog rätt i att människokroppen är en utveckling av djurkroppen, men de glömma att själen har en självständig tillvaro med anor uppifrån, med minnen från stjärnorna, och att det här köttet bara är ett fodral, som stramar.⁹

This is the cause, incidentally, of Strindberg's break with Darwinism, which informed such works as *I havsbandet* and *"Paria"*.

The novel is remarkable for quite another set of symbols, drawn from the so-called occult sciences and theosophy: Doppelgangers, astral projections, auras, etc. They are all connected with Ester's daemon-lover,

⁷ *Skrifter*, IV, 116 (XIII): "Lust and hate! that's what love is: supposedly the highest sentiment, it nevertheless inhabits the lower regions."

⁸ *Ibid.*, 117 (XIII): "We behave like animals, ... we kiss with the same mouth that packs away food, and we make love with the organs of excretion!"

⁹ *Idem.*:

The Darwinians are right, of course, when they say that man's body evolved from the body of animals, but they forget that the soul has an independent existence, with origins on high, with recollections of the stars, and that this flesh is only a container, which is not big enough.

Max, who seems strongly attracted to the occult, and refer either to him and Ester or to Ester's parents, Gustav and Brita. They are used to throw more light on the male-female dichotomy, as Strindberg sees it, and are generally prefaced with the words "the occultists say ... ", "the theosophists believe ... ", etc.

The most frequent references to occult phenomena are to the Doppelganger. Max's attempt to define or redefine what is meant by the term helps determine what is meant by it generally in Strindberg's works:

-- Dubbelgångare i pöbelns mening tror jag inte på; men det kunde ha varit en projektion av oss utifrån bysten. Vi, du och jag, "se" ju varandra ibland, och det är ju bara projektioner, plus något som jag icke känner ännu. Teosoferna ha observerat faktum, men kunna icke förklara det; nämna dock "tillfälliga materialiseringar av tankens halvmateria".¹⁰

The usual sense of the term is mentioned earlier in the novel: "Vet du vad natt-maran är? Det är din

¹⁰ Skrifter, IV, 159 (XVII):

"I don't believe in what the masses understand by Doppelgangers, but it could have been a projection of ourselves originating in the heart. Don't we -- you and I -- sometimes 'see' each other? and that can only be projections plus something else, which I don't know yet. The theosophists have observed the phenomenon, but can't explain it; they describe it, though, as 'temporary materializations of the half-matter of thought.'"

fiendes själ, som besöker dig."¹¹ But it is the identification of the Doppelganger with thought projections which seems to predominate. In occult doctrine, thoughts produce forms on the astral plane, and if the thought producing them is sufficiently intense, it is occasionally possible for these forms to materialize on the earthly plane. A Doppelganger is thus a concretisation of one's own thoughts: a concept not unknown to psychology, where people are said to project their own character traits, hopes, fears, etc. on to others. This more modern view of so-called occult phenomena is evoked near the close of the novel, where it contributes to the theme of the seeming impossibility of man ever to know and understand woman. One reason for this impasse is perhaps that man never sees woman, or at least never falls in love with her, but instead projects all his own best qualities on to her and, like Pygmalion, falls in love with the image he has thus created: "Allt det sköna vi se hos [kvinnan], det är bara våra projektioner på hennes vita duk, som intet finns på."¹²

¹¹ *Skrifter*, IV, 127 (XIII): "Do you know what a nightmare is? It's the soul of your enemy, visiting you."

¹² *Ibid.*, 177 (XVIII): "Everything beautiful we observe in [woman] is only our own projections on to her white canvas, which is blank."

Max also believes in the aura: the astral radiation which, occultists believe, surrounds each person, defining (to those who have astral vision and are thus able to see the aura) what kind of person he is and providing a kind of personal space, ambience, or sphere of direct influence. Thus, when Ester feels cold (see below), it is because Max is reclaiming his own aura, which she has usurped (like a vampire). Similarly, he warns her not to protect herself from the cold by wearing her mother's shawl, lest her mother's aura, still clinging to the shawl, do her physical harm:

-- Lägg bort din mors schal! sade greven lugnt. Det sitter så mycket i den av hennes aura; och det kan oroa dig! Du kan komma in i sjukliga stämningar ...¹³

The most esoteric of Max's beliefs is that Ester's father killed her mother, albeit unwittingly, by projecting his sorrow (over the divorce and exclusion from the bosom of his family) on to her soul, which was not strong enough to bear it:

-- ... om jag vore teosof, skulle jag gissa att hon dog av hans sorg. Hans själ ympad på hennes slets ju bort, och det fat-

¹³ Skrifter, IV, 127 (XIII):

"Take off your mother's shawl!" the count said calmly. "So much of her aura remains in it, and it can upset you! You can fall into morbid moods ..."

tades tid för en sakta utlösning; därför
röcks hennes hjärta sönder.¹⁴

This extract connects astral projections (whether Doppelgangers or auras) to the parasitic plant symbol; they are also connected to another symbol, for when Max returns to his belief that Gustav is responsible for his wife's death, he uses the symbol of cold rather than occult theory:

-- För att nu återvända till din far, så är det min övertygelse att han dödat din mor utan att veta det. Han har frusit ihjäl henne, och om du ser efter, så har hon dött av köld.

