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STRINDBERG'S COSMIC THEATRE: THEOSOPHICAL IMPACT AND THE THEATRICAL METAPHOR

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

STRINDBERG'S COSMIC THEATRE: THEOSOPHICAL IMPACT AND THE THEATRICAL METAPHOR

by

Eszter Szalczer

Adviser: Professor Harry G. Carlson

The dissertation explores connections between the theosophical interests and the dramatic-theatrical innovations of August Strindberg (1849-1912). Nineteenth-century theosophy is regarded as an inspirational model for a cosmic theatre that Strindberg developed from about 1890. The term cosmic theatre implies the theatricalizaton of all facets and areas of existence and the world process, from the realms of nature to society and the human psyche. The theatre becomes a metaphor of the human condition and an organizing principle in Strindberg's universe.

Starting out from a larger context, chapter one provides an overview of occult tendencies that impacted modernist developments of turn-of-the-century European drama and

theatre. Chapter two positions theosophy within late-nineteenth-century occultism and gives an outline of the theosophical thought system as it appeared in Strindberg's time, including the theatrical features in the cosmology. Chapter three investigates evidence of Strindberg's contacts with theosophists and his readings in theosophical literature from the 1880s to his death in 1912. Chapter four traces the impact of these contacts in Strindberg's literary works (prose and drama), by reviewing theosophist characters and theosophical motifs, themes, and imagery appearing in them. The final three chapters explore Strindberg's cosmic theatre as it evolves from his essays on nature, his novels, and plays written between 1890 and 1909. The analyses focus on poetic techniques that theatricalize the world and the self, and on the structural, aesthetic, and philosophical qualities of the theatre arising from the texts. The conclusion discusses implications of Strindberg's cosmic theatre in terms of modernism.

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Ståhle Sjönell, and Ulf Olsson, whose comments and suggestions were enormously helpful. I am thankful to Karen Knape for copying and sending me materials when I could not go to Stockholm. I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation support group, Anne Beck, Helen Huff, and Dana Sutton, who all meant great help in the writing process.

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I dedicate my work to my husband Tamás Szalczer without whose indefatigable support, critical readings, and inspiring insights this dissertation would not be complete.

C O N T E N T S

Textual Note and List of Abbreviations

Strindberg's texts and standard theosophical literature most frequently cited in the dissertation are listed here separately from the bibliography. For these citations sources are given parenthetically in the text according to the abbreviations below.

When quoting Strindberg I give my own translation if there is no published English translation available. For example, letters included in Michael Robinson's selection (Letters) are quoted in his translation; otherwise my translations are given following the text of the Swedish edition of Strindberg's letters (Brev). All citations from manuscripts, such as Strindberg's notes and drafts (SgNM) and the Letters by Torsten Hedlund (e.g. the "Danube-Letter") and by Alphonse Walleen to Strindberg are my translations. The publication of the critical edition of Strindberg's collected works (SV) is still in process--I have used it whenever possible; in citations of works that have not yet appeared in the critical edition, the standard edition of Strindberg's collected writings (SS) is used.

Brev (followed by volume number:page number) = August Strindbergs brev, edited by Torsten Eklund, (vols. 1-15) and Björn Meidal (vols. 16-20) (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1948-).

By the Open Sea = By the Open Sea, translated by Mary Sandbach (London: Sacker & Warburg, 1984).

Chamber Plays = The Chamber Plays by August Strindberg, translated by Evert Sprinchorn (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1962).

Plays of Confession = Plays of Confession and Therapy by August Strindberg, translated by Walter Johnson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979).

Queen Christina = *Strindberg's* Queen Christina, Charles XII, Gustav III, translated by Walter Johnson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955).

Five Plays = Five Plays of Strindberg, translated by Elisabeth Sprigge (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960).

Inferno = Inferno/From an Occult Diary, translated by Mary Sandbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1979).

Legends = Legends: Autobiographical Sketches, no translator (New York: Haskell House, 1973).

Letters (followed by volume number:page number) = Strindberg's Letters, 2 vols., selected, edited and translated by Michael Robinson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

OD = Ockulta dagboken (Stockholm: Gidlund, 1977), facsimile reprint with an appendix by Harry Järv.

Plays of Confession = Plays of Confession and Therapy by August Strindberg, translated by Walter Johnson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979).

Roofing Ceremony = The Roofing Ceremony and the Silver Lake, translated by David Mel Paul and Margareta Paul (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

Selected Essays = Selected Essays by August Strindberg, selected, edited, and translated by Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

SgNM (followed by folder number:item number,sheet number) = Strindberg's manuscripts in the "Green Sack," SgNM, 1-69, Nordiska Museets Strindbergsdeposition i Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm.

SS (followed by volume number:page number) = Samlade skrifter av August Strindberg, edited by John Landqvist, 55 vols. (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1912-21).

Strindberg: Five Plays = Strindberg: Five Plays, translated by Harry G. Carlson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

SV (followed by volume number:page number) = Samlade verk av August Strindberg, editor in chief Lars Dahlbäck, 1- (Stockholm: Almqvist &Wiksell, Norstedts, 1981-).

WHP = August Strindberg, World-Historical Plays, translated by Arvid Paulson (New York: Twayne, 1970).

Abbreviations for citations from standard theosophical works:

Ancient Wisdom = Annie, Besant, The Ancient Wisdom: An Outline of Theosophical Teachings (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1959 [first printed 1897]).

Esoteric Buddhism = Alfred Percy, Sinnett, Esoteric Buddhism, third edition (London: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1884).

Esoteric Christianity = Annie, Besant, Esoteric Christianity or the Lesser Mysteries (Adyar, India: theosophical Publishing House, 1901; repr., 1957)

Glossary = Helena Petrovna, Blavatsky, Theosophical Glossary (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892; repr. Los Angeles, CA: Theosophy Company, 1973).

Isis = H. P. Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology, 2 vols. (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1976.)

Key = H. P. Blavatsky, The Key to Theosophy (Los Angeles, CA: Theosophy Company, 1973 [A photographic reproduction of the original edition, London, 1889]).

SD = H.P. Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, religion, and Philosophy, 2 vols. (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1988 [Centennial edition, facsimile of the original ed., 1888]).

Introduction

Theosophy--among many other brands of modern occultism--was part of the socio-cultural climate of the Western world in the late-nineteenth-century, along with the philosophies of Hegel and Nietzsche; post-Darwinian evolutionary science; the restlessly shifting vogues of literature, fine arts, and theatre; world fairs, museums, and ecumenical religious tendencies. During recent decades there appeared a number of critical studies that explore the role of the occult, especially that of theosophy, in the formation of artistic and literary modernism.[1] Even though August Strindberg (1849-1912) is considered by many as one of the originators of modern drama and theatre, this connection between his theosophical interests and his dramatic-theatrical innovations has not, as yet, been exhaustively explored.

The purpose of this dissertation is to assess the extent and implications of such a connection. My concern is to show that Strindberg was not only well read in theosophy and continuously had personal contacts with theosophists from the 1880s to the end of his life, but that the impact of his readings and relations are traceable throughout his work during this time-period. By "impact" I do not mean any overt religious-ideological influences, but rather, a metamorphic artistic process. What Strindberg detected in theosophy, as we shall see, are inspiring imagery and thought structures that he could exploit poetically, transforming them in the

creative process to fit his own purposes.[2] But even more importantly, theosophy, regarded as a system, offered a view in which both cosmos and the individual are structured theatrically, each participating in one continuous, or rather, cyclically occurring performance which constitutes existence. Such a view of the world seems to respond to the modern sense of fragmentation and illusoriness of life and personality, a feeling that Strindberg himself suffered from, and developed dramatic and theatrical techniques to cope with.

My central thesis is that theosophy can be seen as an inspirational model for a cosmic theatre that Strindberg developed from about 1890, applying techniques similar to the theatrical dynamics of theosophy, but unique and solely Strindbergian in their artistic effectivity and validity. This cosmic theatre in which I regard Strindberg's works in various genres--his scientific prose, novels, and drama--as building blocks, was a major artistic achievement, as well as a philosophical statement in face of the dilemmas of modernity.[3]

Critics have previously pointed out several aspects and instances of Strindberg's theosophical contacts. The earliest scholarly reference (1923) to his preoccupation with theosophical ideas came from the pen of the philosopher and psychologist Axel Herrlin, a friend of Strindberg who shared the latter's interest in occultism around the turn of the century. Comparing some philosophical views of Strindberg

and another Swedish author Bengt Lidforss, Herrlin observes similarities between theosophical concepts such as the "elementals" and "Karma" and Strindberg's notion of the "Powers" and "Nemesis" in the novel Inferno.[4]

Martin Lamm in his classic study Strindberg och makterna investigated the components of Strindberg's syncretic religion developed during and after his so-called Inferno-crisis (1894-97). Lamm found Strindberg's concern with the supernatural "Powers" from 1897 "a primitive feature" in this religion, nourished by his readings in French occultism and in theosophy, among others. Lamm confirms that Strindberg's use of the concepts of astral bodies and elementals can be traced back to theosophical sources.[5] He also claims that despite Strindberg's hostility towards Mme Blavatsky (founder of the Theosophical Society), many of his theories were really close to theosophical ideas. Thus, for example, his later works show an interest in the doctrines of Karma and reincarnation about which he read in Blavatsky's The Secret Doctrine, sent to him during his most severe psychotic crisis in 1896 by the Swedish theosophist Torsten Hedlund. Lamm argues that Strindberg's main objection to theosophy was due to his need for a personal God as opposed to theosophical pantheism.[6] Even so, "French occultism, Blavatsky's theosophy, and Swedenborg's doctrine of spirits left their traces on Strindberg's conversion."[7]

Vagn Børge explores the role of religious-mystical conceptions and ideas in the formation of what he calls

Strindberg's mystical theatre. This mystical theatre is constituted by what Børge considers Strindberg's eighteen "dream plays" from To Damascus (1898) to The Great Highway (1909). While Børge's intention is to focus on the aesthetic-dramaturgical application of these religious ideas, his thesis is obscured by a chaotic mixture of what he thinks was Strindberg's take on Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, the mystic Swedenborg, and the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann. He criticizes Lamm for failing to realize "the close relationship between Indian thought, theosophy, and Swedenborgianism which the poet Strindberg melts together into a Buddhistic Ur-Christian mysticism." Unfortunately, Børge does not take care in defining any of these terms--he simply considers it "a given fact" that the Indian contents of A Dream Play are a result of Strindberg's theosophical studies.[8] Later, however, Børge comes to another conclusion about A Dream Play, namely, that it was Strindberg's reading of Kalidasa's Sakuntala that informed the play so that it became, modeled on ancient Indian dramaturgy, an "ur-drama of life itself, made into a scenic poem."[9] Though Børge's arguments are sometimes contradictory or confused, he was perhaps the first critic to see a connection between religious/metaphysical contents and dramatic form and technique in Strindberg.

Walter Berendsohn in his Strindbergsproblem discusses Strindberg's novel fragment Armageddon (1907), the theosophical source of which had already been pointed out by

Lamm.[10] Berendsohn discusses the differences between theosophical and Swedenborgian contents detectable in the fragment.[11]

Gunnar Brandell in Strindbergs infernokris (1950, English translateion Strindberg in Inferno) maintains that Strindberg briefly took interest in occult-theosophical ideas only because they helped him to deal with his guilt feelings during periods of a psychotic crisis. However, "after the last crisis, when he maneuvered his guilt conflicts into a new position by means of the study of Swedenborg, these ideas became superfluous and were discarded. To the extent that they occur at all after Inferno, 'occult' ideas play a less central role in his outlook."[12] Yet, analyzing Strindberg's new artistic cosmos after his Inferno-crisis, Brandell at least on one point acknowledged that "such fantasies become a regular feature of his world-picture," namely, beliefs concerning what theosophists call prehistoric architecture such as grottos and pyramids allegedly built by the race of giants who "recur constantly in occult speculation. Madame Blavatsky in particular lavishes a good deal of attention on them."[13]

In his four-volume Strindberg biography Brandell discusses several instances of Strindberg's exchanges with theosophists.[14] He thinks that the more Strindberg knew about theosophy, the more suspicious he became; not only because the movement was led by an authoritarian woman, but also because it "was colored by an Anglo-Saxon humanitarianism,

and a sort of evolutionary belief, which was more alien to Strindberg than ever."[15]

Going back to the 1950s, we find Hans Lindström's important book Hjärnornas kamp which explores Strindberg's interest in experimental psychology against the intellectual background of the 1880s. Lindström points out the significance of Strindberg's friendship with the journalist Carl von Bergen, the person who introduced theosophy in Sweden and brought Strindberg into contact with theosophy for the first time.[16] Lindström devotes his attention also to Strindberg's acquaintance with the works of the German psychologist and philosopher Carl du Prel whose "scientific mysticism" appraised by many contemporary artists, rested, as we shall see, on theosophical grounds.[17]

In the 1950s Hans Erlandsson gave an eyewitness's account of the theosophical circles in Lund at the time of Strindberg's residence there 1897-99.[18] More recently Louise Vinge showed that Strindberg's circle of friends in Lund had close ties with the two overlapping groups that defined the city's cultural atmosphere at the turn of the century: the group of the theosophists and that of the craftsmen and artists.[19]

Carl Fehrman detected theosophical influence in the final scene of A Dream Play, which he saw as the staging of a "life-panorama," a phenomenon described by Blavatsky in Key to Theosophy and by Annie Besant in Ancient Wisdom. Referring to Erlandsson, Fehrman also pointed to Strindberg's

contacts with Swedish theosophists during the 1890s. He concluded that this theosophical influence had led to a brilliant theatrical invention on Strindberg's part. By projecting an inner monologue into a "life-panorama" (represented by the procession of all characters preceding the sacrificial death of the protagonist), Strindberg had succeeded in scenically formulating the inner time of a near-death experience.[20]

Göran Stockenström's dissertation is a thorough mapping of Strindberg's involvement with Swedenborgian mysticism and its artistic implications. Although he mentions theosophy only in passing, it is important to note here that he was the first scholar who actually showed that Strindberg's spiritual concerns had a profound significance for his art. Criticizing Brandell for his one-sided explanation of Strindberg's artistic renewal from the point of view of the author's neurosis, Stockenström strives to demonstrate that the coherence of Strindberg's modernism stems from his mystical experience of reality.[21]

In the same year another dissertation appeared on almost the same subject in the United States. Howard J. Jensen examined the role of Swedenborgian and other religious influences on Strindberg's dramatic expressionism. He devotes a few pages to describe theosophy as a syncretic movement that was in the air, and concludes that Strindberg "absorbed many theosophical ideas, and his later writings show this influence. Indeed, his Buddhism is strongly

colored by theosophy."[22] However, Jensen does not specify any further, what exactly this influence consists in. He claims, for example, that Strindberg accepted the ideas of reincarnation and Karma, but reveals no evidence that would support his statement.

Contrary to Jensen, French critic Guy Vogelweith claims that Strindberg found only unsympathetic ideas in theosophy, which made him quickly turn away from it. Such was the doctrine of Karma, which to Strindberg seemed an infernal conception, one that subscribed to an eternally prolonged state of purgatory. Vogelweith reduces Strindberg's spiritual-intellectual interests into simple pragmatic considerations of seeking relief from his mental sufferings and pangs of conscience during the Inferno-crisis. He claims that after leaving theosophy behind, Strindberg studied the mysticism of Swedenborg, which seemed better suited to his personal problems. However, after his most severe crisis had passed, Strindberg lost interest even in the great mystic, and turned towards "exoteric" pious literature and experimental psychology.[23] This is a simplified version of Brandell's learned and incomparably more profound psychological approach without giving credit to the Swedish scholar.

In his book on Strindberg as dramatist Evert Sprinchorn points out several motifs in Strindberg's so-called chamber plays, which he thinks were inspired by Blavatsky's writings such as Isis Unveiled and The Secret Doctrine. Supporting his

argument with corresponding quotations from these works, Sprinchorn discusses the "cosmic web" of life, Karma, and Kama-Loka; terms that Strindberg turned into images depicting an illusory ghost world and the various stages of death in The Burned House (1907) and The Ghost Sonata (1907).[24] Sprinchorn asserts that Strindberg's main achievement as a dramatist was that he dematerialized the stage while theatricalizing the spirit. In this project he was inspired by several contemporary thinkers who thought that "the unconscious life is striving to be a drama."[25] One among these was Carl du Prel who wrote about the dreamer as dramatist and the dream arising from the conflicts between the divided parts of the self.[26]

In her discussion of Strindberg's short novel The Roofing Ceremony (1907) Barbro Ståhle Sjönell observes that the theosophical concept of life panorama is even more pertinent in this work than, as Fehrman argued, in A Dream Play. The dying protagonist in Strindberg's short novel searches the connections between causes and effects in the incidents of his life, which is a typical feature of the theosophical review of life at the moment of death (livsrevy) as opposed to the Swedenborgian concept of the review of sins (skuldrevy). Ståhle also points out that theosophical literature which Fehrman indicates as source material, Strindberg indeed had in his possession.[27]

Among Strindberg's drafts and sketches for The Roofing Ceremony Barbro Ståhle discovered also a note which shows

that he had a theosophist woman in mind for the nurse who attends the dying protagonist. In the drafts appears another reference to theosophy, namely Kama-Loka (the theosophical name for an after-death state) mentioned among terms (Sheol, Hades) designating the same state in other religions.[28]

In his most recent book that explores the complexities of Strindberg's artistic renewal upon re-emerging from his Inferno crisis, Harry G. Carlson devotes an entire chapter to "The Romance of the Occult." He points out that Strindberg was not a solitary case of artistically utilizing occultism, but that at the turn of the last century "the occult revival proved an important creative stimulus" to many well known writers, artists, and composers.[29] According to Harry Carlson, Strindberg's interest in theosophy was due above all to the Eastern orientation and the syncretism of its doctrines. Harry Carlson also traces several theosophical ideas, such as astral bodies, astral plane, thought-forms, and elementals, which became part of the imaginative ferment that informed Strindberg's late works.[30]

Studies that treat the role of religious, mythical, or occult (other than theosophical) ideas in the formation of Strindberg's aesthetics and artistic techniques, are also important to my approach. John Ward, for example, traces the development of Strindberg's religious ideas and their manifestations in the plays.[31] Harry G. Carlson's mythopoeic approach discloses fundamental patterns in Strindberg's drama.[32] Ann-Charlotte Gavel Adams explores evidence that

Inferno (1897) originally was not meant as an autobiographical work but as an occult novel targeting a specific French reader-audience.[33]

While I am indebted to previous scholarship for illuminating several aspects of Strindberg's theosophical-occult connections, I will take a fresh look at his relation to theosophy and re-evaluate its significance for his work in the creation of his cosmic theatre. A view of the theosophical cosmology as a whole--more precisely, reconstructed as it was known to Strindberg--brings to the surface a basic theatricality inscribed in this system. What I detect in theosophy is a theatricality in the Platonic sense, which is quite natural considering its ties to the Platonic and Neo-Platonic tradition (see chapter 2).

In Plato we find the first extant examples of the metaphor of theatrum mundi, the world as a stage.[34] The essence of what I call the Platonic sense of theatricality, is expressed by the most telling image in Book 7 of Plato's Republic. Here, in the famous allegory of the cave the phenomenal world is represented as a shadow-play and it is implied that everything perceived by the senses is only the reflection of real objects.[35] Plato uses the theatrical metaphor to suggest an existential duality which includes, on the one hand, a metaphysical reality represented by the real people and objects hidden behind a parapet across the cave, and on the other hand, a world of illusions suggested by the shadows on the wall of the cave.

Based on the etymology of the Greek word theatron, "a place for viewing," Elizabeth Burns defines theatricality as a mode of perception, rather than a mode of behavior or expression. She argues that theatricality may occur not only in the theatre but also in societal life when an observer perceives a situation, in which he or she does not participate, as a staged, performative event.[36] As we shall see in Strindberg's works, one can become an observer also when participating in a situation but being separated from oneself, perceiving oneself as a mask or an actor, which implies that a sense of theatricality may also result from the splitting of the inner, mental space, that of the self. In such cases then, theatricality occurs on the interior stage of the psyche as opposed to an external, societal scene. When such a situation is evoked within a literary work, it can be termed textual theatre; and within a drama, as discussed in chapter seven, it produces metatheatre.

I will examine the theatricality of a cosmology that unfolds from the theosophical literature on the one hand, and that of Strindberg's literary texts on the other. In this context theatricality implies the textual production of performative situations by splitting up the represented world into a space of the performance/spectacle and that of the audience/spectator. This can be achieved by the doubling of the fictional layers, for example by framing a scene to be viewed. Framing is a device that separates the observed from the observer placing them on two different ontological-

fictional planes.[37] Theatrical double structure can be provided also by the dialogization of the represented world with a controlling consciousness--that of the dramatist, director--placed above it.

Masking, role-play, and imitation are again other means of creating theatrical scenes to look at, separating the world of the masked actor from that of the observer. These devices create discrepancies between signifier and signified, since the viewed objects or figures are not what they seem to be. It is an illusionistic theatre in which a world of appearances is separated from, yet, presupposes a realm of invisible reality which the appearances imitate. Both in theosophy and in Strindberg's cosmic theatre illusion is created in the Platonic sense of mimesis (discussed in book 10 of the Republic), according to which artworks imitate sensory objects that are already only imitations of real objects in the world of ideas. Yet, occult-theosophical thought claims the privilege to have access to the invisible world through the visible, and Strindberg, in turn, utilizes this gesture of unveiling which Plato would not grant for the artist.

What I call Strindberg's cosmic theatre (chapters 5-7) implies such theatricalizaton of all facets and areas of existence and the world process, from the realms of nature to society and the human psyche. At the same time, the theatre becomes an organizing principle in Strindberg's universe, and

theatricalization functions as a means of creating a cosmos out of chaos.

The dissertation applies a method of starting out from the larger context and then gradually narrowing the focus to explore Strindberg's cosmic theatre, analyzing the texts in light of contextual evidence. Thus, chapter one provides a wider overview of occult tendencies that impacted developments of turn-of-the century European drama and theatre. Chapter two, then, positions theosophy within late-nineteenth-century occultism, seen in the contemporary ideological crossfire. The chapter also gives an outline of the theosophical thought system as it appeared in Strindberg's time, concluding with a summary of theatrical features in the cosmology. Chapter three investigates evidence of Strindberg's contacts with theosophists and his readings in theosophical literature. Based on primary sources, I establish a chronological outline of these contacts during consecutive periods of Strindberg's life from the 1880s to his death in 1912. Chapter four, then, traces the impact of these contacts in Strindberg's literary works (prose and drama), by reviewing theosophist characters appearing in them, as well as motifs, themes, and imagery in which inspiration from theosophical thought is detectable. The final three chapters explore Strindberg's cosmic theatre as it evolves from his essays on nature (chapter 5), his novels (chapter 6), and plays (chapter 7); all written between 1890 and 1909. The analyses focus on poetic

techniques that theatricalize the world and the self, and on the structural, aesthetic, and philosophical qualities of the theatre arising from the texts. Finally, in the conclusion, implications of Strindberg's cosmic theatre are discussed in terms of modernism.

Because of the syncretic-eclectic nature of theosophy, a number of concepts--such as Karma, Maya, reincarnation, unmasking, life-review--overlap with those in Vedic literature, Hinduism, or Buddhism, in Swedenborg, or in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, all of which also meant substantial inspiration for Strindberg. Nevertheless, examining them in the context of the theosophical system, the concepts take on more nuanced and slightly different meanings. But I do not intend to differentiate between theosophical and other connotations every time such concepts occur. Nor do I claim that certain influences are strictly and exclusively theosophical. Rather than to exclude others, I consider more important to include theosophy as one among many voices in the late nineteenth-century intellectual discourse in which Strindberg actively participated.

Notes:

[1]See for example Sixten Ringbom, The Sounding Cosmos: A Study of the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1970); The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985, ed. Edward Weisberger (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986); and Okkultismus und Avantgarde von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900-1915 (Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 1995) which includes studies in the performing arts; in the field of literature see Leon Surette, The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University, 1993).

[2]On several aspects of Strindberg's poetic use of theosophical imagery and concepts see my articles "Strindberg och teosofin," Teosofiska rörelsen 9, no. 6 (1988), and 10, nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 (1989); and "Modes of the Spirit: The Poetic Application of Theosophical Ideas in the Works of August Strindberg," in Nordic Experiences: Exploration of Scandinavian Cultures, ed. Berit Brown (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 39-46.

[3]'Modernism' and 'modernity' are not unanimously defined terms, even though they are often used interchangeably, or at other times denoting different (social/historical/aesthetic) aspects of an era of which the late nineteenth-century is seen as either the climax or the precursor. Most scholars agree that "the phenomenon of (artistic) modernism must be viewed in its wider social-cultural context, notably that of high- and late-capitalist society, dominated and propelled by industrialization, massification and technological progress, but also soon to be shaken by debacles such as the First World War and upheavals such as the October Revolution" (Walter Gobbers, "Modernism, Modernity, Avant-Garde: A Bilingual Introduction" in The Turn of the Century: Modernism and Modernity in Literature and the Arts, European Literature, Studies in Literature and the Arts, vol. 3, ed. Christian Berg, Frank Durieux, and Geert Lernout [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995], 7-9).

[4]Axel Herrlin, "Bengt Lidforss och August Strindberg: En studie över deras tankegemenskap och förhållande till samtida naturfilosofiska och metafysiska idéströmningar," Från sekelslutets Lund (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1936), 148-157.

[5]Martin Lamm, Strindberg och makterna (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelsens Bokförlag, 1936), 13-15, 89.

[6]Ibid., 47, 103, 123-134.

[7]Ibid., 132.

[8]Vagn Børge, Strindbergs mystiske Teater: Æstetik-dramaturgiske Analyser med særlig Hensyntagen til Drömspelet (København: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1942), 187-88.

[9]Ibid., 207.

[10]Martin Lamm, August Strindberg (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1942), 2:367, note 2.

[11]Walter Berendsohn, Strindbergsproblem: Essäer och studier (Stockholm: Kooperativa Förbundets Förlag, 1946), 98-104.

[12]Gunnar Brandell, Strindberg in Inferno, trans. Berry Jacobs (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 121. (The original Swedish edition appeared as Strindbergs infernokris [Stockholm: Bonniers, 1950].)

[13]Ibid., 206.

[14]Gunnar Brandell, Strindberg: Ett Författarliv (Stockholm: Alba, 1983), 3:161-82, 220-40.

[15]Ibid., 3: 161-62.

[16]Hans Lindström, Hjärnornas kamp (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri AB, 1952), 241-43, 235-37.

[17]231-33, 297-98.

[18]Hans Erlandsson, "Marginalanteckningar till August Strindbergs 'Inferno' och 'Legender,'" lecture delivered at the meeting of Strindbergsföreningen in Lund at Åke Hans restaurant, 22 September, 1956, The Hans Erlandsson Collection, the Town Library of Lund, Sweden.

[19]Louise Vinge, "Om konstnärer, konsthantverkare och författare i Lund omkring år 1900," in Sparbanken Finn: Årsredovisning 1995 (Lund: Sparbanken Finn, 1996), 40-50.

[20]Carl Fehrman, "Slutscenen i 'Ett drömspel,'" Poesi och Parodi (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söners Förlag, 1957), 84-95.

[21]Göran Stockenström, Ismael i öknen: Strindberg som Mystiker, Acta Universitatis upsaliensis, historia litterarum 5 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1972), 347.

[22]Howard James Jensen, "Swedenborgian and other Religious Influences in Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1972), 28.

[23]Cf. Guy Vogelweith, "Strindberg et l'ésoterisme parisien," Revue d'histoire du théâtre 30, no. 3 (1978): 334-345.

[24]Evert Sprinchorn, Strindberg as Dramatist (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 256-66

[25]Ibid., 85.

[26]Ibid., 91, 169.

[27]Barbro Ståhle Sjönell, Strindbergs Taklagsöl: Ett prosaexperiment (Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 1986), 95-98.

[28]Ibid., 35, 100.

[29]Harry G. Carlson, Out of Inferno: Strindberg's Reawakening as an Artist (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 191.

[30]Ibid., 193-94, 195-222.

[31]John Ward, The Social and Religious Plays of Strindberg, (London: Athlone, 1979).

[32]Harry G. Carlson, Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[33]Ann-Charlotte Gavel Adams, "The Generic ambiguity of August Strindberg's 'Inferno': Occult Novel and Autobiography" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1990); and "Strindberg som Ockultismens Zola," Strindbergiana 8 (1993): 123-138.

[34]Ernst Robert Curtius traces the origins of the theatrical metaphor back to Plato, quoting examples from his late dialogues such as the Laws in which living beings are said to be the puppets of the gods. See European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trast (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), 138.

[35]"Imagine . . . men living in a sort of cavernous chamber underground. . . . At some distance is the light of a fire burning behind them; and between the prisoners and the fire is a track with a parapet built along it, like a screen at a puppet show, which hides the performers while they show their puppets over the top. . . . [The] prisoners so confined would have seen nothing of themselves or of one another, except the shadows thrown by the fire-light on the wall of the Cave facing them. . . . [they] would recognize as reality nothing but the shadows of those artificial objects" (The Republic of Plato, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford [New York: Oxford University Press, 1945], 227-29).

[36]Cf. Elizabeth Burns, Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 12. The view of theatricality and performance as social (everyday or ritual) practice has been developed by several theorists, see for example, Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982); Richard Schechner, Performance Theory, revised and expanded edition (New York: Routledge, 1988); Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Garden City, New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1955); Bruce Wilshire, Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Studies in textual theatricality can be found, for example, in Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. D.F. Bouchard, trans. D.F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); Evelyn Gould, Virtual Theatre from Diderot to Mallarmé (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989); and in the collection of studies The Play of the Self, ed. Ronald Bogue and Mihai I. Spariosu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

[37]The theory of framing as an aspect of theatricalization was worked out by Erving Goffmann applied to social interactions, in Frame Analysis (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

Chapter One

The Occult in the Turn-of-the-Century Drama and Theatre, 1870-1914

In an article in 1890 the French novelist Anatole France claimed that "a certain knowledge of the occult sciences became necessary for the understanding of a great number of literary works of this period. The vertigo of the invisible seized them, the idea of the unknown haunted them."[1]

Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Alchemy are but a few examples of the proliferating brands of occultism in late-nineteenth-century Europe.[2] In order to provide a background for the understanding of Strindberg's relationship to theosophy, this chapter will briefly discuss the effect of this occult revival on European drama and stage. As opposed to the view that regards Strindberg's explorations in the occult as mere idiosyncrasies on his part, the review will show that such explorations were common at the turn of the century among many dramatists and other theatre artists who sought a variety of ways to develop antirealistic forms of expression and to create a new theatrical language. Strindberg lived through an era of often fierce collisions between a socially-psychologically anchored realism and attempts to place metaphysical drama and abstraction on stage.[3] As we shall see, occult trends and secret societies were hotbeds of artistic modernism and inspired playwrights

and theatre artists to embark on an ardent re-evaluation of drama and stage in spiritual terms.

William Butler Yeats, who visited Paris in 1894 and attended the performance of Axel by Villiers de l'Isle Adam at the Théâtre de la Gaîté, wrote in the preface to the play's English translation:

> [Axel] did not move me because I thought it a great masterpiece, but because it seemed part of a religious rite, the ceremony perhaps of some secret Order wherein my generation had been initiated. . . .
>
> Axel or its theme filled the minds of my Paris friends. . . . 'Villiers de l'Isle Adam,' Rémy de Gourmont wrote, 'has opened the doors of the unknown with a crash, and a generation has gone through them to the Infinite.'[4]

Throughout Europe, practitioners and theorists of drama, theatre, and dance, who felt that the theatre had been limited and distorted by an age of reason and commerce, drew upon occult sources directly or indirectly in an attempt to restore the theatre to what they thought was its original metaphysical function. Although they were all thoroughly immersed in and fascinated by esoteric doctrines, some of them, such as Mallarmé and Kandinsky, focused on their poetic as well as theatrical applicability. Others, such as Edouard Schuré, Maeterlinck, and Yeats, not only wrote plays and dramatic theory based on an occult outlook, but they also pursued systematic studies in the occult tradition, which they laid out in often monumental works.[5] Still others were practicing occultists, initiates, and members or leaders of occult groupings. Yeats, for example, was, by turn, a member of the Dublin Hermetic Society, the Theosophical Society,

and, along with Aleister Crowley, The Golden Dawn.[6] In the 1880s Schuré was associated with the Theosophical Society in France, and in the early 1900s he collaborated with Rudolf Steiner on the staging of his plays at the Theosophical Conventions in Munich.[7] Steiner himself, author of a series of occult plays and the inventor of a new stage art called Eurythmy, was leader of the German Section of the Theosophical Society until 1912, after which he founded the Anthroposophical Society. The Russian Symbolist playwright Alexander Bely became a member of the latter in 1914.[8] Dramatist and novelist Josephin Péladan revived, in the company of other occultist friends, the Rosicrucian Brotherhood in France in 1885, and some years later he founded a new order called Rose-Croix Catholique.[9]

Occultism in the Modern Age

The modern occultists of the late nineteenth century drew upon a long tradition of metaphysical thought that was believed to contain elements of esoteric or secret knowledge, as well as teachings as to how to gain and practice that knowledge. They claimed as their sources in antiquity the metaphysics of Pythagoras and Plato (both of whom were alleged to have been initiates in the secret mystery cults of their time).[10] Their teachings, modern occultists believed, were revived in Gnosticism and Hermetism in the Hellenic period and during the European Renaissance re-emerged in modified and blended forms such as Neoplatonism. Other

thriving branches of occultism of the Renaissance such as alchemy, Cabala, and astrology would later become incorporated in practices of Magic. A further phenomenon embraced by modern occultists was the visions of Christian mystics such as Emanuel Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme. They embodied man's striving for spiritual enlightenment and showed ways of communication with other worlds.

Sociologist Edward A. Tiryakian, who distinguishes between esoteric knowledge as a belief system, and occult practices based on this belief system, states that "the crucial aspect of esoteric knowledge is that it is a secret knowledge . . . handed down . . . to . . . persons who are typically ritually initiated by those already holding this knowledge," and that the adept submits "to a series of trials and ordeals, . . . [becoming] increasingly socialized into the esoteric culture and increasingly desocialized from the . . . exoteric culture."[11] This definition leads us towards the double focus of the present chapter, which is the innate theatricality of occultism and its alignment with the artistic-theatrical avant-garde. I propose that occultism is inherently theatrical as a consequence of its participatory and initiatory aspect which is based on the presumption that ultimate reality is hidden behind the empirical world. Occultists take the latter as a sign-language they seek to decipher in order to gain knowledge of the former. On the other hand, the approach to occultism as a subversive counterculture throws light on the fact that the avant-garde

intellectuals found in it a storehouse of tools in their attempt to create an alternative artistic language.

Examining the relation between esoteric culture and avant-garde culture, Tiryakian cites Vytautas Kavolis who had explored "the sociocultural nexus between avant-garde culture and what he calls 'Satanic' and 'Promethean' personality modes. . . . These . . . are manifested in the activist and nihilistic aspect of avant-garde culture, oriented to both the destruction of the established order of things and to a perpetual innovation and renovation of forms."[12] This is a view which helps to place Strindberg's occultism within the evolving avant-garde culture of the late-nineteenth-century. In many ways, he was a typical victim among artists of what James Webb calls the "crisis of consciousness" brought about by the socio-political and economic transformation of the Western world and manifested in industrial, scientific, religious, and social revolutions from the age of the European Renaissance up to our days.[13]

Thus, the late-nineteenth-century revival of occultism can be seen as a "flight from reason"[14] in that occultists sought to retrieve an authentic metaphysical orientation within culture. Yet, paradoxically, the occult revival of the late nineteenth century was strongly influenced by the rise of new science and the age of reason. It was not only a reaction against the dehumanizing effects of the times, but also a child of this era. Modern occultism was neither religion, nor science, but typically made use of both,

borrowing from the former ideas and images of a spiritual reality and combining them freely with the methodology and outlook of the latter. While on the one hand the gap between science and religion became definite by the mid-nineteenth century, on the other hand a striking cross-fertilization evolved between the positive sciences and the domain of the spiritual and irrational, which added a new quality to occultism. Esoteric knowledge now became popularized and gradually absorbed by exoteric culture as occultists relied increasingly on the tools of the predominant progressive sciences. Following the model of comparative religion, occultists developed syncretic systems of thought in order to present a "synthesis" of religions, philosophies, and sciences, which became a watchword of the times. The modern encyclopedic mind of natural sciences worked behind the occult syntheses and the new scientific concepts of transformism and evolution theory were applied by occultists to supernatural processes. From the new developments of psychology, for example, occultism appropriated both terminology and methodology such as hypnotism, trance, and animal magnetism, and applied them in spiritualism, magic and other occult fields; and conversely, pioneers of psychology such as Freud himself, borrowed elements from occultism.[15]

Theatre of Initiation: Dramaturgy of Liminality and Transition

However diverse the trends of occultism may be, there are some basic principles which they have in common. Thus, for example, the practice of initiation has a seminal importance in occultism as the doorway to a higher knowledge. Theosophist author Edouard Schuré developed an entire theatrical theory based on the function of initiatory theatre in human evolution. He claimed that the origin of theatre could be found in the ancient mystery cults, especially in the Hellenic mystery of Eleusis. He thus established a link between the beginnings of theatre and that of the occult tradition. According to this theory initiatory theatre was bound up with the connection between the phenomenal and the invisible world, and it was also related to the interior world of the soul. Initiatory drama, Schuré proclaimed, was the instrument of the theatre of the soul. He maintained that from the time of the Renaissance, Western theatre had come to neglect both the interior world of the soul and the universal world of the spirit.[16]

Schuré also undertook the reconstruction of the initiatory mystery of Eleusis, a lifelong project that he pursued from his youth.[17] His efforts resulted in a play, The Sacred Drama of Eleusis, in three acts, its plot based on the Greek myth of Demeter and Presephone intertwined with the myth of Dionysos. According to Schuré, the "problem of cosmic evolution and that of the evolution of the soul are

closely united" in the original mystery, as well in his reconstruction.[18]

Initiation is both main theme and structural principle in Villiers's Axel (1885), a play admired by both Symbolist poets and occultists. Saturated with Rosicrucian symbolism, the play follows the steps of the two protagonists, Axel and Sara, through their initiatory journey towards higher knowledge, and their eventual escape from the prison of the flesh through voluntary death.

After Villiers, initiatory structure and theme became quite common in the anti-realistic drama of the turn of the century. Schuré's The Children of Lucifer (1901) is centered around the hero's initiation into a new religion, the cult of Lucifer in the time of the Roman Empire. It is a syncretic thesis play in which the cross of Christ and the star of Lucifer are united through the love, marriage, and sacrificial suicide of the Luciferian initiate and his Christian wife.

Like Schuré, Rudolf Steiner was preoccupied with the revival of the mysteries which he sought to realize by writing a series of mystery plays. These, entitled The Portal of Initiation (1910), The Soul's Probation (1911), The Guardian of the Threshold (1912), and The Soul's Awakening (1913) were meant to convey the experience of the process of Rosicrucian initiation through which man's soul-powers are revealed as the "spiritual archetype enters the human sphere."[19] The plays represent the successive stages of man's

spiritual evolution through a series of transfigurations of the characters from earthly personalities into Spirit Beings, which is the ultimate goal of initiation.

Since initiation structurally includes a rite of passage, a progress from one state of being into another, these plays usually take place on the borderline in-between these states and involve a movement of transition. The most usual is a structure of cyclical movement or that of descent and ascent, both in a cosmic and in a psychical-spiritual sense. Many of the plays start with a descent or fall into the underworld (or the abyss of the unconscious), which in the occult sense means incarnation, the imprisonment or limitation of the soul by matter and darkness (e.g. The Sacred Drama of Eleusis, The Portal of Initiation). The eventual ascent or decarnation, which is usually achieved through death, equals spiritual rebirth and liberation, the reunion of the soul with the boundless universe (e.g. Axel, Children of Lucifer, or Péladan's The Prince of Byzance, 1896).

There are a number of other occult plays in which the cyclical pattern often overlaps with a journey structure to depict rites of passage, as in Yeats's Shadowy Waters (1892), Hofmannstahl's Death and the Fool (1893), and Claudel's The Break of Noon (1905).

These examples demonstrate that the motifs that follow from the general occult notion of initiation and its related experience of liminality, are reflected in the plays also as

abstract structural features of cyclical movement, descent and ascent, and transition between different ontological states and levels. As I will later demonstrate, we can recognize these motifs and structural features again in Strindberg's dramaturgy, related to specific theosophical notions, but thoroughly individualized in the Strindbergian crucible.

The Cosmic Planes of Being: Theatre of Correspondences and Allusions

The occult distinction--from Plato to Swedenborg and Madame Blavatsky--between the noumenal a priori world and the manifested phenomenal world implies the idea of several ontological layers connected by a series of correspondences. The late-nineteenth-century revival of such a conception of the universe resulted in a series of aesthetic transformations in artistic representation. Thus, for example, Mallarmé's notion of pure poetry, which comes from an occult understanding of the correlation between microcosm and macrocosm, individuality and infinity, word and Universe,[20] was a radical departure from essentialism, as a result of which the notions of self and presence are replaced by those of relation and absence. As he puts it in his essay on the "Crisis of Poetry" (1886), the "pure work implies the disappearance of the poet as speaker, yielding his initiative to words which are mobilized by the shock of their difference; they light up reciprocal reflections like a

virtual stream of fireworks over jewels."[21] Mallarmé's treatment of language and poetry illuminates the rise of avant-garde thought and poetic abstraction in relation to the occult-mystical view of the world as incessantly mobile sets of relations, in which form and matter are devoid of essence. These relations include binary oppositions, correspondences, analogical relationships, transitions between hierarchical planes, transmutations and transformations. This kind of world view is ultimately dramatic, since in drama the subjective voice of the author is structurally absent; and the linguistic medium of dialog locates dramatic space "in-between," as exchange or transition between persons, objects, ideas, or existential states.

Mallarmé's assessment of the theatre, is, of course, closely connected with his conception of poetry. On the one hand, he conceives of a cosmic drama, and on the other, a "theatre of the mind" without need for a physical stage. His play Igitur (1869), however "undramatic" it might seem from the point of view of conventional theatre, embodies both of these aspects. Its protagonist, Igitur, "descends the stairs of human mind, goes to the depths of things: as the 'absolute' that he is."[22] Structurally the piece describes a double motion: the ego is projected into the cosmos, and the universe is injected into the mind. It is cosmic and subjective theatre at the same time.

Several decades after Mallarmé, Maeterlinck sought to create a drama which would bring together the absolute-cosmic

and the subjective-internal. He arrived at a less radical conclusion than Mallarmé, insofar as he did not think it necessary to replace physical theatre with a virtual one of the mind. Yet, he minimized external action in drama in order to render the stir of the Infinite in the human soul perceptible, and to portray "the individual, face to face with the universe."[23]

In the plays of Maeterlinck allusion replaces dramatic action, something that had become a cornerstone of Symbolist aesthetics ever since Baudelaire and Mallarmé. It was again Mallarmé who in this respect extended this aesthetics from poetry to theatre. In his essay on Paul Margueritte's performance of his own monodrama Pierrot, Assassin of His Wife (1882) Mallarmé declares:

> This is how mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror: he thus acts up a medium, a pure medium, of fiction.[24]

Just like correspondence and analogy, allusion implies structurally and ontologically the presence of a visible sign that refers to something absent and invisible. Late-nineteenth-century occult dramaturgy explored the zone of transition in-between the visible and the invisible, through the abstract medium of relations: correspondences, analogies, and allusions. Occult thought considers all which is visible and manifested in form and matter as a sign or representation of the invisible and infinite. In the phenomenal world nothing is what it seems to be; it is the world of

appearances, it is but a treacherous web of deceptive images, veils, masks, doubles, in a word: theatre. The medieval-renaissance idea of theatrum mundi, or the conception of the world of appearances, secret codes, and masks became once again central to late-nineteenth-century occult thought from Mallarmé to Maeterlinck, and, as we shall see, emerged in Strindberg with elemental force.

Towards the Infinite: Self, Mask, and Dramatic Character

According to occult thought, there is a correspondence between the individual and the universal spiritual progress; between the cosmic levels and hierarchies and the inner states of the soul. Consequently, late-nineteenth-century occult theatre is not concerned so much with the socio-psychological complex of the human personality as with the ideal and universal Self. Mallarmé wrote to his friend Henri Cazalis (May 14, 1867):

> I still need to look at myself in that mirror in order to think and . . . if it were not in front of this desk on which I'm writing to you, I would become the Void once again. . . . I am now impersonal and no longer the Stéphane that you knew,--but a capacity possessed by the spiritual Universe to see itself and develop itself, through what was once me.[25]

With Mallarmé's Hérodiade (1864-69) and Igitur (1869), dramatic character emerged as archetype. This was not simply the summation of humanity but a symbol of the soul disguised as a separate individuality, ever striving towards infinity and dissolution in a boundless being.

Paul Claudel's hero in Tête-d'Or (1889) declares that "this world was made for man and a limit was set about him."[26] Yet, he perceives his own being beyond this limit:

> A sense of the living force within my soul, the vital essence,
> That does not enter into marriage, nor pass through the gates of birth,
> The secret purpose of my being.[27]

The occult theory of the human being as the manifestation of the spirit clothed in a series of bodies (spiritual, mental, astral, etheric, physical) as its vehicles, urged a departure from the psychological realism of the dramatic character. The apparent theatricality of this occult principle is manifested in the appearance of the human self as an actor, performing roles in the disguises of his diverse bodies. The personality is seen as a mask, an appearance. That is why these plays are full of masks, doubles, shadows, reflections, all of which reveal the discrepancy between man's true self (the Spirit, the Absolute), the image of the self (double, shadow, anti-self, ghost), and his disguise (persona, mask, vehicle). These masks and doubles can also embody the "other" self or selves of a character. For example in Mallarmé's view man can possess a multiplicity of arbitrary personalities, but his true self is the Absolute which alone is independent of chance.[28] For Yeats anima mundi, the World-Soul, is what the Absolute is for Mallarmé. He explains that "our animal spirits or vehicles are but, as it were, a condensation of the vehicle of anima mundi, and give substance to its images

in the faint materialization of our common thought, or more grossly, when a ghost is our visitor." And he adds that "the other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self, as one may chose to name it, comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality."[29] Yeats thus recognized through occultism the theatrical and illusory character of both the phenomenal world and the human personality:

> If we cannot image ourselves different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves. . . . active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing a mask.[30]

Maeterlinck also talks about the double self in his essay "On Emerson" evoking the experience when the "countenance of our divine soul smiles at times over the shoulder of the human soul, her sister."[31] In connection with the staging of his plays Claudel explains similarly that he

> had the idea of giving each of the characters a double, exactly like him, but nonspeaking--a kind of shadow, or perhaps a witness. . . . One of the figures represents that which speaks and takes part in the plot, the other simply that which is permanent, which exists, and watches as we act. Thus each of the beautiful pillars surrounding the choir in the cathedral Le Mans has joined to it a thin column which silently expresses the upward soaring of its slender lines.[32]

There are likewise two aspects of the protagonist in The Break of Noon. "The song of Mesa" towards the conclusion of the play is composed of a dialogue between Mesa and a Voice. Claudel explains in a letter to Jean-Louis Barrault who was going to play the part, that he brought in that Voice, because there is "someone who listens and someone who

speaks."[33] Yet, at the same time, the dramatis personae are not complete in themselves, which is indicated by their names such as Ysé (Greek 'equality'), Mesa ("the half"), Amalric ("divisioning into three"), and De Ciz ("the cutting").[34] It is by virtue of their associations with one another, their combinations and separations, analogically to chemical elements, that a full cosmic-spiritual process is completed.

There are many other examples for the treatment of dramatic character as a set of multiple selves, doubles, masks. Leonid Andreyev's play The Black Maskers (1908)--in which the main character, Lorenzo, slays his double--explores the multiplicity of the self. In Stanisław Przybyszewski's Visitors the protagonist, Adam, is inseparable from the Visitor who is his own shadow that lures him to death. In Rudolf Steiner's plays man's multiple soul-forces, archetypes, and "bodies" appear as characters.

If the occult view of the universe resulted in a correlational dramatic structure, the occult idea of man as a series of selves, personalities, and bodies, implied a dramaturgy in which dramatic character appears not as a psychological unity, but as a set of relations. Both of these techniques, which we will later see emerging in Strindberg's plays, signify the transition towards an avant-garde dramaturgy.

From Sacred Geometry to Theatrical Abstraction

Éliphas Lévi in The Key to the Mysteries, a book praised by Strindberg,[35] invites "the great poets of the future to create once more the divine comedy, no longer according to the dreams of man, but according to the mathematics of God."[36] Lévi's demand reflects the occult view according to which the knowledge of ultimate reality can be attained only by breaking through the layers of the immediate, concrete, material appearances in order to get to the spiritual and abstract nature of things, which is constituted by numerical and geometrical relations and proportions.

The occult notion of a sacred geometry goes back to the tradition that grew out of Pythagorean mathematics and number theory, and Plato's cosmology as planar and solid geometry outlined in his Timaeus. According to this cosmology, essential forms, numbers, and proportions informed the universe creating order out of the primordial chaos. Geometric proportions were thought of as archetypes that exist a priori, without any material counterpart. They constitute the highest, ideal plane of existence, and, in turn, are reflected in the elements of the lower, material world.[37]

The Pythagorean-Platonic tradition was the source for late-nineteenth-century occultists for their notion of creation and existence in terms of number (e.g. Eliphas

Lévi), geometrical forms (e.g. Madame Blavatsky), and vibrations (e.g. the theory of "thought-forms" developed by theosophists Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater). Translated into the field of arts there evolved out of this view techniques and theories of speech, movement, rhythm, color, sound, form, and synesthesia, all of which had consequences for the theatre.[38]

François Delsarte (1811-1871) developed an aesthetic system combining the idea of Divine trinity as manifested in man through the law of correspondences, according to which spiritual meaning is reflected in bodily utterances. He stated that a bodily function is corresponds to each spiritual function. His subsystem for theatrical expression contained threefold sets of divine-human functions such as life-soul-spirit, rhythm-harmony-melody. To each of these, he ordered gestures with three possible variations of direction and intensity. This system of body-motion-expression[39] inspired the Swiss Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) who was Delsarte's pupil in the 1880s.[40] But while in Delsarte metaphysical idea and practical doctrine are directly related by virtue of correspondences, Jaques-Dalcroze connected them by his central notion: rhythm. Bodily exercises, Jaques-Dalcroze thought, effect our spiritual being, and man's sensibility can be developed so that the vibrating tones of music will release corresponding vibrations in the tissues and in the nervous system of the moving individual.[41]

For Jaques-Dalcroze "plastic expression" was the realization of a liberated universal rhythm that, as he thought, had been distorted and disguised by the individual rhythm of limiting forms.[42]

Working with Dalcroze in Hellerau from 1910 to 1914, Adolphe Appia was just as dedicated to the realization of the union between the temporal fluidity of music and the spatial experience of the three-dimensional human body. In his and Dalcroze's collaboration the production of Gluck's Orfeo (1913) was hailed by critics as "music made visible."[43] Appia's book, Music and the Art of the Theatre (1899) explains the relations between music, speech, pantomime, and dance in the word-tone drama in a way that anticipates both Dalcroze's and Rudolf Steiner's ideas and practical solutions for the translation of inner, spiritual experience into the realm of physical forms.[44]

Among those inspired by the Dalcroze method of movement was Rudolf Steiner, who created Eurythmy, a system of movement and gesture on stage. It was presented on stage for the first time in 1912 in Munich, in the production of Steiner's mystery plays. Eurythmy was developed as "a total system of correspondences--movement, sound, speech, cosmos, body organs."[45] It involves the plastic formation of speech, in which the spiritual value of sounds and words are expressed through gesture and movement. The system consists of gestures and movements that arise from the vibration of the sounds of speech.[46]

For Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958), pioneer of modern dance and movement, occult tradition was likewise an important source of inspiration. A major influence in Laban's work was the Platonic cosmogony according to which geometrical bodies make up the cosmos. Laban took the Platonic icosahedron (a volumetric form with twenty triangular faces) as a model for the possible movement-directions of the human body, which became the basis of his system he called Choreutik. He considered the structure of the crystal a form-giving force; a force of tension. In the course of motion he viewed each tension as an invisible crystal, and he maintained that the dancer builds "crystal-empires," invisible castles.[47]

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), whose art was profoundly influenced by theosophy, saw in true artworks revelations of the Spirit. Though known essentially as a painter, he experimented with dramatic art and stage composition, and he declared in 1911 that the art of the future, would become the true stage-composition, which would include musical, pictorial, and physical movement. These are elements that, properly combined, would "make up the spiritual movement."[48]

The most significant of Kandinsky's stage compositions, The Yellow Sound (1912), consists of a series of images in slow transformation achieved by colored light and the movement of figures on stage. The sound effects include singing of poems, recitation, and unintelligible words. The abstract medium of carefully set up correspondences and

oppositions between colors, sounds, forms, rhythms, and movements, is intended to achieve "certain complex of vibrations. . . . that. . . . causes a virtually identical vibration of the receiving soul."[49]

From this brief survey we can conclude that the influence of occult doctrine on the drama and stage of the turn of the last century resulted in a non-realistic, abstract, and relational dramaturgy which is manifest in the dramatic structures of liminality and correspondences; in the dramatic character as sets of correlations; and in the application of geometrical forms and proportions as elements of a new, abstract medium of the stage.

Notes:

[1]Revue Illustrée, 15 February, 1890, quoted by Mircea Eliade in Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1976), 51.

[2]The term "occult" etymologically refers to something hidden; it is something that is "communicated only to the initiated." In early science and natural philosophy it is applied "to physical quantities not manifest to direct observation but discoverable only by experiment." The occult is "of the nature or pertaining to those ancient and medieval reputed sciences (or their modern representatives) held to involve the knowledge or the use of agencies of a secret and mysterious nature (as magic, alchemy, astrology, theosophy, and the like)." The Oxford English Dictionary, second ed., s.v. "Occult." The Encyclopedia of Religions defines occultism as "a large number of practices, ranging from astrology and alchemy to occult medicine and magic, that are based . . . on the homo-analogical principle, or doctrine of correspondences. According to this principle, things that are similar exert an influence on one another by virtue of the correspondences that unite all visible things to one another and to invisible realities as well" (The Encyclopedia of Religions, 1987 ed., s.v. "Occultism"). For the history and national characteristics of late-nineteenth-century occultism see for example James Webb, The Occult Underground (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974; repr. 1988); and Joscelyn Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

[3]Typical of the times was, for example, in Paris the simultaneous efforts of Antoine's experiments with Naturalist staging at the Théâtre Libre and attempts at a stylized symbolist staging of for example Maeterlinck's metaphysical plays in the 1890s. For details see for example, Frantisek Deak, Symbolist Theatre: The Formation of an Avant-Garde, PAJ Books (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[4]Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Axel, trans. Marilyn Gaddis Rose (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970), xiii-xiv.

[5]See for example Édouard Schuré, The Great Initiates: A Study of the Secret History of Religions, trans. Gloria Rasberry (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1961), first French edition 1889; Maurice Maeterlinck, The Great Secret, trans. Bernard Miall (London: Methuen, 1922; New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1969); W. B. Yeats, Mythologies (New York: Macmillan, 1959; Collier Books, 1969).

[6]On Yeats's involvement with occultism see Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1948); and Virginia Moore, The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1954).

[7]Cf. Joscelyn Godwin, The Beginnings of Theosophy in France (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1989), 9; and Marie Savitch, Marie Steiner von Sivers: Fellow Worker with Rudolf Steiner, trans. Juliet Compton-Burnett (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1967), 41-54, 64-69.

[8]Daniel Gerould, "Andrei Bely: Russian Symbolist," Performing Arts Journal 3, no. 2 (Fall 1978): 27.

[9]Webb, The Occult Underground, 170-180.

[10]Cf. Schuré, The Great Initiates, 252-409.

[11]Edward A. Tiryakian, "Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture," American Journal of Sociology 78, no. 3 (November 1972):499-500.

[12]Ibid., 503.

[13]Webb, The Occult Underground, 10-11.

[14]Ibid., 11.

[15]Tiryakian, "Towards the Sociology of Esoteric Culture," 506-507.

[16]Cf. Edouard Schuré, The Genesis of Tragedy and the Sacred Drama of Eleusis, trans. Fred Rothwell (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Co., 1936), 51-68, 128.

[17]Cf. Schuré, The Great Initiates, 19-20.

[18]Schuré, The Genesis of Tragedy, 242.

[19]Savits, Marie Steiner, 80.

[20]Cf. Stéphane Mallarmé, Selected Letters of Stéphane Mallarmé, ed. and trans. Rosemary Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 81.

[21]Stéphane Mallarmé, Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. and trans. Mary Ann Caws (New York: New Directions, 1982), 75.

[22]Ibid., 91.

[23]Maurice Maeterlinck, "The Tragical in Daily Life," in The Treasure of the Humble, trans. Alfred Sutro (New York: Dodd, Mead, n.d.), 124.

[24]Mallarmé, Selected Poetry and Prose, 69.

[25]Mallarmé, Selected Letters, 74.

[26]Paul Claudel, Tête-D'Or: A Play in Three Acts, trans. John Strong Newberry (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1919), 72.

[27]Ibid., 14.

[28]Cf. Elisabeth A. Howe, Stages of the Self: The Dramatic Monologues of Laforgue, Valéry and Mallarmé (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990), 99-100.

[29]William Butler Yeats, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," in Mythologies, 350, 334.

[30]Ibid., 334.

[31]Maurice Maeterlinck, On Emerson, and Other Essays, trans. Montrose J. Moses (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1912), 33.

[32]Claudel on the Theatre, ed. Jacques Petit and Jean-Pierre Kempf, trans. Christine Trollope (Coral Gables, Fl.: University of Miami Press, 1972), 72.

[33]Ibid., 153.

[34]Paul Claudel, Two Dramas, trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1960), 11.

[35]On the title page of Occult Diary Strindberg listed this book, among other sources, as an explanation especially for the signes and symbols in the diary.

[36]Lévi, The Key to the Mysteries, 10.

[37]Cf. Robert Lawlor, Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982; paperback edition New York, 1989; repr., 1992), 6-9, 96-97. See also Plato, Timaeus, trans. H. D. P. Lee (Baltimore, MA: Penguin Books, 1965; repr. 1969), 69-81.

[38]In his essay "French Symbolism and Early Abstraction," Robert P. Welsh points out the connection between the occult doctrine of a sacred geometry and abstraction in the visual arts: "Abstract artists embraced long-established iconographic motifs, esoteric sign language, and, finally, pure geometrical forms. Despite the variety of applications, this devotion reflected a shared reliance by the artists upon a body of spiritualist religious, philosophical, and scientific writings, which constituted one major aspect of nineteenth-century thought. Although in terms of artistic style the progression was away from residual naturalism toward ever more reductive forms of abstraction, this need not imply any lessening in the spiritual significance of the so-called nonrepresentational forms of art. It is now becoming clear that for artists like Frantisek Kupka, Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich, and Vassily Kandinsky the purification of natural into abstract forms implied the proposition that geometric configurations function as paradigms of spiritual enlightenment" (The Spiritual in Art, 64).

[39]Genevive Stebbins points out the Neoplatonic and cabalistic sources of the Delsarte system, and she draws parallel between Delsarte's definition of the trinity and that of Eliphas Lévi, in Delsarte System of Expression (New York: Dance Horizon, 1977), 383-85; she also cites Prof. Monroe who called Delsarte "Swedenborg geometrized," ibid. 114.; On Delsarte's occultism see also Pia Witzmann, "Dem Kosmos zu gehört der

Tanzende: Die Einfluß des Okkulten auf den Tanz," in Okkultismus und Avantgarde, 600-603.

[40]Irwin Spector, Rhythm and Life: The Work of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Dance and Music Series No. 3 (Stuvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1990), 9-10.

[41]Cf. Witzmann, "Dem Kosmos zu gehört der Tanzende," 605; It is interesting to note that the facade of the Hellerau Institute as well as the stage was decorated with the mystic circle of Yin and Yang, the Chinese ideogram of perpetual motion; see Spector, Rhythm and Life, 158.

[42]Ibid., 116, 117.

[43]Spector, Rhythm and Life, 169.

[44]Cf. Walter R. Volbach, Adolphe Appia, Prophet of the Modern Theatre: A Profile (Middleton, CT: Weseyan University Press, 1968), 83-87.

[45]Robb Creese, "Anthropological Performance," Drama Review 22, no. 2 (June 1978): 58. On stage presentations see also Savits, Marie Steiner, 106; and Witzmann, "Dem Kosmos zu gehört der Tanzende," 609.

[46]See Rudolf Steiner, Eurythmy as Visible Speech, trans. Vera and Judy Compton-Burnett (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1956; repr., 1984), 17-20, 157-187, 201-20.

[47]Cf. Witzman, "Dem Kosmos zu gehört der Tanzende," 612-14.

[48]Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, trans. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 51.

[49]Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsey and Peter Vergo (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1982), 1:57-58.

Chapter Two

What is Theosophy?

As one among the branches of nineteenth-century modern occultism, theosophy[1] was initiated by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) who, together with Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and William Q. Judge, founded the Thesophical Society in New York in 1875. Blavatsky developed a comprehensive cosmology with the guidiance of what she called Mahatmas, her purported transcendental spiritual teachers.[2]

The chief objectives of the Theosophical Society were the creation of a Universal Brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, color, creed, sex, or social position; the encouragement of comparative studies in ancient world religions, and the investigation the hidden mysteries of nature and the psychic and spiritual powers latent in man.[3]

The headquarters of the Theosophical Society soon moved from New York to India, first to Bombay in 1879, and then to Adyar in 1882. The body of the Society was composed of several large sections--the Indian, the American, the Australian, and the European Sections--each of which consisted of branches and lodges scattered all over the world.[4]

Thanks to the wide dissemination of theosophical ideas through the international branches, many artists and intellectuals came into contact with theosophy around the turn of the century. Yeats, for example, joined the

Theosophical Society in London in 1887, Mondrian was member of the Dutch Branch from 1909 to 1916, and Kandinsky came to close contact with the Munich Branch in 1908.[5] Strindberg, as we shall see, was first informed of the the doctrine by its Swedish propagators.

When Blavatsky had first arrived to New York from Paris in 1873, she associated with spiritualists, but soon discredited them and set out to establish her own brand of occultism. She aspired to achieve nothing less than the revival of ancient wisdom in order to bridge the increasing gap between science and religion, an ambition that, as we shall see, lay close to Strindberg's heart as well. Blavatsky claimed that there was a primordial Wisdom Religion which underlay all the existing creeds of the world and, it required "no blind faith to believe, for it was knowledge" (Glossary, 370). She stated that Wisdom Religion was in the custody of great spiritual teachers (Mahatmas) who revealed it to those ready to receive such knowledge. Ancient wisdom could also be regained from the great religions of the world by recovering the hidden, esoteric meaning of their symbolism, a method Blavatsky developed in her major works.

Theosophy Layed Out in Basic Works

Blavatsky's two grandiose books, Isis Unveiled (1877) and The Secret Doctrine (1888), indicate the successive development of the theosophical thought system. Isis Unveiled draws upon Egyptian hermetism and the Western occult

tradition from Gnosticism to the Kabbala, Freemasonry, and Spiritualism. The Secret Doctrine reveals a distinct alignment with Eastern religious and philosophical tradition as it is found in Brahmanism, Hinduism and especially in Buddhism, yet showing a permanent adherence to a Platonist tradition as well.

Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology consists of two volumes, the first of which is subtitled Science, and the second Theology. Blavatsky states in the introduction that her book offers "a brief summary of the religions, philosophies, and universal traditions of human kind and the exegesis of the same" (1:xliv). For "true knowledge" she turns to pre-Christian religions and philosophies and traces in them the first principle of existence as Intelligence (termed variously Nous, Logos, or Universal Mind), that which contains all pre-existing, unmanifested forms of life even before giving them birth (1:xi-xiv).

Isis Unveiled aimed to combat both the materialism of modern science and the dogmatism of Christian theology, and was directed against the tyranny of these two authorities of the time (1:xlv). Volume one criticizes contemporary science on the basis of its incompetence in dealing with the "missing links" of knowledge, those which ancient wisdom could clearly explain from the universal laws of nature. For example, Blavatsky finds clues as to the origin of the universe and the evolution of cosmos and mankind in the "sacred numbers"

of ancient myths and "mythopoeic fables" (1:122), systematized by Pythagoras and Plato (1:7). Her arguments are supported from the standpoint that "there is a logos in every mythos" (1:162). Besides cosmology, volume one treats issues such as the cyclical evolutionary law in the universe and nature, the preexistences of the world and man, the nature of matter and spirit, and physical and psychic forces manifest in nature, including sound, light, electricity; the transformations of energy; attraction-repulsion; and time and space. It also deals with such phenomena as the existence of elemental spirits that work out the forms of nature, pre-Adamite human races, Androgyny, and vampirism.

Volume two of Isis Unveiled is "an analysis of religious beliefs in general, . . . in particular directed against theological Christianity, the chief opponent of free thought" (2:iv). This volume deals with the origins of Christian beliefs which are found in pagan cults and rituals, especially those of solar and phallic deities. While explaining the pre-Christian sources of Christianity, Blavatsky also offers an esoteric interpretation of Christian symbolism which focuses on the doctrine of emanation of the universe from a divine source, and the cycles of spirit falling into matter (embodiment) and rising into heaven (death and resurrection) (2:191-94, 422).

The main thread of thought maintained throughout Isis Unveiled is the idea that there is an unseen universe beyond the empirical world, and the former constitutes reality,

while the phenomenal world is illusory. Only the clairvoyant can capture the images of reality which are imprinted upon the astral light as if on a "cosmic canvas" where "the record of all that was, is, or ever will be" is kept (1:185). Moreover, physical existence is simply the manifestation of the Spirit as exemplified in Christ who represents the embodied Spirit or Logos manifested in matter. The same idea, "the whole philosophy of the universe" was expressed long before Christianity in the circular symbol of the Egyptian serpent which represents "matter vivified by spirit" (1:149). As the serpent "upon casting his coat becomes freed from a casing of gross matter. . . , so man, by casting off the gross material body, enters upon the next stage of his existence with enlarged powers" (1:149).

The Secret Doctrine which bears the ambitious subtitle The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy, has a similarly encyclopedic scope as Isis. In the "proem" it is stated that the book consists of the transcription--equipped with Blavatsky's commentaries--of Stanzas from the "Book of Dzyan" (a title that appears on the third cover page of Strindberg's Occult Diary, see chapter 3), the oldest religious manuscript in the world. It is unknown to scholarship, but now it has been revealed to the author by the "adepts" who had guarded it for centuries (1:i).

The introduction explaines that the "Book of Dzyan" contains the "secret doctrine," the universal religion of the ancient prehistoric world (1:xxxiv). Blavatsky explains the

three fundamental propositions of this secret doctrine. The first establishes "an Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable Principle," the infinite Cause whose one aspect is absolute, abstract space, and the other is abstract motion and Consciousness (1:14-15). The second proposition states the law of periodicity, the eternity of incessantly manifesting and disappearing Universes. This ebb and flow of worlds corresponds with the eternity of the Pilgrim, also called the Monad which is the immortal principle in us, an indivisible part of "the Universal Spirit, from which it emanates, and into which it is absorbed at the end of the cycle" (1:16). The third proposition asserts "the fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Oversoul. . .; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul--a spark of the former--through the Cycle of Incarnation . . . in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law" (1:17).

Volume one of The Secret Doctrine is entitled Cosmogenesis, and it treats the origin and evolution of the universe from its emanation out of the divine source, through successively evolving planetary chains, to its annihilation by being absorbed into the source again. A planetary chain means a series of reincarnations of the same globe, each of them corresponding to a different evolutionary stage. These are actually stages in the manifestation of the Spirit in the course of its gradual materialization. Having reached the most purely material stage, the process is reversed.

The second volume, Antropogenesis, deals with the history of the earth and the evolution of mankind through a series of "root-races." These represent mankind at different stages of its evolution, being made of varying ratios of spirit and matter, and accordingly creating a civilization on the continent they inhabit which then submerges to give place to the next one.

Based upon Blavatsky's fundamental works that were known to Strindberg, the overall main tenets of theosophy can be summarized as follows:

All religions stem from the same ancient Wisdom Religion, the teachings of which are hidden in their rituals and symbolism. The multiplicity of beings is the manifestation of the One: the divine source out of which all have emanated. The universe, mankind, and the individual human being undergo a corresponding evolution which means that all beings and life forms are on the march towards ever higher spirituality. The universe occurs through periodically reincarnating planetary chains whose planets are invaded by the life waves of mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, and by mankind that appears in a series of root-races. Theosophy conceives man not as a body having a soul, but as a soul that has several bodies which are its vehicles or instruments for making appearances at each reincarnation. The eternal soul is considered man's individuality and true Higher Self, while his "bodies" make up his personality, the lower self. At every reincarnation man puts on his bodies as

if putting on masks or costumes for a performance, to cast them off again at death. Each body (physical, astral, mental, etc.) corresponds a certain principle in man which pertains to a certain existence plane. Reincarnation is regulated by karma that assures cosmic justice and equilibrium, as the consequences of each action during one's lifetime are enforced during another.

Theosophy in Historical Context

The question arises: how could theosophy, in itself an eclectic and by no means original system of thought, exert a significant cultural influence to the extent that it is considered one of the major sources of inspiration for the avant-garde abstract art? How could it be embraced by such prominent writers and artists of the turn of the century as Maeterlinck, Yeats, Kandinsky, and Mondrian, Scriabin, Stravinsky, among many others? There is no simple answer; but for a better understanding one has to look at the historical and socio-cultural context as manifested in the institutions of science and religion, or in the ideas of tradition and progress, rationalism and utopia.

The occult-spiritual trends of the late nineteenth-century are usually seen as a recapitulation of the revolt started by the Romantic movement as a response to the age of enlightenment and rationalism, a "rebellion against the bourgeois establishment and ideology."[6] The revolt manifested in an upsurge of secret societies and esoteric doctrines in

the face of increasing industrialization and mass-production, and a turn towards "ancient wisdom" hidden in the symbolic language of myth, religion, antique philosophers, and enraptured mystics as opposed to positivistic modern science.

This implied, on the one hand, an adherence to the cultural values of the past, a backward turn, which is akin to the interest of Romanticism in the Middle Ages, the "primitif," and Orientalism.[7] On the other hand, what goes beyond Romantic escapism in late nineteenth-century occultism, is that these new trends were the manifestations of a disruptive counter-culture which strove to constitute an alternative to ongoing social practices. It is in this quality that they became associated with the formation of modernism and the avant-garde.[8]

Among the occult trends, it was theosophy that--through its assimilation of Oriental doctrines, its anti-clericalism, its emphasis on the brotherhood of mankind, and the acceptance of all human creeds--joined hands with forces that urged social and religious liberation.[9] The emphasis on ancient wisdom did not mean that theosophy turned its back to the modern ideology of progress. On the contrary, the theosophical system confirmed the possibility of gradual human perfection, and the repossession of divine qualities through successive reincarnations. As we saw, this process corresponds with the planetary evolution that would lead to an ideal human existence in a regained Paradisiac state. The final goal of evolution was said to be a thoroughly

spiritualized state of man and the earth itself.[10] It is difficult not to associate this aspect of theosophy with the nineteenth-century socialist-utopian movements, such as that of Fourier and Saint-Simon. These aimed to achieve an ideal society through political, economic, scientific, and especially technological improvement. A basic difference is that while the socialist-utopians offered pragmatic means of achieving the goal, theosophy stayed within the realm of the spiritual. Nevertheless, both were concerned with a future state of bliss in this world, and not in another.[11]

The Theosophical Society's Eastern relations has been a much debated and controversial issue because of its political implications. As a reaction to the Society's activities in Asia, two opposing attitudes emerged in the West: one that denounced the Society because of its assimilation of Oriental ideas unfit for Western intellect; and another that claimed that Asian metaphysics was entirely absent from the theosophical system, and accused Blavatsky and her companions of disguising Western ideas with an Oriental terminology.[12]

These extreme reactions can be understood from the facts that provoked them. Upon their arrival to Bombay in 1879, Blavatsky and Olcott converted to Buddhism and set up the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in India. From that time on the Society "took on the role of a mouthpiece for Eastern wisdom to address the West."[13] As Schwab shows, the "Oriental Renaissance" of the nineteenth century in Western Europe, which included the establishment of Oriental Studies

and Comparative Religion, and culminated in a profound impact of the East on Western literature and philosophy, was precipitated by colonial interests.[14] The Theosophical Society, on the other hand, politically allied with anti-colonial forces, and contributed even to the rise of Indian national resistance which led to the founding of the Indian National Congress. As Campbell states, "the championing of Indian aspirations and the attraction of influential Anglo-Indians to their cause were two of the significant accomplishments of the Theosophists' early years in Asia. A third was. . .: their influence on the revival of Buddhism in Ceylon . . . (now Sri Lanka) [where] the colonialists had used religion and education as instruments of subjugation.[15] This bearing of the theosophists was not appreciated by the Christian missionaries who siezed on the first opportunity of revealing Blavatsky's occult phenomena as fraud.[16] Also, as soon as Blavatsky set foot on Indian ground, she was placed under British surveillance, suspected of being a Russian spy.[17] After Colonel Olcott's death, Annie Besant succeeded as the President of the Society. Among her efforts to improve education in India was the co-founding of the Central Hindu College based on Hindu tradition and culture, which later became the core of the Benares Hindu University. She also worked for the emancipation of Indian women through education, and in recognition of her political work for Indian independence, she received the honor to serve as president of the Indian National Congress in 1917.[18]

While the involvement of the Theosophical Society in Indian affairs evoked much distrust in the West, the syncretism of the theosophical outlook was very much timely, and eagerly grasped upon. The theosophical idea that all religions are basically the same inspired many artists at the same time when the development of comparative mythology and religion made it possible that the creeds, churches, and religious sects of the world started to communicate with one another. This was but the culmination of a process that had started earlier in the century. The discoveries of both natural sciences and the humanities had shaken the foundations of established Western thought. The birth of Oriental scholarship, linguistics, and history had offered for Westerners insight into hitherto unknown worlds. At the same time, the discovery of ancient fossils and the evolution theory questioned the biblical view of creation and the theological world view. All this inevitably led to the demand for a greater freedom of thought and religious liberalism. The epitome of this process was an unheard of event, the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, where among others, the representatives of the Theosophical Society allegedly lectured for an audience of 3,000 people.[19]

Although Blavatsky's theosophy rejected both religious dogmatism and the materialism and shortsightedness of modern science, she could sensitively make use of not only religion but those elements of science which in her time were considered most progressive, and yet, seemed to confirm

ancient wisdom. The great established religions she explained "esoterically" so that they fit into the metaphysical system she set up. On the other hand, while criticizing Darwin, Blavatsky's theosophy incorporated the theory of evolution, adjusted to the Buddhist, Neoplatonist, and Gnostic doctrine of the evolution of the soul towards spiritual perfection to which the whole cosmos served as background. By doing so, theosophy confirmed the modern faith in human progress, yet, without losing sight of the spiritual aspect.

Yet another aspect of contemporary science exploited by theosophy was that the theory of evolution inspired biologists and chemists to investigate a single ur-source of all elements and organisms, which gave rise to scientific Monism.[20] For theosophists, this seemed to confirm the religious and philosophical monism of the Vedic religions and of Platonism, which asserted a single divine source of the multiplicity of beings in which all apparent variety is essentially one, and the One is present in all. This idea had become the theosophical justification for the existence of a universal brotherhood, which, in turn, ensured the sympathy of forces for democratization. New sciences such as archaeology, paleontology, and geology also were handy to theosophy, since these revealed that the antiquity of life on earth was far greater than was imagined before.[21] These finds could be used as evidence for the existence of prehistoric human races and submerged continents theosophists talked

about. Moreover, Blavatsky's claim in The Secret Doctrine of offering a synthesis of all human knowledge was perfectly in accord with the method of positive science which strove for knowledge by the meticulous accumulation of data in all fields.

All this implied that one did not have to be "unscientific" in order to embrace theosophy, which seemed to be a major attracting force for intellectuals. Nor was it necessary to renounce any particular religion, for each contained the same knowledge hidden in their individual symbolism. Theosophy thus brought together ancient wisdom and modern science onto the same plane, something that Strindberg himself aspired to achieve, when he set out "to mediate a transition between science, on the one hand, and occultism and religion on the other" (Brev 11:136).

The Theatricality of Theosophical Cosmology

From this eclectic blend of religious and philosophical ideas that constitute modern theosophy a consistent pattern seems to emerge, that of a cosmic theatricality. In the theosophical cosmology the Universal Spirit features as the immortal actor and, putting on different bodies for costumes, appears in the phenomenal world of illusion. The universe is considered in theosophy a cosmic shadow-play (SD 1:278), or a drama projected on a cosmic screen of illusion (SD 1:275, Esoteric Christianity 105-06).[22]

The evolution of the universe through a series of existential planes (physical, etheric, astral, mental, etc.) generates stages for the Universal Spirit to manifest itself in the form of individualized souls, which, in turn, perform their parts disguised as entities of nature and human personalities (SD 1:152-53, 570-71). Thus, this absolute subject can be seen both as dramatist (creator, the cause of existence), actor (as the plurality of beings), and spectator (as the subject superior to the phenomenal world).

Human life includes for theosophists a pilgrimage of souls, which takes place in descending and ascending cycles through a series of planes of existence that represent various degrees of spirit/matter and reality/illusion (SD 1:14-18, 27, 135). The greater the degree of materiality, the more the pilgrims are entangled in the veil of illusion. This includes not only a false world of appearences around them, but their own illusory character, being deprived of the awareness of their true identity with the Universal Spirit (SD 1:17-18, 145-147, 274).

Earthly personality appears therefore as a mere mask which is cast off at the transition to a higher plane (for example at death) when one is to receive a new mask and a new body/costume. Man's pilgrimage through the hierarchical planes of existence towards a higher spirituality is characterized by recurring performative rites of passage, such as "life panorama" at the moment of death when the dying man watches scenes of his own previous life, a situation when

the subject is split into actor and spectator (Isis 1:149, Key, 162).

Finally, there is a constant communication between the various planes of existence (through overlapping, correspondences, and transtitions between them; SD 1:152-160, 2:553-61, 591-96), which represents the cosmos as a giant drama text.

As we shall see in the following chapters, several ideological endavours of the theosophical movement--such as the promotion of religious liberalism, a syncretic, encyclopedic, and monistic outlook, and the attempt to reconnect science and spirituality--coincided with Strindberg's own interests and ambitions. We shall also observe Strindberg's tehnique of poetically exploiting theosophical ideas and imagery, transforming them in the creative process to fit his own artistic purposes.

But beyond borrowings recognizable in concrete images or recurring motifs, there appears in Strindberg a more indirect but nonetheless consequential structural parallel with the theosophical cosmology. I propose that this cosmology served for Strindberg as a model for the representation of cosmic processes as theatre. From the 1890s we can observe in Strindberg's work a theatricality that resembles that of the theosophical system. Chapters 5-7 will explore in Strindberg's works the emergence of a cosmic theatre in which different genres--scientific essays, novels, and plays--

function as building blocks, setting up several existential planes as stages for the cosmic theatre to be performed and watched. As we shall see, Strindberg's approach to theosophy was that of a creative artist who looked not only for material for his writing but also for reprsentational forms and structures to incorporate in his own constantly renewing techniques.

Notes:

[1]Unless otherwise indicated, the survey of the theosophical thought system in this chapter is based on literature disseminated during Strindberg's lifetime. Evidence for what was demonstrably known to Strindberg is presented in chapter 3 and in appendix I.

[2]The term theosophy derives from Greek roots meaning divine wisdom or knowledge (theos = God, sophia = knowledge). Cf. Key, 1-7; Bruce F. Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 28. In the context of our discussion "theosophy" denotes the cosmology developed by Blavatsky and elaborated by her followers. However, the term has often been used in a broader sense indicating various metaphysical currents of both Eastern and Western origins, such as the theosophy of Brahmanism and Buddhism; or that of such Christian mystics as Jacob Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg. Blavatsky's modern theosophy acknowledged as predecessors and incorporated elements of these often ancient metaphysics, as a result of which, as we shall see, Strindberg found in theosophy much that corresponded with his readings in Swedenborg or Buddhism. On the various uses of the term see for example Paul Oltramare, L'Histoire des idées théosophiques dans l'Inde, 2 vols. (Paris: E. Leroux, 1906; repr., 1927), 1:vi-viii; and Joscelyn Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, xii.

[3]Key, 39; Glossary, 328.

[4]For a detailed history of the TS see for example Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived, 1-146.

[5]Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (New york: E.P. Dutton, 1948), 62; Ringbom, The Sounding Cosmos, 59-65.

[6]Mircea Eliade, Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions, 52. See also James Webb, The Occult Underground, 10-12. On the other hand, Edward A. Tiryakian suggests a correlation between occultism, modernism and the reinforcement or reinvention of bourgeois-industrial ideology, by stating that "much of what is modern, even the ideology of modernization at its source, has originated in esoteric culture; paradoxically, the value orientation of Western exoteric society, embodied in rationalism, the scientific ethos, and industrialism, has forced esoteric culture into the role of a marginal or underground movement. That is, modern Western civilization . . . has increasingly given to esoteric culture the mantle of a counterculture, while at the same time coopting many of its values and products" ("Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture," 502).

[7]For a definition of "the primitif" in the context of Romanticism see Harry G. Carlson, Out of Inferno, 225-26.

[8]Pointing out the link between occultism and the formation of the avant-garde in the 19th century Tiryakian states that "the basic cognitive model of hidden, underlying reality central to esoteric thought, is that of a reality moved by forces, by energies constantly in motion and in tension with one another: it is a model opposed to the static, stable, or harmonious view. . . . Hence, we suggest, at the very heart of the

ideology of modernization, or modernism, is an esoteric influence. . . . This ideology of change, of modernism per se, is one which Bell locates in the cultural tradition of avant-garde art that appeared in the 19th century as a counterculture to the rising bourgeois culture of industrial society" (Tiryakian, "Sociology of Esoteric Culture," 502-503). For the assessment of the specific impact of theosophy on abstract painting see for example Rigbom, The Sounding Cosmos.

[9]Godwin sees Blavatsky's theosophy as an heir and continuation of the 18th century Enlightenment and of freethinking humanism, which is confirmed by her connections with left-wing political forces. The Theosophical Enlightenment, 284-86, 292.