Ester började vandra på golvet, och tog en schal från klädhängarn:

-- Jag är rädd för dig! sade hon. Du fryser ihjäl mig du också!¹⁵

There is little difference here between figure of speech and symbol. Max, who has ceased to love Ester, is acting very coldly towards her, just as Gustav had a very cold relationship with his wife. That there is

¹⁴ Skrifter, IV, 125 (XIII):

"... if I were a theosophist, I'd guess that she died of his sorrow. His soul, grafted on to hers, was torn off, and, since there wasn't time for a gradual release, her heart was torn asunder."

¹⁵ Ibid., 127 (XIII):

".... But getting back to your father, I'm convinced that he killed your mother without realizing it. He froze her to death, and if you look into it, you'll find that she died of cold."

Ester began to pace the floor, taking a shawl from the coat-rack. "I'm afraid of you!" she said, "You too are freezing me to death!"

something more than a metaphor involved, is demonstrated by Ester's feeling cold enough to put a shawl around her shoulders (further strengthening her parallel to her mother, whose shawl it was). The same process (i.e., passing from figure of speech to symbol) occurs earlier in the scene, and also involves cold:

-- Du tillhörde icke mina regioner.
 -- Och det säger du, så, så kallt!
 -- Det är icke kallt, men du känner det så! -- Fryser du inte nu?
 -- Jo, alldeles förskräckligt!
 -- Ser du! Det finns andra värmekällor än mekaniskt arbete och kemisk frändskap. -- Tycker du inte det drar här i rummet?
 -- Å, det blåser.
 -- Det är jag, som återtar min aura....¹⁶

These are the major symbolic threads in *Götiska rummen*. There are also instances of symbols familiar from other Strindberg works, but none of them is of interest, either for the light it throws on the novel, or for the light the novel throws on Strindberg's use of the symbols. One ought not to leave *Götiska rummen*, however, without noting its description of Arvid Falk.

¹⁶ *Skrifter*, IV, 126 (XIII):

".... We belonged to different worlds."
 "You say that so, so coldly!"
 "It isn't cold, but it seems so to you!"
 -- Aren't you cold now?"
 "Yes I am, terribly cold!"
 "You see! There are other sources of heat than mechanical work and chemical affinity. -- Don't you think this room has a draught?"
 "Oh! it's like a wind."
 "That's me, taking back my aura...."

Like Strindberg's stranger/wanderer heroes, he goes through life as a victim, suffering punishment for unknown crimes, for which he feels he must nevertheless do penance:

-- Han är ... så lik Balzacs Louis Lambert, en som inte är hemma här. Hans missnöje med allt härnere vill han tillskriva sina latent minnen om ett bättre; han tycker allting är dåliga kopior av original, dem han dunkelt erinrar sig. Och hans svajande mellan askes-fromhet och sinnlighet -- gudlöshet¹⁷ anger att han betraktar jordelivet som ett straff och att han emellanåt måste ta ett gyttjebad som penitens.¹⁸

This is as compact a character sketch as one can find of the persona of Strindberg's autobiographical novels, as well as of the major figures in many of his most personal and soul-searching plays. The idea that the malcontent is one who dimly remembers a better existence, and the allusion to the ideal forms of Plato clearly links Falk to the symbolism of the Isle of the

¹⁷ Both *Skrifter* and *Samlade skrifter* (LX, 266) have this reading ("sinnlighet -- gudlöshet") for what should clearly be (in parallel with "askes-fromhet") "sinnlighet-gudlöshet".

¹⁸ *Skrifter*, IV, 158 (XVII):

".... He's so much like Balzac's Louis Lambert: someone who isn't at home here. He attributes his discontent with everything down here to latent memories of a better world; he thinks all things are copies of originals, which he dimly remembers. And his vacillation between asceticism-piety and sensuality-godlessness shows that he considers life on earth a punishment, and that occasionally he must take a mud-bath as penance."

Blessed, the dominant symbol of Strindberg's post-Inferno years. Falk is Strindberg's alter-ego, and elsewhere in the novel, again in a description of Falk, he writes what could very well serve as his own literary epitaph:

-- Falk var en vivisektör, som experimenterade med sin egen själ, gick alltid med öppna sår, tills han gav sitt liv för vetandet, jag vill inte begagna det missbrukade ordet sanningen. Och skulle hans samlade skrifter komma ut en gång, borde icke ett ord ändras, utan alla motsägelser lösas i den gemensamma Kierkegaardska titeln: Stadier på Livets väg.¹⁹

One recognizes in this suggested title the stations of the pilgrimage plays.

¹⁹ Skrifter, IV, 30 (III):

".... Falk was a vivisectionist who experimented with his own soul, and always went about with open wounds, until he gave his life for knowledge -- I don't want to use the much-abused word truth. And if his collected works are published some day, not one word should be altered, but all contradictions should be resolved in the collective Kierkegaardian title: Stages on the Road of Life.

Chapter 74

Svarta fanor

In *Svarta fanor: sedeskildringar från sekelskiftet*¹ (*Black Banners: Life and Manners at the Turn of the Century*, 1907) as in *Götiska rummen*, Strindberg turns away from the liberal idealism of his past, but here he goes farther in indicating what is to take its place: not a jaded and reactionary conservatism, but rather a spirituality which views all social questions, even life itself, as nothing but illusion and therefore beneath contempt. The symbol of this spirituality, which is typically Strindbergian -- his own synthesis of religion, philosophy, natural history, occult studies, etc., without dogma -- is the secular monastery which Count Max (already familiar from *Götiska rummen*) and a few friends establish. It has been an important symbol in Strindberg's work from *Inferno* on.

As the title perhaps suggests, the portrait Strindberg paints of contemporary life is not a flattering one; he assumes rather the stance of an Old Testament prophet, railing against the godlessness, pettiness, amorality, and, ultimately, the futility of turn-of-the-century literary and liberal Stockholm.

¹ *Skrifter*, IV, 183-352.

The novel tells the stories of two men: the author Falkenström (very similar to Strindberg himself) and Zachris, both of whom have made unhappy marriages and find themselves at variance with respectable society. Falkenström is released from his marriage by divorce and finds refuge in a monastery. Zachris, on the other hand, is delivered from his connubial hell only when his wife dies. He is denied entrance into the monastery, and at the close of the novel seems bent on a course of anarchy and personal vendetta. Interwoven are stories of other worthies of Stockholm's literary and liberal establishment.

The villain of the piece is Zachris, who uses others for his own ends and delights in destroying them when they have served their purpose. A prominent newspaperman, he in fact lives on the misfortunes of others. He is not surprisingly characterized by a set of traits typical of Strindberg's work: those of the cannibal, vampire, and savage beast. This set of symbols is gathered around Zachris very early in the novel, and stays with him to the end. It is introduced at the banquet with which the novel opens. Kilo, the bookseller, has been ruined by Zachris' publishing schemes, but far from feeling enmity towards him, is presented as a martyr. The epithets in the following extract are notably the author's own, not Kilo's:

[Kilo] visste att Zachris hade skulden,
men ... han icke ville göra vilddjuret led-

set. Han trodde nämligen att en vampyr kunde bli ledsen.²

Zachris' wife, Jenny, was formerly Kilo's fiancée. His suffering at Zachris' hands includes not only financial ruin and the alienation of Jenny's affections, but he is also made to suffer Zachris' subsequent complaints about Jenny: "Med sin luta måste han ibland spela för sin vampyr och mottaga Zachris' klagovisor över den elaka Jenny."³

Zachris' vampirism consists of his living on others generally, not just on Kilo. This is emphasized in Ch. IV:

[Zachris] åt människor, åt till sig deras färdigheter, åt upp sig på främmande förmögenheter, och hade en förmåga att intränga i andras liv, plöja med andras kalvar, så att han förväxlade sin person med andras. Intet kunde växa och trivas i hans närhet, ty han röck opp groende frön, och åt dem.⁴

² *Skrifter*, IV, 193 (II):

[Kilo] knew that Zachris was at fault, but ... he didn't want to upset the beast. You see, he thought a vampire could be upset.

³ *Ibid.*, 194 (II): "Sometimes he had to play the lute for his vampire, and put up with Zachris' lamentations on the spiteful Jenny."

The passage contains an allusion to the biblical story of David at the court of Saul.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 210:

[Zachris] ate people, nourished himself on their accomplishments, sated himself on the faculties of others, and had an ability to force himself into others' lives, to plow with others' calves, exchanging his personality for theirs. Nothing could grow in

This is expanded upon in Ch. XIX:

-- Allt vad Zachris ägde hade han stulit; han stal människor och tankar, ord och uttryck, han kunde stjäla utseendet av en person han beundrade; han kunde stjäla en annans ryktbarhet och talang, substituera sig i en annans liv ...⁵

The male vampire Zachris has a female counterpart: a woman to whom Falkenström's wife flees with her children for protection once she has initiated divorce proceedings. After being rescued from a deep depression, Falkenström walks by the house and sees his unhappy children, who look like prisoners, gazing from a window. In another window stands the woman who has taken his wife in:

... där stod -- det rysligaste i människohamn han någonsin sett. Med rött hår, svullna ögon, och en mun såsom uppskuren med en rakkniv, läppar som alltid föreföllo blodiga och gav honom den föreställningen att hon sög blod. Denna kvinna hade en gång bekänt sin kärlek för honom, och när han tillbakavisat henne, hade hon kastat sitt hat över honom, och sin perversa inslagna kärlek på hans hustru. Därpå hade båda blodsugarne öppnat krig mot honom, och vampyren hade skiljt honom från hans barn. ... han nu såg detta avskyvärda ansikte med dess grönvita färg ... och

his proximity, for he tore up growing seeds, and ate them.