[10]Cf. Ancient Wisdom, 361-62. Manfredo Tafuri in his book Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1976; paperback repr., 1992) defines the notion of utopia as perpetuated change; quoting Karl Mannheim, he maintains that "for 'progressive thought . . . every single thing receives its significance only from some other thing that is ahead of it or above it, from a utopia of the future or from a norm that exists above being.' . . . Utopia is therefore nothing other than 'a structural vision of the totality that is and is becoming,' . . . a system of orientation intent upon 'breaking the relationships of the existing order' in order to recover them at a higher and different level" (52-53).

[11]James Webb points out the occult roots of the nineteenth-century utopian movements, see The Occult Underground, 342-364.

[12]For example, fin de siècle French occultist circles were apt to follow Western magic and esoteric tradition and did not tolerate Blavatsky's approach to Asia. Such attitude was expressed by Papus (Gérard Encausse), leader of the Groupe indépendant d'études ésotériques (Martinist Esoteric Society), started out as a theosophist and a close collaborator of Blavatsky before founding his own occultist school in 1887. Cf. Godwin, Beginnings of Theosophy, 19-26. The French theosophist, Edouard Schuré, whose book Les grands Initiés (1889) had an enormous influence on writers and artists, considered Christianity the supreme goal of the evolution of religions, and the white Aryan race as spiritually and morally superior, which is contrary to Blavatsky's all-embracing, democratic outlook. Schuré became associated with Rudolf Steiner, president of the German Section of the Theosophical Society. Steiner himself turned his back on theosophy in 1912 to establish his own Antroposophical Society in 1913. (In Steiner's resentment with theosophy it was just the last straw that Annie Besant announced the reincarnation of the World Teacher or Christ in a Hindu boy.) Steiner's antroposophy centers around the figure of Christ, and relies exclusively on Western esoteric concepts. Cf. Schuré, The Great Initiates, 22-31, 38-45; and Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived, 156. On the other side were those who accused Blavatsky of fake Orientalism. For example the French scholar Paul Oltramare claims that the Theosophical Society has nothing to do with true Indian metaphysics. See L'histoire des idées théosophiques dans l'Inde, 1:ii-vii. This single opinion suffices for Schwab to entirely dismiss the Theosophical Society in his treatment of

the 19th century "Oriental Renaissance" as an "occurrence, on which it is not necessary to dwell" (Oriental Renaissance, 8).

[13]Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 321.

[14]Schwab describes the beginnings of Indic scholarship starting with the compilation of Sanskrit grammars and the first English translations of Hindu sacred and literary texts such as the Bhagavad Gita (1785) and Shakuntla (1789): "The decisive period in Indic studies began with the arrival of English civil servants in Calcutta around 1780, who supported by the governor, Warren Hastings, began an extraordinary undertaking. Learning does not determine its own course alone, and the initial intention, conversion, yielded to or was intermingled with another intention, conquest. The aim in this period was no longer to clear a path for knowledge but for administration. . . . When British authority was installed in Bengal, its first priority was to thread the labyrinth of local custom and legislation, and its representatives realized that languages would be the key to domination" (Oriental Renaissance, 33). Schwab claims that the study of the phenomenon which he terms "Oriental Renaissance"--which, just like the first Renaissance of Europe, "not only enriched the index of knowledge; it determined lines of thought,"--is essential "to the understanding of the nineteenth century" (15). Cf. also Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 308-309.

[15]Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived, 81. For more details on Blavatsky's anti-colonialist sympathies, and her involvement with Indian nationalist and revolutionary groups see K. Paul Johnson, The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 107-209. On the other hand, it cannot go without mention that theosophical thought implies also the displacement, appropriation, and Westernalization if Indian religious terms and, as such, it is aligned with cultural colonization.

[16]In 1884, during Blavatsky's visit to Europe, the missionaries published insinuating letters attained from her housekeeper Mrs. Coulomb and they threatened Madame Blavatsky with lawsuit in case she returned to India. For more details and other consequences of "the Coulomb-affair see Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived, 87-95. For more details on the Theosophical Society's relationship to India see Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 307-331.

[17]Ibid., 213-225.

[18]Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived, 119, 124.

[19]Ibid., 102-103.

[20] For more details on this discourse see Niels Holt, "Ernst Haeckel's Monistic Religion," Journal of the History of Ideas 32, no. 2 (April-June 1971): 265-280. Due to Haeckel's efforts scientific and philosophical Monism became fashionable from the 1890s throughout the early 1900s, that is after Blavatsky's death. See also Blavatsky on "Science and the Secret Doctrine Contrasted" including her views on Darwin, Haeckel, and the theosophist astronomer Camille Flammarion in SD 2:670-790.

[21] Good introductions to nineteenth-century history of science and its impact on culture are: Loren Eisley, Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961) and Peter J. Bowler, Evolution: The History of an Idea, revised edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

[22]Although here I cite only a few passages from Isis, SD and Key, theosophical literature on the whole is infiltrated with this kind of structural theatricality, more examples of which will be given in later chapters as needed.

Chapter Three

Strindberg and Theosophy

Strindberg's first encounter and further contacts with theosophical ideas came through Swedish friends and acquaintances (with the exception of one Danish friend) interested in spiritual questions and those involved with the Swedish theosophical movement. It is therefore necessary as a background to unravel the development of the Swedish theosophical movement in the context of the contemporary cultural milieu in Sweden and the rest of Europe.

A further point to be stressed is the symbolic quality of Strindberg's occult interests. As we saw in the introduction, his involvement with French occultism has been discussed by critics either in terms of his religious-psychotic crises between 1894-97, or as a means of establishing himself in the European literary mainstream of the 1890s. In either case it is associated with a break away from the constraints of the family, and a stifling Swedish cultural-political milieu. By contrast, theosophy for Strindberg served rather, as we shall see, as a connecting link with the homeland.

This chapter will trace the continuity and significance of Strindberg's contacts with Swedish theosophists from the 1880s to his final years in Stockholm. My investigation is based on primary sources: letters to and from Strindberg, his manuscripts, his Occult Diary and other writings that

contain autobiographical references, his library holdings, and comments and references by Strindberg's contemporaries.

Strindberg's most notable theosophical contacts were briefly the following: his earliest encounter with theosophical ideas can be traced back to 1884 in Stockholm through the Swedish journalist Carl von Bergen. His second significant contact with the movement came through Torsten Hedlund, a leading theosophist in Gothenburg, Sweden. Hedlund wrote to Strindberg first in 1891, and he came to play an important role in Strindberg's life between 1894 and 1896, during which period they maintained a lively correspondence while Strindberg was staying in Austria and Paris. Then, between 1897 and 1899, while living in Lund, the small university-town in Southern Sweden, Strindberg knew several theosophists, and was close friends with the sculptor Sven Bengtsson, one of the founders of the local theosophical lodge. Upon his return to Stockholm in 1899, Strindberg showed a renewed interest in theosophy, keeping up with publications of the Swedish Theosophical Society. He also maintained personal contact with cartographer Georg Ljungström, whose theosophical writings he admired, and he corresponded with another theosophist friend from Denmark, baron Alphonse Walleen.

The evidence included in this chapter demonstrates the invaluable contributions of especially three Swedish theosophists--Hedlund, Bengtsson, and Ljungström--to the formation of Strindberg's new outlook during his final

creative period (1897-1912). The ideas, concepts, speculations, and intriguing issues they conveyed to Strindberg fell on fertile ground, and eventually reappeared as organic elements in Strindberg's works. The crucial importance of these connections regarding Strindberg's work has not yet been established by previous scholars.

This chapter will also discuss some of Strindberg's most important theosophical readings. For a more complete annotated list of theosophical literature owned and read by Strindberg can be found in Appendix I.

Religious Liberalism and the Rise of Theosophy in Sweden in the 1880s

The effects of a growing interest in Orientalism in the West, and the study of comparative religion championed by the scholar Max Müller[1] reached Sweden in the 1870s. At the same time, the zeal of Swedish liberals found an echo in the endeavors expressed in the slogans of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society: the creation of a universal brotherhood of mankind, the promotion of comparative studies in religion, philosophy, and natural sciences, as well as the scientific investigation of natural laws, and man's hidden powers. According to Edvard Rodhe, "theosophy could find a way into the hearts of many [Swedish] liberals under the banner of science and brotherhood."[2]

With the rise of liberalism in Sweden in the 1830s, in opposition to an oppressive state supported by the powerful

Swedish Lutheran Church, the struggle for the freedom of thought as well as religious freedom came to the forefront. A strict social hierarchy was maintained by the double brace of state and church well into the second half of the nineteenth century. The Conventicle Decree of 1726, which imposed strict punishment on religious gatherings outside of the Church, was finally abolished in 1858. A second regulation from 1734, valid until 1860, would banish from the country those who deviated from the pure evangelist doctrine.[3] The fact that Strindberg was cited in court as accused of blasphemy as late as 1884, reveals a restrictive political-cultural climate in Sweden. Such public figures as Carl von Bergen, Viktor Rydberg, and Strindberg, were among the first to fight these constraints, opening up paths for political influences and intellectual trends from a more advanced Western Europe. The confining power of the Church exerted a strong impression on Strindberg as a youth, revealing also at least one aspect of his lifelong struggle to come to grips with the questions of religion and faith.

Carl von Bergen (1838-1897), a liberal journalist and lecturer, open to new intellectual and spiritual trends, was one of those who prepared the ground for the theosophical movement in Sweden by a series of lectures that appeared in print in the newspaper Aftonbladet in 1887.[4] This review reveals that the theosophical system incorporated all the "hot" issues of contemporary intellectual life: anti-materialism reconciled with a scientific world view, the

theory of evolution, scientific as well as religious monism, religious syncretism, Orientalism, religious freedom, and universal brotherhood.

The lectures, delivered at the auditorium of the Academy of Science in Stockholm in March, 1887, recounted the foundation and activities of the Theosophical Society, Madame Blavatsky's life and journeys, and explained the tenets of theosophy. These were, said the lecturer, based on a monistic world view, derived from the esoteric wisdom of the East, according to which the diversity of the phenomenal world has evolved from a single source of existence. The qualities of man and nature evolved in accordance with higher universal laws, including the immortality of the soul and a realm of invisible powers beyond the phenomenal world. Carl von Bergen emphasized also that theosophy on several points agreed with the Western theory of evolution, but that theosophists claimed to go further than Darwin, by tracing the evolution of planetary systems beyond that of the organism. A further point that von Bergen stressed in his lectures was the syncretism of the theosophical outlook, which meant that theosophy acknowledged all religions, and maintained that each of them bore a substance of truth, an esoteric "nucleus" of knowledge.[5]

Carl von Bergen's lecture series outlined the entire theosophical thought-system in Sweden for the first time, and, in turn, inspired further public discourse on theosophy. Even the eminent Swedish author and pioneer of religious

liberalism Viktor Rydberg (1828-1895) promoted the spread of theosophical ideas in Sweden by providing an introduction to the Swedish translation of Sir Edwin Arnold's theosophist work The Light of Asia.[6] Another champion of religious liberalism, journalist Axel Fritiof Åkerberg (1833-1901), who in 1889 became a founding member of the Swedish Branch of the Theosophical Society, discussed his view on theosophy in the journal Sanningsökaren:

> At such times as ours, when the authoritarian faith of the Church . . . and the coarsest materialism fight for power, one can have all reason to mark the significance of the revival . . . of the esoteric doctrine of the East. It is a doctrine that acknowledges intuition and spiritual outlook, but seeks to harmonize it with reason; one that acknowledges the hidden powers of nature and of human life, but treats them in the context of universal laws.[7]

Finally, the Swedish branch of the Theosophical Society was established in 1889, with Gustaf Zander as president, Victor Pfeiff as vice president, and A. F. Åkerberg as secretary.[8] Many of the Swedish translations of theosophical literature, among them those read by Strindberg, were translated, disseminated, or written by Pfeiff and Åkerberg. In 1887 they translated into Swedish two basic books by leading British theosophist A. P. Sinnett, vice president of the Theosophical Society. In 1890 appeared in Åkerberg's translation of Die Philosophie der Mystik (1885) by the German philosopher and psychologist, Carl du Prel (1839-1899), who was among the founding members of the Theosophical Society in Germany in 1884, and co-publisher of the theosophically oriented journal Sphinx (1886-1896).[9] These

books by Sinnett and du Prel belonged to Strindberg's library in 1892, before his acquaintance with the Paris-occultists, and by 1896 he was familiar with the journal as well.[10]

Carl von Bergen lectured widely not only on theosophy but also on other modern mystical and spiritual movements and ideas. His activity met with the opposition of radical materialists, and a fierce debate developed in the press. Economist Knut Wicksell was the first to accuse von Bergen of betraying the spirit of "new rationalism." Subsequently the debate between the Swedish young social radicals and the spiritually oriented religious liberals continued into the early 1890s.[11]

An interesting insight into the intellectual climate and debates of the second half of the nineteenth century in Sweden is provided by von Bergen himself, in his book Vårt reaktionära "Unga Sverige" (Our Reactionary "Young Sweden"). A group of writers, including Ellen Key and Gustaf af Geijerstam, who joined under the name "The Young Sweden" in the 1880s, and considered themselves progressive intellectuals, took up social questions and publicly championed atheism and materialism. They attacked Viktor Rydberg and Carl von Bergen for their insistence on dealing with questions of religion and spirituality. Von Bergen, in turn, accused them of representing a reactionary point of view which has long been left behind by the rest of Europe:

> Today's leading science . . . combating atheist materialism, teaches . . . us not to see chaos in existence, but rather an organized whole, a system or unity in the variety of forces, in which unity is not

> dissolved in variety, but permeates and dominates it, so that the whole makes an animated, living organism.[12]

Von Bergen here refers to scientific monism that became fashionable throughout Europe as an offshoot of the theory of evolution, developed by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel.[13] According to von Bergen, scientific monism implies a theistic view of the world, which is much more in accordance with the laws of nature than a pure positivistic materialism. He supports his argument with the examples of progressive scientists whose work is evidence that "the science of our times . . . considers the soul as a living force in the system of forces that constitute the universe.[14] Von Bergen states that the most influential example of such "progressive science" is Carl du Prel.[15]

A similar assessment of the period is given by Strindberg in the article "Bevittna vi en upplösning eller en utveckling av den religiösa känslan?" ("Do We Witness the Dissolution or the Development of Religious Feelings?") from 1907, in which he looks back on the last three decades of the nineteenth century:

> If religion is . . . a feeling of togetherness with the Cosmos and god, then this connection can be momentarily broken. . . .
> This was the case with us, children of the previous century, who at the start of the 70s . . . lost the connection with the beyond, and remained earthbound. . . .
> Soon we were done with Christianity and . . . religion was "a defeated point of view". . . . At the same moment the gorilla was discovered. . . .
> . . . But at the end of the 80s . . . the religious feeling returned, but in new forms. Ancient wisdom was dug up, Vedantism and Buddhism penetrated into Europe, and religion came back under the names of theosophy and occultism. . . .

> At the end of the 90s we could greet the religious congresses, where all the world's peoples and creeds kneeled together (Chicago, Paris, Stockholm.). . . . . This seems to be the way of religious development towards the goal: a monistic religion, "without dogmas and theology," accordingly, towards evolution through dissolution (SS 54:463-64).

As we saw in chapter 2, the Theosophical Society played an important role at the Religious Parliament in Chicago, pressing for the reconciliation between different creeds. A monistic, all-embracing religion without dogmas and theology was what theosophy claimed to represent.

Carl von Bergen and Strindberg's Reactions to Theosophy in the 1880s

Carl von Bergen was, in fact, Sweden's representative at the Religious Parliament in Chicago in 1893, an event that Strindberg mentions with appreciation in the article quoted above, as well as on other occasions. Von Bergen traveled widely, and acted as a mediating link between Sweden and the cultural life of the rest of the Western world.

His lecturing in Sweden started in 1876 on contemporary cultural issues and debates. Among his lecture-series were issues such as "Cultural Conditions in America" (1876) and "New World-Views" which included the philosophies of Comte, Mill, and Spencer (1876-78) among others.[16]

After his early new-Protestantism and new-rationalism von Bergen became involved with spiritualism in the 1880s, parallel with the rise of religious-mystical trends Europe-

wide. His lecture-topics changed accordingly, and now he discussed hypnotism, spiritualism, and theosophy.[17]

As Hans Lindström pointed out, Carl von Bergen's spiritual career gained significance for Strindberg, who, after his Inferno-crisis, discovered parallels between his own and von Bergen's personal development. Among Strindberg's notes and drafts Lindström observed that Strindberg on several occasions identified von Bergen with Uriel Acosta, the title figure in Karl Gutskow's play (1847).[18] In To Damascus Part III (1901) Strindberg completes the parallel, introducing a blind monk called Father Uriel in memory of Uriel Acosta, whose course of life evokes that of Carl von Bergen:

> At one time he was very young and wanted to know; he always wanted to be at the head of modern movements, and discovered new ways of looking at the universe. . . . about 1820 he began to discover the so-called philosophy of enlightenment. . . . In 1830 our friend Uriel became a Hegelian. . . . In 1850 he became a materialist. . . . In 1870 he became a hypnotist, in 1880 a theosophist, and in 1890 he considered shooting himself! . . . You see, he wanted to know, but he wasn't allowed to! And that's why he now believes! (Plays of Confession, 228-29).

Strindberg's sympathy and identification with Uriel/von Bergen is shown by The Stranger's--the protagonist of To Damascus--reaction to the story. Strindberg himself adopted often shifting views and ideas which he constantly questioned at the same time. The Stranger thus answers here the attacks and criticism that Strindberg himself often had to face:

> If Father Uriel had kept his faith from 1810, people would have called him conservative. . . , and now that he has kept up with the developments in his time and consequently given up the faith of his youth, people

> would say he was a traitor. . . , no matter how he would have behaved, people would have criticized him (Plays of Confession, 229).

Strindberg's first encounter with theosophy can be traced back to his relation with Carl von Bergen, the very person who introduced theosophy in Sweden. It predates Strindberg's involvement with the Paris occultists, and leads us back to the 1880s in Sweden. Strindberg and von Bergen had known each other personally before they met again in 1884 at the congress of the Peace League in Bern.[19] In the same year their paths crossed again in Stockholm, when Strindberg was charged with blasphemy upon the publication of his short story collection Getting Married (Giftas). He was compelled to return to Sweden from Switzerland to stand trial where he was eventually acquitted. The case grew into a political bout between liberals and conservatives, and the reactionary establishment started a campaign against the author as well as the publisher Albert Bonnier. Von Bergen was naturally among those that took stand on Strindberg's side. Strindberg even requested him as a juryman for the trial, but he was rejected by the prosecutor.[20]

Strindberg depicts his stay in Stockholm during the trial in his short story Short Cuts (Genvägar) that first appeared in the German journal Neue Freie Presse in 1887. In the character called Axel we can recognize Carl von Bergen who visits his friend, author Karl Billgren (Strindberg), and talks to him about theosophy, showing him Blavatsky's book Isis Unveiled.[21] Presumably it is this encounter that

Strindberg refers to in his first letter to his theosophist pen-friend Torsten Hedlund on 29 July 1891. He assures Hedlund that he had been "wholly familiar with the doctrines of theosophy since 1884, when I have had contact with pupils and personal acquaintances of Madame Blavatsky" (Letters, 1:359).

As Short Cuts reveals, during the 1880s Strindberg remained suspicious towards the spiritual-religious renewal advocated by the liberals, all the more so because of his irritation with the women's liberation movement, which he accused of exploiting the flourishing spiritual trends for their own purposes. (In fact, Ellen Key, the leading Swedish feminist of the time, was a materialist, and, as a member of the Young Sweden group, was opposed to spiritualism.) In his foreword to the second part of Getting Married (1886) Strindberg writes:

> In Europe there are currently two mystical movements: spiritualism and theosophy. These movements are led and exploited by women. What could lie behind this, I have been asking myself for a couple of years during which I observed them. Is it, I wonder, that women now with one leap seek to skip over the hundreds of years of slow development that male thought went through, and by a pretended higher knowledge convince men that women further advanced? (SV 16:356-57).

However, as Hans Lindström points out, regardless of Strindberg's rejection of spiritualism and theosophy in the 1880s, he was already then susceptible to the psychological mysticism that these movements made use of.[22] This is clear from Strindberg's interest in such phenomena as mesmerism, animal magnetism, hypnotism and suggestion psychology, all of

which color his work at that time, even when otherwise inspired by naturalism and Darwinism. However, the novel By the Open Sea (I havsbandet, 1890) is Strindberg's first work that unites scientific eagerness with a metaphysical quest, which is what apparently caught the attention of the theosophist Torsten Hedlund.

Mentor, Adviser, Comforter: Strindberg and Torsten Hedlund, 1891-96

Torsten Hedlund (1855-1935), who became Strindberg's spiritual mentor and financial supporter between 1894-96, during the years of the latter's psychotic crisis, came from an enlightened family active in Sweden's cultural life. His father Sven Adolf Hedlund was for forty-nine years (1851-1900) editor-in-chief of Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning which he turned into one of Sweden's leading liberal newspapers. He discovered the young Viktor Rydberg, soon to become one of Sweden's foremost writers, and invited him to Gothenburg in 1855 to become a permanent contributor to his paper. Sven Adolf Hedlund's son, Torsten, became printing manager at the paper in 1874, and was its managing director between 1906-14.[23] In 1902-1903 he also published in Gothenburg a series of theosophical newsletters entitled Solhug.[24]

Torsten Hedlund's significance in Strindberg's personal life and spiritual development was crucial despite the fact that they never met in person, but maintained contact via

letters. On the one hand, Hedlund was patient and understanding towards Strindberg's needs and problems, assisting him in publication and getting him financial support whenever he needed it during the Inferno years. On the other hand, their intellectual-spiritual exchange was mutual; Hedlund communicated a theosophical outlook to Strindberg, while Strindberg felt confident to pour his speculations, meditations, and discoveries in the letters to him.

The correspondence between Strindberg and Hedlund was initiated by the latter in 1891. He wrote to Strindberg thinking he recognized theosophical ideas in the novel By the Open Sea. In this letter, unfortunately no longer extant, Hedlund wondered if Strindberg was a theosophist, and inquired about his views of Blavatsky.[25] In Strindberg's response on 29 July, 1891, he claims complete familiarity with theosophical doctrines as far back as 1884, when he had come into contact with disciples of Mme Blavatsky, meaning probably Carl von Bergen (Brev 8:319). However, as this letter shows, he was at that time not particularly impressed by the theosophical movement which he found "an extraordinary peculation by one or two power-hungry people who wanted to bundle Darwinists, Spiritualists, Atheists and Socialists together in one great mishmash, and create a universal doctrine." (Letters 1:358)

Although Strindberg claims in this letter that he "cannot have any real opinion of Madame Blavatsky herself,"

he cannot resist adding, "but she was probably a great self-deceiver who, by the suggestive influence of her sex upon the opposite sex, succeeded in creating the illusion that she was an unusually profound spirit" (Letters 1:358).

Strindberg's letter was discouraging enough for Hedlund not to insist on a continuing contact, and Strindberg himself was not yet motivated to do so either. However, after a few years of silence Strindberg suddenly reopened the correspondence on July 23, 1894, which then continued to November 1896. Although in Inferno Strindberg suggests that Hedlund initiated the revival of the contact, it was actually Strindberg who resumed the correspondence. He asked Hedlund for information about the alchemist Jolivet-Castelot whose book La Vie et l'âme de la matière he found containing the same ideas of monism and transformism as he himself expressed in his newly published Antibarbarus. He asked Hedlund if Jolivet-Castelot was a theosophist or had anything to do with the movement (Brev 10:153-54).

Strindberg's subsequent letters to Hedlund reveal his eagerness to discuss metaphysical questions, while kneading his own cosmology into a new shape in the course of an exchange of ideas. His letters display a critical attitude towards theosophy, and he meticulously examines every single theosophical idea that Hedlund presents to him, dismissing some of them, and constantly returning to others that seem to him intriguing or suitable to be absorbed in the ferment of his own world-view. In his Occult Diary which Strindberg

started writing early 1896, several entries reveal his anxious expectation of Hedlund's letters. On 18 June, 1896, he notes for example that "in the evening, after many days of anxiety, came Thorsten Hedlund's letter. . . . It was kind and comforting!" In his introductory comments to Occult Diary he states, among references to other sources, that "there is explanation for this diary in letters to Torsten Hedlund" (OD, [iii]).

In the letter by which Strindberg resumed contact, he also asked Hedlund to explain him in a few clear words what was meant by theosophy (Brev 10:154). Receiving Hedlund's response (8/8/1894) Strindberg felt that it reached him at a crucial moment of his life, which was, in fact, the initiating phase of his Inferno-crisis. This letter made such a strong impression on Strindberg, that he gave it a special name by putting "the Danube Letter," ("Donaubrevet)--he received it in Austria near the Danube--in the top-margin.[26]

The "Danube Letter" was of extraordinary significance for Strindberg. It contains a whole series of issues that seem to have engaged Strindberg's imagination and would later re-emerge in his letters, essays, fiction, and plays, sometimes as straightforward discussions, sometimes poetically elevated and transformed. As we shall see (chapter 4), many of the theosophical concepts, described by Hedlund in this letter, gradually became assimilated in

Strindberg's world-view, and appeared in his later work as recurring themes and motifs.

To satisfy Strindberg's curiosity, Hedlund in the "Danube Letter" outlines the theosophical doctrines, striving at the same time to show their validity for Strindberg's work and person. After the introductory passages of the letter Hedlund goes on to reassure Strindberg that the monistic philosophy and the theory of transmutation that Strindberg applied in Antibarbarus, his recently published work in chemistry, are quite in accord with the theosophical approach. Furthermore, he repeatedly stresses that theosophy adheres to the laws of nature stated by natural science. For example, according to the theosophical version of evolutionary theory, the course of evolution happens in a cyclical or rather spiral pattern, which is to say, "everything tends to come back to the same point on the circle, but one step higher."

After sketching the overall patterns of theosophical thought Hedlund proceeds to explain the basic tenets of theosophy as follows: theosophy has a monistic outlook by asserting that all is One, and every individual phenomenon emanates from the One and returns to it. The One is the passive principle of existence, which turns into "being" through activity. The active aspect of being is called the All which includes the whole collective of living entities or individualities. Life, which is movement and combination, is the innermost substance of matter. This substance is called

All-Thought, which transforms itself into individualities, splitting up into ideas, thoughts, and qualifications that create individual beings (a conception that will reverberate, as we shall see in chapter 7, even in Strindberg's dream play technique). Consequently, the variety of life, in ceaseless change and transformation, emerges from the manifestations of a single principle.

Another passage of the "Danube Letter" recounts how nature works through cosmic principles to enable man to develop himself into a higher, universal consciousness. Hedlund outlines seven principles of human existence that correspond to seven cosmic stages or existential planes. The human soul, wandering through these various stages, participates thus in the universal evolution, until its eternal and divine part is reunited with the original source at the highest plane. It takes, however, many life cycles (reincarnations on earth) before the individual soul can return to its divine source. The seven stages, or aspects of human life are listed as follows: 1. man's earthly physical body; 2. the astral body (the astral double of the physical); 3. the life principle; 4. the animal soul (instincts); 5. the human soul (intelligence) and the divine-human soul (intuition or Manas which is man's higher nature); 6. divine nature; 7. the One (Atma or the source).

From these seven cosmic/human dimensions, it was the astral plane and astral body that captivated Strindberg most, as we can see in his continuing correspondence with Hedlund.

He repeatedly reports his occult experiences of meeting the astral doubles of his acquaintances, demonic astral elementals, and the telepathic communication of thought-waves on the astral plane (e.g. Brev 11:264, 253, 269, 291, 293, 326-30, 357). On the other hand, Hedlund's passages on the life-cycles, reincarnations, and evolution of man have theatrical implications which will emerge as more indirect inspiration in Strindberg's later work. Here it is enough to note that the "Danube Letter" reflects the theosophical view of the human spirit as a pilgrim throughout the cosmic evolution, for whom every appearance on the stage of earthly life is a trial on the way towards moral and spiritual perfection.

A further theme in the "Danube Letter" is the theosophical view that the true individuality of man stems from the combination of the three highest principles which are the human soul, the divine soul, and the One manifested as All-Thought. The eternal and Divine substance of man is called individuality, as opposed to the personality which is the lower self. For theosophists, man's transmutation means his becoming an individuality, by transcending his lower animal self and cultivating in himself the highest principles pertinent to a Universal Self that embraces all mankind. That is why Hedlund, even in later letters, challenges Strindberg to renounce his egotistic self in favor of his true individuality. This idea for Strindberg seemed insane and suicidal, and on 17 May, 1896 he wrote to Hedlund:

> Why do you always urge me to extirpate my self? It is my most sacred duty to care for, cultivate, and observe this self, otherwise it will be dragged down to the level of those disgusting little selves that give nothing, only suck one dry, cling to one, and daub one with filth (Letters 2:555).

As Hedlund explains in the "Danube Letter," there are "white magicians" who sacrifice their "small selves" for the "boundless Self" which is each individual's share in the "All-Thought." There are "Great Masters," souls that renounce entering a state of bliss after death, in order to guide and protect men, thereby sacrificing their self-interest for the good of mankind. "The white Magician grows out of the shell of human form like the butterfly grows out of a cocoon. Is it not transmutation?" exclaims Hedlund, exhilarated. It is again a fascinating image to which, as we shall see, Strindberg will return in several later letters and works (Brev 11:114, 129).

Hedlund furthermore contrasts in the "Danube Letter" the self-sacrifice of "white magicians" with activities of "black magicians," referring as an example to the "black French school" of occultists. He warns that they are dangerous for mankind, for they seek to control others in order to satisfy their own egotistic lower selves, so that they become "small vampires."

From the "Danube Letter" on, the contrast between black and white magic is a constantly recurring topic in the Hedlund-Strindberg correspondence. At first Strindberg is appalled by such a distinction:

> In so far as you are a Monist and believe that everything is in everything, heat and cold, hate and love, why do you then draw such a sharp, dualistic distinction between black and white magic? (Letters 2:500).

Yet, Strindberg himself repeatedly returns to this topic, assuring Hedlund that "wait, and you will see that I was wrongly accused, that I wasn't mad, that I didn't serve the Black but the White" (Letters 2:587).[27]

Closing the "Danube Letter" Hedlund warns forebodingly that "you are about to enter an extremely significant period of your life--but especially in your life-cycle--the cycle in which you now play the 'role' of Aug. Strindberg." Hedlund refers to the theosophical view of the personality as a mask or shell that the eternal human individuality puts on every time it starts a new life-cycle on earth. What is remarkable here is that Hedlund's naive prophecy anticipates a theme that came to gain an increasing significance in Strindberg's post-Inferno writing, that of man playing roles and wearing masks in the theatre of life.

Following the "Danube Letter" the extensive correspondence between Hedlund and Strindberg lasted almost all the way through Strindberg's Inferno-crisis. While Hedlund lived in Gothenburg all this time, Strindberg stayed in Paris and made trips to Ystad, Sweden, and finally to Austria. Except for the "Danube Letter" and five additional letters, dated between 1894 and 1912, no other letters by Hedlund survived. Strindberg's extant letters to Hedlund, however, bear witness that besides the discussion of

theosophy, Strindberg entrusted Hedlund with his deepest spiritual trains of thought, his plans for shaping works, and the processes of his scientific and occult experiments.

The most frequently discussed theosophical issues that occur in Strindberg's letters to Hedlund during 1895-96 are the astral plane of existence and the phenomena related to it, such as the expansion of the human soul in dream and after death, the astral doubles of human beings, the activities of the so-called elementals that are astral beings created by evil human thoughts and desires. Strindberg constantly returns to the fascinating idea that, through the mediation of the astral plane, dreams and thoughts can create an independent reality, or cause natural disasters such as cyclones or earthquakes (e.g. Brev 11:264, 268, 291, 293, 326-30, 356-59).

A further theme in the correspondence is Strindberg's claim for being a "naturalist-occultist" (Brev 11:381), for which he apparently received encouragement from Hedlund, who wrote to him that people are looking for "The Zola of the Occult" (Letters 2:590). These terms implied that Strindberg considered a scientific, experimental method of approaching nature the springboard for metaphysical conclusions, as his favorite saying from the Talmud--"if you want to learn to know the invisible, observe with open eyes the visible"--suggests (Letters 2:594).

Strindberg's letters to Hedlund demonstrate how he accumulated an enormous range of data by observing his

environment and experimenting with a great variety of natural phenomena. He gathered facts from a great number of scientific and metaphysical disciplines; from chemistry, astronomy, botany, biology, mineralogy, archaeology, and meteorology to alchemy, philosophy, comparative mythology, and religion.[28]

In the letters to his theosophist friend Strindberg clearly felt comfortable to develop this new method of writing, since Hedlund himself drew attention in the "Danube Letter" to theosophy's claim of being a metaphysical system based on scientific grounds. Hedlund asserted in the letter that even in the evolution of "the individuum-mankind" natural laws must prevail, and "everything must be based on logical processes." Towards the closing of the "Danube Letter" he concludes that "the founders of the Theosophical Society, fully in agreement with a strict natural process," promote "the study of the yet unknown powers of nature and that of the hidden spiritual nature of man."

As we saw (chapter 2), Blavatsky's principal works laid fundamental emphasis on the importance of knowledge as opposed to faith in the grounding of a metaphysical system which she referred to as a wisdom-religion (Key, 7). Her criticism of contemporary science on the one hand, and her claim on a scientific methodology and scope on the other hand, reveals an encyclopedic outlook which draws parallels between natural and spiritual processes.

Similarly, for Strindberg the positivistic method of accumulating data is paired with his reading of nature as a secret language, a system of signs, what he calls after Swedenborg, correspondences (Brev 11:356-358). In this respect, both theosophy and Strindberg's new method of thinking reflect the nineteenth-century fascination with science, the encyclopedic ambition of positivism, and a desire to transcend the accumulated fragments and achieve wholeness through spirituality.

Strindberg's letters to Hedlund display the shaping of a new creative process as he practices the leap from the natural to the supernatural, from a realistic setting to a spiritual landscape. This method of Strindberg's originates, on the other hand, in his idea of nature as a constantly transforming product of a creator-artist who experiments with an infinite variety of forms and images. He writes to Hedlund on 20 July, 1896, that during his walks in Jardin des Plantes, the Paris zoo, he often watches the animals, and his "most recent view" is "that they have been created by the hand of a great Artist, who made sketches, rejected them, began again, and developed both himself and his skills in the process. . . . He . . . shows himself to be the Great Artist who expresses the highest independence and freedom in his 'caprice'" (Letters 2:583). Here we can see Strindberg's sense of nature as a cosmic spectacle arise, in which he, the spectator, is challenged to decipher its symbolism. But the spectacle is never completed, its images are in constant

transformation, and he, the observer, is witness to an infinite rehearsal, to nature as a work in progress. This is not simply Strindberg's revival of the Romantic parallel between God and the artist, but it has a more direct model in the theosophical conception of the Universal Mind that works out the forms of nature, as it is summarized by Annie Besant:

> The mental plane is that which reflects the Universal Mind in Nature, the plane which in our little system corresponds with that of the Great Mind in the Kosmos. In its higher regions exist all the archetypal ideas which are now in course of concrete evolution, and in its lower the working out of these into successive forms, to be duly reproduced in the astral and physical worlds. . . . The vibrating life of the Thinker shapes the materials around him, and according to his volitions so is his work. . . . spirit-matter here becomes the obedient servant of the life, adapting itself to every creative motion (Ancient Wisdom, 123-24).

However, a recurring point of disagreement between Strindberg and Hedlund was the question of a personal versus a pantheistic or "collective" god of theosophists. Strindberg's strong need for a personal god and providence--as he declared in a letter on 30 June, 1896--made him reject the theosophical concept of the divine:

> Impossible for me to exist with a collective god in whom I was part owner, for then I'd be able to make slight changes in my destiny, and that I cannot do. And I consider it pride, arrogance, to want to enter into partnership with our Creator and preserver.
>
> No, I experience God as a quite personal acquaintance who has 'sought' me so openly these last years, so obviously, that I have awakened, though I still don't always understand what he wants of me (Letters 2:559).

In another letter Strindberg claims that "black magic is practiced by godless or arrogant beings who make themselves one with God. God in us, yes, in so far as we are emanations

of His being, that is one thing; but God the fixed point outside us, by which alone we can accomplish anything, the Creator above us, and we his creations with traces of his being, under him, that is how I understand the matter" (Letters 2:585).

Finally, we need to discuss Strindberg's curious antipathy towards Madame Blavatsky, displayed in the letters, despite the fact that he drew inspiration from the theosophical thought-system. In September, 1896 Hedlund sent first Isis Unveiled and then The Secret Doctrine to Strindberg who at that time stayed in Austria (Brev 11:374). On 26 September Strindberg wrote to Hedlund that he would once again read Madame Blavatsky's work in order to form a just opinion and make his friend happy. But still in the same letter he adds that "my thoughts about her since 1884 you know: namely that she did not have any revelations: that she researched in the library and used others' manuscripts, that she was not the first . . . ." (Brev 11:346-47). He even compiled a hypothetical list of sources for The Secret Doctrine, which can be found among his manuscript notes. He lists several works by Eliphas Lévi, one by Henry More, and books that treat the subjects of magic, Gnosticism, Rosicrucianism, Buddhism, the Cabala, Christ and Krishna, the Atlantis, and "pre-Adamite Man" (SgNM9:3,13). On 31 October, 1896 Strindberg further comments on The Secret Doctrine:

> You say that all I seek is to be found in the S.D.! No, I say; I was searching twice throughout the book and could not find anything by the author concerning chemistry, in which science she claims herself ignorant;

> nothing on botany, no "correspondences," and only an animalistic worship of the Self (Brev 11:375).

Yet, his negative opinion about Blavatsky and her plagiarism did not prevent Strindberg from listing "Dzyan's book," the unknown source on which Blavatsky claimed to have based The Secret Doctrine, on the introductory pages of Occult Diary, among Swedenborg and the Book of Ezekiel (OD [ii]). A week after the last quoted letter Strindberg writes, probably as a reply to Hedlund's inquiry about the reason of his antifeminist outburst regarding Blavatsky's books:

> Why I am a misogynist. Because I hate Gaia, the infernal, the evil for the sake of evil. And I hate the feminine in myself as well as in others on the same grounds. Look at these representatives of highest womankind, life-savers, universal prophets, which is disguised greed for domination. They look like evil spirits! whores! adventuresses! (Brev 11:385).

Such an extreme emotional outburst seems unreasonable, behind which there are apparently deeper roots than simply Strindberg's personal dislike for Blavatsky. He keeps relating Blavatsky to the hated women's liberation movement, by which he felt persecuted since the Getting Married-trial in 1884, mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, his canny approach to Blavatsky is clear in later writings, especially in A Blue Book, where he repeatedly refers to agreeable ideas from Blavatsky and Annie Besant, applying only the generalized term "theosophists say. . . ," without ever mentioning their names.[29] Not surprisingly, the theosophist friends he trusted, such as Torsten Hedlund, Sven Bengtsson, Georg Ljungström, were all men.

Another aspect we have to consider is that Madame Blavatsky was, in fact, a controversial figure, and in the 1880s and 1890s she was widely criticized and accused of fraud and plagiarism, which Strindberg must have been aware of.[30]

But, perhaps more importantly, we must not forget that when he wrote the letters denouncing Blavatsky, Strindberg went through one of his gravest psychotic phases, in the form of persecution mania projected on certain people and groups.[31] On October 25, 1896, he writes in his Occult Diary:

> As I came up to my room, I sensed that the air has been poisoned, and at the desk I had an attack like those in Paris. Probably . . . the Papusists, or the Goldowners[32], or the Blavatskysts are those who want to kill me, either by envoûtement [bewitchment] or by gas-poisoning (OD, 14, 10/25/1896).

The same attack of paranoia at the culmination of a severe phase of his Inferno-crisis drove Strindberg to break with Hedlund, apparently without any reason, ending a correspondence under the course of which he had written to the theosophist sometimes daily. Just a couple of months earlier, on 20 August 1896, writing from Ystad, Sweden, Strindberg expressed to Hedlund his thanks "for helping me a long stretch of the way in my evolution" (Letters 2:589). Surprisingly, in the same letter he even plays with the idea of joining the "theosophist banner:"

> I implore you, implore because I've been nourished by your hand and encouraged by you in times of trouble, felt your salutary displeasure in moments of pride, to let me gather together the rags of my soul and my body; let me first undertake a crusade against my old self, then I

> shall be ready to follow the banner - provided it is white (Letters 2:589).

However, the image of the benefactor, comforter, and spiritual guide has turned into its opposite in the letter of break-up on 23 November, 1896, where Strindberg attacks Hedlund openly: "Your craving for power, your egoism, your prophet's megalomania are the grossest I have ever come across!" (Letters 2:600). And his final words to the faithful friend are: "In the past I saw you in my mind as Azariel. Now you have changed, and I last saw you as Ariel![33] And you have been given another mission: to torture, tempt, and be withstood" (Letters 2: 601). Strindberg does not hesitate to redistribute the roles people play in his fate.

Lund, the City of Healing, 1897-99

In the summer of 1896, under an attack of paranoia Strindberg fled from Paris to Ystad in Southern Sweden to take refuge at his friend, doctor Anders Eliasson. According to the autobiographical novel Inferno, he soon started to suspect even his host of intending to murder him, and in the middle of one night he flew in panic as far as the house of the city doctor. Strindberg found relief during this nightly visit, and, he says, "we sat chatting for two hours, and I found out that the doctor was a theosophist to whom I could tell everything without fear of compromising myself" (Inferno, 198). After this episode Strindberg left Sweden again to stay with his in-laws and daughter in Austria, but

in December 1896 he returned to Southern Sweden, and settled in Lund, a small university town.