⁵ *Skrifter*, IV, 337:

".... Everything Zachris owned, he had stolen; he stole people and thoughts, words and expressions, he could steal the appearance of a person he admired; he could steal the reputation and talent of another, substitute himself in another's life ..."

tänkte på att hon, monstret, fick vara i samma rum som hans barn....⁶

Falkenström is also a victim of Zachris' vampirism, as pointed out by one of the "philosophers" in the monastery:

-- [Zachris] har flyttat till Örebro och jagar på Falkenströms revier. Denne hade nämligen koloniserat där, och upparbetat en vänkrets som Zachris nu vampyriserar. Det är tionde gången han schakaliserar efter Falkenström....⁷

Here as elsewhere, the vampire symbolism is closely associated with that of animals of the lowest sort. Passages cited above have compared Zachris to a beast and a jackal; other characteristics he assumes

⁶ Skrifter, IV, 244 (IX):

... there stood -- the most horrible human apparition he had ever seen. With red hair, swollen eyes, and a mouth like a slash made by a razor: lips which always seemed bloody and gave him the impression that she sucked blood. This woman had once confessed her love for him, and when he rejected her, had cast her hate on him and her perverted, pent-up love on his wife. Thereupon, both bloodsuckers had opened war on him, and the vampire had separated him from his children. ... he now saw this loathsome face with its greenish-white colour ... and thought about her, the monster, in the same room as his children....

⁷ Ibid., 347 (XXI):

".... [Zachris] has moved to Örebro and is hunting on Falkenström's preserve. Falkenström had settled there, you see, and had cultivated a circle of friends, whom Zachris is now vampirising. This is the tenth time he has scavenged like a jackal after Falkenström ..."

from the lower animal orders are those of a polyp: "Han hade polypens natur, kunde hala ut flera sugarmar på en gång...;"⁸ of an ape, in a passage that recalls the greenish skin of the novel's female vampire:

När han såg sig i trymån, fasade han, ty ögonen syntes inte, utan endast glasögonens ovaler och de voro gröna genom reflexerna från en lampskärm. Han såg själv att det var spökapan, och det slog så mycket mer, som han en gång fått ordet slungat bakom sig på en teaters parkett;⁹

of a dung-beetle:

...när han ... gick förbi ett parti veritabla frukostätare hörde han följande dialog:

-- Är det han?

-- Han ser ju ut som en koprofag!¹⁰

and of an ensnared fox: "Zachris satt fast, men som räven kunde han bita av sig svansen."¹¹ His children

⁸ *Skrifter*, IV, 211 (IV): "He had the nature of a polyp, and its ability to throw out several tentacles at once...."

⁹ *Ibid.*, 272 (XII):

When he saw himself in the pier-glass he shuddered, for he could not see his eyes, but only the ovals of his glasses, and they were green with the reflection of a lampshade. He saw himself that this was the ghostly ape, an epithet once flung after him in the stalls of a theatre, and it hurt that much more.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 279 (XII):

... when he ... walked past a party of true breakfast eaters, he heard the following dialogue:

"Is that him?"

"Doesn't he look like a dung-beetle!"

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 306 (XIV): "Zachris was trapped, but like a fox he could bite off his tail."

are compared to dogs: "Pojkarne voro uppfostrade till jakthundar, och nu hetsade de sina föräldrar;"¹² and he and his wife, isolated from the humanity around them, are "... som apor i bur."¹³

Animal symbolism is also used to emphasize the lack of humanity of the formidable Hanna Paj,¹⁴ the female vampire. Falkenström characterizes her as an ass, for her lack of insight, and also as a goat (a beast traditionally associated with Satan, and with lechery) for her perversity:

-- Tack ska du ha för din rapakalja, gamla Hanna! En åsna är du, och under denna åsnefest som pågår sedan tio år ha alla åsnor samlat sig kring dig, när du skriar, falla de på knä, alldeles som vid Blåkulla-festen där häxorna kyssa bocken i ändan.¹⁵

As this is a novel of social criticism, the symbols of beastliness are extended to contemporary soci-

¹² Skrifter, IV, 239 (VIII): "The boys had been raised as hunting dogs, and they now baited their parents."

¹³ Ibid., 240 (VIII): "... like apes in a cage."

¹⁴ The characters Zachris and Hanna Paj are thinly disguised portraits of Strindberg's contemporaries, Gustaf af Geijerstam (1858-1909) and Ellen Key (1849-1926), respectively.

¹⁵ Skrifter, IV, 249 (IX):

".... Thanks a lot for your twaddle, old Hanna! An ass is what you are, and during this feast of asses, which has been going on for ten years, all the asses have gathered around you; when you bray they fall to their knees, as at a witches sabbath, when the witches kiss the goat's behind."

ety by the brethren of the monastery; Kilo criticizes the materialistic spirit of the times thus: "... våra dagars materialister.... ... nosa i jorden som tryffel-svin...."¹⁶

These bestial symbols all indicate a brutalized, dehumanized nature. There is, however, another kind of animal symbolism, in which certain animals, often birds, symbolize positive traits such as innocence, spirituality, and even altruistic self-sacrifice. Following Kilo's remarks, from which the above characterization of society is an extract, Count Max, the key figure in the monastery, illustrates the malaise of contemporary society with a parable in which a canary, symbol of the soul and of spirituality in general, is shot by its owner for no apparent reason. Because of the joyfulness of its song and its lack of provocation, it also symbolizes the qualities of joy and innocence:

Jag vet en ung man som kom hem i soluppgången, och när han möttes av sin kanariefågels glada morgonsång, så tog han fram sin revolver och sköt fågeln. Långt efteråt ... förklarade han att han först tänkt skjuta sig själv, dock utan att ha begått någon dålig handling under natten; längre fram i tiden ville han minnas att fågeln liksom föreställde hans onda samvete vilket han ville döda. Men när han vaknade på förmiddagen, grät han vid åsynen av den döda fågeln, dock utan att ångra gärningen. "Någonting måste dö!" Mera kunde han inte säga.

[Detta erinrar om rabbinernas tolkning av gamla testamentets offer, särskilt den om

¹⁶ *Skrifter*, IV, 290 (XIII): "... the materialists of our times.... ... plough the earth with their noses like swine seeking truffles...."

syndaoffret (chattat) med blods utgjutande.]¹⁷

Similarly, birds are used to symbolize the innocence of Falkenström's children, the victims of his shattered marriage and the ensuing events:

De kände på glasrutan med fingrarna som om de ville ut, likt småfåglar instängda, flaxande, stötande sig mot det genomskinliga okända.¹⁸

Zachris' vampirism has its parasitic equivalent in the plant world: "... Zachris var ett självlöst gélée,

¹⁷ *Skrifter*, IV, 291 (XIII):

I know a young man who, coming home at sunrise and being greeted by the joyful morning song of his canary, got out his revolver and shot the bird. A long time afterwards ... he explained that at first he had planned to shoot himself, although he had done nothing wrong during the night; still later, he thought he remembered that the bird somehow represented his bad conscience, which he wanted to kill. But when he awoke in the middle of the morning, he wept at the sight of the dead bird, without, however, regretting the deed. "Something had to die!" That was all he could say.

[This recalls the rabbis' interpretation of the Old Testament sacrifices, especially that of the sin-offering (the chatta), with the spilling of blood.]*

* Strindberg's brackets.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 244 (IX):

They pressed against the windowpane with their fingers as if they wanted out, like small birds that are shut in, fluttering, bumping against the transparent unknown.

en oorganiserad materia som levde likt en tryffel på andras rötter."¹⁹ During his long wait for his wife's death, she also compares him to a parasitic plant -- "... jag måste ... utrota dig ur min själ och min kropp...."²⁰ -- and to an irritant weed: "... när du vidrör mig med dina tankar, bränns det som nässlor på min kropp."²¹ There have been no flowers -- symbols of so much, but chiefly of beautiful and tender emotions -- in their life together. They and the qualities they symbolize will first appear at Jenny's funeral, when they will be borne not by Zachris, but by his associates: "... om tre dagar bli ni bjudna på min begravning ... och då ska ni komma med blommor...."²²

It has been a marriage without joy or love primarily because Zachris is not only incapable of these emotions, but also destroys them in others; in terms of the symbolism, nothing can grow in his proximity. This symbol is further developed by Count Max:

En avskuren röd ros, bleknar icke av harm,
och en vit ros rodnar icke av vrede; men om

¹⁹ *Skrifter*, IV, 303 (XIV): "... Zachris was a resin with no self, an unorganized substance which lived like a truffle on the roots of others."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 324 (XVI): "... I must ... root you out of my soul and my body...."

²¹ *Idem.*: "... when you think about me, my body burns as if from nettles."

²² *Ibid.*, 333 (XVIII): "... in three days you'll be invited to my funeral; and then you'll bring me flowers...."

där är hat i huset så tvina de innan sol går ned. Under en ond människas hand trivs inga rosor och inga andra blommor heller.²³

Roses symbolize love, here both carnal (red) and spiritual (white); neither, it has been noted, flourish in Zachris' home.