In the chapter "Pilgrimage and Atonement" of Inferno, Strindberg writes, leaving his intermediary station, Skurup in Sweden, that "I left that town . . . and went to Lund, where I had friends, doctors, psychiatrists, even theosophists, on whose support I counted for my temporal salvation" (Inferno, 251).

There are several theories of Strindberg's recovery from his "Inferno," which scholars explain as either the result of Strindberg's readings of Swedenborg, or his religious conversion, or the power of visual imagination the help of which the author's creative energies could be regenerated in a self-healing process.[34] In addition to the significance of all these elements, a basic change in Strindberg's way of life took place upon his return to Sweden. He stayed in Lund till June 1899, with the interruption of a period in Paris (August 1897-April 1898) and a trip to Belgium in August 1898. In Lund he lived surrounded by friends, active, and writing literature again. Ending a long period of self-inflicted isolation, the healing sense of human community seems to have stabilized his recovery. As Gunnar Brandell points out, "the year 1897 initiated one of the most serene periods in Strindberg's life. As far as is known, he not only succeeded in keeping peace with friends he saw daily, but he also cultivated old acquaintances whom he had previously neglected, or broken with altogether. . . .

Sometimes he asked people to forgive his injustices he had done them; often his gestures conveyed a silent prayer for forgiveness, as when he sent a picture of himself to Hedlund in 1899."[35]

According to Brandell, "Strindberg had come to Lund with a mind-set filled with occult-theosophical and half-religious ideas concerning a new universe which was supposed to replace the antiquated conceptions of science."[36] These ideas he shared with a circle of friends whom he saw regularly in Lund, including the theosophist sculptor Sven Bengtsson (1843-1916).

In the Occult Diary (1896-1906) and in Legends (1897), Strindberg recounts how he and his companions constantly discussed and compared their occult experiences. Strindberg felt that here he found "brothers in misfortune" ("olycksbröder," SS 28:209) who had been afflicted with the same mysterious malady as he himself, that of being persecuted by invisible powers, whether they be punitive or edifying spirits, or the effects of black magic practiced by people from afar, or embodiments of guilt feelings.

A valuable source concerning Strindberg's theosophical connections in Lund is the theosophist artist Hans Erlandsson's lecture delivered at the meeting of the Strindberg Society (Strindbergsföreningen) in Lund on 22 October, 1956.[37] According to this account the Theosophical Lodge of Lund whose founders included the sculptor Sven Bengtsson (Strindberg's friend, named earlier) and doctor

Bror Gadelius, became particularly active by the end of the 1890s. Erlandsson (1877-1973), who was in his twenties at the time of Strindberg's sojourn in Lund, remembers that on 22 January 1898 the British theosophist Annie Besant, later to become president of the Theosophical Society, visited Lund, and delivered a lecture entitled "Man, Master of his Destiny."[38] This day coincided with Strindberg's forty-ninth birthday, at which time he was in Paris, writing the first part of To Damascus.

Hans Erlandsson suggests the identities of models for several characters in Inferno and Legends, recognizing in them theosophists Strindberg knew personally in the area. Earlier in this chapter I already talked about one character in Inferno, the theosophist physician in Ystad to whom Strindberg fled in an attack of paranoia. According to Erlandsson this benevolent doctor was the theosophist Albert Eksteén (1858-1916). Erlandsson also suggests that in Lund Strindberg moved in the same circles as doctor Bror Gadelius, one of the founders of the Theosophical Lodge in Lund, who worked at the city hospital.[39] There seems to have been several theosophist physicians in Lund, for Strindberg writes in a letter to Marie Uhl on December 23, 1896 that "the day before yesterday I was invited [to a company] together with the vice-head of the mental hospital. He was fortunately a theosophist, and we could talk about everything. Everything!" (Brev 12:25). According to Torsten Eklund's note for the letter this man was doctor Adolf Strömstedt,

whom Strindberg calls in Legends "my doctor friend, my psychiatrist" (SS 28:217).

Most of Strindberg's comrades in Lund were young intellectuals; one exception was the well established sculptor Sven Bengtsson, at that time in his fifties. He was among the founding members of the Theosophical Lodge in Lund. According to Hans Erlandsson, Bengtsson created a tribute to Madame Blavatsky, a "cinerary urn in the shape of an Indian pagoda."[40] Erlandsson, who was a native of Lund and saw Strindberg several times in the streets of the city, describes Bengtsson's apartment at the time when Strindberg was a regular visitor at the home of the sculptor:

> There was a lot to see here. Tapestries on the walls. The fluttering light of chandeliers and bracket lamps illuminated carved cupboards and chests. Ceramics. Rare books: "Occult Philosophy" by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa. . . . , "Light," the main organ of Spiritualists, in which the facts of so-called "correspondences" served as the strongest argument for another world than the one we can see. . . .
>
> The lightly sour scent of oak panel and juniper twigs and the glow of the birch wood fire in the green-tiled stove suited well as a background for the sharply modeled features of Sven Bengtsson with his fair pointed beard. His sonorous voice had assumed the vibrations of copper-clang, which made an even more interesting impression.[41]

Strindberg and the theosophist Bengtsson were often engaged in discussions of their occult readings, experiences with spirits, and in spiritualist experiments such as the practice of psychography.[42] Bengtsson was an ardent amateur archaeologist, and he shared with Strindberg a strong interest in "prehistoric architecture." Theosophists believed that certain natural formations of stone actually

have been made by the hands of an earlier "race" than mankind, often called the giants.

In Occult Diary (18, 3/20/1897) Strindberg notes his unsuccessful archaeological venture with Bengtsson. On one occasion during his stay in Lund, he invited the theosophist to take an excursion to the so-called Ystad-stones which he suspected having been made by prehistoric hands. They approached the stones several times, but were mysteriously prevented from getting close to them.

Strindberg also describes how Bengtsson's compositions of statuettes that included devil-figures broke when they were sent to a Stockholm exhibition. Another time Strindberg notes that Bengtsson's newly molded Mephistopheles statue broke, after which the artist was afflicted with partial blindness for several days, and his eyes could not stand day-light. Both the theosophist Bengtsson and Strindberg attributed these occurrences to the disapproving influence of spirits.[43]

During 1897-98, Strindberg's diary entries reveal his continuing sensitivity towards theosophical ideas and his awareness of current events related to the theosophical movement. Certain occult sensations and images seemed to haunt him. For example, on March 21, 1897 he reports that upon returning to his apartment "there was a sweet scent in my rooms, which happens at times. (Cf. Swedenborg: when spirits approach there is an aromatic fragrance.) Theosophy says: Fragrance when a Mahatma approaches! H.P.B. [Helena

Petrovna Blavatsky]" (OD, 19). After visiting Bengtsson on 4/2/97 he records again in his diary that when he got home, there was a fragrance of flowers in his room, and in Legends he states that on April 2 "in the evening there is a scent of jasmine blossoms in my room, a gentle feeling of peace take[s] possession of my mind, and this night I sleep quietly (Swedenborg says that the presence of a good spirit or angel is known by balmy perfume. The theosophists maintain the same, but call angels 'Mahatmas')" (Legends, 128-29).

In August 1897 Strindberg departed again for Paris in order to seek publisher for his newly written Inferno. He stayed there until March 1898, writing Legends and To Damascus in the meantime. The Occult Diary lets us know that he was reading Lotus Bleu, the French organ for theosophists (42, 9/4/97). At about the same time, in a letter to Gustaf af Geijerstam, Strindberg reports his readings on Doppelgängers in Allan Kardec's Livre des Esprits, and urges his Swedish friends to get informed on the topics of mysticism from such readings as the journals Lotus Bleu and L'Initiation (Brev 11:160).

At the same time, Erik Sjöstedt, the Paris-correspondent of the newspaper Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfartstidning, reported on the most significant occult schools thriving in Paris to the Swedish public in an series of articles. These were the so-called Martinist Order led by the renowned Papus, the Free Masons, the Cabalistic Rosi-Crucians, and Sar (Joséphine) Péladan's "Catholic" Rosi-Crucian group. As

Sjöstedt remarks, the membership of these groupings were of the aristocratic and educated classes, while spiritualism attracted the uneducated masses. The Papusist-Martinist school came into being through Papus' break with the theosophists, and it counted in France 30,000 members, the article claims.[44]

Among Strindberg's manuscripts there is an essay which he wrote in Paris on 24 November, 1897, which reflects where he stands at the moment regarding the occult movements:

> My attitude towards the Papusists is unchanged, but impersonal, for they are all Martinists. And Saint Martin was a strict Catholic, as well as a disciple of Boehme and Swedenborg. And in L'Initiation write both theosophists, Catholic priests, Jews, and Hindus. . . . Theosophy is a movement that has the same purport as occultism and the same mission: to prepare what is to come: the reconciliation with the gods, the renewal of the acquaintance with what is beyond earthly life. Therefore, I am not opposed to theosophy as long as they don't attack me. . . . Madame Blavatsky's two main theories, Karma and reincarnation, are by Allan Kardec from the 1850s, and are fully justified. . . . Finally: Buddhism which now extirpates Christianity, is for the Orientals, but we Westerners have something better ourselves. Nevertheless, the theosophists themselves start to realize that their self-sufficiency is not well grounded and therefore they have started a cooperation with the other occultists, for which I wish good luck to both parties (SgNM9:2,14).

Although in France the Papus school enjoyed the greatest popularity, during Strindberg's stay in Paris he was constantly reminded of Blavatsky's theosophy, not only by the reading of Lotus Bleu, but by "signs" he perceived as being connected to the movement. On October 30, 1897 he reports in his diary, that he heard the ringing of "glass harmonica from St. Thomas church, and the following day "the glass-harmonica

again! Cf. Blavatsky's glass-bells" (OD, 45).[45] While still in Paris, on 25 December 1897 Strindberg notes that "returning home I found from Stockholm the Theosophist-Christ-Script Three Letters on a Question of Life." (OD, 49).[46]

Upon his return to Lund in March, 1898, Strindberg continued seeing Sven Bengtsson, but, according to the entries in Occult Diary, he received contradictory impulses whenever he turned to theosophy or other forms of occultism. His readings and conversations on occult subjects, and his eagerness to follow the events connected with these movements seem to have given him consolation and a feeling that the time was ripe for a positive change. Yet, at the same time, he had a feeling of frustration and an urge to withdraw himself from any involvement. For example, reading a book on the Cabala, he writes that "this book gave me light, and I saw in the current occultism a preparation for the return of Christ and a coming reconciliation between religion and science" (OD, 62, 6/2/98). The next day, however, he had an attack of anxiety after reading on the Cabala, at which he cried out: "What is this? Is it forbidden to me to read occultism? But what about the peace during reading and the ripening idea to reintroduce Christ to the path of reason for materialists and philosophers?" (OD, 62). On September 11 Strindberg reports that there was a theosophist congress in Stockholm under the leadership of Katherine Tingley, and that "every time theosophists have had a congress, I was troubled.

Now as I write this, someone is rumbling above me, and I feel a strain in my back and chest" (QD, 100). Strindberg's generally increasing anxiety reflected in the diary indicates his approaching departure from Lund.

Back to Stockholm: Strindberg and Georg Ljungström, 1900-1912

Four months after celebrating his fiftieth birthday with his friends in Lund, Strindberg moved once again to Stockholm on 20 June, 1899, embarking on the most prolific period in his whole literary and theatrical career.

After moving back to Stockholm, Strindberg had two kinds of important sources that added to his previous contacts with theosophical ideas. One source was his frequent readings of theosophical journals and related literature. The other was his personal contacts with theosophists. One of these was the writer Carl Alphonse Walleen (1863-1943) who lived in Copenhagen and corresponded with Strindberg between 1905 and 1912. Only one of Strindberg's letters to Walleen has survived (dated October 10, 1905) in which he reports that he had just finished reading the theosophist Annie Besant's book (in Swedish translation) Death--and After?, and declares that he still finds Christianity simpler and sounder than the theosophical dogma of Karma (Brev 15:185). From the nine extant Walleen-letters to Strindberg we know that they exchanged views concerning Strindberg's mysterious "master" or "teacher," a subject that Walleen took great interest in. He suggested to Strindberg that this person could be the

materialization of a "larva," an "elemental" of a dead person who lives in Strindberg's aura, and is not necessarily an "esprit correcteur" as Strindberg claimed. In a letter, dated July 17, 1905, he maintains that hell is a state of mind, a process of disintegration, rather than an eternal doom. He adds that "everything consists in . . . shadows of realities, projections of potentialities. . . . Perhaps the world, our world, is a chaos in formation, in fermentation--striving for harmony, which, I believe, is the goal." In the same letter he assures Strindberg that he believes in telepathic influence, since "by every expression of the will a being is created, which acts in accordance with the direction and the force of the will-impulse." (SgNM:Brev till August Strindberg från Waleen, Carl, Alphonse). These beings, whom Walleen identifies as "the kamamanasic elementals, so-called by the theosophists," seem to be identical with the thought-forms described by Annie Besant and Leadbeater in theosophical literature.

In the meantime Strindberg developed a new friendship that became a crucial influence and inspiration for him, an admiration for the theosophist poet Georg Ljungström (1861-1930) who, along with two other Ljungström brothers, founded in Stockholm the theosophical lodge called Orion. One of them, Fredrik, invented a new type of steam turbine, another, Oscar, worked for a real estate company, and upon his retirement settled down in Point Loma, California, at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society (then led by

Katherine Tingley), and went on to write on theosophical issues such as karma and the cosmic and spiritual evolution.[47] Strindberg owned one of his books dedicated to the first chair of the Swedish Theosophical Society, Gustav Zander.[48] Georg, who worked for the state as a cartographer, published a series of theosophical writings and poems that Strindberg came to read in the publications of the Lodge Orion, called Teosofiska Småskrifter.[49]

It is hard to tell when exactly Strindberg and Georg Ljungström first met in person, but Occult Diary and A Blue Book suggest that Strindberg knew Ljungström's writing in 1906 or 1907, just before the publication of Strindberg's novel Black Banners. Strindberg associated Ljungström with benevolent forces that came to his aid to save him from the clutches of black magicians. In A Blue Book which contains Strindberg's commentaries for Black Banners, he recounts:

> In those days when Black Banners was about to be published, I went into a book shop and found on the counter at first sight a booklet Teosofiska Småskrifter by the association Orion. I took the script with me home. There at first I found a wonderful poem entitled Alfa Omega by Georg Ljungström. Thereupon I read messages from the Astral world by the same G. L. (SS 46:413).

Strindberg then goes on to paraphrase Ljungström's article on the realm of black magicians where "a few millions of souls that have fallen lowest suffer a completely unbearable oppression by the sovereigns of black magicians who rule there" (SS 46:413). Yet, even for these souls the path of good and loving action is left open, and if they chose that

path, their bad karma can be changed. Strindberg feels that he has been a victim of black magicians in the same way, and is able to depict the sufferings in hell similarly to the many medieval saints who, according to Ljungström, "were just such newly converted black magicians from the depths of the world of torment, and it explains their firm belief in hell and their strong talent to represent its horrors" (SS 46:414).[50] Then he concludes:

> This was my situation when I was about to break with the black magicians (Banners). . . . But I placed my soul in the hands of God, and went on. . . . Strangely enough, from that moment on my true Karma came to fulfillment. I was protected, I was doing well, and I gained new and better friends than those I had lost. And now I want to attribute all my earlier systematic adversities to the fact that I had served the black ones. There was no blessing with them! (SS 46:414-15).

In another essay of A Blue Book Strindberg talks about the "resurrection" of forms in the vegetable kingdom, and for further information on these "shells" and on the souls of plants he refers the reader to "the revelation of our amidst us living profound mystic Georg Ljungström in Teosofiska Småskrifter, booklet 10" (SS 46:348-49).

Strindberg's library certainly contains this item along with many other issues of Teosofiska Småskrifter published between 1895 and 1909. All of them contain Ljungström's theosophical writings, articles, essays, and poems, heavily marked and underlined, and equipped with notes on the margin by Strindberg. The question of when he actually started reading this theosophical organ remains open, but most

probably he obtained back copies after moving to Stockholm, and possibly in 1906 to which date his first notes refer.

Among Ljungström's writings there is a series of articles entitled "Messages from the Astral World" ("Meddelanden från astralvärlden") which starts in nos. 8-9 (1906) and is completed in nos. 13-14-15 (1908). This is the writing which Strindberg so extensively paraphrases in A Blue Book, and also from the dense markings it seems to have been of particular interest for him, along with poems such as "Jest of Life" ("Lifvets gyckel"), "In Devachan" ("I Devachan," both in nos. 8-9, 1906), and others. The back cover of each issue gives a list of current theosophical literature including works by Blavatsky, Sinnett, and Edwin Arnold in the translations of Pfeiff and Åkerberg. On one of the copies of the journal Strindberg noted the address of the distributor of theosophical literature. On the cover of nos. 13-14-15 (1908) we find Ljungström's respectful dedication to Strindberg.

An entry in the Occult Diary on 18 January, 1908, indicates that Ljungström at this time was not an unusual visitor at Strindberg's home, or at least this was not their first personal meeting. And, as could be expected, the visit was accompanied by strange coincidences:

> In the evening the theosophist Ljungström announced his visit for 7 o'clock. Soon afterwards an anonymous letter was delivered by an old woman, concerning Hegel's death and warning about delusions (theosophy, Buddhism). Ljungström came, he left at 8:30. At 9 the sculptor Notini came and brought back my Buddha statue. . . . This is curious (OD, 277).

From the holdings of Strindberg's final library it is evident that after his return to Stockholm he was more than ever immersed in theosophical readings. Besides Teosofiska Småskrifter there are several other theosophical periodicals, heavily marked by Strindberg, with issues from the 1900s. There is a copy of Revue théosophique française from 1904, a number of issues of the Teosofisk tidskrift för Skandinavien between 1891-1902, and no. 6 of the monthly The Theosophical Path (editor Katherine Tingley) from 1911. A copy with Strindberg's notations of the German theosophical journal Lucifer mit der Gnosis from 1904 is unfortunately missing from the current library.[51] Strindberg also had numerous issues of Efteråt, a popular Swedish journal in which writings by Swedish and foreign theosophists, as well as spiritualists and other occultists appeared. In a letter to publisher Björck & Börjesson on May 31, 1907 Strindberg ordered back copies of this journal, along with J.U. Lloyd's theosophical novel Etidorhpa (an anagram for "Aphrodite"). In 1904 Strindberg asked his German translator Emil Schering to send him four articles by Carl du Prel on occult-theosophical subjects, such as astral bodies, that appeared in the journal Die Zukunft.[52] Apparently, du Prel was among Strindberg's long-time favorites. A character in the novel Svarta Fanor (Black Banners also written in 1904), praises du Prel's excellent essays appearing in Die Zukunft during the 1890s, and regards the study of occultism and theosophy as necessary for a new, progressive world view (SV 57:130).

Strindberg's copies of Efteråt contain theosophical writings including translated excerpts concerning astral light from the theosophist author Edouard Schuré's Les grands initiés (July 1897), an obituary for a pioneer of the Swedish theosophical movement A. F. Åkerberg (August 1901), an article on the religion of the future taken from the journal Theosophia (May, 1904), and a lecture "Invisible Helpers" by leading theosophist C.W. Leadbeater (August-Sept. 1905, June 1906).

In his library Strindberg also had a number of books by internationally well known theosophists such as Blavatsky, Besant, Sinnett, and Rudolf Steiner. He owned for example a Swedish translation of Annie Besant's popular theosophical work The Ancient Wisdom published by the Swedish Theosophical Society in 1900, which is now unfortunately missing from his library. So is the Swedish translation of Blavatsky's Key to Theosophy, published in 1890. Another book by Besant, Esoteric Christianity in German translation, published in 1903, is still to be found there, with marks and underlinings typical of Strindberg, in red and blue pencil.[53]

Both Strindberg's admiration for Georg Ljungström, and his increasing theosophical readings suggest that this is the first time in his life when he openly shows his interest in theosophy. How this interest is reflected in his works will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

Notes:

[1]Cf. Schwab, Oriental Renaissance, 127-28.

[2]Edvard Rodhe, Den religiösa liberalismen: Nils Ignell - Viktor Rydberg - Pontus Wikner (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag, 1935), 439-440.

[3]On the significance of religious liberalism in Sweden see Svenska folket genom tiderna: Vårt lands kulturhistoria i skildringar och bilder, ed. Ewert Wrangel (Malmö: Tidskriftsförlaget Allhem A.-B., 1939), vol. 9: Vid 1800-talets mitt, 98-110. See also Franklin D. Scott, Sweden: The Nations History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 355-361.

[4]"Visdomsreligion eller den nya Teosofien," Aftonbladet, 4, 8, 11, 15 March, 1887.

[5]Cf. Ibid.

[6]Edwin Arnold, Asiens ljus eller Den stora försakelsen, trans. Victor Pfeiff with an introduction by Viktor Rydberg (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1888). Cf. Rodhe, Den religiösa liberalismen, 441.

[7]Quoted by Rodhe in Den religiösa liberalismen, 440.

[8]Ibid.

[9]On du Prel's theosophical affiliations see Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 1914 ed., s.v. "Theosophische Gesellschaft;" and Eberhard Bauer, "Spiritismus und Okkultismus" in Okkultismus und Avantgarde, 72-73. Strindberg draws a parallel between theosophical thought and du Prel as early as 1891, see letter to Ola Hanson , 23 October, Brev 8: 361; and as late as in the novel Black Banners (written 1904), see SV 57:130.

[10]A. P. Sinnett, Den dolda verlden, trans. from the fourth edition of The Occult World by V. Pfeiff (Stockholm: Looström & Komp:s, 1887); De invigdes lära, trans. of Esoteric Buddhism by Victor Pfeiff, A. F. Åkerberg (Stockholm: Looström & Komp:s Förlag, 1887), unfortunately, these books from Strindberg's library are lost; Carl du Prel, Det dolda själslivet eller mystikens filosofi trans. A. F. Åkerberg (Stockholm: Oscar L. Lamms Förlag, 1890); cf. Hans Lindström, Strindberg och böckerna (Uppsala: Svenska Litteratursällskapet, 1977), 51, 52. For Strindberg's interest in the Sphinx see Brev 11:299, cca 10 August, 1896 to Jollivet-Castelot.

[11]For more details on the press-debate see Lindström, Hjärnornas kamp, 226-30.

[12]Carl von Bergen, Vårt reaktionära "Unga Sverige": Nutidsbetraktelser (Stockhholm: Adolf Johnsons Förlag, 1890), 68.

[13]On scientific monism and the influence of the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) on Strindberg and other European intellectuals see chapter 5.

[14]Bergen, Vårt reaktionära "Unga Sverige," 79.

[15]Ibid., 78. In return, von Bergen was attacked among others by Karl af Geijerstam (1860-1899) in his book Modern Prejudice: A Comment Against Theosophy and Spiritualism and An Answer for Mr. Carl von Bergen (Modern vidskepelse: Ett inlägg mot teosofi och spiritism jämte Ett svar till herr Carl von Bergen (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1892). It was Georg Ljungström, later to beome a significant theosophist contact for Strindberg, who answered in his A Theosophist's Answer to Karl af Geijerstam's "Modern Prejudice" (En teosofs svar på Karl af Geijerstams "Modern vidskepelse" (Stockholm: Tönnes Algrens Förlag, 1892).

[16]Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, s.v. Carl Frederic Berndt von Bergen.

[17]Lindström, Hjärnornas kamp, 226-27.

[18]SgNM 4:3,3.

[19]SS 54:214.

[20]Cf.Lindström, Hjärnornas kamp, 239; For more details on the Giftas-trial see for example Olof Lagercrantz, August Strindberg (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), 125-141.

[21]SS 54:76-79.

[22]Cf. Lindström, Hjärnornas kamp, 240.

[23]Svenska folket genom tiderna 9:93-97, 140-141; and Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, s.v. "Torsten Hedlund".

[24]Solhug: Meddelande från Internationella Broderskaps-ligan i Sverige nos. 1-3 (12/13/1902, 12/31/1902, 13/1/1903).

[25]Cf. Letters 2:488.: "Herr Torsten Hedlund,
Two years ago you wrote to me after the publication of By the Open Sea and asked, or at least wondered, if I was theosophist. My work seemed to exhibit a certain similarity of outlook." See also Inferno: "I think this is a suitable place in which to insert the story of the occult friend who played such a decisive part in my life as my mentor. He gave me advice, comfort, and chastisement; and in periods of acute poverty that recurred from time to time, he it was who stood by me and provided me with means of substinance.

As early as 1890 he had written to me about a book I had published. He had found that on some points my ideas agreed with those of the theosophists, and he asked me to give him my views on occultism and on that priestess of Isis, Madame Blavatsky." Inferno, 167.

[26] Although "The Danube-letter" was precipitated by Strindberg's resumption of the correspondence, he writes in Inferno: "at this critical moment of my life, I received another letter from this unknown man, a letter that struck an elevated, almost prophetic, note. In it he foretold for me a future that would be rich in suffering and in honour. Into the bargain he gave me his motiv for renewing our correspondence. This arose from a presentiment he had that I was at that moment passing through a spiritual crisis and that a word of comfort was perhaps necessary." Inferno, 167. The original of "The Danube-letter" and five other extant Hedlund letters to Strindberg (8/23/1894, 12/18/1894, 10/17/1896, 10/21/1896, 1/25/1912) are kept at the archives of Bonnier Bokförlag, Stockholm.

[27]See also other discussions of this issue in Strindberg's correspondence with Hedlund in Brev 11:284, 294, 304.

[28]See Strindberg's observations, speculations, and experiments in these disciplines in Brev 11:88-90, 196, 218-20, 264, 272-73, 326-30, 334-36; See also Strindberg's letters to Anders Eliasson during 1895-96 in Brev 10, 11.

[29]Cf. for example SS 46:22, 41, 107, 128; SS 47:558, 638-39, 693, 699, 703; SS 48:886, 902, 912, 934.

[30]For more contemporary information on these accusations consult for example W. E. Coleman, Blavatsky Unveiled (London: n.p., 1891), and Emma Colomb, Some Account of My Intercourse with Madame Blavatsky from 1872 to 1884 (London: Elliot Stock, 1885).

[31]Cf. Gunnar Brandell, Strindberg in Inferno, 107-11.

[32]The "Papusists" belonged to the "Groupe indépendant d'études ésotériques" in Paris, led by Doctor Papus (Gérard Encausse) who himself started out as a theosophist, before breaking with Blavatsky and founding his own occultist school in 1887. See Godwin, The Beginnings of Theosophy, 9. The Goldowners' persecution Strindberg feared probably because of his alchemical experiments.

[33] 'Azariel' is a reference to the name Azarias assumed by the archangel Raphael when guiding the blind Tobit and his son Tobias in the Book of Tobit. 'Ariel' in Hebrew means 'the Lion of God,' and one of the fallen angels in Milton's Paradise Lost.

[34]On Strindberg's recovery from his Inferno-crisis see Brandell, Srindberg in Inferno, 93-97; Johan Cullberg, Skaparkriser: Strindbergs Infeno och Dagermans (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1992), 11-120; and Harry G. Carlson, Out of Inferno, 261-264..

[35]Brandell, Strindberg in Inferno, 94-95.

[36]Brandell, Strindberg -- Ett författaliv 3 :230.

[37]According to a private letter to me by Prof. Bengt Erlandsson, son of Hans Erlandsson, by the end of the 1800s Lund had 4-5,000 inhabitants. As he recalls, the theosophical movement appealed mainly to the well

educated craftsmen and artists who on their study trips received influences from the continent, especially from Germany, rather than to the academic world of Lund. Louise Vinge, in her article "Om konstnärer" confirms the significance of the theosophical movement in the cultural life of Lund around the turn of the century through the involvement of the town's artists and craftsmen. In Sparbanken Finn, 40-50.

[38]Hans Erlandsson, "Marginalanteckningar," 13.

[39]Ibid., 11.

[40]Erlandsson, 13. Louise Vinge has published the photograph of this cinerary urn commissioned for Bengtsson by the countess Constance Wachtmeister upon Mme Blavatsky's death (1891), and received in London with great appreciation in 1892. The photo, to be found in the Sven Bengtsson Archive at Kulturen in Lund, shows a miniature of a vaulted Indian shrine "made of copper, silver and gold. . . . On the top, there is a blooming lotus-flower in the chalice of which sits a flaming golden heart" ("Om konstnärer," in Sparbanken Finn, 42-43). Perhaps it is not too far fetched to associate this piece--of which Strindberg must have known from Bengtsson--with the growing castle in Strindberg's A Dream Play (1901) which has quite similar attributes.

[41]Erlandsson, "Marginalanteckningar," 13-14.

[42]See for example OD, 18, 3/20/97, and SS 28:254-55. Psychography is the writing of messages dictated by spirits.

[43]See SS 28:237-38; OD, 4/2/97, 5/15/98; see also Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, s.v. "Sven Bengtsson."

[44]"Ockultismen i Frankrike," GHT, 5 August 1897.

[45]This might be an allusion to Blavatsky's description of healing by glass harmonica, cf. Isis 1:215.

[46]Tre bref i en lifsfråga by Hedivg Julia Augusta Nordén (Stockholm: Ivar Hægströms Boktryckeri, 1897) is a "scientific" approach to the Gospels, aiming to prove that energy is equivalent with the eternal divine spirit as life principle in accordance with the new developments in physics.

[47]For his elder days Oscar Ljungström returned to Sweden and settled in Lund where he became close friends with the theosophist Hans Erlandsson. The latter's library contains several of Ljungström's theosophical writings, with the author's dedication.

[48]Oscar Ljungström, Existenslinjer och utvecklingsnormer (Stockholm: Wahlström och Widstrand, 1906); cf. Lindström, Strindberg och böckerna, 108.

[49]Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, s.v. "Ljungström;" Svenska folket genom tiderna, 9:183; Erlandsson, 13.

[50]Cf. Teosofiska småskrifter no. 10 (1906): 21-25.

[51]See Lindström, Strindberg och böckerna, 100.

[52]Brev 16:27-28 and 15:50.

[53]For the now missing Besant and Blavatsky books see Lindström, Strindberg och böckerna, 94, 96; these copies disappeared after Lindström completed the catalog of Strindberg's library; see also appendix I.

Chapter Four

Theosophist Characters and Theosophical Concepts in Strindberg's Post-Inferno Works

A remarkable interplay occurs between Strindberg's ever shifting attitudes towards the various religious, occult, and mystical movements that flourished in late nineteenth-century Europe. For him these spiritual trends and groupings fulfilled roles in a morality play staged by Strindberg himself, a play in which alchemy and magic, Swedenborgianism and theosophy, Protestantism and Catholicism appear as objectified, alternately good and evil, forces in constant battle with one another. This drama occurs simultaneously in Strindberg's letters, scientific works, fiction, and plays, and we can see in all of them the collision of ideas and the shifting points of view maintaining the tension.

In my view theosophy was also a participant in a creative process thus described. Strindberg's connections with theosophists, discussed in the previous chapter, were more than merely biographical data, for they are indicative of his method of continually dramatizing not only people and experiences but also ideas he encountered.

In this chapter I will examine the consequences of Strindberg's contacts with theosophy on a direct and concrete level that include the poetic use of theosophist characters and theosophical concepts in his works.

Strindberg's Theosophist Characters

Theosophist characters start to appear regularly in Strindberg's autobiographical writings, fiction, plays, and play-drafts from Inferno (1897) on. I have already pointed out in the preceding chapter that real-life theosophists--modeled on Strindberg's acquaintances--appear in his autobiographical fiction including Shortcuts, Inferno, and Legends, and among the plays in To Damascus Part III. I will now trace in Strindberg's fiction and play-drafts characters that he clearly labels as theosophists. Some of them are modeled on real people, some are purely fictional. But Strindberg's theosophist characters were also motifs, poetic means of impersonating ideas. Often they are portrayed as benevolent forces that represent hope, healing, and a promise of a purer, spiritually rooted life. At other times they are seekers and troubled souls, who lose their identities in the maze of roles and masks.

a) The Theosophist as Healer

In chapter 9 of the novel Gothic Rooms (Götiska rummen, 1904) there is a minor character who identifies himself as "a theosophist and Martinist" (SS 40:130). He is a doctor who clairvoyantly senses from afar the death of his patient whom he describes as someone who "always searched behind the phenomenon, took life as temporary, . . . as a guest performance given on detour. He suffered from existence, and he was longing home" (131).

This assistant doctor is an example of the theosophist character in the role of healer and comforter, reminiscent of Torsten Hedlund and the Ystad doctor with whom the protagonist seeks a night's refuge in Inferno. But the theosophist doctor in Gothic Rooms, instead of attempting to preserve physical life, points out the spiritual comfort to be found in death. The healer is elevated from the role of the physician to that of the metaphysician.

A similar configuration emerges in the novel The Roofing Ceremony (Taklagsöl, 1907). Here again, Strindberg connects theosophy to a healer figure in the character of the nurse. In a preliminary note Strindberg calls the nurse "the theosophist woman" ("teosofinnan," SgNM6:16,43) and connects her with the themes of reincarnation and life-panorama, both of which, as we shall see, belong to the theosophical vocabulary.

It is she who listens to the long confessions of the dying protagonist as he recalls a panorama of scenes from his past life, and at the same time she witnesses and, we could say, assists the process of dying. But death and rebirth are intimately intertwined in the novel, and the role of the nurse is illuminated in a visually stunning representation of the concept of reincarnation. Namely, the sick man's process of dying "looked as though he were being born into some other, unknown land, . . . as if he were becoming a baby again. Sometimes his cries imitated those of a woman in childbirth, and even his movements" (The Roofing Ceremony,

73). Thus the figure of the nurse is associated with dissolution and restoration at the same time, and by the bedside of the dying man she becomes a midwife at the birth of new life. Midwife in a double sense. On the one hand, she mystically assists the delivery of the spirit from the physical body. She is preparing him for the moment of death by listening to his confession of the things he did in earthly life, and thus she assists in a cleansing process. On the other hand, the nurse is there as a midwife to indicate the potential reincarnation of the spirit in a new earthly form. In theosophical terms this process implies that the spirit finds a new "vehicle" (including a whole set of mental-astral-physical bodies) in a newborn baby.

In the novel Black Banners (Svarta fanor, 1904, first published in 1907) the theosophist bookseller Kilo is given the role of the spiritual healer and restorer. He is contrasted with the "vampires" of the contemporary literary world, whose main representative is the author Zachris. The latter represents the "black banners" which, as we saw earlier, Strindberg associated with what theosophists termed black magicians. Kilo is, perhaps, the only unselfish character in the novel and he is described as a peaceful soul, having "the mind of a child, and as theosophist, he always sought to create a beautiful artwork out of his little person, as much as he could. He was careful with his thoughts and desires, exercised moderation and reason, and protected himself from evil influences. Zachris had stolen

his fiancée early on, but since he could not acknowledge the owner's rights in love, he did not complain, even though he grieved. . . . he felt only compassion, could not feel malice, for he sympathized with the suffering of all living beings" (SV 57:18-19).[1]

Kilo and Zachris are both in love with the same woman, Jenny. In his notes to the novel Strindberg contrasts the "vampire-love" of the husband Zachris with the self-sacrificing, telepathically consoling love of the theosophist.[2] Zachris gradually murders his wife by psychically torturing her and using her as the object of his writing. On the other hand, Jenny tells Zachris that Kilo "has given me back to mankind, after that I had strayed in your zoo, for you are animals" (SV 57:186). On her deathbed she exclaims in a delirium:

> I have just spoken to Kilo! He lives in another world, and he made me feel homesick there. We don't write. . .; we speak only, in thoughts! (SV 57:193).

Strindberg makes the theosophist Kilo telepathically heal the dying woman's spirit as a "white magician" whose self-sacrificing task, as Torsten Hedlund described in the "Danube Letter" (1894), is to guide human beings towards higher planes of exitence.

b) The Theosophist as Spiritual Seeker

Gothic Rooms depicts the life of Stockholm society in the 1890s. There we meet the architect Kurt whom Strindberg identifies in his preliminary notes to the novel as a theosophist (SgNm7:1,14). He is a sensitive thinker who values reconciliation between religions, and is often occupied with thoughts of unexplained phenomena such as a cyclone in Paris (SS 40:262-63).[3]

Another young figure in the novel, Count Max, is an exponent of theosophical ideas. He opposes Darwinism and materialism, and for him the immortal soul of man, astral bodies, auras, dreams and the "temporary materializations of the half-matter of thought" (SS 40:267) are more real than the physical world (SS 40:195, 210-214, 257-59, 304-05). Both Kurt and Max are portrayed as troubled souls, longing to find truth beyond the labyrinthine world of appearances.

Count Max appears again in Black Banners, immersed in occult, mystical, and theosophical ideas. Following the occult tradition, he gathers a small company (among them the theosophist bookseller Kilo and the writer Falkenström) in order to "study theosophy" (SV 57:92) in a castle remote from the noise of society, which they call the cloister. Here, in solitude, they devote themselves to spiritual studies, experiments, and discussions on the basis of a "confessionless . . . religion without forms" (SV 57:92) which theosophy was. Strindberg transcribes in the novel several discussions and treatises of the dwellers of the

"cloister," many of which deal with his favorite theosophical subjects such as the astral world, the interdependence of matter and spirit, transmutation, and mysterious phenomena occuring in nature.[4]

For the seeker, theosophy might represent just a station in his spiritual development, as it did for Carl von Bergen in real life, and for Father Uriel in To Damascus Part III, discussed in the previous chapter. The same type of character appears among Strindberg's manuscripts in the plot-line of a planned play called "Mirages" ("Hägringar"):

> He is married; separates from his friends. . . . He was a faithful theosophist, but now he loses his belief, when it is challenged by life and experience (SgNM4:19,6).

Another version of the seeker is a theosophist character associated with the theme of the human personality as a mask. A folder among Strindberg's manuscripts contains his drafts and notes for "Occult dramas" and "Nemesis dramas." Here we find the outline for a play with the character Algot Lange based on Strindberg's real-life friend the opera singer with the same name. He apparently represents for Strindberg the theatricality of human personality, the conflict between the self and its roles:

> One who denies his identity, and as a result he loses his self as punishment.
> Algot Lange denies his identity out of vanity . . . L. became actor-singer and was never allowed to be himself, only to play . . . roles in foreign countries, so that his person was forgotten at home;
> finally he gave up theatre, and became a theosophist = a Buddhist, that is;
> at present he endeavors to kill his ego = to annihilate his person (SgNM4:21,4).

Both Buddhism and theosophy considers man's earthly personality an illusory, changeable mask and offers a solution for the subject in the identification with the immutable higher Self, the Universal Spirit. This, however, is only possible, if the personal ego is rejected, something that was a point of discussion in the correspondance between Torsten Hedlund and Strindberg, as we saw earlier.

The conflict between self and mask and the search for a self behind the mask appears as a major motif in such significant dramas as A Dream Play (1901) and The Ghost Sonata (1907) or The Great Highway (1909). There it is not concretized in theosophist characters, but is conveyed by complex poetic and structural means which will be discussed later.

Recurring Theosophical Concepts in Strindberg's Post-Inferno Works

Alongside theosophist characters, Strindberg's post-Inferno works contain numerous discussions of and allusions to theosophical concepts such as black and white magic, physical, astral, and mental planes of existence, Kama-Loka, Devachan, elementals and astral bodies, karma, reincarnation, death ecstasy, cosmic evolution, and the like.[5] We can observe that in his discursive prose such as Jardin des plantes (1896) and A Blue Book (En blå bok, 1907-1912) and in some of his fiction such as Inferno (1897), Legends (Legender, 1898) and Black Banners these concepts, though

often within the framework of narrative fiction, are treated on the level of direct reflection. In some other fiction such as The Roofing Ceremony (Taklagsöl, 1907) and in plays such as A Dream Play (Ett drömspel, 1901) and The Ghost Sonata (Spöksonaten, 1907) they gain metaphorical qualities and are treated as organic parts of the symbolic system and imagery of the work as a whole. We can trace them, as we shall see, in themes and imagery that both depict and question the lines between visible and invisible realities.

In the remainder of this chapter I will briefly review examples of theosophical concepts traceable in Strindberg's works. He seems to have been particularly taken by two major branches of ideas: one includes the concepts related to the various planes on the hierarchical ladder of being and the transiton between these planes, the other includes ideas related to the cosmic evolution and the processes of nature.

a) Existence Planes and the Pilgrimage of the Human Soul

The first volume of A Blue Book, a collection of essays in four volumes written during the span of half a decade, contains dialogues of the ficitional characters the Teacher and the Disciple who often introduce their arguments with the phrase "theosophists claim that . . . " or with other references to theosophical concepts that confirm experiences or serve as springboard for their trains of thoughts. For example, when the Disciple reflects on the multiple planes of being, he starts out by saying that "my experience has often

confirmed the claim of theosophists that we live even on a higher plane" (SS 46:129), and then he proceeds to elaborate on the idea. Another time the Teacher concludes an essay by a reference to theosophical thought:

> Theosophists say that we already here live two lives, a conscious one here on earth, and an unconscious one up there. Most people, however, seem to have broken the connection with the higher plane, and therefore they cannot comprehend the "beyond" (SS 46:128).

When referring to Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, the Disciple supplies also its theosophical interpretation, "that parallel with terrestrial life we lead a double life on the astral plane, but unconsciously" (SS 46:22). Later the Teacher returns to this idea and looks at it from another point of view.

> Theosophists speak of the seven planes of Kama-Loka, the state after death. I must admit that under certain circumstances in life, I have lived on several planes at the same time. . . . These contradictions of existence I tried to explain through the split personality or the multiplicity of the self (SS 46:248).

The subsequent two volumes of A Blue Book maintain such explicit use of theosophical terms in discussing, for example, the notions of thought-forms (SS 47:638-39), Karma (SS 47:699), reincarnation (SS 48:845-49), Kama-Loka (SS 48:911-12), and the astral plane and the astral body (SS 48:886-95). However, even more usual in the post-Inferno works are poetic images and metaphors elaborated on the basis of theosophical concepts. One of these, for example, is the opposition between black and white magicians who were said to be able to influence other people's lives by means of

transcendental knowledge which they acquire at various planes of existence (e.g. Key, 288-300; Ancient Wisdom, 78-79).

From the time of his correspondence with Torsten Hedlund during the 1890s to his later days in Stockholm, Strindberg was quite intrigued by the subject of black and white magic. The description of the realm of black magicians in the astral world was, as we saw in chapter 3, what fascinated him even in Georg Ljungström's writing in the 1900s. The theme emerges in allegorical form in the play To Damascus Part I in the appearance of the infernal blacksmith and the white flour-covered miller's wife in the "Ravine scenes," and also in the black and white garment of the Abbess in the "Asylum scene."

In the novel fragment Armageddon (1908) Strindberg depicts the earth as a penal colony where a secret society of black magicians rule over the souls of the damned, just as he had read about it in Georg Ljungström's article "Messages from the Astral World" discussed in the previous chapter.[6]

It is in the novel Black Banners where the concepts of black and white magic and magicians are most fully developed and become the main theme of the work. Torsten Hedlund in the "Danube Letter" relates black and white magicians to the seven principles and corresponding seven planes of man's existence. Black magicians can reach as far as the fourth principle which corresponds the animal soul in man, while white magicians communicate the values and knowledge of higher spiritual planes to man on earth. In Black Banners

Strindberg juxtaposes the main characters who represent black (Zachris) and white (Kilo, Count Max) forces. Thereby two alternative ways of human development are set up: one egotistic, earthbound, and destructive, the other unselfish, benevolent, and spiritual. The former thrives as a parasite; the latter lives the life of self-sacrifice, just as Hedlund characterized them in the "Danube Letter."[7]

In connection with the various planes of being Strindberg was particularly fascinated with the astral plane. According to theosophists, this realm is inhabited by elemental spirits that build the forms of nature, and by the astral doubles of physical as well as psychic entities. Moreover, this is the realm where thought-forms are made visible by the projection of human emotions, desires, and intentions into astral matter (Ancient Wisdom, 63-90).

In Inferno Strindberg often refers to "the powers" ("makterna"), mysterious forces that either aid or pursue the narrator-protagonist. Axel Herrlin, a friend of Strindberg's from Lund, notes the author's involvement with theosophy at the time of working on Inferno. He points out that Strindberg's use of the terminology of "powers" and "elementals" in Inferno drew on theosophical sources:

> Through Strindberg's occult studies his imagination had come to be preoccupied with natural beings like the so-called elementals which he also names in "Inferno." As the writings of occultists and theosophists represent these beings, they have a certain kinship with those forces that are called form-giving drifts. . . . Like slimy, ignorant creatures--such as the "elementals" of theosophists-- behave sometimes the "Powers" in "Inferno." [8]

Thought-forms, entities brought into being by the astral vibrations of thoughts and desires, is another theosophical concept that preoccupied Strindberg's imagination. In A Blue Book he considers the possible damage caused by malevolent thoughts:

> Theosophists say that one can create thought-forms that come alive and become real. They mean that people can . . . send out evil impulses from a distance, which are carried out by others (SS 47:638).

Both Legends and its unfinished sequel "Jacob Wrestles" ("Jakob brottas") abound in descriptions of astral Doppelgänger and other apparitions. In fact, the theme of astral doubles creates one of the leitmotifs of Legends. Strindberg incorporated both theoretical discussions on the subject and mysterious stories concerning astral doubles. He talks about experiences he had, which confirmed the existence of astral bodies as it is claimed by theosophists:

> Theosophists assume it as a fact that the soul or the "astral body," has the power to quit the body and to clothe itself in a quasi-material form which under favorable circumstances can be visible to many (Legends, 85).

Strindberg inserted in Legends one of his essays, entitled "The Irradiation and Dilatability of the Soul" ("Sälens irradiation och utsträckningsförmåga"), which had been originally published in the French occultist magazine L'Initiation.[9] In this article he describes encounters with the astral doubles of other people, and concludes:

> I am sure that the soul possesses the power of expansion which it exercises in a very high degree during ordinary sleep, and at death to such an extent that it leaves the body, and is by no means extinguished (Legends, 94).

According to theosophists, the "astral shell" of the dead may linger on earth and attach itself to living people, from whom it "will suck up magnetism as a sponge sucks up water, and will then take on an illusory appearance of vitality" (Ancient Wisdom, 115). Blavatsky compares this kind of vampirism of the astral shell to "the jelly-fish which has an ethereal gelatinous appearance so long as it is in its own element" (Key, 144). Strindberg portrays in Black Banners the "vampire" Zachris as such dead shell, who "was a selfless jelly, unorganized matter that lived on the roots of others like a parasite. He had always lived others' lives, never his own, he had intermittently identified himself with a series of persons, performed roles, made types out of himself" (SV 57:158). A similar image of the astral body of the dying protagonist occurs in The Roofing Ceremony as "he began to flow outward, reached out for those nearest, the nurse and the doctor, and with real ameboid movements of his soul he extended pseudopodia, wrapping himself around their thoughts and feelings as if to keep himself on solid ground" (Roofing Ceremony, 72-73).

A further concept related to the astral plane which captured Strindberg's imagination is Kama-Loka. It is the theosophical term for hell or purgatory, which is actually an after-death state of being on the astral plane. Lingering here are souls that are captives of their own personas. The theosophical image of this state is the inner self imprisoned in a series of concentric shells that have been

created out of astral matter by the lower passions and animal desires accumulated during one's earthly life:[10]

> In the astral world character expresses itself in form and the man who is full of evil passions looks the whole of them; bestial appetites shape the astral body into bestial forms. . . . No man can be a hypocrite in the astral world, and cloak foul thoughts with a veil of virtuous seeming; whatever the man is, that he appears to be in outward form (Ancient Wisdom, 102).

Such characters appear in The Ghost Sonata, where The Mummy, for example, can be seen as a figure symbolizing the layers of the astral shell built up by one's own earthly actions and desires that imprison the soul and create one's Karma.

The theosophical imagery of Kama-Loka made a deep impression on Strindberg's imagination. An essay in A Blue Book recounts the strange experience of a young poet who seemed to be possessed by his dead mentor. Strindberg wonders if the dead man lived his life "from the other side. . . , still bound to the earth? Theosophists consider it possible, and they explain it in the chapter on Kama-Loka, the lower world of desire" (SS 48:912).

Strindberg's portrayal of Stockholm's literary establishment in Black Banners reflects the shadow-world of Kama-Loka. The first two chapters of the novel include a grotesque description of a "ghost supper" at Professor Stenkåhl's salon, where the guests are shown as greedy beasts, since Kama-Loka is the realm of animal instincts according to the theosophical conception:

> Before the soup was served, there was a silence as usual, and sixteen right hands seemed to roll balls of bread so that the table resembled a beach in low-tide with

> crawling crabs. . . . The soup-eaters . . . appeared to be silently praying for the misfortune of the others, since they were all enemies. . . . The gentlemen, in fear of getting their beards greasy with food, "held up" their mustaches and exposed their teeth like angry beasts. They glanced around checking if someone noticed how they resembled dogs with a bone in their mouths (SV 57:9, 12).

One of Strindberg's chamber plays, The Ghost Sonata (Spöksonaten, 1907; Strindberg originally called the play "Kama Loka: A Buddhist Drama"[11]), takes place entirely in this infernal region of the astral plane. The characters are caught in mechanical repetitions of actions, such as the ghost supper where they "nibble on cookies, all at the same time, so that it sounds like rats nibbling in an attic. . . . They look like ghosts . . . always the same people, saying the same things" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 279). In the play the character of the Mummy imagines herself being a parrot--a bird that senselessly repeats words and phrases--, and the Old Man turns into a parrot at the moment of his death. Both the repetitious actions and speech (the parrot metaphor) can be understood as characteristics of "the astral corpse. . . , or the 'shell' of the departed entity. . . . The shell drifts vaguely about in the kamalokic world, automatically and feebly repeating its accustomed vibrations. . . , and finally disintegrates feebly" (Ancient Wisdom, 115). The character of the Milkmaid is also interesting from a theosophical point of view. She is an apparition, seen only by the clairvoyant Student and by the Old Man in whom she relentlessly haunts her murderer. Annie Besant describes the

phenomenon that in Kama-Loka "sometimes a man may be seen constantly followed by his murdered victim, never able to escape from his haunting presence" (Ancient Wisdom, 104).

The spiritual stage that lies "above" the astral plane in the theosophical cosmology is the mental plane. The souls of the dead, purified in the purgatory of Kama-Loka, proceed to the devachanic state on the mental plane. Devachan, which features in several of Strindberg's post-Inferno works, signifies in theosophical literature a state of grace after death, a heavenly realm where the purified souls can rest before a subsequent reincarnation on earth.[12] In 1907, the same year The Roofing Ceremony was written, Strindberg describes in Occult Diary a dream-vision that reminds him of how he imagines Devachan:

> After a long, painful evening I dreamt at night, for the first time in my life, something beautiful, which resembled a scene from "devachan". . . .
> At the night of the 22nd I "saw" a room so incredibly beautiful that I fell into ecstasy. There were tables laid for a name-day feast, and there stood dark violet purple-colored bellflowers as big as hats, and they could move. Later I saw a simple but cozy apartment; Harriet was lying there in bed as a young girl. Later I was outdoors in a landscape of radiant green. . . . Right afterwards I saw butterflies, as big as thrushes, in the most beautiful colors (OD, 626, 5/21-22, 1907).

In Armageddon Strindberg portrays the couple Pärlskön (Pearl-beauty) and Havsdroppe (Sea-drop) dwelling in the realm of bliss, where, like in his dream of Devachan "the flowers . . . were moving," and there were no repulsive animals "only butterflies, as big as thrushes" (SS 54:148). Unlike those who linger in Kama-Loka, the angelic couple has

no longer any "animal features," but they "lived in a transitory state . . . ready to proceed, onward, upward" (SS 54:152).

In several works Strindberg draws a parallel between dream, death, and the passing of the soul into higher worlds.[13] In Legends, for example, the narrator-protagonist recounts a dream in which he fell into an abyss:

> But strangely enough I fell upwards instead of downwards. I was closely surrounded by a dazzling halo of light, and I saw --. What I saw gave me two simultaneous ideas, "I am dead, and I am delivered." A feeling of the greatest happiness overcame me, together with the consciousness that the other life was now over. Light, purity, freedom filled my spirit, and as I cried "God!" I obtained the certainty that I had won forgiveness, that hell was behind me, and that heaven was open. Since that night I feel still more homeless than before in this world, and like a tired, weary child, I long to be able to "go home" (Legends, 148-49).

According to theosophical thought "death is the last ecstasis on earth. Then the soul is freed from the constraint of the body, and its nobler part is united to higher nature and becomes partaker in the wisdom and foreknowledge of higher being" (Key, 11, n.). Similarly, in several of Strindberg's post-Inferno works death is depicted as an ecstatic departure towards a blissful and spiritually enlightened existence. In Gothic Rooms (in chapter 9) a transition to Devachan occurs in the episode of the death of the poet Axel attended by the theosophist doctor mentioned earlier in this chapter. When at dawn the doctor and the visitors hurry to the sick-bed, they see the dead man lying there "with his head tossed back, his mouth open as if in

ecstasy, and his glance turned upwards; his entire face was in rapture as though he had seen something beautiful beyond measure, perhaps the land of his dreams" (SS 40:132). The Roofing Ceremony ends with an image, similar to the one in Gothic Rooms, describing the ecstatic features of the dead protagonist:

> He . . . fell asleep, to all appearances, but he died. And lay there, smiling as if he saw only beautiful things, green meadows, children and flowers, blue waters and flags in the sunlight (Roofing Ceremony, 74).

In theosophical terms it is the liberated spirit that will rest in the sunshine of Devachan evoked by the closing image of the novel. It is the spirit which "grows out of the shell of human form like the butterfly from the cocoon," to borrow again Torsten Hedlund's words in the "Danube Letter." From this perspective it is clear that the vision of the giant butterflies in Strindberg's "Devachan-dream" and in Armageddon is not an arbitary image but one indicative of Devachan on the theosophical mental plane of being, and of the transition onto that plane.

We find a related theme in The Ghost Sonata. Although the entire play takes place in Kama-Loka situated on the astral plane, in the concluding scene we see a character passing from the infernal regions onto a higher plane of existence. The realm of Devachan opens up to the most innocent character in the play, the Young Lady, at the moment of her death. She dies as all the falseness in her surroundings is exposed, but her escaping soul is received by

the blaze of the Sun, the symbol of the all-encompassing Universal Spirit. Here too, similarly to the nurse in The Roofing Ceremony, and to the theosophist doctor in Gothic Rooms, there is a clairvoyant character, the Student (according to Swedish tradition he is a seer since he was born on a Sunday) who spiritually assists the Young Lady on her journey towards Devachan. Theosophical literature claims that "it is possible . . . for yet living persons to have visions of Devachan. . . . The spirit of the clairvoyant ascends into the condition of Devachan in such rare visions" (Esoteric Buddhism, 85). As if looking into the spiritual realm, the Student utters a prayer above the dying girl:

> He's coming to set you free! Welcome, you pale and gentle deliverer!--Sleep, my beautiful one, lost and innocent, blameless in your suffering. Sleep without dreaming. And when you awaken again . . . may you be greeted by a sun that does not burn, in a home without dust, by friends who cause no pain, by a love without flaw (Strindberg: Five Plays, 296).

And while he is singing the so-called Sun Hymn, "the room disappears. Böcklin's painting, 'The Island of the Dead,' appears in the background, and from the island comes music, soft, calm, and gently melancholy" (297).

These closing passages of The Ghost Sonata and the intertwined auditory and visual sensations seem to echo Annie Besant's elevated description of the departure from Kama-Loka where "we left the soul asleep, having shaken off the last remains of his astral body, ready to pass out of Kama-Loka into Devachan, out of purgatory into heaven. The sleeper awakens to a sense of joy unspeakable, of bliss immeasurable,

of peace that passeth understanding. Softest melodies are breathing round him, tenderest hues greet his opening eyes, the very air seems music and colour, the whole being is suffused with light and harmony. Then through the golden haze dawn sweetly the faces loved on earth, etherealized into the beauty which expresses their noblest, loveliest emotions, unmarred by the troubles and the passions of that lower world" (Ancient Wisdom, 163-64).

Theosophists read by Strindberg depict Devachan also by the metaphor of summer "vacation . . . from the winter-class of earth."[14] In A Blue Book Strindberg, too, deals with "the summer vacation after the first death" as a station on the road towards higher worlds (SS 48:1036.). The chamber play The Pelican (1907) concludes with the impending death of the main characters by fire, and the last line is the Son's ecstatic exclamation: "Now summer vacation begins" (SV 55:63)!

A further theme related to the multiplicity of existence-planes in Strindberg's post-Inferno works, is that of the human spirit imprisoned in matter. From his Inferno-crisis on, Strindberg suffered increasingly from the feeling of being imprisoned in a physical body, and his conviction grew ever stronger that there must be a higher plane of existence where the human soul belonged. The same idea is expressed by Annie Besant who speaks of "the 'seven heavens' into one or other of which men pass . . . after the 'change that men call death'. For death is only a change that gives

the soul partial liberation, releasing him from the heaviest of chains. It is but a birth into a wider life, a return after brief exile on earth to the soul's true home, a passing from a prison into the freedom of the upper air" (Ancient Wisdom, 174).

The imprisonment of the soul on earth and its longing "home" to a purer and more spiritual realm than that of the senses, became one of the leitmotifs in A Dream Play (Ett drömspel, 1901). The play represents man on earth as being confined to live and experience life through the senses. Thus the human spirit is hindered from perceiving the true nature of reality. This is the painful conclusion of the god Indra's Daughter who descends from heaven to earth in order to take part in human life. When she is asked at the end of the play what she suffered most of all down here, her answer is:

> From just--being alive: from sensing my vision dimmed by my eyes, my hearing muffled by my ears, and my thoughts, my bright, airy thoughts trapped in that labyrinth of fatty coils in my brain (Strindberg: Five Plays, 262).

It is important to note that in theosophical thought, as well as in Strindberg, the notion of various existence planes is always related to the experience of transition. It is these "in-between" states, or rather, the passage from one plane to another, that is of interest. For example, at the moment of death the human soul--an entity containing a spark of the Universal Spirit--ascends from the physical onto the astral plane, leaving the physical body behind. At a later

stage after death the soul passes further onto the mental plane. When it reincarnates, the reverse process takes place: a descent from the mental plane onto the astral, and then to the material plane. This continual process of individual descent and ascent actually describes a spiral pattern and implies the spiritual evolution of human beings. The states of transition between the existence planes is characterized by an experience of ecstasy as the soul views the panorama of its past life (Key, 162, Ancient Wisdom, 162-63).[15]

Indra's Daughter in A Dream Play undergoes exactly this two-way journey. She is a divine spirit, a child of god, who descends on earth and incarnates to experience the life of human beings. Eventually she ascends to heaven again through death, experiencing at that moment a review of her earthly life in the closing scene of A Dream Play, whose theosophical sources had been pointed out by Carl Fehrman.[16] As Blavatsky explains the phenomenon:

> At the solemn moment of death every man . . . sees the whole of his past life marshalled before him, in its minutest details. For one short instant the personal becomes one with the individual and all-knowing Ego. . . . But this instant is enough to show to him the whole chain of causes which have been at work during his life . . . He reads his life, remaining as a spectator looking down into the arena he is quitting; he feels and knows the justice of all the suffering that has overtaken him (Key, 162).

The motif of life-panorama indicating transition into a new phase of life, appears in Strindberg already in "Jacob Wrestles" when the narrator describes his extraordinary

spiritual experience during a walk in the Louxembourg Gardens in Paris. A ball of light carried on birds' wings approaches him, and "then in a second the record of my whole past life is enrolled like a micrographic reproduction on an enormous placard. . . . I review my whole life from early childhood to this day (Legends, 202-204).[17]

Strindberg's first post-Inferno play, To Damascus, Part I, takes up the motif of life-panorama again as assimilated even in the dramatic structure. The protagonist, the Stranger, undertakes a journey which turns into a flight from the consequences of his past actions. During the trip he is constantly haunted by the figures of his past, and at the climax of the play he is confronted with a silent gathering of all the people--or rather, their likenesses--whose lives he has ever affected. After this shocking experience the Stranger once again passes through the same places in a reversed order, encounters the same people again, and finally he arrives at his starting point. Thus the whole "action" of the drama can be seen as the panorama of the Stranger's past life viewed in an immense mirror.

An example for structuring a whole novel as a life-panorama is The Roofing Ceremony. For the most part it consists of the monologue of the dying protagonist relentlessly recounting every detail of his life, viewing causes and effects. He is in a state of transition, hovering between life and death, and in his stream of consciousness unfolds the review of his whole life, culminating in an

ecstasy of death. It seems that in the theosophical concepts of death ecstasy and life-panorama Strindberg found the seeds of a technique of projecting inner psychic and spiritual human states, and at the same time connecting them to universal processes.

In theosophical literature the idea that death is an ascent towards higher spiritual planes is related to the view of human life as a pilgrimage of the soul through trials and tribulations. As Blavatsky states in The Secret Doctrine, one of the main tenets of theosophy is "the fundamental identity of all souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul--a spark of the former--through the Cycle of Incarnation . . . in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law" (SD 1:17). Besant explains also that "the physical, astral, and mental plane are 'the three worlds' through which lies the pilgrimage of the soul, again and again repeated" (Ancient Wisdom, 174).

Human life as pilgrimage appears as both a theme and a central structural element in many of Strindberg's post-Inferno plays, from To Damascus and A Dream Play to The Ghost Sonata and The Great Highway. The plot in these plays is made up by the main character's journey through a series of trials and tribulations in the course of fulfilling a spiritual quest.

A consequence of the conception of human life as a spiritual pilgrimage is the sense of earthly life as unreal,

an intermediary station towards the true home of the soul which is the spiritual world. The phenomenal world is thus a deceptive illusion, and both theosophists and Strindberg borrow the Buddhist concept of Maya to describe it. "The Universe is called, with everything in it, MAYA," says Blavatsky, "because all is temporary therein. . . . Compared to the eternal immutability of the ONE. . . , the Universe, with its evanescent ever-changing forms, must be necessarily, in the mind of the philosopher, no better than a will-o'-the-wisp. Yet, the Universe is real enough to the conscious beings in it, which are as unreal as it is itself" (SD, 274).

This concept of reality seems to have strongly inspired Strindberg when in the Author's Note to A Dream Play he places a single consciousness above the portrayed world as its source, superior to all the characters of the play. It is the consciousness "of the dreamer. For him there are no secrets, no inconsistencies, no scruples, no laws. He neither condemns nor acquits, only relates" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 205-206). By the introduction of the dreamer as both the source of the action and the observer of the play, the objective reality of the whole dramatic world is questioned and made illusory, while it appears real for the characters who act and suffer within it. In the same play Strindberg introduces the concept of Maya as the root of all ambiguities and contradictions of human life:

> In the dawn of time, before the sun shone, Brahman, the divine primal force, allowed itself to be seduced by Maya, the world mother, into propagating. This contact between divine and earthly substances was heaven's

> original sin. And so the world, life and human beings are only an illusion, a phantom, a dream image (Strindberg: Five Plays, 261).

Reincarnation and Karma are for theosophists the notions that describe the mechanism of the evolution of the human soul through a series of life-cycles on its pilgrimage towards the achievement of higher spirituality, "the whole order of nature evinces a progressive march towards a higher life" (SD 1:277). This explains also why theosophists look at earthly existence as role-playing and at the human personality as a mask, a shell, a mere vehicle for the reincarnated spirit. In the "Danube Letter," as we saw in chapter 3, Torsten Hedlund had referred to the human personality as a role or mask. At that time Strindberg was appalled by the idea, and felt that his highest task was to cultivate his personality, but by 1901 he expresses an altered view on the subject. In A Dream Play Indra's Daughter, the divine spirit, descends on earth and assumes roles (those of the child, the wife, the lover, the mother, the confidante) as she passes through human life. At the same time, she remains a spectator all the way through, watching herself acting her roles, and commenting on the situations and characters seen.

In the drafts for the unwritten play "Mirages" ("Hägringar") Strindberg deals with the same idea of the transitory human character, saying that "characters are only imaginary, they dissolve in smoke. . . . He who clings to character, has no character!" (SgNM4:19,4). In The Roofing

Ceremony again, the personality appears as a role. The description of the process of dying suggests also the idea of reincarnation of the soul after leaving the temporary lower self behind:

> Sometimes new personages seemed to grow inside him. . . . His own personality was dissolved, and his inborn character was revealed to be a mask behind which he performed his role . . . With the dissolution of the self followed the disappearance of selfishness . . . the pains came on regularly, just like childbirth pangs, so that it looked as though he were being pumped by a bellows into a new body, at the same time, as if he were becoming a baby again (Roofing Ceremony, 72-73).

This passage finds a striking resonance in Annie Besant's theosophical description of the reincarnation of the immortal higher self of man, called the Thinker:

> The Thinker alone lives forever; he is the man for whom "the hour never strikes," . . . who . . . puts on and casts off bodies as a man puts on new garments and throws off the old. Each personality is a new part for the immortal Actor, and he treads the stage of life over and over again, only in the life-drama each character he assumes is the child of the preceding ones (Ancient Wisdom, 178).

The entire Ghost Sonata can be read as the examination of the idea of the personality as a disposable mask. At the moment of death "the hour strikes" and the mask must be shed in the purgatory of Kama-Loka. During the course of the play the characters unmask one another and expose the very void in their inner being. The Old Man challanges the others to "listen to the clock ticking, like a deathwatch beetle in the wall! . . . In a few moments it'll strike and your time will be up!" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 287). The Mummy, however,

stops the clock and unmasks The Old Man sending him thereby to death.

From this brief survey of recurring theosophical ideas in Strindberg's post-Inferno works concerning multiple planes of being, we can conclude that he drew chiefly on those which consider human life as role-play, a pilgrimage towards higher spiritual planes, and life on earth as a transitory dream or illusion. These concepts show man acting in a cosmic spectacle through a series of evolutionary stages. At crucial moments, most notably at the moment of death or rebirth, man turns from actor into a spectator of his own previous life.

The use of concepts that feature on the theosophical astral and mental planes where the limitations of time, space, and character cease, led Strindberg to discover a technique which allowed a representaion of reality and personality as transitory and fragmented, lacking solid boundaries and a fixed essence. The essence is replaced with constant transformation, motion, transition from one state of being to another. Thus Strindberg's choice of applying theosophical concepts related to the various existence planes and the transition between them, tied him to modernist thought which we have examined in connection with occultism and turn-of-the-century drama and theatre (chapter 1). This choice on Strindberg's part, however, gave rise to the

dilemma of the subject, which, as we shall see, he dealt with by means of strategies of a cosmic theatre.

b) The Cosmic Evolution

Besides the human evolution that takes place on various existence-planes, the theory of cosmic evolution is the other major pillar of the theosophical thought system. These two circles of ideas represent but two aspects, microcosmic and macrocosmic, of the "cosmic spectacle."

This outlook also offered connecting links between the subjective and small world of man and the objective and impersonal processes of history and nature. Man is not separated from the cosmic processes but is seen as individual reflection of universal patterns. As Blavatsky puts it, "during the great mystery and drama of life. . . , real Kosmos is like the object placed behind the white screen upon which are thrown the Chinese shadows, called forth by the magic lantern. The actual figures and things remain invisible, while the wires of evolution are pulled by unseen hands; and men and things are thus but the reflections, on the white field, of the realities behind the snares of Mahamaya, or the great Illusion" (SD 1:276).

Human life in Strindberg's A Dream Play appears just such a shadow play. Through the incarnation of Indra's Daughter, the petty conflicts and everyday sufferings of man are placed in a larger, cosmic context. Yet, the actors in this play of humanity remain unaware of the reality behind

the shadows, and the play ends with the image of "a wall of human faces, questioning, grieving, despairing" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 264).

Theosophists talk about three phases of the cosmic evolution, which are the "evolution of spirit-matter, the evolution of form, and the evolution of self-consciousness" (Ancient Wisdom, 49). Strindberg the novelist and dramatist was particularly interested in the third phase whose focus was on human beings as individuals. But Strindberg the artist and scientist, the "Zola of the occult," (Brev 11:307)[18] was equally intrigued by the first and second phases, by the manifestations of spirit and matter, their transmutations and transitions into one another, and in the ways in which nature worked with forms. Especially appealing to Strindberg was the conception that "all forms exist as Ideas in the Mind of the LOGOS, and . . . these were thrown outwards as models to guide the Builders" (Ancient Wisdom, 53). Similarly, Torsten Hedlund says in the "Danube Letter:"

> Emanation from the One, existence as the All--collectively--eventually return up into the One. What in a passive state is the One, becomes in activity the All or "every" unity. The active side of the One is in this case "individuality." Actively an Individuality, passively the One. "I am Brahm [Brahma], Brahm is I," says to himself the enlightened occultist.
> But movement, combination, life incessantly clothe the eternally immutable Individuality in new qualifications.

Hedlund's visually lively description of the dynamics of life-forms originating from a single source seems to have been integrated by Strindberg into a dramatic technique, and formulated in the Author's Note to A Dream Play where the

"characters split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense, fragment, cohere. But one consciousness is superior to them all: that of the dreamer" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 205). There have been attempts to establish the identity of Strindberg's "dreamer."[19] But whether he had a concrete person, or god, or the author himself in mind, for us more important is the thought structure underlying this statement. It is a thought structure that reveals a universe (in this case the universe of the play) in which cosmic variety and the multiplicity of beings are manifestations of a single consciousness, after the model of Blavatsky's "Universal Mind."[20]

Blavatsky says in Isis Unveiled that "the sacred numbers of the universe in their esoteric combination solve the great problem and explain the theory of radiation and the cycle of emanations. The lower orders before they develop into higher ones must emanate from higher spiritual ones, and when arrived at the turning-point, be reabsorbed again into the infinite" (Isis 1:7). Evidently Strindberg was seriously preoccupied with the examination of cosmic evolution. A Blue Book contains his observations concerning cosmic numbers (SS 46:275, 329). Among Strindberg's manuscripts we can also find notes of Strindberg's speculations on cosmic numbers, which parallel the theosophical cosmology:

> 0 = Nothing. With One Everything is born . . . !
> 1 is the number of God; unity. Immutably: gives birth to itself . . .
> 2 is the number of discord/division. That of hate, the evil. Everything is created (SgNM21).

According to theosophical thought, the universal evolution takes place as a cyclical outpouring of life-waves from a single divine source. The life-waves spread throughout a series of planetary chains, producing on each planet a successive evolution of mineral, vegetable, animal, and human habitations. The planetary systems, the individual planets, and their inhabitants each tread their own cycles of evolution. The direction of their evolution proceeds from being purely spiritual towards gradual materialization. But the final goal of evolution is to elevate all forms of life once again from the obscurity of matter into the pure light of the spirit. An evolutionary cycle is completed when on all levels all beings achieve the state of spirituality, thus reuniting with their source, the Universal Spirit. The multiplicity of all forms, beings, and planes then ceases, and everything rests within the One. This cyclical repetition of evolution and involution is called by theosophists the Days and Nights of Brahma.[21]

The idea of planetary evolution appears in Strindberg's post-Inferno writings, in a poetically elaborate way. Already during his Inferno crisis, when writing Jardin des plantes, he intended to trace cosmic evolution in the incarnations of earth. Jardin des plantes (1896), which contains a series of essays on nature, was meant to represent a "new cosmos" (Letters 2:536) that unfurled before Strindberg as a result of his observations and experiments:

> I begin by searching out the primal elements of the world and their transmutation into one another in the

> volcanoes. I descend into the depths of the ocean . . . and observe the origin of life out of water. Ascend into the air . . . to reach my conclusions about the atmosphere and the way in which the earth took shape, . . . and the other worlds beyond our own.
>
> Return to earth: begin with the stones and the first forms of life. Dwell on the zoophytes, and particularly on the parting of the ways between plants and animals . . . .To the Animals. . . .
>
> From there to man, who is not an animal; who like the earth itself, has perhaps had previous incarnations (Letters 2:536).

There is a striking structural parallel between Strindberg's outline of the world order in this letter to Hedlund and the theosophical description of the cosmic process in Annie Besant as she outlines the plan of Ancient Wisdom:[22]

> Beginning on the physical plane we shall climb slowly upwards. . . .
>
> As we watch, we see strata appearing of successive densities, till seven vast regions are apparent, and in these centres of energy appear whirlpools of matter that separate from each other. . . .
>
> Narrowing down our view to the chain of which our globe is one, we see life-waves sweep round it, forming the Kingdoms of Nature, the three elemental, the mineral, vegetable, animal, human. . . , we watch human evolution, and see man developing self-consciousness by a series of many life-periods (Ancient Wisdom, 43).

In the Prologue of A Dream Play the image of a planetary system appears. (Strindberg added the Prologue to the play in 1906, at the time of his connections with theosophist Georg Ljungström.) We can see Indra's Daughter standing on a cloud, passing by planets and descending on Earth "that dark and heavy world lit by the moon. . . . The densest and heaviest of the spheres that wander space" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 207). The voice of the god Indra explains that the Earth "is fair, as is all Brahma created . . . / but it was fairer still/ once, in the dawn of time" (Strindberg: Five

Plays, 208). Indra's Daughter, a divine spirit, feels suffocation as she draws closer to the heavy material world in order to experience life in human incarnation.

The symbol of the growing castle in A Dream Play[23] might also be connected to theosophical cosmology, an allegorical hint to the evolution of planetary chains. When in Esoteric Buddhism Sinnett describes planetary evolution as many theosophists have done before him, he uses a curious image to illustrate the process:

> If we compare the system of worlds to a system of towers standing on a plain--towers each of many stories and symbolizing the scale of perfection--the spiritual monad [the individual soul] performs a spiral progress round and round the series, passing through each tower, every time it comes round to it, at higher level than before (Esoteric Buddhism, 33-34).

Indra's daughter descends from other worlds/planets when she arrives on earth, and she lands on earth right in front of a "growing castle," or we could say, a tower. In her commentaries on The Book of Dzyan Blavatsky also describes the celestial governors of humanity, the "planetary Dhyanis from the Spirit of the Sun. . . . messengers of Light and Life" that are sent "from the palace (house, the planet)" to serve each of the seven human races (SD 2:29). At the conclusion of the play Indra's Daughter feels that "the moment is near when I shall rise again into the ether with the help of fire" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 260). She returns to the growing castle which is now in flames, and as she steps into the fire, it is suggested that her physical body evaporates and her spirit ascends again into higher worlds.

She leaves the earth and ascends towards a world of higher spirituality symbolized by the growing castle, on the roof of which a Chrysanthemum bursts into flower at the moment of her death.[24]

In The Ghost Sonata the concept of planetary evolution takes the form of a visually striking allegory. Scene Three takes place in the "hyacinth room" which is decorated with a large seated Buddha statue, "in his lap is a bulb, out of which the stalk of a shallot has shot up, bearing its globe-shaped cluster of white, starlike flowers" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 289). The Student explains the symbolism of this image to the Young Lady:

> The bulb . . . is our earth. The stalk shoots up, straight as the axis of the world, and above, with its six-pointed star flowers, is the globe of heaven. . . . And so this flower is a replica of the universe . . . That's why the Buddha sits brooding over the bulb of the earth in his lap, watching it grow outwards and upwards, transforming itself into a heaven! --- This wretched earth aspires to become a heaven! That's what the Buddha is waiting for! (Strindberg: Five Plays, 290).

Strindberg's image of the Buddha watching the shallot, and the Student's interpretation of it as an allegory, comprise the process of planetary evolution in which earth and heaven are but two evolutionary stages, or incarnations of the same globe. Blavatsky's The Key to Theosophy concludes, in fact, with the optimistic statement that "earth will be a heaven in the twenty-first century" (307). Besant explains that a planetary chain "passes through seven distinct stages in its evolution; the seven globes as a whole form its planetary body, and this planetary body

disintegrates and is re-formed seven times during the planetary life. The planetary chain has seven incarnations, and the results obtained in one are handed on to the next" (Ancient Wisdom, 350). The earth is at present in the fourth round of evolution, and today's humanity is the fifth root-race (Ancient Wisdom, 361). Annie Besant's book concludes with an elevated description of the promise of future evolution, quite like the expectation of Strindberg's Buddha regarding the earth's evolution into heaven:

> At the end of the seventh race of the seventh round . . . our chain will hand on to its successor the fruits of its life; these fruits will be perfected divine men, Buddhas, Manus, Chonans, Masters. . . . The planetary Logos will gather up into himself all the fruits of evolution, and with His children enter on a period of bliss. Of that high state we cannot speak. . . ; only we dimly know that our glad spirits shall 'enter into the joy of the Lord,' and, resting in Him, shall see stretching before them boundless ranges of sublime life and love, heights and depths of power and joy, limitless as the One Existence, inexhaustible as the One that IS (Ancient Wisdom, 361-362).

The evolution of forms of life on earth is another central theme in Strindberg's work during and after the Inferno crisis. He tends to treat the secrets of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms in the theosophical manner, that is to say, he regards them as parts of the universal evolution, and a microcosmic projection of macrocosmic patterns. In Jardin des plantes Strindberg obliterates the boundaries between organic and inorganic matter. While theosophists speak about "spirit-matter" and a universal life principle for which there is no dead matter (e.g. Ancient Wisdom, 48), Strindberg animates inorganic

matter by finding analogies and correspondences throughout nature. He discovers that the patterns of life in crystals, stones, plants, and animals imitate each other as if in a grand cosmic theatre.

> Plants share . . . with metals the urge to build new formations. . . .
>
> The iron ore, called limonite, copies everything, imitates animal life with its mussel-like shapes. . . .
>
> Or: the coral is a stone, it is the limestone of the sea which turns into glucose which strives to become a plant . . . it blossoms immediately and its flowers become animals, for they contain egg white and gelatin (SS, 27:221).

In A Blue Book Strindberg talks about the ghosts and astral shells of plants, created by matter's innate instinct to build forms, referring to Georg Ljungström's article in the same subject in Teosofiska Småskrifter. In another essay he analyses the shallot (the very plant in the Buddha statue's lap in The Ghost Sonata) as a microcosmic image of the universe (SS 46:348-49, 352-53).

Torsten Hedlund's "Danube Letter" to Strindberg describes the cosmic evolution as spiral pattern by which "everything tends to come back to the same point on the circle, but one step higher." According to The Secret Doctrine "the whole order of nature evinces a progressive march towards a higher life" (1:277). In several post-Inferno plays of Strindberg, including the To Damascus trilogy and A Dream Play a similar repetitive and spiral pattern emerges as main structural principle in the development of the dramatic action.[25] Thematically, the spiral pattern also represents the spiritual evolution of the

main characters. In To Damascus Part I the Stranger at the end of the play finds himself on the same street corner whence he started out his journey, but he is in a higher stage of spiritual development, ready to continue his pilgrimage, which in Part III leads him to a monastery high up in the mountains. Indra's Daughter in A Dream Play descends to earth from heaven, passes through a series of stations, and then she returns through the same path to the place of her departure, to ascend to heaven again.

Theosophical literature describes the evolution of mankind through a series of "root-races" that inhabited successively emerging and submerging continents on earth. Such continents were Lemuria and Atlantis, on both of which dwelled a human race that resembled giants (Isis 1:122; SD 2:1-9).[26] I noted already Strindberg's fascination with these prehistoric giants and with their "architecture." In Legends he tells us the story of his attempted visits to the Ystad-stones with his theosophist friend, Sven Bengtsson. He refers to a human race from the time of the vanished continent Atlantis. He cites authorities such as Olaus Magnus and Swedenborg to confirm this view:

> The account of this adventure may close with a note regarding the character of these remains of pre-Adamite sculpture. The occultists attribute their origin to men of the Tertiary period [Atlantidernas människosläkten] and place them in the same category as the colossal stone image found in the Easter Islands and in the desert of Gobi. Olaus Magnus mentions them also, and has found them in great numbers on the coast of Braviken in East Gothland. Swedenborg attributes them a symbolical significance, and regards them as artistic products of the silver age (Legends, 48-49).

In A Blue Book Strindberg devotes several essays to this subject, entitled "Archaeology [Prehistoric Architecture]" ("Arkeologi [Förhistorisk arkitektur])" (SS 46:335-37), "Who Built Fingal's Cave?" ("Vem byggde Fingalsgrottan?") (SS 46:310), and "Halle och Hunnenberg" (SS 48:1001), which shows that even after 1906 he was quite obsessed by the idea.

Among the post-Inferno works it is especially A Blue Book which demonstrates Strindberg's encyclopedic ambition, and his desire to create a synthesis. It was an ongoing project in which he systematically gathered information, speculations, data in all kinds of disciplines. Here he accumulated and discussed ideas he had included in the novel Black Banners. But his dedication to bridging the gap between science and religion and of revealing all aspects of the processes of the universe can be traced back much earlier, namely to the Inferno years, to his correspondence with Torsten Hedlund, and works such as Jardin des plantes.

However, unlike Blavatsky, Strindberg attempted to achieve a synthesis on the poetic plane. Yet, it was not a balanced synthesis that he achieved, for his method was dialectical: he uncovered ideas from divers sources and clashed them against one another, turning them into characters in his lifelong drama. In the following chapters we will trace how the theosophical concepts transformed as they were deployed in the battle of ideas out of which unfolded the ever-dynamic multilayered texture of novels and dramatic compositions.

Notes:

[1]According to Hans Erlandsson, the theosophist artist from Lund, the model for Kilo was an old friend of Strindberg, publisher Claes Julius Looström (1846-1915), and the name "KILO" derived from the initials C.J.LO. His company published the Swedish theosophical journal Teosofisk tidskrift (of which Strindberg had many issues after 1900), and other theosophical works, such as books by A. P. Sinnett in the translations of the Swedish theosophists Viktor Pfeiff and A.F. Åkerberg (Strindberg owned copies of these books as well, see appendix I). See Erlandsson, "Marginalanteckningar," 13. However, the critical edition of August Strindbergs samlade verk identifies as model for Kilo Ernst Gernandt who was Strindberg's main publisher between 1897-1902. Cf. SV 57:309.

[2]See Strindberg's preliminary notes for Black Banners in the "Green Sack:" "Jenny is murdered by Zachris: he must have her close to be able to write her out of himself.
Kilo's love." SgNM7:2,34; Cf. SgNM4:28,2: "Kilo the comforter."

[3]In his book by the theosophist astronomer Camille Flammarion Strindberg marked with red pencil the parts that describe this mysterious cyclone in Paris in 1897. See Annaire Astronomique et météorologique Pour 1897 (Paris: Flammarion, n.d.), 183-87.