If the world at large is an untamed wilderness, full of parasitic, life-sapping fungi and poisonous weeds, the monastery, in contrast, is built around a garden (symbol of the order and discipline of the conscious mind) filled with vines (symbol of life):

De fyra sidorna i kvadraten inneslöto en gård, apterad till trädgård, med en fontän mitt i korset av två varandra skärande lövgångar av klängväxter på spaljé.²⁴

It is no coincidence that this garden is laid out in the shape of a cross and contains a fountain, both also symbols of life. A cross in the centre of another construction, as here, symbolizes the bridge or ladder by means of which the soul may reach God (Cirlot, 65).

²³ *Skrifter*, IV, 293 (XIII):

A cut red rose doesn't go pale with indignation, and a white rose doesn't get red with anger, but if there's hate in the house, they wither before the sun sets. Under an evil person's hand, no roses can thrive, nor any other flowers either.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 253 (X):

The four sides of the square enclosed a courtyard which had been converted to a garden with a fountain in the middle, where two trellised arcades of vines crossed each other.

The Great Work of alchemy (transmutation of base metals into gold) is a symbol for the perfection and salvation of the soul, and the redemptive character of the monastery is emphasized by alchemical symbolism: the building was once a sulphuric acid factory and still possesses remnants of that time, giving at least part of the monastery the appearance of an alchemical laboratory:

Av svavelsyran fanns intet annat spår än ett stort kök med spis under kåpa och med blås-bälg, vartill sedan kommit ett långt diskbord vid fönstret med små trefötter, sandbad, spritlampor och kokbägare, några sättkolvar, retorter, diglar och kemikalier.²⁵

Elsewhere, alchemical symbolism appears in Cin-nabar, the name Zachris is called by his enemies. Cin-nabar is a red crystalline compound of mercury and sulphur. As the former stands for the female principal, the latter for the male, this association of Zachris with a compound of the two may suggest that he possesses both masculine and feminine traits: something which, given Strindberg's opinion of the feminine, might well account for his failure as a man. The ques-

²⁵ *Skrifter*, IV, 253 (X):

The only remaining trace of the sulphuric acid factory was a large kitchen with a hooded stove, to which was adjoined later a long counter by the window with small tripods, sand-baths, spirit lamps and beakers, a few flasks, metal plates, retorts, and chemicals.

tion Jenny asks of Zachris is, at any rate, left unanswered, so we must draw our own inferences:

-- De sitter på operakafét och talar om oss. De kallar dig för cinnober och mig för litteraturludret, vad är det för slag? ... varför säger de cinnober?²⁶

The final chapter of the novel contains the death of Smartman, a character who has also divorced his wife (who is also involved in an unnatural relationship with Hanna Paj), and who subsequently destroys himself with drink. The letter he leaves behind for his son contains Strindberg's chief indictment of contemporary Swedish society: it does not lack vision, but it lacks the will, the strength, and the faith to act upon that vision. This message is dressed in the rising and falling symbolism familiar from Strindberg's earlier works:

Lik vandraren som med hopp och längtan strövat över slätten för att nå berget, satt jag nu vid bergsroten och stirrade på det nådda målet -- en bergsvägg. Finnes det då ingenting där bakom eller däruppe? frågade jag mig. Mitt förstånd svarade att det måste finnas något. Men jag orkade icke med en bergstigning, jag vågade icke riskera att få se på andra sidan en ny slätt och ett nytt berg lika de förra. Jag längtade nog till nya utsikter, men jag blev sittande, modlös, hopplös, tills jag föll och blev liggande.

Det föreföll mig som om min spårvagn släppt kontakten med kablarne däruppe, och därför stannat. Däruppe? Det fanns ju intet

²⁶ Skrifter, IV, 330 (XVIII):

".... They sit in the opera cafe and talk about us. They call you Cinnabar and me a literary whore, whatever that might be. ... why do they call you Cinnabar?"

uppe och nere, sade de lärda, men likafullt, jag är därefter och kan aldrig komma upp.²⁷

This Kafkaesque wanderer recalls the Stranger of the Till Damaskus trilogy, whose pilgrimage leads him to a monastery, there as here the only escape from desperation and failure. It also anticipates Libotz in Syndabocken, who climbs his mountain and descends the other side, only to find, as Smartman fears, a world very much like the one he has left, but who has accepted his destiny and found inner peace despite that.

Within the walls of the white monastery in Svarta fanor is a curious mixture of religion, both western and oriental, philosophy, alchemy, Swedenborgian correspondences, and theosophy: the sort of brew, in fact, which Strindberg serves up in *En blå bok*. This extraor-

²⁷ Skrifter, IV, 349 (XXII):

Like the wanderer who, with hope and longing, had rambled over the plain in order to reach the mountain, I now sat at the foot of the mountain and stared at the goal I had reached: a rock-face. Was there anything beyond it or on top of it? I asked myself. My understanding answered that there had to be something. But I couldn't cope with climbing a mountain; I didn't dare risk seeing, on the other side, another plain and another mountain, like those I had just crossed. Oh, I longed for new vistas, but I remained sitting, without courage, without hope, until I collapsed and lay there.