[4]The motif of withdrawing from society to a monastery or obscure castle in order to study occult sciences or for the purpose of religious conversion, was quite popular in nineteenth-century literature, and here Strindberg had such forerunners as Villiers de L'Isle-Adams (Axël, 1885), Edward Bulwer-Lytton (Zanoni, 1842), or J.K. Huysmans (En Route, 1895), all of whom had been involved in occultism, and the works of the two latter authors, made admittedly a strong impression on Strindberg.

[5]See Glossary of Theosophical Terms in appendix II.

[6]Cf. Teosofiska småskrifter 10 (1906): 21-25.

[7]Hedlund wrote Strindberg in the "Danube Letter": "The siblings black and white magic wander together far on the rocky road. The farther up they reach on the mountain path, the stronger their basic thought of 'self-offering' must be. The one's: 'evil for the sake of evil,' the other's: 'good for the sake of good.'"

[8]Herrlin, Från sekelslutets Lund , 149. For an overview of critical assessement of Strindberg's use of the term "powers" see Carlson, Out of Inferno, 217-18.

[9]Cf. Brandell, Strindberg in Inferno, 322.

[10]The term "Kama-Loka," taken from the Sanskrit, is defined in theosophical literature as the "realm of desire;" for definition and description see Key, 143-44; Ancient Wisdom, 64, 91-117; Esoteric Buddhism, 90-107.

[11]Cf. Brev, 11:354; SS, 45:342. The subtitle is another example of how Strindberg often viewed theosophy and Buddhism as interchangeable.

However, the play's imagery clearly shows, as we shall see, borrowings from modern theosophical literature.

[12]According to Blavatsky "Devachan" is a Sanskrit term meaning "the dwelling of the gods," see Glossary, 98. For descriptions of Devachan in texts known to Strindberg see Key, 98-100; Esoteric Buddhism, 66-89; Ancient Wisdom, 151-178.

[13]Cf. for example Blavatsky's definition of Devachan: "The 'land of gods' literally; a condition, a state of mental bliss. Philosophically a mental condition analogous to, but far more vivid and real than, the most vivid dream. It is the state of death of most mortals." Key, 100.

[14]Poem by Georg Ljungström "In Devachan," Teosofiska småskrifter 8-9 (1906): 94.

[15]The theosophical idea of spiritual evolution through a series of reincarnations towards the realization of an immanent transcendental ego is also the central thesis of Carl du Prel's "transcendental psychology" which, as we shall see in chapters 6 and 7, was another important influence in the formation of Strindberg's cosmic theatre and so called dreamplay-technique.

[16]Carl Fehrman, Poesi och Parodi , 84-95. Göran Stockenström discusses the concept of life panorama in Swedenborg where it appears in a slightly different meaning than in modern theosophists, namely as a panorama of sins (skuldrevy). See, Ismael i öknen, 83. Strindberg could, in fact, often find similar or closely related ideas in Swedenborg and theosophy, since Blavatsky herself drew on the writings of the Swedish mystic.

[17]Hans Erlandsson went to Paris in 1925, and took a photograph of that very tree to which Strindberg said he was leaning at the moment of this revelation. Concerning the curious image of the winged light ball Erlandsson refers to the classical theosophical work that inspired many artists in the early 20th century, Thought Forms by Besant and Leadbeater, in which the phenomenon of the mysterious light-ball on wings is described and pictured in a drawing. (See Erlandsson, "Marginalanteckningar," 4.) That book, however, first appeared in 1901, that is, years after Legends was written. More probably, Strindberg could have met this by theosophists favored image in Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine, in which it is analyzed in a comparative mythological context. Blavatsky here makes a connection between seraphs or cherubs and the mythological winged fire snakes which she identifies with the world egg as the source of creation. Moreover, she relates the symbol of the winged globe to man's rebirth or second birth, and in an esoteric meaning to Devachan, the place (or state) of bliss. See SD 1:364-65.

[18]Besides being a dramatist, novelist, and poet, Strindberg had a lifelong interest in painting, photography, music, and science, all of which he also practiced during different phases of his career. See more on his involvement with science in chapter 5.

[19]See for example Lamm, Strindbergs dramer, 2:316; Brigitta Steene, The Greatest Fire: A Study of August Strindberg (Carbondale: Southern

Illinois University Press, 1973), 99; Egil Törnqvist, Strindbergian Drama: Themes and Structure (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1982), 147-48; Carlson, Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth, 139.

[20]Cf. Isis 1:289; SD 1:14-15; and Key, 110, where Blavatsky explains: "As already stated, we reject the idea of a new soul created for every newly-born babe. We believe that every human being is the bearer, or Vehicle, of an Ego coeval with every other Ego; because all Egos are of the same essence and belong to the primeval emanation from the universal infinite Ego. Plato calls the latter the logos...; and we, the manifested divine principle, which is one with the universal mind or soul."

[21]See the term as first introduced and explained by Blavatsky SD 1:368.

[22]This is not to suggest, however, a direct influence in this case, since Besant's book appeared in 1900, while Strindberg wrote Jardin des plantes in 1896.

[23]Strindberg made it known that the "real-life" model of the growing castle was an actual building in Stockholm. Cf. Martin Lamm, August Strindberg, 321.

[24]Comparing the ending of A Dream Play to the connotations of the Buddha statue in The Ghost Sonata, Egil Törnqvist concludes that "a heaven growing out of the earth, that is ultimately what we are all waiting for. With this hope A Dream Play ends" (Strindbergian Drama, 162). The symbolism of the growing castle resembles also that of the cinerary urn made, by Sven Bengtsson for Blavatsky, in the shape of an Indian pagoda with a flaming heart in a lotus flower on top (see chapter 3). Strindberg must have known its description or photograph from Bengtsson.

[25]See an exhaustive description of the ascending, spiral progress of beings towards ever higher spirituality in Sinnett, Esoteric Buddhism, 37-44. Here it is important to note that as several Strindberg scholars pointed out, Strindberg was also indebted to Kierkegaard's notion of repetition. See for example Gunnar Brandell, Strindberg in Inferno, 18-22, and 33; and Freddie Rokem, "The Camera and the Aesthetics of Repetition: Strindberg's Use of Space and Scenography in Miss Julie, A Dream Play, and The Ghost Sonata" in Strindberg's Dramaturgy, ed. Göran Stockenström (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 121-122.

[26]Vanished continents and races tremendously intrigued the late nineteenth century, and engaged the interest of both writers and scientists from Edouard Schuré to Ernst Haeckel. But the first mention of the mythical continent Atlantis is found in Plato's Timaeus.

Chapter Five

Viewing the Spectacle of Nature: Natural-Philosophical Essays

A striking theatricality, structurally similar to that of the theosophical thought system,[1] lies at the core of Strindberg's natural-philosophical works written in the 1890s and 1900s. This chapter will focus on representational techniques in a selection of prose from this period. These techniques include the structuring of the represented world and the author's relation to it.

Antibarbarus: Hidden Qualities Behind Appearances

Antibarbarus (1894) was the first of a number of works during the Inferno period that Strindberg devoted to the exploration of nature and the "secret of the universe" (SS 27:208), a riddle which, as he believed, natural sciences left unresolved. The book is marked by Strindberg's attempt to apply monist theory in chemistry in the footsteps, as he declares, of Darwin and Haeckel (SS 27:115, 118).

As a generic term monism denotes those theories which assume a single force, source, or system from which the multiplicity and variety of beings evolve.[2] In natural sciences the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) was the most well-known promoter of monism during Strindberg's lifetime. Leaning on Darwin's theory of evolution Haeckel advanced carbon theory (the assumption that carbon is the

common stock from which all life forms had descended) and introduced hylozoism in science (the belief in the unity of organic and inorganic matter).[3]

Monism as a philosophical term refers to metaphysical systems that assume a single ultimate principle instead of two or more, denying, for example, the duality of spirit and matter. As we saw in chapters two and three, theosophists actively participated in the contemporary discourse on monism versus dualism, and maintained that the theosophical tradition followed a monistic philosophical approach which held that all variety in the universe stemmed from a single principle or Universal Mind.

Antibarbarus includes four treatises in chemistry, in which Strindberg borrows terminology both from evolutionary-monistic biology and from the occult-mystical vocabulary in his analysis of chemical substances. Similarly, his method is a blend of the experimental-scientific and the occult-intuitive when he points out analogies, correspondences, and transmutations in inorganic matter.

In the first treatise Strindberg deals with the "ontogenesis of sulfur," and he argues on the basis of experiments and analogies that sulfur is not an element but a compound (SS 27:117-138). He claims that "sulfur is a Proteus [the god who can change forms], which in the next moment won't be the same as in this one" (SS 27: 130); and that it "contains nothing and everything. Under the influence of certain reagents it has the ability to manifest

itself sometimes as an oxygenate marsh gas, sometimes as hydrated nitrogen, and so on" (SS 27:137). Strindberg thus not only personifies chemical substances, but endows them with the actor's ability of self-transformation as performers in nature's spectacle, both precipitated and watched by the experimenting scientist, the author himself.

Strindberg starts out the second treatise "On the Transmutation of Coal and the Elements, Transformistic Chemistry, or Everything is in Everything" ("Om kolets och ämnernas transmutation, transformistisk kemi eller allt är i allt") from the assumption that there is "only one single element from which all others arose by splitting, condensing, diluting, copulating, crossbreeding, and so on" (SS 27:139). This outlook on the dynamics of nature, which also assumes that "there is no definite borderline between the organic and the inorganic" (SS 27:139), foreshadows Strindberg's dramatic technique in A Dream Play (1901), in which the whole represented universe has its origin in a single dreaming consciousness that watches himself/herself appear as a cavalcade of characters that "split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense, fragment, cohere" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 205). This structural parallel between the scientific prose work and the play illuminates how thoroughly Strindberg's thinking was imbued with a theatrical sense of the world, and, on the other hand, how deeply his reinvention of dramatic form and expression was rooted in his broader philosophical outlook and existential experience. While in

the scientific treatise chemical elements are animated and behave like fragmented human beings, we shall see that in the play human characters behave like volatile chemical elements, or rather like substances during alchemical transmutation. However, in the background of both, there emerges the crucial problem of identity, a quest for an underlying substantiality beyond the chaotic disarray of evaporating, splitting forms, dualities, and contradictions. The theatrical metaphor becomes a fitting illustration of this ideological-artistic problem. For Strindberg sees both nature and human existence as illusory worlds on a stage where individual actors appear in a variety of masks and disguises.

In Antibarbarus Strindberg is convinced that silicon acid "plays games not only in diamond, but it appears so often in the disguise of coal that one could think that these two bodies have the ability to flow into each other and replace each other," which seems to be "transmutation or the transition of different substances into one another" (SS 27:142-43).

Strindberg here develops a technique for representing the natural world in the process of creation and in a state of constant transformation, producing a series of fleeting shapes, a world of spectacle, not unlike the world of Maya in Buddhism and theosophy. Once again, we can see the rudimentary elaboration of the above mentioned dreamplay-technique. The essay is filled with examples and illustrations of the ability of substances to transform

themselves theatrically, appearing and acting like one another. This discovery makes the narrator question the existence of an enduring identity of things, since "who knows if melting lead . . . is not quicksilver? And if lead, condensing at the highest heat . . . could not become silver" (SS 27:158)? Yet, behind all these transformations, there emerges an identity, that of a single substance at the source, one actor who appears in multiple masks, and the conclusion is that "the entire chain of metals can be derived from hydrogen" (SS 27:159).[4]

Throughout Antibarbarus chemical elements, as they appear in nature, are viewed as sensible disguises of their insensible qualities which, through experiments, reveal their real identity. The realm of chemistry provides for Strindberg a network of appearances which, for the true monist, veils a hidden and unified reality, one, however, which is controlled by a subject which deliberately plays with masks and performs roles. Whether it is elements or compounds, all forms and particles of matter are animated and participate in this masquerade of nature.

Jardin des plantes: Mimetism and Masking in Nature

In Jardin des Plantes (1895), a collection of essays about nature, Strindberg presents a view of the cosmos in which all elements, forms and forces are related, each of them being a manifestation of an all-encompassing Universal Mind that lies behind the patterns of nature. This Universal

Mind appears as an artist-creator who constantly experiments with the variations of life-forms.

In July, 1896, Strindberg wrote to Torsten Hedlund that due to his observations of nature in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, existence appeared to him in a new light and he understood that animals had been "created by the hand of a great Artist, who made sketches, rejected them, began again, and developed both himself and his skills in the process" (Letters 2:583). The narrator-scientist of Jardin des plantes also notes that he has often noticed in the realm of plants "nature's method of making sketches before carrying out something" (SS 27:265). In the introduction, however, Strindberg declares himself the creator, the underlying artist-mind of the world presented in his Jardin des plantes: "See here my Universe, such as I created it, such as it revealed itself to me" (SS 27:209). Thus, right from the beginning the author-scientist positions himself as a unified subject against a unified cosmos, and the apparent disorder experienced by the reader is just the expression of artistic freedom:

> This book is about the great disorder and the infinite relatedness. . . . Pilgrim, . . . if you follow me, you'll breath freer, for in my Universe reigns disorder which is freedom (SS 27:209).

The first essay in the book "The Sigh of the Stones" ("Sternarnas Suckan"), opens with an episode that recalls the story of creation from The Book of Genesis, further stressing the subject's creative role in the representation of nature:

> At the beginning there was all! If there was a beginning at all. . . . From earth were they taken and into earth did they return. Carbon and silicon, silicon and carbon (SS 27:212).

After mythologizing the origin of life in inorganic matter, the author goes on to re-invent the forms of nature based on the occult principle of analogy:

> To be able to render the forms [of nature], I have to invent a terminology of my own, borrowed mostly from the vegetable kingdom, the forms of which, remarkably, belong to the animal kingdom as well (the heart, the kidney, the feather, the horn, the hair, etc) (SS 27:218).

This is evidently a kind of re-creation of the forms of nature through words. For Strindberg, writing is a sort of alchemy by which dead matter is transformed into animated beings since they appear to be closely related parts of the organism of the universe.

What, then, does this cosmos look like? Nothing is what it seems to be. Imitation, copying, disguising, and likeness are the main patterns of the events taking place in this universe. Nature becomes a stage for the cosmic theatre where metals, plants, and animals borrow forms from one another, thus play-acting and assuming deceptive masks as they make their appearances. Both organic and inorganic matter share the urge to build new formations as, for example, the iron ore which "copies everything, imitates animal life with its mussel-like shapes," or prismatic quartz which "imitates excellently sea anemones," and the coral which "strives to become a plant . . . and its flowers become animals, for they contain egg white and gelatin" (SS 27:221).

Ice crystals on the window pane (SS 27:219) and in the forest (SS 27:217) imitate the forms of plants and their evolutionary grades, so that the question arises, "is it water that gave form to plants, or the other way around" (SS 27:217)? In turn, plants are themselves mysterious beings, and perhaps they descended from higher planes for they "preserve the procreative faculty of the highest mammals and deceptively imitate their male and female organs" (SS 27:248).

The secrets of nature are revealed beyond the web of appearances. For example, it turns out that the flower Cyclamen Europaenum defies all attempts at being classified, for it masks its identity by assuming characteristics of other plants, showing the petals of a lily, but the roots of an onion (SS 27:262). One might also wonder if the seed-vessel of the plant is "only an imitation and if the seeds should only be regarded as onion buds" (SS 27:263)?

Strindberg observes the changeable appearance of Cyclamens and bestows upon them even the ability of imitating their surroundings, reflecting the appearances of other beings, while changing their looks all the time:

> I had been looking at the ivies for a while, when I noticed a Cyclamen amidst them. And then I noticed some more of them and saw eventually as many leaves of Cyclamen as those of the ivy. That I did not see the Cyclamens at once, was because this species, called Europaenum, had dark green lines in the middle of the leaves, with whitish gray surroundings, so that the dark green inside made an ivy leaf. My thoughts were led immediately to mimetism (SS 27:265).

By means of such conclusions, we find ourselves in the midst of a theatrical process that eternally takes place in the universe. Nature appears to be a spectacle in which beings and things imitate, copy, and mock one another, as a series of transient appearances evolves in front of the observer. Strindberg uses active verbs to describe how one thing pretends to be another. Natural phenomena not only look alike, but act alike; imitate, copy, and simulate are verbs that suggest conscious acting.

Although, as he declares in Jardin des plantes (SS 27:262), Strindberg above all seeks likenesses everywhere in nature with an artist's eye, these likenesses are more theatrical than poetic. The signifier does not replace the signified as in a poetic metaphor but seems to consciously imitate and simulate it, to pretend to be and act like it, preserving, at the same time, the "actor's body" and underlying identity which the scientist-observer can distinguish from the imitated character. The whole of nature is endowed with creative energies, form-building instincts, and artistic intentions, carried out by stones, algae, flowers, trees, and animals, acting like living performers.

Although this kind of theatrical impersonation of nature is most apparent in Jardin des plantes, its traces appear in other prose works of the 1890s, most explicitly in "The Secrets of Flowers" ("Några blomstrens hemligheter," 1900), where Strindberg finds the fruits of the wintergreen simulate pears (SS 27:681), the umbels imitate thistles, daisies

simulate heather, and certain peas (lomentaria articulata) dress up as mistletoe (SS 27:686). Even more than that, Strindberg catches a chestnut tree in the act of imitating a horse-chestnut by means of certain gestures of its branches used as arms and hands:

> One summer as I was wandering in Lundagård . . . I saw a young chestnut tree stretch forward a hand with seven fingers, exactly with the same gesture as the horse-chestnut whose leaves it simulated (SS 27:684).

Such a "strange maneuver" (SS 27:686) of genuine chestnut trees which sometimes can be seen nonchalantly "lying with the elbows on the ground" (SS 27:684) can also be observed in the mountain birch which "has no three-fingered leaves, but by means of a simple hocus-pocus, pretends to have them" (SS 27:687). Strindberg wonders if this is "a conscious juggler's trick or only the expression of an immanent energy with an unconscious but clear intent" (SS 27:687)?

In Jardin des plantes a sense of nature's theatricality also arises through the technique of framing. In the very first essay the narrator positions himself as an onlooker of a framed image of "a spot of nature . . . enclosed within a wall like the garden of Eden. The whole of creation is gathered at one spot, and each object recounts its story" (SS 27:211). This image implies a promise that in front of the eyes of the wanderer will now enfold the whole macrocosm in space and time, as retold by the objects within the frame.

A few pages later Strindberg applies the framing device again. He tells the story of how he once was walking in

Berlin and caught sight of a window-pane with ice-ferns on it. To his astonishment, the patterns of the ice-ferns seemed to imitate the evolutionary grades of plants, encompassing the whole botanical system starting from the algae, up to "mosses, ferns, . . . grass and palms," displaying an increasing density towards the bottom of the pane (SS 27:219).

Strindberg's simple story of a window-pane becomes a mythical prototype of the evolution of life. For him the ice-ferns serve as proof that the myth of creation is re-enacted on all levels of nature:

> And I thought: According to Kant-Laplace the earth took shape so that the tenuous nebula condensed into water and primary rocks. Then nothing is more logical than to think that the forms of plants took shape by the increasing condensation of water on the surface of the earth, just like on the window-pane (SS 27:220).

By framing the image with the window, both the reader and the narrator become spectators of the represented microcosm within the frame, and at the same time, a distance is created between the onlooker and the image. Moreover, by setting up an analogy between the frozen image and the process of creation and evolution, the static image is filled with motion, time dimension is included, and the ice-ferns enact a dynamic scene, impersonating, like actors, plants and their story of evolution. The window-pane becomes a proscenium stage.

At other times the scientist's observation under the microscope is presented as watching the events of biological evolution enacted within a framed scene:

> Watching a fermenting drop of wine under the microscope, one can see the whole of zoology pass by and every particle repeat the retained memories from its metempsychosis [transmigration of souls], . . . from the animal body in the stall, from the vine stock, from other plants (SS 27:237).

Overall in Jardin des plantes nature appears as a cosmic kaleidoscope that offers elusive images to the observer, a spectacle that reveals cosmic correspondences by imitation, masking, and copying. In all of these essays Strindberg strives to grasp the motion of transition between ontological layers, between organic and inorganic matter, between life and death, between the realms of plants and animals, matter and spirit, between changing images. The different layers are involved in a constant dialogue as they mutually effect, reflect, or imitate one another. The source of this spectacle, the dramatist and stage director, emerges as a conscious creator amusing himself also by play-acting, slipping into an infinite variety of shapes and masks, similar to the Universal Mind that holds the invisible threads of the cosmic shadow play in The Secret Doctrine. In spite of the sense of disorder, fragmentation, and deceptive appearances in nature, the controlling role of an active and unified subject is maintained. It is a role that the author reserves for himself as he presents his universe. The reader, along with the scientist narrator, is given the part

of the spectator, separated from the observed performance by the insertion of a series of frames that serve as proscenium arches.

The Sun and the Eye: Macrocosmic and Microcosmic Sight

Sight and the act of watching is central to Strindberg's scientific prose, and the eye and instruments of sight such as the microscope, telescope, photographic plate, or camera, become part of the image seen or taken. In the very midst of his Inferno-crisis Strindberg turns suddenly towards light with an enormous intensity. In an essay, entitled "A Glance into Space" ("En blick mot rymden"), published in L'Initiation in 1896, he comes to the conclusion that there must be an interrelation between the sun and the eye. He wonders what light is, if it is something outside or inside man, and if the sun may "possibly be that original light, which, by my imperfect eyes, can be caught just as a yellow spot on the retina" (SS 27:353). He then carries out simple experiments concerning the human eye, and finds that it corresponds to the sun. The sun, the eye, and the process of photography seem to belong together not only in a physical sense, but even by an inherent, mystical connection, which positions the subject as the source of the cosmos:

> Is it the inner image of the eye that is depicted by the astronomer in words and pictures? And are those the lenses of the telescope he photographs on a photosensitive plate? . . . Where is the beginning and the end of the self? Is it the eye that adapts to the sun? Or is the phenomenon called sun being created by the eye? (SS 27:354).

Thus, on the one hand, identity is dissolved as the self loses its contours to encompass all, and on the other, the world is subjectified as a projection of the self, and appears "a mere cerebral phenomenon" (SS 27:355).

Strindberg's optical-mystical speculations called forth a reply in L'Initiation in April 1896 by the French Buddhist Guymiot who declared that the eye is "a reduction of the egg of Brahma. The universe is created like a man; each of Brahma's eggs is a solar system. . . . Everything that occurs in our solar system has its analogy in one of our eyes" (SS 27:355-56). Guymiot speaks of a Vedic school which teaches that the purple-black spot that Strindberg saw when he pressed on his eyeballs is a hole on the disk of the sun. Through this hole the liberated souls of the dead rise toward higher worlds. The astronomer, indeed, draws the inner pattern of his eye when he is sketching the picture of the cosmos. The eye and the cosmos correspond to each other. The firmament is a cosmic cornea, the stars are made of light reflected in the tissue of the cosmic eye. Consequently, Guymiot concludes, "one has to take seriously the concepts of macrocosm and microcosm in order to gain a knowledge of nature. There is nothing outside man that would not be inside him and in the other forms of existence" (SS 27:357).

Strindberg's essay "The Sunflower" ("Solrosen," 1896), with the subtitle "Analogies, Correspondences, Harmonies," is a kind of answer to Guymiot, in which he further develops his ideas concerning the sun and the eyes. He observes

correspondences between the sun and the sunflower. He places the sunflower into a macrocosmic relation, examining, at the same time, the microcosmic effects of the sun. This results in a mystical threefold analogy between the sun, the flower, and the eye, yet based on experiments as "scientific" evidence:

> Cut a segment through the cornea of the eye, and you will see a sunflower. The bottom of the sunflower's disk, when it is full of seeds, looks like a honeycomb with cells, and the seeds are like the larvae of the bees, but the whole thing is like the eye of an insect.
>
> The hermaphroditic disk-bloom of the sunflower resembles, on a schematic drawing, the cells of the optic nerve in the retina (SS 27:361).

For Strindberg, then, cosmos appears as a spectacle displayed for the sight of an observer, and at the same time, contained within the macrocosmic and microcosmic organs of vision, the sun and the eye. In other words, the world seems to be both created by and entrapped within the spectator's gaze.

A Blue Book: The Universe as Drama Text

In his later discursive prose Strindberg maintained his view of nature as a web of macrocosmic and microcosmic correspondences. The four parts of A Blue Book (1907-12) can be seen as one enormous storehouse of his scientific, religious, as well as occult ideas and speculations recorded during the final period of his life. In hundreds of very short essays that make up A Blue Book, Strindberg discusses all sides of cosmic as well as human life, encompassing the levels of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, astronomical relations, meteorology, human physiology and psychology, comparative religion and linguistics, photography, and unexplained natural phenomena. By this time, Strindberg came to criticize Darwinists and even the monist Haeckel whose work Natural Creation he ironically labels as "Unnatural Creation" (SS 47:456). Nevertheless, he maintains the monist's standpoint as he explains the unity of matter or searches for the original "ur-religion" and "ur-language" (SS 46:291-92, SS 47:557-58). Furthermore, in A Blue Book Strindberg, like theosophists, is critical of modern science because it pits faith against knowledge. As in his scientific prose of the 1890s, Strindberg considers the task of true science to be a quest for the lawgiver behind creation and for the controlling hand in the apparent disorder (SS 46:30).

The author of A Blue Book, however, renounces the role of the creator and contents himself with that of the observer who aims to catch the underlying intentions behind the observed phenomena. Yet he is never a passive observer, but always busies himself with making connections and setting up correspondences between the pieces of life's mosaic, an activity from which arises a network of meanings controlled by the watching subject. By this technique of continuous framing, Strindberg again succeeds in saving the subject from dissolution in a world of maskings and appearances. It is the ego that consumes the world and not the other way around, and the meaningful wholeness of the world depends on the subject.

In A Blue Book, like before, Strindberg thinks of reality in terms of hierarchical cosmic levels. What is new here is that his discussions imply a vertical movement, usually a longing or passing from an inferior towards a superior level on which the observed things and qualities gain a new meaning. More precisely, it is the observer's perspective that has changed, the observing eyes being placed on a higher, ideal level of being. Consequently, in A Blue Book the cosmos appears as a gigantic network of hierarchical planes that communicate and reflect one another, and their hidden connections are revealed and given meaning by the observer.

Thus, for example, Strindberg views man from the standpoint of a higher life when he declares that the world

is the reflection of one's inner being, and consequently we bear both heaven and hell within ourselves (SS 46:30). Furthermore, he claims that the purpose of existence includes man's development into a "superman" through a series of life-cycles (SS 46:31), an idea that recalls the theosophist conception of spiritual evolution. Strindberg agrees with the theosophists' view that "we live even on a higher plane" and that we have an animal body here on earth in order for us to feel homesick for a higher spiritual plane (SS 46: 128-135). He keeps exploring "higher existence forms" (SS 48:1033-36) and astral perceptions and phenomena (SS 48:886-95). The inexplicable migration of birds and curious cloud formations become meaningful from the standpoint of an invisible design active on higher planes, and the symbolism of water is explained in terms of an astral plane of being (SS 47:472, 778). Plants not only undergo transmutations, but Strindberg is convinced that they have a nervous system which elevates them onto higher planes (SS 46:312, SS 48:962).

Evert Sprinchorn talks about Strindberg's work in the field of natural sciences as a systematic effort in his "great project" which includes his exploration of matter and the forms of life all the way to the "homo spiritualis."[5] In all of his scientific works Strindberg adheres to the monistic conception of the world, but Sprinchorn observes that he reverses Haeckel's formula. The German scientist asserted that man's subconscious had been formed through

previous phases of biological evolution on earth, while Strindberg regards man's subliminal self as something that developed out of the life on higher planes of existence. As Sprinchorn points out, in Strindberg's theory of evolution "man has descended not from the lower forms of life as Darwin and the natural scientists argued, but from some ideal existence as Plato and the modern occultists would have it."[6]

Indeed, Strindberg's approach is akin to the theosophical adaptation of the theory of evolution, according to which man descends from a divine-spiritual plane to live on the physical-material plane in an animal body. From this lowest plane, during periodic reincarnations on earth, man undergoes evolution so that eventually he can return to the highest plane.

For our discussion the importance of this view lies in its structural, methodological implications. In A Blue Book, then, Strindberg explores the realms of the universe through the study of vertical levels of existence. It is a cognitive process in which meanings are created "in-between" the existential layers through their collision, comparison, and dialogue. The universe appears as a drama-text, viewed/read by the observer from the perspective of the highest plane.

The representational techniques of Strinderg's writings on nature, which resulted in a theatricalization of the world, can briefly be summarized as the positioning of the authorial subject as both source/dramatist, actor, and

spectator of the represented world; the introduction of a transcendental subject that splits into multiple characters to perform a spectacle of imitation, masking, and metamorphosis; dialectical relationships between different existential levels; and the separation of viewer and viewed by framing and situating the watching eye in relation to the watched image. As we shall see in the following chapters, these techniques, more elaborated, are present in Strindberg's fiction and drama from the 1890s on, revealing a process of working towards a radically new dramaturgy that finds its aesthetically relevant expression in the so-called dreamplay-technique.

Notes:

[1]See chapter 2.

[2]Cf. Oxford English Dictionary vol. 9, second edition, s. v. "Monism."

[3]For details on Haeckelian monism see Holt, "Ernst Haeckel's Monistic Religion," 265-280. On Haeckel's influence on Strindberg see for example Evert Sprinchorn, "The Zola of the Occult," in Strindberg and Modern Theatre (Stockholm: Strindbergssällskapet, 1975), 103-105.

[4]Harry G. Carlson observes a connection between the notion of natura naturans (creative nature) in Strindberg's approach to nature in the 1890s, the Indic metaphysical concept of Maya, signifying the metamorphic, dynamic, and illusory nature of the phenomenal world, and the endlessly dissolving and coalescing world of A Dream Play. See Out of Inferno, 297-99.

[5]Sprinchorn, "The Zola of the Occult," 104.

[6]Cf. ibid., 105.

Chapter Six

The Theatricalization of the World and the Self in the Post-Inferno Fiction

In a letter on May 6, 1907 Strindberg confided to his German translator, Emil Schering, that "the secret of all my novels . . . [is that] they are plays. During those long periods when, as you know, the theatre was closed to me, I hit upon the idea of writing my plays in epic form--for future use" (Letters 2:741-42). Like the author himself, the heroes of his novels are unable to abandon the theatre, to break the confines of their masks, or escape the compulsion of play-acting. The theatre is encapsulated in their minds and engraved in their selves; their senses are bewitched by illusion while they suffer from the lack of identity and reality, yearning for a fixed point within or without which keeps eluding them. The connection between the extended use of the theatrical metaphor and theosophical thought structures becomes stronger with each novel.

The Pre-Inferno Precedent: Cosmic Theatre in *By the Open Sea*

The scenery of the novel By the Open Sea (I havsbandet, 1890) is the Stockholm archipelago, a landscape seen through the eyes of the protagonist, the fishery inspector Axel Borg. The narrative starts with his sea-journey to the main island of the area where he arrives to investigate and improve fishing conditions. As the inspector's appearance is

described in detail, our attention is drawn to his golden bracelet in the shape of a serpent biting its own tail, which suggests that his powers do not lie in his physical strength. The bracelet represents the mythical Ouroboros symbolizing the eternal cycles of birth and death, creation and destruction, descent and ascent, and it is also an emblem of divine wisdom, and latent psychic and occult powers (SD 1:65, 364, 657; 2:29, n., 94, n., 96, 214). And indeed, when the pale and fragile inspector, inexperienced in sailing, senses danger, he takes over the command of the boat and steers it safely to the destination.

It is not surprising that Torsten Hedlund suspected Strindberg to be a theosophist when he read this work. One reason could be that the connotations of the Ouroboros--that frames the theosophical insignia and features significantly in Blavatsky's cosmological discussions--are stressed throughout the novel, connected to the cosmic symbolism of the sea. On his first morning on the island the inspector faces "the desolate sea. . . . [which] had a soothing effect like a wide-open, steadfast, large blue eye. . . . The onlooker felt flattered when he saw about him this circle of which, whatever his position, he was the centre. This great expanse of water was like the embodiment of something emanating from the beholder, and only existing through him" (By the Open Sea, 16).

Thus, Borg's first action on the island is a ritual gesture of situating himself in the world around him,

precisely in the center of what is likened to an omnipresent eye. His position-taking in the cosmic focal point encircled by the waters is symbolized by his serpent bracelet. It is also his first step towards the theatricalization of the world and the self. What follows can be read as a spectacle projected from this center, as if from a director's mind. The reader will be introduced to the universe through the consciousness of the protagonist, as it is perceived by his senses and grasped by his intellect.

We soon find out that the inspector is not content with arbitrary appearances but more interested in unveiling a hidden reality behind the surface. In his new dwelling he sets up the desk as the "hearth," an "altar to work," and places on it "his microscope, his diopter, his scales, his deep-sea sounder, and his dip-sticks. . . . These instruments . . . had grown to be a part of his being like new senses, other organs, stronger and finer than those nature had given him as his heritage" (By the Open Sea, 21, 22-23). And indeed, we can soon follow Borg when equipped with his instruments he sets out in a boat and peers down into "secret places" (By the Open Sea, 26) scrutinizing the bottom of the sea. To this end he uses a large marine-telescope through which "he gazed down into the lower world from which the great creations of the terrestrial life had developed" (By the Open Sea, 26).

The inspector does not care for the sensual enjoyment of the artist but aims at higher knowledge, like Plato's

philosopher who is trained to discern the real beyond the apparent. Yet, he does not realize that in his position as an observer he distances himself from nature instead of penetrating into it; he does not notice that his instruments, inserted between the subject and the observed object, further alienate him from nature and that he thus transforms nature into a spectacle, instead of grasping a more profound reality. He turns the universe--from the sea-bottom to the ether, from algae to human beings--into a theatre in which he is both director and spectator.

For it is the protagonist's vision that creates a cosmos out of chaos, and the order bestowed on the world as it emanates from the eye of the beholder. The universe as the reader is made to see it, exists, indeed, only through him, the one who stands in the projecting center of the metaphoric eye.

From the beginning, Borg is characterized by a hunger for images and an urge to take possession of his surroundings through vision. When "the inspector, who was used to having his eyes sated by impressions" moves into his new home on the island, he is dismayed by the bare walls of the room. He relies on the magical power of imagination "to conjure up brighter or darker images merely to escape from nothingness" (By the Open Sea, 12-13).

Throughout the novel the inspector is often shown taking a seat by his window, watching the external world. One Sunday morning, for example, he is observing the seascape through a

looking glass, while "a new object appeared on the forty-five degrees of the horizon which he could compass from the window. A naval gun-boat sailed at half speed into the lee of the island, struck sail and dropped anchor. Through his binoculars he could see the sailors moving about" (By the Open Sea, 51-52).

The window and the use of the optical device have multiple theatrical implications. Borg's position, his relation to the viewed seascape is that of the spectator sitting in a theatre box, watching the performance through his looking glass. This instrument and the inspector's other tools gain magical qualities through allusions scattered in the text to their ability to uncover secrets. In the quoted scene the binoculars seem to conjure up an optical illusion like a theatrical diorama which is framed and distanced from the observer by the window and the instrument.

However, the inspector does not simply observe his surroundings, he wants to leave his mark on it, to re-shape it after his own fancy. He relies on theatrical means in order to control people and nature. Like an illusionist, he strives to manipulate others by conjuring up spectacular shows, tableaux vivants, and special effects in order to demonstrate that "the products of the conscious mind [are] much more ingenious than those of unconscious nature". (By the Open Sea, 20). To combine "the useful with the entertaining" (By the Open Sea, 97) he promises to produce an illusionistic spectacle for his fiancée's birthday by making an Arctic isle

appear an Italian landscape. He conceives a few minor alterations to be made on the isle "so that when the next mirage occurred this, seen through the colossal magnifying-glass provided by the varying density of layers of air, would appear on the horizon greatly enlarged" (By the Open Sea, 97). For this purpose he sculpts rocks and fells trees, but miscalculates the effect, and produces instead the image of a sinister graveyard. Nevertheless, for this experiment he uses the layers of air as an optical device, working like a Prospero who commands the elements with his magic power.

Wishing to impose his vision on his fiancée, the inspector seeks to use special effects provided by nature to evoke in her a theatrical illusion:

> He hastily improvised a plan whereby, using the visual material provided by the skerries, he would . . . lead her in a few hours by means of living pictures through sensations that she would believe to come from the outside world. In this way he would slip the net of his soul over hers, tune her strings in harmony with his instrument. . . . The inspector, who observed that this splendid spectacle had not failed its effect, now decided to put a text under the soft music of this surge of emotion (By the Open Sea, 80-81).

Borg makes Maria see nature not as she actually perceives it but as, suggestively projecting his vision, he has arranged it into a harmony of lines, shapes, and sounds. The dreamlike illusion which he presents makes her "benumbed and lulled" so that she accepts "without reflection the new view he gave her of the monotonous landscape--which for her formerly lacked life--and of the origins and meaning of existence" (By the Open Sea, 81).

A kind of genteel voyeurism, that is, watching others' lives is another means by which Borg turns the world into a "fourth wall" type theatre.[1] From the first moment of their encounter he watches Maria and her mother with the objectifying gaze of a spectator at a performance. In his first infatuation he peers from his window into their cottage. The movements and gestures of the women are described in detail, as well as the setting and the aesthetically satisfying effect of the scene on the furtive spectator. We are watching him as he watches them through the double frame of his and their window:

> As he followed their supple, irregular movements with his eyes it seemed to him that he was listening to music. . . . gentle vibrations set in motion through the eye which . . . made the very foundations of his soul quiver. A general well-being streamed through him when he saw the undulations of these female hands as they unpacked small articles from their bags and placed them on tables and chairs, saw the elastic rise and fall of hips and shoulders which a coarser gaze would not have observed. And when the young woman walked through the room there were no straight lines, no corners, no edges when she turned, and no angles when she bent down (By the open Sea, 66).

Apparently, his vision arranges, again, the observed scene into a composition of harmonious forms, lines, sounds, and motion.

At another time the inspector watches his fiancée and his assistant walking on the shore

> with their arms around one another's waists. They paused between the unseen observer and the sheet of moonlight on the water, so that he could see the outline of their figures as clearly as if he had them between the lens and the mirror of a microscope (By the Open Sea, 150).

Again, the scene is rendered from the onlooker's point of view, and the allusion to the microscope suggests the spectator's scientific detachment towards the experimental objects while actually he turns people into puppets or figures in a shadow-play. But knowing the inspector's tendency to create illusions and purposefully re-shape what he sees, we cannot be sure that the scene is really happening in the way it is described. By now it is clear that he sees what he wants to see.

Again, another aspect of the protagonist's illusionistic theatre is that he turns people into actors, imposing roles on them without their consent, and directing their performances as well. This happens when after sending a breakup letter to his fiancée, the inspector

> took up his position by the window to observe the effect of his shot. . . . A moment later the figure of Miss Maria could be seen moving backwards and forwards behind the curtain in the dining room. She seemed to be walking to and fro agitatedly, sometimes stopping and gesticulating with her arms. . . . This went on for about an hour (By the Open Sea, 155).

This melodramatic dumb show continues into the afternoon when Maria sits down at her window "so that she could be seen from the customs house and there she remained, mostly seated, sometimes drumming on the window-pane, sometimes reading a book, and now and then passing her handkerchief over her face" (By the Open Sea, 156).

Borg's and Maria's relationship is bound to come to an end, for the inspector is unable to directly connect with people without the mediating link of theatre. By

theatricalizing others in ways described above, he also distances them from himself, thus excluding any possibility for immediacy and intimacy. The ending of the engagement is the turning point after which the inspector is gradually removed from the central position of the sole spectator where he had placed himself. Towards the end, there is a reversal of the initial image of the sea as the all-encompassing eye with Borg as its radiating center. Standing on the shore, he notices a multitude of small eyes floating on the surface of the water; dolls from a shipwreck, which he takes for real children whose "cheeks were rosy and white, and their large, wide-open blue eyes stared up at the black sky" (By the Open Sea, 182).

As if waking from a spell, Borg is now able to carry out a final ritual act that will free him from the magic circle of his theatre--the reverse of his initial act on the island. He sails out to the open sea on Christmas Eve to be dissolved in the dark mass of water where all distinction, distance, and illusion ceases.

The Theatre of the Mind in *Inferno*

Inferno (1897), the autobiographical novel that deals with the author's experiences during his Inferno-crisis, is imbued with a theatrical perception of life in a different way than the previous novel. One aspect of the theatricalization of the narrative is that it evokes a series of theatrical and dramatic genres expressive of the

protagonist's life-situations or psychological states. Looking back at the events of his previous life-period, the narrator-protagonist interprets his experiences as a play or rather as several different plays in which he had performed roles in various settings. He comments on the events as a "boring drama, which was threatening to turn into a farce" (Inferno, 243). Tragicomic and melodramatic elements are also mixed in the narrative as the protagonist believes himself victimized by evil forces, pursued by vengeful scoundrels and supernatural powers.[2]

The evocation of theatrical genres implies the performative quality of the recounted events, that is, the presence of at least one actor and one spectator. Both of these functions are fulfilled by the same person constantly splitting into protagonist and narrator. He is the protagonist playing the leading parts in the stories re-enacted on the stage of the narrator's memory who then functions as audience.[3]

The narrator stresses from the beginning this double consciousness of being a spectator and an actor. In the initial chapter he claims that "the part I was playing to myself was that of the innocent victim of unjust persecution" (Inferno, 105). Soon he adds that reflecting "upon my fate I can see the hand of the Unseen at work, disciplining me, driving me on, towards a goal that I myself was still unable to discern" (Inferno, 112). Towards the conclusion of the novel the narrator sums up his experiences in a tragicomic

vein wondering whether the Gods are "jesting with us mortals, and is that why we too, sharing the jest, are able to laugh in the most tormented moments of our lives?" (Inferno, 262) Thus bracketed by theatrical allusions the recounted events evoke the sense of a series of scenes staged by "the Unseen" or "the Gods" for the education and perhaps also for the entertainment of the narrator-protagonist.

As an actor the protagonist appears in a variety of mythical and historical roles, such as Job, Jacob, Ismael, Saulus, Orpheus, Buddha, Prometheus, Faust, Dante, or Napoleon.[4] Towards the conclusion of Inferno the narrator announces his preparation for a new role by buying a costume, "a fashionable cloak with a cape and hood, of a flea-brown colour and very like the habit of a Capuchin friar. Thus it was in the garb of a penitent that I re-entered Sweden after six years of exile" (Inferno, 252). This role, however, will only be played out in Legends (1898), the sequel to Inferno.

Besides conscious role-playing, the introduction of the Doppelgänger results also in the multiplication and fragmentation of the self. The narrator recounts his adventures with mysterious doubles, the manifestations of split personalities, different selves or astral bodies of the same person active in different places at the same time. The self thus appears in many disguises while its identity becomes more and more elusive.

Yet Strindberg rescues the self from utter dissolution by turning it, so to speak, inside out. The narrator-

protagonist of Inferno can be seen as a variant of the Dostoyevskyan "Underground Man" who "is not an objectified image but an autonomous discourse, pure voice; we do not see him, we hear him."[5] Instead of a clearly outlined character interacting with his environment, we see a collision between the world and the hero taking place internally on the stage of the narrator's consciousness, and the elements of the external world are drawn into an interior drama. He pursues an inner dialogue with everything he sees, hears, observes, since everything addresses him, appears to him as puzzles or signs that posit questions, provoke and challenge him. The narrator-protagonist of Inferno reacts to the objects of his perception dialogically, he compulsively interprets every tree, cloud, objects in a shop window, branches and pieces of paper he finds on the street, glances or gestures of unknown passersby; and he uses them as theatrical settings, stage properties, and motivations of the inner dialogue. The ego absorbs everything around him and turns his environment into parts of his subjectivity, a "divided scene [which] . . . insures the endless polyphonic movement of thoughts."[6] As in dreams, the self watches himself interacting with a symbolically re-molded environment. Therefore Inferno implies an attempt of the subject to re-possess the world that otherwise appears fragmented, alien, and meaningless. It is once again rendered meaningful by relating things together on the stage of the mind.

Antithetical Worlds in *Black Banners*

The theatrical metaphor serves the examination of the psychology of the writer in the novel Black Banners (1904, first published in 1907). The characters are thoroughly theatricalized revealing the monstrous capacity of human beings to feed on others' lives and accordingly assume masks and roles. Set in the turn-of-the-century Stockholm milieu, the societal life of the literary establishment is depicted as a stage where people play games, steal one another's roles and masks, pretend, and show off false appearances. Tired of this play-acting, a few (male) members of the literary society seclude themselves in the so-called Cloister, devoting their time to studying theosophy (SV 57:92), i.e. works in natural sciences, psychology, ethics, religion, and occultism. For this purpose, fictional dialogues dealing with topics in these areas are inserted in the text of the novel. These are full length treatises in the manner of Strindberg's essays in A Blue Book, reminiscent of Platonic dialogues. They break the linearity of the narrative and produce additional layers in the text. For the characters in the Cloister apply a method of cognition and expression, in other words a language, separate from that of the society that they left behind.[7] As opposed to the teasing and insinuating style of social intercourse where language serves to deceive others and conceal rather than clarify meaning, the Cloister dwellers discourse elucidate a theme, in the

style of Plato's dialogues, approaching it from several points of view.

Thus the novel juxtaposes two antithetical existential modes. A social reality, experienced as an impenetrable, malleable surface of appearances, play-acting, and masking, is pitted against an intellectual utopia, an epistemological mode of being that pursues truth, purity, substantiality, and community that can be achieved through study and knowledge.[8] The Cloister thus evokes the utopia of the ideal Platonic republic governed by philosophers, and at the same time it expresses a desire for a spiritually, ethically and intellectually highly developed state of man. According to theosophists, the goal of cosmic evolution is that man achieves again perfect spirituality and unity with the higher self. In his theosophical psychology Carl du Prel, one of Strindberg's long-time favorites, describes the future man who in the course of evolution will reach a state when the now unconscious higher self can directly perceive the transcendental world. According to Hans Lindström, the ascetic philosophers of Strindberg's Cloister embody the utopia of this future man.[9] In Black Banners the esoteric Cloister dialogues are introduced in chapter 10 at about the middle of the novel, after which they run parallel with the exoteric discourse of external society, alternating chapter by chapter.

There are three characters, the philosopher Count Max, the writer Falkenström, and the publisher Kilo who

participate first in the societal-theatrical world, and then only in the cloistral world, with one exception of Kilo's telepathic communication with the external world towards the end of the novel. The rest of the characters partake exclusively in one of the two discourses, like, for example, the mysterious Revisor R. who appears only in the Cloister, and Zachris, one of the main figures in the novel, who is at home only in the world of masking and pretending.

The writer Zachris is a character without a self and with an uncontrollable desire to subjugate others through his possessive identification with them. He is described as an actor who lives only by impersonating others, since "he had an immense void to fill and a boundless impressionability. He ate people, consumed their skills, devoured their wealth; and he had the ability to intrude on others' lives . . . so that he confused his own person with others" (SV 57:39). He is a "selfless jelly" who "played roles, made types out of himself" (SV 57:158).

However unsympathetically Zachris may be portrayed, the pain over the lost self shines through the characterization. The recognition that the writer is (or has to become) a selfless chameleon, of which Zachris is a palpable example, is expressed by another writer figure, Falkenström, who realizes that "in order to write my collected works I sacrificed my life, my person" (SV 57:147).

Zachris's cannibalistic appetite signifies a void within him caused by the loss of his self, and an insatiable hunger

to fill this void. His fleeting appearances are created by external impressions; his metamorphic character is the result of his practice of absorbing, appropriating the external, the other, the mask. He represents an infernal, monstrous, and grotesque gluttony. He is said to have "stolen everything he possessed, he stole people and thoughts, words and expressions, he could steal the looks of a person he admired; he could steal another's fame and talent and put himself in the place of another" (SV 57:202).

Zachris is, then, the embodiment of the mask itself; the theosophist Kilo calls him a "larva" (SV 57:193; for the Latin 'ghost,' 'mask'), a mere shell. He has "the nature of an octopus" (SV 57:40), he is formless, or rather, constantly switching forms. The essence of his being is condensed in the image of his glasses that become the metaphor of the mask which, like a magic mirror, reveals no face behind it, but entraps the faces of those who look upon it:

> The green shade of the electric lamp was reflected in his glasses and created two unstable patches that hid his eyes. He seemed to have been born with glasses since no one had seen his gaze. . . . When he sometimes wiped his glasses, he bent down his head so that he avoided showing the mirror of his soul. This insignificant person was believed to influence people by hypnotizing them with his glasses (SV 57:43).

Zachris, however, is not the only "vampire" character in the novel. All of his fellow writers, journalists, and critics hunt each other's possessions, translators, publishers, and wives, acting in the same tragicomedy. The mechanics of acting and metamorphoses that in earlier Strindberg works

seemed to invigorate nature, turns into deception, savage betrayal, and cruel subjugation of others in a social context.

Before Falkenström enters the Cloister, he is also described as a mask or a living corpse, "all of his features on his face were erased; and the reflection of the snow transformed his face into one white spot with a few indentations" (SV 57:78). Later he confesses that "it has seemed to me from an early age that my life was staged before me so that I would be able to observe all its facets. This insight made me reconcile with misfortune and taught me to consider myself an object" (SV 57:147).

The novel concludes with the posthumous letter of the character Smartman to his son, in which he approves of the poet's right to "play with thoughts, experiment with points of view" (SV 57:218). This can be read as the justification of the text's open ended dialogism juxtaposing two conflicting discourses. However, both societal theatre and intellectual utopia produce illusory worlds. Like his characters, Strindberg remains suspended between guilt feelings and self pity, seemingly resigned to the fact that the writer's fate is to sacrifice himself, with an eternal yearning for an unattainable identity: a utopia.

Crossing the Threshold in *The Roofing Ceremony*

Almost twenty years after the writing of By the Open Sea, the technique of theatricalizing the world from the

point of view of a central consciousness emerges again in The Roofing Ceremony (Taklagsöl, 1907). As a consequence of an accident, the protagonist, named the conservator, is in the process of dying. In his morphine-delirious stream of consciousness he re-enacts his past life like in a vast panorama, an experience which, according to theosophists, one undergoes at the moment of death. The entire narrative is constructed of the conservator's reminiscences, producing a theatrical structure as he "watches" himself re-enacting his previous life in the company of other characters.[10] At the climax, right before death ensues, the scenes of his life are once again recapitulated in his mind:

> Sometimes he screamed in pain, and thereby he distorted his face. He saw visions that frightened him. . . . the flowers on the wallpaper merged into faces, portraits of all those he had known since childhood, ever since his youth, and he spoke to them, reminding them of experiences they had shared with him; he declared his views, defended himself, asked them to forgive, forgave (Roofing Ceremony, 71).

Seeing again the scenes of one's own life is a motif intertwined with that of watching and listening to others' lives and being watched and heard by others so that life appears as a theatre of which we are alternately spectators and performers. The dying man recollects how he used to follow the events of the life of his downstairs neighbors by listening to the sounds from their apartment, and picturing in his imagination what might be happening there.

> From my own place upstairs, I had heard the whole story of this marriage's origin and descent, without knowing its performers, without having really seen them on the

> stairs, and while remaining entirely unacquainted with the scene (The Roofing Ceremony, 17).

When the conservator once goes downstairs to use the neighbors' telephone, he can satisfy his visual curiosity and complete his acoustic experiences with the scenery. But now he also hears what is going on in his apartment above, and he imagines "how I look from their viewpoint, here below; how they observed our life up there, witnessed our struggle up there, our child-cries, our musical repertoire" (The Roofing Ceremony, 26). Strindberg's play with architectural space here reveals his interest in exploring the layers of theatrical space, and commuting between existential planes, the dramatic-formal expression of which we will see in the plays.

The sick man also watches his rival who appears in a window opposite his own. In turn, the "Green eye" as he is called because of his green lamp, watches him. Strindberg employs here the theatricalizing technique he developed in By the Open Sea. Similarly, in the autobiographic novel Alone (Ensam, 1903) the playwright narrator fills his loneliness with scenes overheard or seen from others' lives, and he stores them as materials for further plays.[11] Both in Alone and in The Roofing Ceremony we can see in an urban setting the house-metaphor grow into a symbol that stands for the theatre of life. As we shall see in the next chapter, this symbol became central in several of Strindberg's chamber plays, such as Storm Weather (Oväder, 1907) and The Ghost

Sonata (Spöksonaten, 1907), where the intertwined dramas of a house's inhabitants are suggested by scenes in the windows or door-openings watched or overheard by other characters on the street or in another room.

These scenes, however, seem to belong to an illusory reality. When in The Roofing Ceremony the conservator is forced to stay in bed after his accident, he starts watching the external world, the window with the "Green eye," in his mirror, while a new house is being erected in front of his window. As death approaches, life appears more and more illusory, like a Platonic procession of shadows on the wall of an underground cave, where the beholder is prevented from seeing the real objects that cast the shadows:[12]

> The sun was shining in and creating a shadow play on the wall where a mirror hung. On the wallpaper, dark forms were seen of men who bent down, moved their arms, rose and bent down again; one of the figures stood still with a map in its hand (The Roofing Ceremony, 26).

Eventually, the conservator's personality emerges also as a mere mask to be thrown away at death. Before dying he "tries on" a series of masks as if flowing into others' performances or rehearsing new roles for another show in another life:

> Sometimes new personages seemed to grow inside him, whether these were 'residues' of his forefathers, or the influence of all those of whom he was thinking. And so he was capable of being mean and vicious, yet, in the next moment, haughty and superior; then an old wise man would emerge, a child, a rudimentary woman. His own personality was dissolved, and his inborn character was revealed to be a mask behind which he performed his role (Roofing Ceremony, 72).

Thus, personality is revealed to be a temporary construction and "the whole fabric of his upbringing,--textbooks, people, and newspapers--frayed into threads, and that little part he had embroidered himself was unraveled and disappeared" (Roofing Ceremony, 72). According to Michael Robinson, Strindberg's modernity lies in his perception of "the complex intertextuality of identity," as he, for example in The Roofing Ceremony, presents the self as "compiled of many discourses."[13] In my view, this short novel reveals also an urge on Strindberg's part to refute his own modernity, as it were, and to rescue the self from dissolution. At the end he lets something immutable shine through all the obscure roles and arbitrary life-events. The dying man "looked as though he were being born into some other, unknown land," and when he finally crosses the threshold of death, he looks like sleeping and "smiling as if he saw only beautiful things, green meadows, children and flowers, blue waters and flags in the sunlight" (Roofing Ceremony, 74). Does this conclusion suggest that at death the "prisoner" of the world of delusions is set free, and instead of the shadows beholds now the real objects lighted up by the sun?[14] Or does it mark a hope that the actor is sometimes allowed to put down the masks, lay back, and just enjoy the illusion? In any case, the ending indicates that the soul has reached a land of rest where the fragmentation of the self into roles and actor ceases.

In the novels discussed so far, we observed various ways of theatricalizing the narratives, such as splitting the subject into actor and spectator, into roles, masks, and doubles. The use of different techniques of vision and framing turns the viewed scenes into spectacles by distancing and objectifying them. To introduce performative qualities such as a panorama of life, play-acting, or the evocation of theatrical genres presents dialogically both the individual mind and the ideological discourses of society.

In By the Open Sea, the hero, from the central position of a viewer, gradually turns the world and the people around him into a spectacle, a panorama of theatrical scenes, thus pushing everything and everybody further and further away which leads to his complete isolation and alienation. In Inferno the hero theatricalizes himself and his life as he watches himself performing roles on the stage of his mind. These roles give the seemingly chance and arbitrary events and phenomena meaning and turn his experiences and the world itself into an internal theatre. In Black Banners society is viewed as a dance macabre of hollow masks--a shadow-play of ghosts and vampires. In The Roofing Ceremony all these aspects are recapitulated as this short novel combines the theatre of the mind (the polyphony of masks and voices within the protagonist's stream of consciousness); the theatricalization of the world by watching others and being watched; and the sense of life as a shadow-play, an illusion from which redemption is possible only in another existence.

Several other of Strindberg's post-Inferno novels display similar theatrical features and techniques, for example Legends (1898), Alone (1903), and Gothic Rooms (1904). With my choice of examples I intended to show on the one hand the different aspects of a thorough theatricalization of the world and the self, and on the other hand, themes and techniques that reveal a continuity as they are utilized in the scientific prose, the novels, and finally, in a new dimension, in the plays.

Notes:

[1]The convention of the "fourth wall" in Western theatre aims at a total illusion of reality on stage by pretending that the actors are unaware of the presence of an audience who therefore feels as if peeping through a hole in the imaginary fourth wall which divides the stage from the auditorium.

[2]Eric O. Johannesson has pointed out "the melodramatic and tragicomic surface" of Inferno. As he observes, a melodramatic atmosphere of dread and claustrophobia is produced as the narrator who, "like Poe's heroes is . . . the sole actor on stage, [is] confronted by demons and chimeras. These take many forms: vampires, mysterious sounds, pressures over the chest, angina, electric shocks. . . . The settings of his adventures are also replete with the customary Gothic trappings" (The Novels of August Strindberg: A Study in Theme and Structure [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968], 176, 178).

[3]Michael Robinson observed "the theatricality in Strindberg's method as a writer experimenting with standpoints, objectifying himself as other . . . staging and watching his fate" (Strindberg and Autobiography: Writing and Reading a Life [Norwich: Norvik Press, 1986], 3).

[4]Johannesson distinguishes in Inferno two major groups of roles assumed by the narrator; the "Job roles" that emphasize the hero's innocence, and the "Faust roles" that emphasize his guilt. See The Novels of August Strindberg, 187.

[5]Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems in Dostoyevsky's Poetics, trans. Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 53. This implies the restructuring of the traditionally static, monological character into what Michael Robinson calls "a site traversed by forces and events rather than individuated essences" (Strindberg and Autobiography, 86).

[6]Gould, Virtual Theater, 34.

[7]Distinguishing the traditional epic genre from the modern novel, Bakhtin explains in his essay "Discourse in the Novel" that the latter is a heteroglot genre, that is, it includes "a system of images of languages," and that "a profound understanding of heteroglossia [implies] an understanding of the dialogue of languages as it exists in a given era" (The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and M. Holquist [Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981], 416, 417).

[8]Bakhtin includes both the mixing of genres and social utopia as means of dialogizing the represented world, which occurs in what he terms the menippean satire, and in the modern polyphonic novel which he demonstrates in Dostoyevsky. Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics, 118.

[9]See Carl du Prel, The Philosophy of Mysticism, trans. C.C. Massey (London: George Redway, 1889), 2:144, 147; and Lindström, Hjärnornas kamp, 298. On du Prel's theosophical affiliations and Strindberg's interest in his writings see chapter 3 and appendix I.

[10]Barbro Ståhle Sjönell observes that The Roofing Ceremony "consists almost entirely of a single long monologue interrupted by stage directions and lines from the characters around the speaker" ("Strindberg's Mixing of Genres" in Strindberg and Genre, ed. Michael Robinson [Norwich: Norvic Press, 1991], 58). In a letter to Emil Schering on 17 April, 1907, Strindberg claims that he originally "conceived it as a play" and the imagery is "Zur Schau, stage effects" (Letters 2:738-39). It is interesting to note that Strindberg wrote this short novel at the time when he was writing his so called chamber plays for his Intimate Theatre.

[11]The theatrical features of Alone are analyzed by Eric Johannesson in The Novels of August Strindberg, 210-226.

[12]Cf. Ståhle, Strindbergs "Taklagsöl," 85.

[13]Robinson, Strindberg and Autobiography, 75-76.

[14]In Plato's allegory of the cave Socrates argues that "just as one might have to turn the whole body round in order that the eye should see light instead of darkness, so the entire soul must be turned away from this changing world, until its eye can bear to contemplate reality and that supreme spledour which we have called the Good" (The Republic of Plato, 232).

Chapter Seven

Self, Masks, and Actors: The Post-Inferno Plays

In Strindberg's post-Inferno plays the world is experienced as inherently theatrical. An illusory reality emerges from the spatial-visual layers and divisions of the ever-transforming mise-en-scène as surfaces, walls and masks, are stripped away exposing infernal or celestial scenes for the glance of the observer. It is never really certain where the theatre ends and life, or perhaps death, begins. Reality and illusion seem to be but two sides of the screen onto which the cosmic shadow play is projected, and interior and exterior worlds intermingle as the self itself becomes a stage. Subjective states are externalized in the scenery and unconscious impulses of the self are personified by several characters who converse or perform scenes for one another.

These patterns are parts of a renewed dramaturgy the source of which lay in Strindberg's experiences during his Inferno-crisis, as well as in his quest for an artistic and spiritual renewal.[1] In a larger context, however, they express the dilemmas of a changing era, reflected also in the philosophical-psychological debates of the times.[2] Symptomatic of this age was the transition from an optimistic faith in progress and reason to a sense of estrangement and fragmentation of the self into functions and social roles without insight into the direction or meaning of the whole. Early in the nineteenth century Schopenhauer saw the world as

a mere representation, entirely conditioned by the subject; in his main work Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (The World as Will and Representation, 1819) he borrowed the Indian concept of Maya, the veil of deception, to express the illusory quality of the phenomenal world in opposition with the only reality which is the Will. In his footsteps Eduard von Hartmann set forth a systematic philosophy of the unconscious, stating that "all unconscious operations spring form one and the same subject, which has only its phenomenal revelation in the several individuals, so that 'the Unconscious' signifies this One Absolute subject."[3]

Utilizing both Schopenhauer and Indian philosophy, late-nineteenth-century theosophists conceived of the phenomenal world as an illusory shadow-play projected from a transcendental subject. In the works of Blavatsky, Besant, and others (see chapters 2 and 4), the cosmic planes of being are seen as stages on which the Universal Spirit--the "immortal actor" identical with our higher self (Ancient Wisdom, 178)--makes its appearances in the disguise of individuals. The masks in which the actor appears on the cosmic stages are cast off at the transition to higher planes, where new masks are assumed. Man's earthly personality is one of these masks, the astral body or shell in which we appear after death, is another one, and the true self is reached only after a long process of evolution and purgation. At the points of transition (such as at the moment of death) "performances" are said to occur at which

the self is split into spectator and actor or several actors. The higher self, then, watches him/herself acting in the panorama of his previous or upcoming life. Sleep is also considered by theosophists as liminal; when the physical body is resting, our transcendental self is activated and is able to convey experiences from higher existence planes (Key, 180; Ancient Wisdom, 86). In fact, the periodical cycles of creation can be seen as the repetitive staging of a monodrama in which the subject--the Universal Spirit that manifests itself in the phenomenal world--acts and interacts with its alter-egos that appear in a variety of shapes and persons.

This dramatic-theatrical view of the world and the self was applied to the field of psychology by Carl du Prel, an occult-theosophical writer highly esteemed by Strindberg (see chapter 3).[4] Supported by his case studies of somnambulists, du Prel proposed a solution of "the human enigma" by setting up a tripartite constitution of the self: sense-consciousness, the unconscious, and the comprehensive transcendental subject. He maintained that man is monistic as subject and dualistic as person, being always in a split condition in the sense that sense-consciousness cannot grasp the unconscious. In other words, we wear two masks on a Janus face, one that perceives the empirical world and another turned towards the eternal and metaphysical reality. These two psychological aspects are two different "persons" of the self, which can only meet and communicate in dreams, in ecstasy, or in the case of certain mental illnesses. In

such instances the "psycho-physical threshold" that separates the two persons is lowered, which makes possible alternating consciousness and dialogues between different parts of the self.

In The Philosophy of Mysticism du Prel depicts the dreamer as a dramatist, claiming that every dream is the result of the dramatic sundering of the ego into several persons whose dialogue is an externalized staging of an inner monologue. The dream scenery is also constructed by parts of the ego. The dreamer either remains a purely receptive spectator of the scenes whose actors and landscapes seem foreign to him, or leaps onto the stage to participate in the performance. In the third kind of dream, the ego is both spectator and actor at the same time, "but the spectator nevertheless knows the actors as his own doubles."[5] Du Prel recounts an insane person who "was able to place before himself his own double, conversing and contending with him." Other patients are said to have conversed with up to fifteen invisible persons, and those "who spoke several languages heard the strange voices . . . as they themselves spoke the language of them well or ill: a circumstance most clearly indicating that it was their own Subject which divided itself into such visionary forms."[6]

We can remember similar scenes occur in Strindberg: the conservator's stream of consciousness in The Roofing Ceremony or the impersonated alter-egos in Inferno acting out roles on the stage of the narrator's mind. It is not simply a direct

influence from du Prel or other theosophist literature that I mean to suggest (or, for that matter, from Schopenhauer and Hartmann), but rather that these sources that Strindberg was familiar with were part of a larger discourse to which he also contributed and which, in turn, nurtured his own experimentation. Strindberg's contribution came to the fullest fruition in the post-Inferno plays, the dramatic inventions of which were embraced by the Expressionist playwrights, and further reverberated throughout modern drama.

The following discussions will explore Strindberg's post-Inferno plays in the context of this contemporaneous, pre-Freudian, discourse--focusing on the theosophical connections.[7] These plays grew out of a view of the world that produced prevalent metatheatrical patterns. Lionel Abel sees the philosophical background of metatheatre in the playwright's vision of "an essential illusoriness of reality" as represented earliest by Calderón and Shakespeare. With the questioning of formerly implacable values "the reality of the world is mortally affected, illusion becomes inseparable from reality. . . . As in tragedy the misfortunes of the hero must be necessary and not accidental, so in the metaplay life must be a dream and the world must be a stage."[8] Thus, metatheatre occurs in "theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized,"[9] and, we might add, in theatre pieces about the self seen as already theatricalized.

Staging the Self: *To Damascus* Part I

Strindberg's first drama after his Inferno crisis, To Damascus Part I (Till Damaskus I, 1898), deals with the protagonist's quest to recover his self through a symbolic pilgrimage. The most striking thing about him is that he has no name, no identity, he is simply called the Unknown One (hereafter referred to as the Stranger by which name he appears in most English translations). He tells the Lady, the first person he encounters in the play, that he is a "changeling" (Plays of Confession, 23), in other words, he has no idea where he comes from and who he is. He declares that "it seems to me as if I'm lying chopped to pieces in Medea's kettle simmering: Either I'll end up in the soap factory or rise up rejuvenated out of my own soup" (Plays of Confession, 29).

He confesses, however, that he is a writer, and indeed, he acts like the author of a play within the play which he invents step by step. He declares that he not only plays with death, but "I play with life--I was a writer, you know. In spite of my innate seriousness I've never been able to take anything really seriously. . . . and there are moments when I doubt life has more reality than my poems" (Plays of Confession, 22). Having no sense of the real and the self the Stranger creates reality by inventing the play of his life, striving to retrieve a self by acting out roles in it. As Abel points out, a distinct feature of metaplays is that the characters on stage become "themselves dramatists,

capable of making other situations dramatic besides the ones they originally appeared in."[10] As such a character, the Stranger conceives and stages a play within the play, one that helps him define himself and his own life-story in which he casts the other characters as actors in different roles.[11]

To begin with, he promptly involves the Lady in his fictionalized life by identifying her with his mother:

> Now your character. . . . You'll get a very good one, for your voice sounds like my dead mother's. . . . my mom never caressed me, but I remember she beat me (Plays of Confession, 24).

In the initial scene the Stranger talks to the Lady as a director who explains the role to an actor. He declares that he "got the idea you were sent either to save me or destroy me." As for the Lady's questioning as to why she should destroy him, he answers that that was her "task" ("uppgift," SS 29:10).

The Lady is thus not an independent human being for the Stranger, but a carrier of roles she is supposed to play in his story. Their initial dialogue suggests that it is he, the dramatist within the play, who has conjured her up from his own imagination:

> Stranger: There you are! I almost knew you'd come.
> Lady: So you did call me--well, I felt you did (Plays of Confession, 21).

When the Lady claims that she is "nothing," the Stranger replies: "All the better--then you're going to be something" (Plays of Confession, 26). He prefers to think of her as "impersonal and nameless" so that he might shape her

according to his needs. He decides to call her Eve, and goes on to determine her age and her character. Besides the roles of the Mother and Eve, the Stranger casts the Lady in a series of mythical roles. As a fairy-tale princess she is liberated by the Stranger from the Doctor who plays the part of the werewolf-husband. Then, casting the Lady as Judith, the Stranger appears in the role of Bluebeard, forbidding her to read his last book.[12]

The Stranger dramatizes himself, too, by identifying with various mythical figures. The enactment of Christ's passion intertwined with that of Saul's conversion into Paul on the road to Damascus are his two major parts. Both of these are structurally expressed by the plot-construction as the Stranger passes what are visually and verbally alluded to as the stations of the Cross; as well as the repetition of the stations in a reversed order after the central Asylum-scene, indicating the process of conversion. By re-enacting mythical events the Stranger succeeds in externalizing his intra-psychic conflicts by turning them into a ritual performance.

Throughout his journey the Stranger experiences a double reality: one that he perceives on the surface, and another that he discovers, sees and hears behind the appearances.[13] These two sides constantly oscillate, and he is never really sure which is the true one, as if he turned alternately two different faces towards the world. Like du Prel's higher self, the Stranger has insight into a transcendental world

mediated by the unconscious, while the divided "sense-person" perceives only appearances. The intuitions of the former are projected in the scenery or in the Stranger's visions and hallucinations that often perplex him. He discerns, for instance, in the Lady's crocheting the image of her parents' home, where he's never been before. At other times messages from his unconscious appear in the setting as mountain or cloud formations resembling giants' heads, or masts of a wrecked ship resembling the three crosses of the Golgotha; or projected into hallucinations like the tones of Mendelssohn's funeral march that pursue the Stranger wherever he goes.

He confesses to the Lady that "I don't know if it's someone else or myself I sense, but in loneliness one isn't alone. The air gets closer, the air sprouts, and beings start developing, beings who are invisible but are sensed and have life" (Plays of Confession, 22). Like the invisible doubles with whom du Prel's insane person converses, these beings step forth from the Stranger's mind ready to perform the drama of his self. These lines reveal also the dramatist's method of conjuring up figures from his inner world--like du Prel's dreaming ego.

Such figures turn out to be the rest of the characters of the play. When the Stranger meets the Beggar, he is not sure of the other's reality, and he touches him to feel if he is real. At the play's climax the Stranger awakens in an insane asylum where he is confronted with a ghost-like company of persons resembling those related to him in the

past. He again doubts their actuality, but the Abbess assures him that "they have a terrifying reality" (Plays of Confession, 65). The objectivity of other characters, such as the Beggar, the Madman, the Doctor, and even the corpse carried by the pallbearers, is questioned by the fact that the Stranger recognizes in them some aspects of his previous life and personality. As his past is thus assembled from a mosaic of scenes, and his self is reflected in the elusive mirror images of his doubles, the Stranger experiences his own life as a performance that leads him towards a deeper understanding of himself.

Strindberg thus utilized various techniques for the staging of the self in the drama which in the Author's Note (Erinran) to A Dream Play he retrospectively refers to as his earlier dream play. Like the dreaming ego in du Prel, the subject in To Damascus falls apart into the plurality of dramatis personae; its conflicts are externalized also in the scenery and in the ritual action; and its twofold aspects--the sensuous and the transcendental--are manifest in the alternating consciousness of the protagonist while the self unfolds as a play within the play.

The Dreamer as Dramatist: *A Dream Play*

In the famous Author's Note to A Dream Play (Ett drömspel, 1901) Strindberg indicates that he subordinated all events and characters in the play to a "dreaming consciousness." It is implied that everything represented

stems from the mind of a dreamer that behaves like du Prel's comprehensive and omniscient transcendental subject, the "inwardly waking dream-Ego,"[14] at times impartially observing, at other times leaping on the dream-stage to perform amidst a multitude of fragmentary figures and images. The same dream supplies all the characters of the play so that they all belong to the same self (the dreamer's) which creates their reality. However, the dream is a painful reality for the figures within the dream-world who are forced to obey the laws of its seemingly senseless logic. They experience the disharmonies of life as fragments of an unintelligible reality, and they feel themselves split, limited, and isolated, lacking contact with the higher consciousness of the dreamer: their higher self.

The god Indra's Daughter who in the play descends to earth and becomes human, expresses this loss of contact with her origin and identity when she cries out:

> Help me Father, Lord of Heaven! (silence) I can't hear his answers any more! The ether no longer carries the sound from his lips to the shell of my ear . . . the silver thread has snapped . . . Alas! I am earthbound! (Strindberg: Five Plays, 250).

The characters of the dream perceive reality as a world of appearances in which they are unable to discover any meaning. In the preface Strindberg describes awakening as a pleasure "compared with a tormenting dream" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 206). A Dream Play concludes with the image of "a wall of human faces, questioning, grieving, despairing" (Strindberg:

Five Plays, 264), the faces of those who are imprisoned in the dream, having no other reality but the dream.

In the Author's Note Strindberg compares "the apparent jumble of a dream [to] life's motley, unmanageable canvas" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 205). The structure of reality in A Dream Play is thus akin to that of Blavatsky's definition of the universe as an evanescent projection of an immutable Universal Self, the shadow play of creation when in the dream of the single subject an illusory plurality of beings is manifested.[15] However, she declares, this "will-o'-the-wisp" is "real enough to the conscious beings in it, which are as unreal as it is itself" (SD, 274).

Nevertheless, the presence of a higher self in the major characters is indicated through the metatheatrical device of role-playing within the role. In the dream they all play double roles alternating consciousness according to their earthly-physical and universal-metaphysical functions. Indra's Daughter is a divine child, in her metaphysical role she stands for the divine origin and cosmic function of the true self of man. The Officer perceives in her the "beauty that gives harmony to the universe.---I see in your lines I find only in the orbits of the solar system, in a lovely chord of music, in the vibrations of light.---You are a child of heaven." Her response, "So are you" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 210), indicates that all human beings bear within themselves a divine self which is but obscured by the roles played on earth. The Daughter herself assumes on earth

several roles to play as the earthly daughter of the Glazier, the wife of the Lawyer, and as mother. In her transcendental role she is a spectator of human life, in her earthly roles she is an actor in the play within the play. But since our empirical consciousness may not wholly grasp the realm of the unconscious where the transcendental self belongs, the Daughter on earth constantly vacillates between her two roles, her earthly duties and her divine calling.[16]

The other main characters also represent twofold identities, they too, play simultaneously an earthly and a transcendental role. The Glazier is not only the Daughter's earthly father, but it is also he who eventually opens with his diamond the door that hides the answer to the riddle of the universe.[17] The Officer in his earthly role experiences the paradoxes of human emotions which he cannot understand. But his bewilderment and suffering is explained by his universal role, namely, during the initial scenes he is a prisoner in the castle, and it is Indra's Daughter who arrives to set him free. In his transcendental role, according to Gnostic symbolism as suggested by Harry G. Carlson, he represents the soul held captive by matter.[18] The Lawyer is both a husband and a father on earth, and at the same time a Christ figure in his metaphysical role: he takes upon himself the sins of others, and he receives a crown of thorns instead of the doctor's wreath. The Poet in his transcendental role becomes, with the help of the Daughter, a

seer, mediator between heaven and earth. In order to stay connected with his earthly self, he takes "mud-baths."

After landing on earth, Indra's daughter, the transcendental subject, becomes the spectator of a series of scenes as human life unfolds in front of her. It is a spectacle of which she is a viewer, but at the same time, she is drawn into it more and more as an actor as well. The other characters are alternately actors and the Daughter's guides through the scenes of human life.[19] They explain to her the meaning of a particular scene, and she as a spectator asks questions and comments on what she sees. In this way a play within the play is created (scenes from human life are performed for the Daughter, and with the Daughter) which also strengthens the sense of life as unreal and dreamlike as the characters glide in and out of scenes, change identities and roles, as Strindberg writes in the Author's Note, they "split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense, fragment, cohere" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 205).[20]

The ever-transforming scene-image reveals a course of spatial intrusion, moving from the surface towards underlying depths. Spatial movement happens either by the removal of backdrops within the same scenery, or by open-scene changes when previously featuring objects re-appear in different functions. In this manner, dramatic space is multiplied by the transformations of the scene-image, while the unchanged visual elements evoke a sense of continuity indicating that we view ever deeper regions of the same space.[21]

As Indra's Daughter embarks on a journey stepping into the "growing castle," she keeps following an inward motion, passing through the landscapes of the self where "time and space do not exist" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 205). Even seemingly outdoor or distant locations such as Fingal's Cave or Fairhaven are contained within the castle, which is thus ever growing in a metaphysical sense. The Daughter is guided through a landscape where the double coding of the images indicates that what we see is different from what it actually is, evoking a double vision of reality. Beyond the transformations of the physical space--the world of illusions--there lies a metaphysical unity and depth expressed by visual continuity and spatial intrusion.

After reaching Fairhaven, most of the Daughter's stations reappear in an inverted order as if she was wandering backwards along the same path. Finally we are again outside the castle. After having said farewell to earth, the Daughter re-enters the castle which now stands in flames, to ascend again to heaven through the cleansing power of fire. She steps back into the realm of the unconscious, and the dream comes to an end. The spectacle has ended, and the grieving and questioning faces emerge, the faces of those who, after awakening, are left in the world of appearances where their senses perceive only illusion and cannot reach beyond to the transcendental self.

The Two Sides of the Cosmic Screen: *The Ghost Sonata*

In The Ghost Sonata (Spöksonaten, 1907) the transcendental self goes astray in a deceptive maze of masks, this time journeying through the rooms of a bourgeois house, instead of a growing castle. The spatial dynamics of the play follow again an inward movement. Scene One takes place in front of the house; in Scene Two we are in the round room of the house, and Scene Three leads us further inside to the Young Lady's room with the hyacinths. Physically, it is a journey through the house; metaphysically, a penetration from a surface of appearances to the heart of reality; and psychologically, an exploration of the inner realms and layers of the self, peeling off the masks and gazing into the depths of the soul.

The process of unveiling the world of illusions and unmasking the self is connected to liminal situations which in theosophy are described as transitions--after death or in sleep--from the physical plane to Kama-Loka on the astral plane, and further on to Devachan on the mental plane (see Chapter 4). All these planes, however, are not thought of in terms of physical space, but as coexistent mental states all of which we are not simultaneously conscious of, but which we experience with different--in everyday life unconscious--aspects of our self (Key, 100; Ancient Wisdom, 90).

The Ghost Sonata can be seen as an exploration of this process of transition through the state of being in Kama-Loka (which is also the play's subtitle) to that of Devachan, a

further station after death. But since these states exist within ourselves, the play does not necessarily represent an actual journey into death, but an internal journey, an unmasking of the personality in order to discover the inner self. In this light the house--like the growing castle in A Dream Play--stands for the self, and the dramatis personae are impersonated aspects of the self.

Gradually, as the protagonist, named the Student, advances from the street, past the facade of the building into inner rooms where he witnesses as the inhabitants are stripped of their masks, the house grows into a metaphor of the theatricality of both life and the self. Before the Student embarks on his journey, the apparition Milkmaid washes his inflamed eyes, so that he can see better. The motif of vision is central to the play, both thematically (the Student, being a "Sunday-child," is a "seer," having visions imperceptible to others) and in the theatrical sense of viewing spectacles. This effect is achieved by the display of what we could call framed sub-spaces within the main space of action, a device that creates at the same time a kind of labyrinthine feeling. The sub-spaces allow a view either into the room of the following or the previous scene, or open up side-rooms, or mark off a space within the space as they reveal scenes (dumb-shows and tableaux vivants) to the audience and the characters in the main-space. In Scene One such performances occur in the windows through which the Student looks into the house. In Scene Two in the closet

where the Mummy lives and the Old Man hangs himself, and in the doorways through which pantomimed scenes in the neighboring rooms can be seen. In Scene Three characters from Scene Two still sitting in the round room are seen through the door upstage right, and an infernal Cook appears in the kitchen door on the left. As the Young Lady is dying in the last scene of the play, a Japanese "death-screen" is placed around her and the hyacinth room disappears as Böcklin's painting "Toten-Insel" ("The Isle of the Dead") appears as backdrop. It is seemingly a space outside the house, but metaphysically can be interpreted as the innermost region into which the Student can penetrate after all the external veils have fallen.

In The Ghost Sonata we find the most elaborate linking of the house symbol to the theatre of life and the self. In Scene One the Student is looking at the facade of the house while the Old Man tells him the stories of all the dwellers appearing in the windows and doorways. The Old Man thus dramatizes the other characters of the play for the Student who becomes in this way a spectator of a play within the play. The fictional, and thus the existential and metaphysical, layers are multiplied as the characters in the windows and doorways pantomime scenes while the Old Man comments on them for the Student:

> Ah, there's my dear little girl. Look at her, look!-- She's talking to the flowers. Isn't she like a blue hyacinth herself? . . . Here comes the Colonel with a newspaper. . . . He's pointing out your picture! She's

> interested . . . she's reading about your bravery (Strindberg: Five Plays, 274).

At the conclusion of Scene One, the Old Man, acting as dramatist and director, suddenly involves the Student in the play within the play drawing him within its frame of reference. The Student Arkenholz is dramatized, he is now forced to transform from spectator into actor, and the metatheatrical arrangement suddenly turns around; the windows are now theatre boxes and the street with the Student is the stage:

> (The Old Man enters standing in his wheelchair, drawn by one of the beggars, and followed by the others.)
> Old Man: Hail the noble youth, who at the risk of his own life, rescued so many in yesterday's accident! Hail Akenholz! (The Beggars bare their heads but do not cheer. At the window the Young Lady waves her handkerchief. The Colonel stares out his window. The Old Woman rises at her window. The Maid on the balcony raises the flag to the top) (Strindberg: Five Plays, 123).

This metatheatrical composition of the initial scene causes life to appear as a theatre piece, a stage illusion of which the Student is at once spectator and actor as he gradually learns about it as a witness, and experiences it as a participant. Like the dreaming ego in A Dream Play, he is the visionary transcendental self who, drawn onto the stage, temporarily loses his clear vision and falls for the masquerade.

In other chamber plays, written during the same period, Strindberg utilizes the house symbol in a similar manner for the theatricalization of the world and the self. In the elegiac Storm Weather (Oväder, 1907) the elderly Gentleman

lives in the illusion that resignation can bring one peace. However, life turns out to be a drama that mercilessly intrudes even upon those who try to withdraw from it. The house the Gentleman lives in stands as a symbol for the theatre of life where "there've been dramas" (Chamber Plays, 5), and his Brother observes that "those four red shades look like theatre curtains with bloody melodramas in rehearsal behind them" (Chamber Plays, 5). As it turns out, the two brothers indeed play roles in the melodrama that takes place behind that window, their fates being intimately related to those who live there. The Gentleman finds the theatricality of life frightening, and he recounts for his brother his most painful experience when he realized that human beings including his wife, conceal their true selves behind deceptive masks and play-acting:

> I saw it once in a look from the most beautiful eyes I've known--looking out at me like some beast of prey . . . I literally became so frightened I looked behind her to see whether there were someone else standing there, the face was so masklike (Chamber Plays, 27).