It seemed to me that my tramcar had lost contact with the overhead cables, and so had stopped. Overhead? Of course, up and down don't exist, according to the wise, but all the same, I'm down there and can never come up.

dinary mixture is introduced long before the monastery is founded, by two men who will become pillars of that community, Kilo and Count Max (the blower of smoke-rings in the following extract):

Som han satt och blåste sina bilder såg han att en ring gick rakt fram mot bokhandlarn, men liksom studsade tillbaka en fot ifrån honom. Och när han vände sig bort för att visa det ingen elak avsikt satt projektilen i rörelse, såg han i en spegel att den lille mannens person var begränsad av ett rökfritt område, där luften var klar.

--Tänk, han är även skyddad för vår onda andedräkt, och utan att veta det, sade han till sig själv.

Redaktör Holger, ingenjören, som följt grevens blickar, svarade på dennes tysta tankar:

-- Ja, det står i Sakantula att lidandet och askesen bibringar högre färdigheter, att botgöraren slutligen behärskar andevärlden så att han till och med fruktas av makterna.²⁸

²⁸ *Skrifter*, IV, 194-95 (II):

As he sat blowing his images, he saw a ring go straight towards the bookseller, but seem to recoil when it was a foot away from him. And when he turned away to indicate that no evil intent had set the projectile in motion, he saw in a mirror that the little man's person was surrounded by a smoke-free zone, in which the air was clear.

"Imagine! he's even protected from our bad breath, and doesn't know it," he said to himself.

Editor Holger, the engineer, who had followed the Count's eyes, answered these unspoken thoughts: "Yes, it says in *Shakuntala** that suffering and asceticism impart higher accomplishments, that the penitent at last rules over the spirit world, feared even by the powers."

* *Shakuntala* is a drama by the Sanskrit playwright Kalidasa (fl. c. 400 A.D.); it is based on a story told in the *Mahabharata* (Benét, I, 537; II, 921).

This is the familiar Strindberg theme of purification and redemption through suffering, the way to liberation; materialism, society's great preoccupation, is only an illusion, and produces such unnatural practices as gynolatry and, even worse, sexual rôle reversal:

-- Schopenhauer har bäst sagt det: att materien saknar verklighet. Därför äro våra dagars materialister så långt från sanningen, att de äro på andra sidan. ... de vända ryggen åt urbilderna och se bara avbilderna. Därför dyrka de Maja, jordanden, kvinnan, och när de icke vilja tjäna gud i kärlek skola de slava hos Omfale i hat.²⁹

Maya (illusion) is also associated with Chaos, and thus with the black banners (symbols of anarchism) of the novel's title.

Twice in the novel nearly identical words are used to express the anguish and suffering inherent in life: "... det är ett helvete att leva;" and "... det är helvetet att leva."³⁰ What distinguishes those inside the monastery from those outside is how they react to the

²⁹ Skrifter, IV, 290 (XIII):

".... Schopenhauer puts it best: material lacks reality. Therefore, the materialists of our times are so far from the truth, they're on the reverse side of it. ... they turn their backs on the prototypes and see only their representations. And so they worship Maya, the earth-spirit, woman, and since they no longer wish to serve God in love, they become slaves to Omphale in hate."

³⁰ Ibid., 224 (VI) and 323 (XVI) respectively: "... life is hellish" and "... life is Hell."

suffering which comes to all: the latter strike out in revenge, seeking to inflict others with equal or worse sufferings, whereas those within regard suffering as a refiner's fire, through which they must pass in order to be purified. If life in the world is hell, it is suggested, life in the monastery is something else; it is no accident that the doorkeeper is named Peter and resembles a patriarch! The building itself suggests another biblical comparison, indicating that if its residents are not exactly in heaven (and the refining fire would seem to indicate purgatory), they have at least been spared the general destruction which is the destiny of their contemporaries: "Taket gav byggnaden en likhet med arken som stannat på berget efter syndafloden."³¹ Like those aboard the Ark, the monastery's residents are not called upon to save the world (which does not deserve salvation), but to concentrate instead on their own preservation, leaving the world to perish.

They are, however, still in this world, even if withdrawn from it. Heaven comes after death, even if hell is synonymous, for most, with life. The dying Jenny gives a picture of the afterlife in her farewell to her tormentor and destroyer, Zachris. Again, it is a negation of contemporary society and values:

³¹ *Skrifter*, IV, 329 (XVIII): "The roof made the building resemble the Ark, stranded on the mountain after the Flood."