Another chamber play, The Burned House (Brända tomten, 1907), centers around the unmasking of a deceptive world of appearances. After being away for thirty years the elderly Stranger returns to his place of birth and finds his childhood home burnt down. The fire had brought to light the double walls within the house showing that the neatly painted surfaces had only served to hide the crimes and the misery of the inhabitants, a terrible reality behind the respectful

appearances. The peeled off paint and the collapsed walls correspond to the unmasking of the inhabitants of the house.

The Stranger possesses a double vision of reality as a result of a suicide attempt after which he was lying in the mortuary for some time. As he claims, upon his awakening he could see both sides of life, the masked, illusory one, and the true one. From that time on he saw himself "as someone else, and I observed, I studied, this other self" (Chamber Plays, 76). Consequently, he now experiences life as a theatre piece "that was being staged especially for me" (Chamber Plays, 68).

In the Ghost Sonata, simultaneously with the physical intrusion from the facade of the house towards its innermost spaces, the characters psychologically intrude into one another by revealing one another's secrets hidden behind the masks. In Scene Two the Old Man unmasks the Colonel by revealing that his name, rank, family relations, and even his looks are false. At the "ghost supper" he goes on to unmask the other participants, but eventually the Mummy reveals that neither he is what he seems to be, and in a symbolic gesture of unmasking she passes her hand over his face saying: "This is you!" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 288) as a result of which the Old Man has to die. Finally in Scene Three the Student discloses the truth behind the false appearances in an exalted speech:

> There's something rotting here! And I thought this was a paradise the first time I saw you enter here. . . . I saw a colonel who wasn't a colonel. I had a noble benefactor who was a bandit and had to hang himself. I saw a mummy

> who wasn't a mummy, and a maiden--which reminds me: where is virginity to be found? Where is beauty? . . . Where is anything that fulfills its promise! In my imagination! (Strindberg: Five Plays, 295).

The mention of lost virginity in the context of a world of veils and masks suggests an interesting connection with the esoteric interpretation of the Fall. According to Blavatsky, primeval man "became despiritualized or tainted with matter, and then, for the first time, was given the fleshy body which is typified in Genesis in that profoundly significant verse: 'Unto Adam also and his wife did the Lord God make coats of skin, and clothed them'[Genesis III. 21]" (Isis 1:149).

Du Prel interprets the same biblical passage "in the spirit of the secret sciences," which teach that man is a materialization of a transcendental subject. He maintains that the state of Paradise is man's pre-existence. The story of the Fall describes man's birth on earth which corresponds his banishment from Paradise as a result of which we have become unconscious of our transcendental being. The "coats of skin" with which God clothed Adam end Eve, "are the earthly bodies about which they were ashamed . . . whereas they did not feel ashamed about their previous nudity of their etheric body."[22]

In the Ghost Sonata the Young Lady is a seemingly innocent sacrifice, yet, she would not marry the Student, for she is "sick at the very source of life" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 296), that is, being born in matter, she is guilty of the original sin, and as such, severed from the pure

spiritual self. The masks and costumes in which the higher self enters the stage of the phenomenal world, express thus a delusion, a blindness towards one's true being.

In this light, the Young Lady's death caused by the series of unveilings and unmaskings in the house--i.e. in the self--is a liberation from the prison of the body and the world of illusion; a re-entrance into Paradise where one is "greeted by a sun that does not burn, in a home without dust, by friends who cause no pain, by love without flaw" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 269). The Young Lady's death exemplifies how Buddha's hope for a heaven rising up out of the earth (Strindberg: Five Plays, 269) may come to fulfillment. Now that the masks are torn and the deceptive surfaces are peeled off, the Student's spiritual vision is also restored. He stands at the threshold for another plane of existence, which is revealed only for those who, like the Young Lady, cross over to the other side of the cosmic screen.

History as the Theatre of the Cosmic Evolution

The stage of the self is expanded to a grander scale in Strindberg's post-Inferno view of history. In his essay "The Mysticism of World History" ("Världshistoriens mystik," 1903) the course of history is viewed as a staging of the evolution of mankind by a higher conscious will. This notion of a conscious will purposefully working throughout history differs from Schopenhauer's blind force, the will that seeks

gratification in the sensuous world. Strindberg in this respect is closer to Hegel's notion of the theatre of world history through which the Spirit strives for an ever greater consciousness of freedom.[23] But Strindberg's view of history at this time seems to have even stronger connections with a theosophical brand of occultism where the world process serves the Universal Spirit's plan for cosmic evolution. During this process, physical, moral, and spiritual equilibrium is maintained by Karma, the law of cause and effect of actions, which imposes both freedom and responsibility upon the individual (SD 1:635-645, Key 200-219). Blavatsky also talks about collective or national Karma generated by individuals belonging to the same society, especially by those in power (Key, 202-203, 244-45).

In the second part of The Secret Doctrine Blavatsky describes the great epochs in the evolution of mankind through the periodical appearance and decline of the civilizations of the seven root-races. History is seen as a drama staged by the Universal Spirit; a play that evolves out of a higher consciousness that conceives a purposeful pattern of evolution. All beings labor unconsciously towards the fulfillment of the goal, which is mankind's re-union with the source of being, the One, the Universal Spirit. As Annie Besant claims,

> there are certain great principles according to which our system is built . . . [and] hosts of inferior beings who act . . . as agents, as instruments; there are Egos of men intermingled with all these, performing their share

> in the great cosmic drama (Esoteric Christianity, 106-07).

Strindberg in "The Mysticism of World History" presents a similar view of history. It seems to him

> as if the world soul had forced its way down into the consciousness of the masses everywhere at the same moment, revealed itself and been transformed according to each people's ability to understand and express it. . . . [T]his soul is influenced from without and fashioned as an instrument for a will that exists outside us . . . , which leads the destinies of peoples and individuals from above (Selected Essays, 183).

After completing what he calls his excursions through world history, Strindberg concludes that "this secretive aspect of the world process which we cannot explain, this unconscious aspiration of mankind which is unaware of the goal but at the service of the conscious will, is what I have called mysticism" (Selected Essays, 219). This goal is the unification of mankind, in both political and spiritual terms, which can only be accomplished through "the internal interaction of conflicting forces" (Selected Essays, 219), that is, dramatically.

In the same essay Strindberg compares history to chemical processes as he considers the role of historical personalities serving alternately the integration and disintegration of peoples, religions, and cultures:

> The one unites, the other divides, and vice versa, but with every return to the old, something new has been added. This undertaking bears a strong resemblance to the chemical analysis in which one precipitates a solution and then dissolves the precipitate in order to precipitate again, and in both cases one remains in ignorance about the process, for only the result is visible (Selected Essays, 219).

Strindberg considers historical figures and events occurring simultaneously at different geographical locations as manifestations of a single conscious will. This approach to history reveals both a connection with his avowed scientific monism of the 1890s, and a kinship with the "dreamplay technique" in which a single dreaming consciousness manifests in the plurality of splitting, merging, interacting actors: different aspects of the same self. As in Jardin des plantes Strindberg's ambition was to trace an infinite relatedness behind the apparent disorder of nature, so in history he attempted to discern a meaningful pattern behind seemingly chance events and collisions of passions and interests of historical figures and peoples. But, like the grieving faces in the ending tableau of A Dream Play, the great personalities of history, whether they are dividers or unifiers, are unaware of their functions and of the higher will that they are the agents of. As Strindberg has Luther say in his world-historical drama The Nightingale of Wittenberg (Näktergalen i Wittenberg, 1903), "God is all-powerful! He rules, and we are mere harlequins and marionettes!" (WHP, 109).

Strindberg's essay on the mysticism of world history was written as a preliminary study for his planned cycle of fifteen five-act plays covering world history which, however, remained unfinished. Besides The Nightingale of Wittenberg he completed only an additional trilogy about Moses, Socrates, and Christ, that have the effect, as Brandell

observes, of sketchy tableaux vivants or historical dioramas.[24] Unfortunately, however, none of these plays achieve a dramatic expression of the ideas developed in the essay, they remain on the level of illustration.

The Nightingale of Wittenberg which dramatically is perhaps the most successful among the world-historical plays, deals with the German religious reformer Luther, not as an autonomous character, but as an individual who carries out a task in the evolution of mankind, in the role of a destroyer and divider. The other main character is the mysterious Doctor Johannes (Faust), an outsider who observes from a distance how Luther fulfills his function, acting at the same time as the all-knowing dramatist. In the midst of political bouts he declares, almost as if quoting from Strindberg's essay on world history:

> I am a spectator who retains his common sense when the rest lose theirs. . . . Everything you utter is empty sound--and the roads you take do not lead to where you imagine! He who is, has been and shall remain, smiles at you, but uses you! (WHP, 84).

The same theatricality pervades several of Strindberg post-Inferno plays about Swedish history, particularly Queen Christina (1901), Carl XII (1901), and Gustav III (1902). As Michael Robinson points out, history for Strindberg "resembles nothing so much as a play 'satt iscen' ('staged')" and his late history plays reveal a "self-conscious theatricality . . . by stressing the element of play, role play, and performance."[25]

The royal protagonist of Gustav III, as the most characteristic example, is presented as an actor in the play of his nation's history. He constantly rehearses his role in front of a mirror, wears masks and costumes, carefully plans his entrées and exits, being aware of his own theatricality:

> King (now looks into the wall mirror directly opposite his place): Where shall I begin?
> Armfelt: At the beginning!
> King: What's that--a catchword, Armfelt? (Queen Christina, 213).

His rule is a ceremonious performance in the eyes of his subjects, as the aristocrat Fersen remarks at the court carnival, "apparently there's a masquerade here the whole year round" (Queen Christina, 260). Behind the scenes the King plays the role of the conspirator including the plotting of a coup d'état, while he wonders if "perhaps the whole thing is a play?" (Queen Christina, 235). But however self-consciously Gustav acts imagining himself the playwright and the director in control of the stage, on the whole he is a blind tool serving the ends of a higher player. He is not only an actor but also a chess figure moved by invisible hands. At the end of the play it is the Queen who unknowingly saves him from assassination, and as they are reconciled, he declares that "the queen is the strongest piece in the game and has the function of protecting the king" (Queen Christina, 265). This play illustrates most prominently Strindberg's view of history in "The Mysticism of World History," as "an enormous game of chess played by a single player who moves both black and white, is completely

impartial. . . , is for himself and against himself, . . . and has only one aim: to maintain balance and justice while ending the match in a draw!" (Selected Essays, 191).

In Strindberg's theory as advanced in his essay on the mysticism of world history the conscious will is a progressive force that acts benevolently behind the scenes, and seems to delight in the colorful and often whimsical spectacle that mankind produces. However, the delicate balance between individual freedom and lawful necessity that characterizes the world historical process in Strindberg's essay--as it does in theosophy by the linked concepts of cosmic evolution and Karma--did not find an adequate dramatic expression in the history plays. The dramas that meant to demonstrate Strindberg's theory, reduce the individuals to marionettes in the hands of a higher will; powerless, if gifted, actors who live in the delusion that they act on their own account.

The Last "Stage": The Actor Seeks the Self

Strindberg's final play, The Great Highway (Stora landsvägen, 1909), is a dramatic poem that recapitulates all the central themes of the post-Inferno plays in a rather bitter, at times elegiac, at times satirical tone. It is a pilgrimage play in seven scenes, a journey through life with seven stations to the grave, symbolic of Christ's passion. Strindberg's last play maintains the sense of the world as a stage and human life as role playing of the masked self. The

hero's quest, to find himself, seems only possible by leaving earthly life behind. One of the characters, the Japanese who prepares to commit a ritual suicide, expresses

> the humiliation of living,
> a mere skeleton in a dress of flesh, . . .
> And the soul, the spirit, sits there in the heart,
> like a bird in the bosom's cage (Five Plays, 340).

This painful summation of human life on earth echoes the complaints of Indra's Daughter in A Dream Play who suffered most "from just--being alive: from sensing my vision dimmed by my eyes, my hearing muffled by my ears, and my thoughts, my bright, airy thoughts trapped in that labyrinth of fatty coils in my brain" (Strindberg: Five Plays, 262).

At the beginning of The Great Highway the protagonist, named the Hunter, seeks "the self that I lost down there" (Five Plays, 303) high up in the mountains. He is painfully aware of the inherent theatricality of life which implies that his true self keeps eluding him. He only wishes to

> sit
> among the audience and watch the play!
> But I must mount the stage, take part and act,
> and once I play a part, I'm lost,
> forgetting who I am (Five Plays, 304).

The Hermit, however, sends him back to continue to play his part. The Hunter meets the Traveler on the road, and the two of them agree that they keep "incognito," and introduce themselves as the role they play in the theatre of life:

> The Hunter. I am a soldier.
> The Traveler. And I a traveler.
> One travels best incognito and--mark my words--
> one should always make acquaintance,
> but never get to know.
> In fact, one never can--

> one only thinks one knows. And so,
> in company--neither friend nor enemy--
> two steps between us--not too close (Five Plays, 305).

The stations on the Hunter's journey through life are presented as scenes from a performance at which he and his temporary companion, the Traveler, are spectators. Sometimes, however, they are tricked into playing parts in the scenes. In Scene Two, at the windmills, the Hunter and the Traveler witness the quarrel between the miller of the mill Adam and that of the mill Eve. When the millers appear, the Hunter warns his companion that "here come the actors. . . . The play's beginning. An idyll of the windmills." The Traveler replies that they are about to see "a pastoral in minor-key. We'll watch" (Five Plays, 307-08). When a new character, a young girl, enters, the Hunter declares "full stop. Now the scene begins" (Five Plays, 311).

The Hunter and the Traveler are careful not to be "dragged into" (Five Plays, 308) the play as actors, but to remain impartial spectators. Yet, the role of the detached observer turns out to be a delusion as well. In Scene Two, the Traveler borrows the Hunter's glasses to see the performance better, and he discovers on them "crystallized water--or salt. A tear that has dried" (Five Plays, 307). He now imagines that he can look behind the Hunter's mask:

> Ah, he weeps often! But in secret.
> Rivulets of tears have carved a course,
> down from the eyes to the smiling mouth
> to quench the smile that would kindle a laugh.
> Poor human being!
> Your mask is torn (Five Plays, 308).

It is our mask that makes us travel "incognito even to ourselves," as the Girl remarks (Five Plays, 313). The Schoolteacher, who is too clever for the accepted standards of the town Assesdean, puts on asses' ears to mask himself when his compatriot approaches. "I must disguise myself," he says, "or he'll think me sane and have me shut up" (Five Plays, 318). Again in another town, Tophet ('Hell'), the Traveler rightly feels that "there'll be plenty of free shows here" (Five Plays, 327). Wherever the Hunter and the Traveler might wander, they can never flee from life's demand to play-act in the cosmic theatre. Stumbling on the grave of an acquaintance, the Hunter reproaches even the dead for participating in this game:

> Yes, I knew you,
> but you would never learn to know yourself . . .
> and you, you went disguised through life,
> your long and heavy life;
> When I unmasked you, then you died (Five Plays, 338).

Despite its dark view, the play confirms the hope of finding one's true self and a truer life in "the country of Desires" (Five Plays, 341), after having stepped down from the stage of this world and thrown off the masks. Confined to live in a world where, as the Hunter concludes, "the deepest of human suffering [is that] I could not be the one I longed to be" (Five Plays, 351), man is in constant search for identity. Strindberg's last play takes us to the borderline marked by this longing, it ends at the verge of the abyss that separates dream from reality, the actor from the self.

How, then, do these plays constitute Strindberg's cosmic theatre? Having theatricalized both nature and the cosmos in his scientific prose and social and psychological processes in his novels, Strindberg in his post-Inferno plays developed the theatre into a metaphor of the human condition. In these, masking and play-acting define the life of the individual, of nations, and of mankind as a whole. Man's self, moreover, is nothing but an illusionistic theatre on the multi-level stage of which unfolds the internal drama as a play within the play. The ego is split into spectators and actors, watching its own reflections and doubles treading the stage; and at the same time the self is also the dramatist and director of the plays of existence, evolution, and history.

The modern experience of the fragmentation and alienation of the self and of reality led Strindberg to develop dramatic techniques soon to be utilized by Expressionist drama and theatre. Such techniques, as we have seen, are the projection of inner psychic states into visual and auditory phenomena, ritualized action, and cyclical pilgrimage-structure; the staging of the self broken up into its personified aspects; metatheatrical structures that serve the multiplication of fictional planes, the doubling of the self, and the evocation of dream-scenery.

All this implies a radical transformation of dramatic character as well as of the spatial-temporal structures of drama. Human beings may no longer act following the demands

of their identities or of a tangible reality. Rather, they behave as if trapped in their masks or in a dream of an unknown dreamer; and a hope for a true and essential reality and the revelation of identity behind the masks lies beyond death, or made briefly perceptible in dreams. The "plot" becomes a penetration of masks and a journey within the self where time and space do not exist.

Here Strindberg joins into the discourse of his time. Both Schopenhauer and Hartmann turned reality into illusion by making the object dependent on the subject. Theosophists, on the other hand, offered the notion of a unified, transcendental subject as the individual basis of the ego whose perplexing fragmentation is but temporary illusion. In Strindberg's plays reality is subjectified as a product of mental activity, conscious will, or unconscious dream. Strindberg dramatized creative and illusionistic techniques by exploiting the analogies between theatre and dream and theatre and the world process; thereby he inflated the subject so that it would contain the entire universe and embrace mankind. However, the single subject--the actor behind the multitude of masks, shadows, doubles, and reflections--keeps eluding, revealing itself only partially or temporarily through the veils of a dreamworld or from a distance. A sense of ambivalence arises from the double function of the cosmic theatre--on the one hand, it makes possible the quest for the undivided self, and on the other,

it thrives on the insurmountable division between the self and its appearences.

Notes:

[1]For details see Brandell, Strindberg in Inferno; and Carlson, Out of Inferno.

[2]Interestingly for our discussion, this philosophical-psychological discourse shows a gradual appropriation of the theatrical metaphor for the illustration of both metaphysical and social processes and that of the constitution of the self. This continued into the twentieth century with Freud who analyzed the psychic apparatus in dramatic terms as conflicting impulses of the id, the ego, and the super-ego, viewed the conflicting instincts of the psyche by analogy of the dramas and myths of antiquity, and considered dream the staging of unconscious desire. See, for example, Sigmund Freud, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949). Today the theatrical metaphor is utilized even by the anthropological and sociological theories of scholars such as Victor Turner or Erving Goffmann (see introduction).

[3]Eduard von Hartmann, Philosophy of the Unconscious: Speculative Results according to the Inductive Method of Physical Science, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1931), 5. The original German edition, Philosophie des Unbewussten, appeared in 1869; Strindberg participated in the Swedish translation published in 1877-78. Strindberg's friend, the philosopher and psychologist Axel Herrlin describes the profound significance of Hartmann's philosophy for the intellectuals of Lund, including Strindberg, at the turn of the century; see Från sekelslutets Lund, 41-98.

[4]My rendering of du Prel's ideas is based on his most popular work, Die Philosophie der Mystik, first published in 1885.

[5]Carl du Prel, The Philosophy of Mysticism 1:123.

[6]Ibid., 142.

[7]By "pre-Freudian discourse" I mean to indicate that although Freud's work appeared in publication already during Strindberg's post-Inferno period (The Interpretation of Dreams came out in 1901, the same year as A Dream Play was written), there is no evidence that Strindberg knew Freud. On the other hand, they both shared sources of inspiration, including the works of Carl du Prel. Besides several references to The Philosophy of Mysticism Freud makes a statement in the 1914 edition of The Interpretation of Dreams concerning "the brilliant mystic Du Prel, one of the few authors for whose neglect in earlier editions of this book I should wish to express my regret, declares that the gateway to metaphysics, . . . lies not in waking life but in the dream" (The Interpretation of Dreams, trans. James Strachey [New York: Basic Books, 1955], 63, footnote 2). We can also hear echoes from du Prel in Freud's remarks on the splitting of the ego: "The ego can take itself as an object, . . . can observe itself, criticize itself. . . . In this, one part of the ego is setting itself over against the rest. So the ego can be split; it splits itself during a number of its functions--temporarily at least. Its parts can come together again afterwards" (Sigmund Freud,

New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, trans. James Strachey [New York: W.W. Norton, 1965], 58). For a Freudian interpretation of, for example, A Dream Play see Evert Sprinchorn, "The Logic of A Dream Play," Modern Drama 5 (December 1962): 352-65.

[8]Abel, Metatheatre, 79.

[9]Ibid., 60, 62.

[10]Ibid., 62.

[11]Richard Hornby considers the sturctures of a play within the play, role playing within the role, and ceremony within the play as varieties of the "metadramatic" in his Drama, Metadrama and Perception (Lewisburg, PA.: Bucknell University Press, 1986), 49-87.

[12]Since my focus is on theosophical and related theatrical implications, I only occasionally touch upon the surface of an extremely rich mythical symbolism that pervades these plays; for an exhaustive mythopoeic analysis of To Damascus, A Dream Play, and The Ghost Sonata see Harry G. Carlson, Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth, 92-123.

[13]Analyzing To Damascus Egil Törnqvist concludes that Strindberg applies "his double-vision method to practically all play elements, manages to make the audience experience--not just rationally learn--that life is a 'terrible half reality' . . . a dream-like mystery, a battle with shadows" (Strindbergian Drama, 95).

[14]Du Prel, The Philosophy of Mysticism, 1:123.

[15]As we saw in chapter 4, Torsten Hedlund described the same process in the Danube Letter as the "emanation from the One, existence as the All--collectively--, return up into the One. . . . movement, combination, life incessantly clothe the eternally immutable Individuality in new qualifications."

[16]As du Prel explains, in the case of one subject falling apart into two persons, "the man of manifest consciousness is only one person of a Subject, whose other person belongs at the same time to another order of things--to a metaphysical world" (The Philosophy of Mysticism, 2:69). In the The Secret Doctrine Blavatsky talks about the so called Dhyani Buddhas emanating from the Universal Spirit, which, in turn, "create from themselves . . . celestial Selves--the super-human Bodhisattvas. These incarnating at the beginning of every human cycle on earth as mortal men, become . . . Boddhisattvas among the Sons of Humanity, after which they may re-appear as Manushi (human) Buddhas" (SD 1:571). In a Buddhist context Harry G. Carlson identified Indra's Daughter with such a Bodhisattva, a future Buddha who has compassion for all beings, as the Daughter's recurring line "human beings are to be pitied" imply. Cf. Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth, 177-18.

[17]Evert Sprinchorn suggests that the door in A Dream Play alludes to Haeckel's Die Welträtsel (The Riddle of the Universe, 1892), the summation of his monistic philosophy on a materialist ground, claiming that carbon is the chemical basis of life; according to Sprinchorn, the

diamond corresponds to Haeckel's carbon. See "The Zola of the Occult" in Strindberg and Modern Theatre, 103-104. On the other hand, Strindberg had a marked copy of Carl Du Prel's Das Rätsel des Menschen (The Riddle of Man) in which the author proposes a monistic doctrine of the soul in a similar vein as in The Philosophy of Mysticism. Although both Haeckel and du Prel preach monism, they are on opposing grounds, since the former plainly refutes the idea of a soul or transcendental reality. As for the diamond, we find an interesting passage in the The Secret Doctrine that might be related here. Blavatsky explains that the Logos is a ray emanating from the universal Spirit, and "as the Lord of all Mysteries he cannot manifest, but sends into the world of manifestation his heart--the 'diamond heart'. . . . from whom emanate the seven . . . Dhyani Buddhas. . . . from the world of incorporeal being, . . . wherein the Intelligences . . . have neither shape nor name" (SD 1:571). No wonder, then, that in A Dream Play the children of the corporeal world can see nothing behind the door opened with the diamond.

[18]Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth, 157.

[19]Du Prel discusses the appearance of benevolent guides in the dreams of somnambulists as personifications of the natural healing powers of the organism, but, he adds, "when alleviation is partial, good and bad spirits appear in conflict" (The Philosophy of Mysticism, 1:118).

[20]Peter Szondi noted the epic distance between the Daughter and the scenes presented for her. He defines the structure of A Dream Play as a "revue" showing scenes of human life to the Daughter-spectator. See Theory of the Modern Drama, ed. and trans. Michel Hays, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 29 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 28. Richard Bark finds the key to Strindberg's dreamplay technique in the dramatic structure that differentiates the represented world by setting up several fictional levels. Dream atmosphere, which involves transformation and the abolition of space and time, may arise when a character in the play is in a dreamlike situation on the same fictional level as the dreamlike; or when a character is not on the same level as the dreamlike but regards it as a spectator of a play within the play; or when the reader/spectator is given the role of the dreamer of the dreamlike. Cf. Strindbergs drömspelteknik, 58-76.

[21]Harry G. Carlson observes that behind the scene changes there is "a critical continuity of identity between the two scenes. Objects have changed, but somehow remain the same. One implication is that no matter how the locations may seem to differ from each other, underneath they are fundamentally alike: we are still in a world of illusion and pain" (Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth , 165)

[22]Carl du Prel, Das Rätsel de Menschen: Einleitung in das Studium der Geheimwissenschaften (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., [1892]), 98-99.

[23]Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, Introduction to "The Philosophy of History," trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1988), 12-22.

[24]Cf. Gunnar Brandell, Strindberg - Ett författarliv, 4:237. All three plays were written in 1903, entitled Genom öknar till arvland (Through

Deserts to Ancestral Lands), Hellas, and Lammet och vildjuret (The Lamb and the Beast).

[25]Michael S. Robinson "History and His-Story" in Strindberg and History, ed. Birgitta Steene (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1992), 53.

Conclusion

Patterns resulting in a cosmic-existential theatricality became, as we saw, prevalent in Strindberg's writing from the 1890s, subsequently to his acquaintance with theosophy. While this theatricality increased in significance, gradually absorbing the whole universe of the works, it found the most original and effective form of expression in the post-Inferno plays. The new dramaturgy that evolved from this thorough theatricalization of the world and the self, challenged all conventional dramatic conceptions, including the representation of space, time, character, and plot. It also encompassed areas that, though anticipated by the Romantics, were previously not commonly treated in drama: the interior, the mental, and the unconscious domains of experience. The ego became a projecting center of the plays, a structural organizing principle. At the same time, it was equated with a transcendental and cosmic reality, which saved the drama from pure interiority.

The dramaturgy that Strindberg developed while formulating his cosmic theatre anticipates many major developments of what can be called modernist drama. Its influence is felt in the Expressionist cry and messianic hope for the new man; in the Existentialist and Absurdist experience of total estrangement in an often claustrophobic existence; or in the Pirandellian twists of the mask and the self, reality and illusion. Strindberg theatricalized the

world in a way which was impossible to overlook by playwrights who followed him.

Martin Esslin thinks that Strindberg's To Damascus trilogy "provided a model for the Expressionist type of play, often conceived as a human being's quest for spiritual regeneration through a series of stages on his upward path." This could only be realized as the outward projection of an inner reality, Esslin continues, and "hence Expressionist drama is full of Doppelgänger figures, characters which are merely aspects of the hero's personality which have split off and have taken on an independent existence."[1] These techniques, basic to Strindberg's cosmic theatre, were pre-figured in the theosophical process of the spiritual evolution of man parallel with that of cosmos, as well as in the idea of the Universal Spirit (or the transcendental self) splitting up into the plurality of dramatis personae on the stage of the phenomenal world and, by analogy, in the dramatic world of the dream. The former anticipates the structure of expressionist stationendrama, the latter, as we saw, is transformed by Strindberg into a dreamplay-technique, and in turn, utilized by the expressionists as the Ausstrehlungen des Ichs.

James McFarlane sees metatheatricality--the ambiguous interrelation of the "fictive" and the "real" together with the self-conscious acting across the footlights--a typically modernist aspect of drama, derived to a large extent from Strindberg, especially from A Dream Play.[2] Experiments with

metatheatricality, both as the self-reflective feature of the theatre and as a paradigm of the human condition, was continued in the drama of Adamov, Pinter, and Beckett.

In an attempt to circumscribe "the mind of modernism" McFarlane discusses such polarities of the late-nineteenth-century cultural climate as the triumph of positivist science and at the same time an increasing interest in the irrational, mystical, and unconscious phenomena, exemplified by the theosophical movement:

> With the creation of the Theosophical Society in America in 1875, the beginnings of a switch of emphasis from social to individual preoccupations received an early measure of formal recognition. . . . [T]he newly formed society . . . also stimulated the serious and systematic investigation of 'occultism'--all those mystic, anti-positivist and irrational potencies of life and matter which now, progressively as the century moved towards its turn, occupied the attention of thinkers and writers . . . . [T]heosophy was concerned to effect individual rather than social change as the key to human advancement. . . . In flat contradiction to the statistical abstractions of the positivist view of things, it believed ardently in the existence of an ego-entity . . . which could . . . contribute effectively to the fuller development of mankind.[3]

Theosophy was certainly not the only model for an existential theatricality. Strindberg's life-long interest in Shakespeare is well known, and he knew of course Calderón, who presented the world as a stage and life as a dream in his dramatic allegories. Glancing back on earlier times, we find again that Plato was the first to make the world seem theatrical. Yet, Strindberg did not simply imitate examples from the antiquity and the Renaissance, but through the theatrical metaphor and its metatheatrical implications he

developed techniques for coping with the dilemmas and ambiguities of the modern consciousness.

Strindberg's cosmic theatre subverts Western conventions of representation by turning the theatrical notions of the theosophical cosmology into an abstract structure, an evolving symbolic edifice, not unlike the growing castle in A Dream Play. It encompasses both the illusory and the unchanging side of being, although still in a divided state. It conveys the sense of fragmentation and alienation of the modern self, and the changed dynamics of perception in an unstable world of masks, shadows, reflections, and illusions.

At the same time, Strindberg's cosmic theatre reveals a Romantic striving towards the essential, the whole, and the transcendental, marked by a nostalgia for the prelapsarian state of man, and by a visionary pathos for the illuminated man who might leap across the abyss between appearance and essence, mask and identity. Theosophical cosmology and psychology offered a way to bridge this existential gap. If man is still in the fallen state of being imprisoned in matter, that is, in a changing sensuous world and body, and if therefore knowledge of a metaphysical reality cannot be gained directly, it may be accessed through a mediator within ourselves, the inner man or the transcendental self, that steps forth in dreams.

Yet theosophical evolutionary optimism is overridden by the sense of ultimate loss that is inscribed in Strindberg's cosmic theatre, revealing an ambiguity, uncertainty, pain

and, at the end, melancholy. The lost values of an essential being and truth are placed before our eyes but out of our grasp; they are revealed to be desired but not to be attained, and thus, the paradigm of the theatre--Plato's parapet in the cave or the theosophical screen that separates the visible world from the invisible--can never be shattered.

Notes:

[1]Martin Esslin, "Modernist Drama: Wedekind to Brecht", in Modernism 1890-1930, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1976; repr. 1991), 534.

[2]Cf. James McFarlane, "Modernist Drama: Origins and Patterns" in Modernism 1890-1930, 505-512.

[3]James McFarlane, "The Mind of Modernism" in Modernism 1890-1930, 75-76.

Appendix I

List of Theosophical Literature and Journals Owned or Referred to by Strindberg

(Bracketed numbers at end of citation indicate catalogue numbers in Strindberg's library; items without catalogue numbers indicate works that Strindberg referred to in his letters, diary, or works, in such cases sources are given.)

Besant, Annie. Äktenskapet sådant det är och sådant det borde vara. 1881. Cf.SS 14:223 (motto to Giftas [Getting Married] Part 2, 1885).

_____. Döden--och sedan? Stockholm: Teosofisk Bokförlag, 1893. Swedish translation of Death--and After? Cf. Brev 15:185, 10 October, 1905 to A. Walleen.

_____. Esoterishces Christentum oder Die kleineren Mysteries. Esoteric Christianity translated by Mathilde Scholl. Leipzig: Th. Griebens Verlag, 1903. [5609]

_____. Den uråldriga visdomen, grunddragen af de teosofiska lärorna. The Ancient Wisdom translated by A. F. Åkerberg and E. Z. Stockholm: Svenska Teosofiska Samfundet, 1900. [4304, missing]

Blavatsky, Helena, P. Den hemliga läran: Sammanfattning af vetenskap, religion och filosofi. 2 vols. Stockholm: Svenska Teosofiska Samfundet, 1894. It was probably this translation of The Secret Doctrine that Torsten Hedlund sent to Strindberg in 1896. Cf. For example Brev 11:346-47, 374, 375-76 to T. Hedlund; OD [ii]; SgNm9:3,13.

_____. Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology. 2 vols. 1877. Probably first shown to Strindberg in 1884, edition not known, cf. SS 54: 76-79. Sent to Strindberg by Torsten Hedlund in 1896, cf. Brev 11: 374; OD 45, 30 October, 1897.

_____. Nyckel till teosofien. Translation of The Key to Theosophy by V. Pfeiff and A. F. Åkerberg. Stockholm: Svenska Teosofiska Samfundet, 1890. [5758, missing]

Efteråt: Tidskrift för spiritism och dermed beslägtade ämnen. Spiritualist journal that contains many articles by well known Swedish and foreign theosophists. Back copies of several years probably acquired in 1907, cf.Brev 16:27-

28, 5/31/07 to publisher Björck & Börjesson. 6, nos. 56-67 (1896).[3818, 3831-3843, 4897].

Efteråt 7, no. 74 (July 1897). This issue includes excerpts from Les Grand Initiés by E. Schuré, entitled "Astralljuset." [3828]

Efteråt 7, nos. 75-76 (August-September 1897) [3827, 3822]

Efteråt 8, no. 84 (May 1989). [3813]

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Appendix II

Glossary of Theosophical Terms

The glossary if based on theosophical literature known to Strindberg and on The Theosophical Glossary first published in 1892.

Astral body: The ethereal counterpart or shadow of man or animal. . . . [T]he "Doppelgänger" (Glossary, 37). The Double, the phantom body (Key, 91). When the man dies, his lower principles leave him for ever; i.e., body, life, and the vehicle of the latter, the astral body of the living man (Key, 143).

Astral shell/corpse: The astral corpse, as [the astral body] is sometimes called, or the "shell" of the departed entity, consists of the fragments of the seven concentric shells . . . held together by the remaining magnetism of the soul. . . . [S]cattered fragments of [the shell] . . . cling . . . to the remaining shells . . . until the seventh or innermost is reached and itself disintegrates, the man himself escapes, leaving behind these remains. The shell drifts vaguely about in the kamalokic world. . . , and may be vitalized . . . by the magnetism of embodied souls on earth. . . . It will suck up magnetism as a sponge sucks up water, and will take on an illusory appearance of vitality (Ancient Wisdom, 115).

Brahma: The impersonal, supreme and uncognizable Principle of the Universe from the essence of which all emanates and into which all returns (Glossary, 62).

Coats of skin: Primeval man became despiritualized or tainted with matter, and then, for the first time, was given the fleshy body which is typified in Genesis in that profoundly significant verse: "Unto Adam also and his wife did the Lord God make coats of skin, and clothed them" [Genesis III. 21]" (Isis 1:149).

Cosmic screen/cosmic drama/shadow play: During the great mystery and drama of life . . . real Kosmos is like the object placed behind the white screen upon which are thrown the Chinese shadows, called forth by the magic lantern. The actual figures and things remain invisible, while the wires of evolution are pulled by the unseen hands; and men and things are thus but the reflections, on the white field, of the realities behind the snares of Mahamaya, or the great illusion (SD 1:278). There are certain great principles according to which our system is built . . . [and] hosts of inferior

beings who act . . . as agents, as instruments; there are Egos of men intermingled with all these, performing their share in the great cosmic drama (Esoteric Christianity, 106-07).

Devachan: (Sanskrit) The "dwelling of the gods." A state intermediate between two earth-lives, into which the Ego (Atmâ-Budhi-Manas, or the Trinity made One [see Higher self, seven principles] enters, after its separation from **Kâma Rupa** (the subjective form created through the mental and physical desires and thoughts in connection with things of matter [Glossary, 172]) and the disintegration of lower principles on earth (Glossary, 98).

Elementals: Spirits of the elements. . . . Except a few of the higher kinds, and their rulers, they are rather forces of nature than ethereal men and women. These forces, as the servile agents of the Occultists, may produce various effects; . . . All lower invisible beings . . . of our terrestrial atmosphere are called Elementals: . . . Elves, Dwarfs, Trolls, Kobolds, . . . Spooks (Glossary, 112).

Evolution (cosmic, spiritual): These three currents of evolution are distinguishable on our earth in connection with humanity: the making of the materials, the building of the house, and the growing of the tenant of the house; or, . . . the evolution of spirit-matter, the evolution of form, and the evolution of self-consciousness (Ancient Wisdom, 49).

Immortal actor: The Thinker alone lives forever; he is the man for whom "the hour never strikes," . . . who . . . puts on and casts off bodies as a man puts on new garments and throws off the old. Each personality is a new part for the immortal Actor, and he treads the stage of life over and over again, only in the life-drama each character he assumes is the child of the preceding ones (Ancient Wisdom, 178).

Higher self: see Individuality

Individuality: One of the names given in Theosophy and Occultism to the Human Higher Ego. We make distinction between the immortal and divine Ego, and the mortal human Ego which perishes. The latter, or :personality" (personal Ego) survives the dead body only for a time in the Kama Loka; the Individuality prevails for ever (Glossary, 154-55). Personality embraces all the characteristics and memories of one physical life, while the Individuality is the imperishable Ego which re-

incarnates and clothes itself in one personality after another (Glossary, 252).

Kama-Loka: (Sanskrit) The semi-material plane, to us subjective and invisible, where disembodied "personalities", the astral forms, called Kamarupa remain, until they fade out from it by the complete exhaustion of the effects of the mental impulses that created these eidolons [images, phantoms] of human and animal passions and desires. It is the Hades of the ancient Greeks . . . , the land of Silent Shadows (Glossary, 171-72).

Karma: (Sanskrit) Physically, action: metaphysically, the LAW OF RETRIBUTION, the Law of cause and effect or Ethical Causation. Nemesis, only in a sense, that of bad Karma. . . . There remains naught after each Personality but the causes produced by it, . . . which are undying, i.e., which cannot be eliminated form the Universe until replaced by their legitimate effects, and wiped out by them, . . . and such causes--unless compensated during the life of the person who produced them with adequate effects, will follow the reincarnated Ego, and reach it in its subsequent reincarnation until a harmony between effects and causes is fully re-established (Glossary, 173-74).

Life-panorama: At the solemn moment of death every man . . . sees the whole of his past life marshalled before him, in its minutest details. For one short instant the personal becomes one with the individual and all-knowing Ego. . . . But this instant is enough to show to him the whole chain of causes which have been at work during his life . . . He reads his life, remaining as a spectator looking down into the arena he is quitting; he feels and knows the justice of all the suffering that has overtaken him (Key, 162).

Magic, black: see Magic, white.

Magic, white: Beneficent . . . divine magic, devoid of selfishness, love of power, of ambition . . . and bent only to doing good to the world in general, and one's neighbour in particular. The smallest attempt to use one's abnormal powers for the gratification of self, makes one's powers sorcery and black magic (Glossary, 198).

Mahâtma: Lit., "great soul". An adept of the highest order. Exalted beings who, having attained to the mastery over their lower principles are thus living unimpaired by the "man of flesh", and are in possession of knowledge and

power commensurate with the stage they have reached in their spiritual evolution (Glossary, 201).

Mâyâ: (Sanskrit) Illusion; the cosmic power which renders phenomenal existence and the perceptions thereof possible. In Hindu philosophy that alone which is changeless and eternal is called reality; all that which is subject to change through decay and differentiation and which has therefore a beginning and an end is regarded as mâyâ--illusion (Glossary, 211).

Personality: see Individuality

Pilgrimage: The Secret Doctrine teaches the fundamental identity of all souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul--a spark of the former--through the Cycle of Incarnation . . . in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law (SD 1:17).

Principles of man/of cosmos: The . . . original essences, the basic differentiations upon and of which all things are built up. We [theosophists] use the term to denote the seven individual and fundamental aspects of the One Universal Reality in Kosmos and in man. Hence also the seven aspects in their manifestation in the human being--divine, spiritual, psychic, astral, psychological and simply physical (Glossary, 262-63).

Reincarnation: The doctrine of rebirth. . . . "Resurrection" with the Egyptians never meant the resurrection of the mutilated mummy, but of the Soul that informed it, the Ego in a new body. The putting on of flesh periodically by the Soul or the Ego, was a universal belief; nor can anything be more consonant with the justice and Karmic law (Glossary, 277).

Spirit: In theosophical teachings the term . . . is applied solely to that which belongs directly to Universal Consciousness, and which is its homogeneous and unadulterated emanation. Thus, the higher Mind in Man or his Ego (Manas) is . . . a spirit; while the term "Soul", human or even animal . . . is qualified as the living soul (Glossary, 306).

Thought-forms: An astral entity will change his whole appearance with the most striking rapidity, for astral matter takes form under every impulse of thought, the life swiftly remoulding the form to give itself new expression. . . . [C]ombinations of astral matter . . . responding to and instantly taking shape under, the impulse of thought vibrations. This elemental essence exists in hundreds of varieties on every subdivision of

> the astral plane, as though the air became visible here . . . and were in constant undulatory motion with changing colours like mother-of-pearl. This vast atmosphere of elemental essence is ever answering to vibrations caused by thoughts, feelings, and desires (Ancient Wisdom, 65-66).

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