-- du vet inte vad andra sidan är, därför kommer du att stanna på den här stranden, där du trivs. Jag vet att det finns en andra sida, ty jag har sett den, och där har jag råkat min mor och mina systrar. Det var enkla, men hederliga människor, som levde i plikter och försakelse, men tåliga i hoppet, icke väntande någon sällhet, härnere. Jag däremot, som råkade in i din och de andras trollekrets, jag ville ha det nu, här, sedan du och de andra berövat mig hoppet om där!³²

In a parallel set of symbols, it is not heaven and hell that are contrasted, but life and death. Those who have lost a sense of meaning in their lives have lost life itself, and when one robs another life of significance, one has committed murder. This type of murder, which Strindberg elsewhere calls soul-murder (and which Freudian psychology identifies with castration), is chiefly (although not exclusively, as the stories in *Vivisektioner* demonstrate) practised by women, as in the case of Falkenström and his wife:

-- nu växte hennes hat så orimligt, att hon mördade mig.
-- Mördade?

³² Skrifter, IV, 324 (XVI):

"..... you don't know what the other side is, and so you'll remain on this shore, where you flourish. I know that the other side exists, for I've seen it, and have met my mother and my sisters there. They were simple but honourable people, who lived lives of duty and self-denial, but were patient in their hope, expecting no happiness here below. I, on the other hand, who got caught up in the spell woven by you and the others, I wanted it now, here, since you and the others had robbed me of hope in the beyond!"

-- Ja, min ära och min frid! Det är
livsfarligt att upptäcka en dams hemlighet
...³³

To which it might be replied that the woman in question
is no lady! Be that as it may, Zachris has also been
murdered by his first wife, who used a method Strind-
berg first explored in *Fadren*:

Striden stod skarp och när fadren segrade,
fann modren ingen annan utväg än att mörda
honom. Hon sade honom helt frankt att gossen
icke vars hans barn.

Zachris trodde först det var den vanliga
manövern, då en kvinna vill mörda en man, men
när hon namngav fadren, så bekräftades en del
äldre misstankar, och han tyckte sig på en
gång läsa de kända anletsdragen.³⁴

The world is inhabited by corpses: very appropri-
ate when considered with the image of life as hell. The
death of the soul, often caused by others, is quite
distinct from the death of the body, but no less termi-

³³ *Skrifter*, IV, 230 (VII):

".... ... her hate now grew so boundless
that she murdered me."

"Murdered?"

"Yes, my honour and my peace! It's
deadly dangerous to discover a lady's secret
..."

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 236 (VIII):

The battle raged, and when the father won,
there was no way out for the mother but to
murder him. She told him quite frankly that
the boy was not his child.

At first Zachris thought this was the
usual ploy, when a woman wants to murder a
man, but when she named the father, a number
of old suspicions were confirmed, and he
thought at once that he could discern the
familiar features.

nal. In the former case, however, the body of the victim still wanders about (a ghost, in fact), free to accuse others and obstruct the good. Zachris, having murdered Jenny in one sense, now awaits her second, physical death:

Zachris njöt och led. Nu önskade han bara livet ur henne. Liket hade han redan visserligen, men det skulle jordas också, och inte gå omkring och skräpa.³⁵

Very few have escaped this death of the soul (and those who have, it seems, are all in the monastery): those who have not been murdered by others have committed suicide, as Jenny informs Zachris and a group of his astonished associates: "... ni äro blåa i ansiktet som döda människor; men det är därför att ni äro döda; ni har begått självmord...."³⁶

Again, Smartman draws all these images together in his letter to his son at the end of the novel. The world resembles nothing so much as a battlefield strewn with corpses:

Barn av min tid såg jag livet framför mig som ett slagfält, och tillvaron som en kamp om brödet, ställningen och kvinnan. Jag

³⁵ Skrifter, IV, 238 (VIII):

Zachris rejoiced and suffered. Now all he desired was the end of her life. He already had the corpse, of course, but it should also be buried, not go around messing things up.

³⁶ Ibid., 333 (XVIII): "... you're blue in the face like dead men, but that's because you are dead: you've committed suicide...."

slog mig fram, kännande mig berättigad var gång jag nedlagt en fiende med alla lovliga eller i nödfall olovliga medel. Det var tidsanden man kallar.³⁷

The black banners of the title are the signs of anarchy, which Strindberg considered had triumphed in contemporary society. They are also symbols of death.

Svarta fanor is a pretty black indictment of society. Small wonder it was the most hostilely received of all Strindberg's works, and the only one he came close to regretting (see the chapter on *En blå bok*)!

³⁷ *Skrifter*, IV, 348 (XXII):

Child of my times, I saw life before me like a battlefield, and existence as a struggle for bread, position, and woman. I fought my way forward, and felt myself justified every time I slew an enemy with all permissible or, in cases of necessity, unpermissible means. It's what they call the spirit of the times.