Modern Drama and Culture: A Dramaturgy of August Strindberg's A Dream Play

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Modern Drama and Culture:
A Dramaturgy of August Strindberg’s *A Dream Play*

by

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Final Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

Skidmore College

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Abstract

The primary objective of this paper is to show a connection between a revolution in thought, a “new consciousness,” of young intellectuals at the turn of the nineteenth century and the ideas of their forefathers that preceded them. The phrase, “new consciousness,” to which this paper frequently refers, is somewhat of a misnomer in that the development of these revolutionary ideas was intimately related to the philosophical, scientific, political and aesthetic traditions from which the generation of 1900 sought to separate themselves. In their eagerness to find an identity, what those of that era chose to define as “new” was actually the result of a creative synthesis formed from the dialectic of what they as a generation inherited and what they imagined. In dramatic literature, no better example of such a synthesis exists than August Strindberg’s, *A Dream Play*, which so innovatively and powerfully merges naturalism, the literary form of the material and scientific consciousness of the nineteenth century and expressionism, the form of the subjective and irrational modern mind of the twentieth century.
Indra’s Voice. Where art thou, Daughter?
Daughter. Here, Father, here!
Indra’s Voice. Thou hast strayed, my child.
Take heed, thou sinkest.
How cam’st thou here?
Daughter. Borne on a cloud, I followed the lightening’s blazing trail from the ethereal heights.
But the cloud sank, and is still falling.
Tell me, great Father Indra, to what region am I come? The air’s so dense, so hard to breathe. . . . (Prologue to August Strindberg’s A Dream Play (197,198).)

I. A New Consciousness Emerges

The constriction in her breathing that Indra’s daughter experiences from the atmosphere of earth while on her quest to learn the true nature of “the Creator’s children” (198) in August Strindberg’s A Dream Play echoes similar feelings of strangulation that Strindberg and the other intellectuals of the pre-World War I generation expressed in regards to what they considered as a miasma of stagnant and desiccated nineteenth century thought. Historian Robert Wohl describes the attitude of

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1 All textual references are to the following edition: Strindberg, August. A Dream Play. translated by Elizabeth Sprigge. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1955.
these young intellectuals towards the world they inherited from their forefathers as one of complaint for having "the misfortune to be born into a dying world" (19). What emerged from their despair was the flowering of a new consciousness, rooted in abstract thought. This new consciousness was one in which dreams, such as the one described by Strindberg in *A Dream Play*, were a more valid mode of inquiry than all the scientific certainties of the nineteenth century. As one historian expresses the transformation, "the rationalist and 'mechanistic' explanation of the world that had dominated European thought from the sixteenth century onward now gave way to an 'organic' explanation . . ." (Sternhell 23). However, this new consciousness did not simply descend from heaven to earth, as Indra's daughter does in the Prologue to *A Dream Play*, instead its genesis was caused by the material conditions present in the nineteenth century. As Walter Benjamin more specifically explains in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, "during long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which it is accomplished is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well" (222).

These historical circumstances that Benjamin refers to were determined by the hegemony of bourgeois capitalism that manifests itself in the industrialization and urbanization of Europe and imperialism throughout the world in the nineteenth century. The ideology of the bourgeois economic revolution was so "internalized" by most middle-class Europeans that its "pervasive set of assumptions," according to historian Robert Paxton, were accepted by most middle-class Europeans as "self-evident" (30). The first of these assumptions that was considered as "the natural order of things" was the right to individual economic freedom, a concept upon which the bourgeois economics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was based. This concept, formally labeled "liberalism," expressed a belief that progress was most
efficacious when accomplished through the actions of individuals rather than through authoritarian forms of government control. The economic determinism of liberal "laissez-faire" capitalism placed its faith in the hands of those who possessed an "enlightened self-interest" (Paxton 32) to act in accordance with the needs of society as well as to their own.

However, liberal politicians sought to achieve another goal in addition to their stated objective of individual freedom, a freedom that clearly was more narrowly defined as economic than anything else. Their desire was to secure a stable and orderly society that would better foster economic growth. Such a socially tractable world would be attainable not only through offering greater economic opportunity, in a sense, a larger piece of the bourgeois economic pie to more of the middle-class; but also from more opportunities for social advancement through social policies, such as universal education which would diffuse any class antagonisms and potential social disorder.

A second ideological assumption that dominated the established consciousness in the nineteenth century and contributed to this sense of an ordered and stable world was the concept of "reason." Perceived as a "fixed, innate human quality" (Paxton 31), reason, expressed in more modern terms as positivism, permeated intellectual thought to the point that all other philosophies, including formal religion, that were considered metaphysical or superstitious were called into question. Reason propounded a scientific view of the world that was based in the individual perception of material phenomena; united with liberalism it reinforced the value of utilitarianism and structured thinking.

Reactions to bourgeois liberalism at first came from the political left and the right in the form of mass politics. The most direct attack was from the socialist movement which championed a working class consciousness and a workers' united revolt against the
selfish individualism of liberalism and capitalism. Similarly, opposition to the hegemony of the middle-class came from conservative parties and traditional religious organizations that came “out of the chateaux and pulpits and into the streets” (Paxton 34), joining peasants, the lower middle-class, aristocrats, and the religious faithful into a mass movement. So intense was the revolt that conservative groups, such as the Action francaise, voiced reactionary feelings against bourgeois capitalism while mixing proto-fascist nationalistic and anti-Semitic views with calls for direct action.

From a dialectic created by the opposition of liberal, reasoned order and mass movement political ideologies, a rebellion of a different sort dawned: the revolt of the new consciousness. Suffering from what they perceived as spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic alienation, turn of the century scientists, artists, and philosophers turned inward into the well-spring of their own creative and intuitive minds while escaping the stultifying order of reason and what they perceived as corrupted Manichean political ideologies of the left and right. This new consciousness, defined by what it sought in the ethereal areas of the mind, was the trenchant response of the generation of 1900 to what it considered was choking them in the intellectual atmosphere of the nineteenth century.

H. Stuart Hughes in Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930 details the terms of this philosophical generation gap. First and foremost, these young intellectuals sought to distance themselves from what they considered to be the conservative, staid, and intellectually suffocating middle-class society. As Hughes explains, the attraction to the philosophy of Fredrich Nietzsche was a form of escape for this generation “away from the smugness, the philistinism of the upper middle-class . . . that exuded a sense of heaviness, of material excess, of confinement”(40). Secondly, the validity of either of the materially based political ideologies, capitalist or socialist, was rejected. According
to Hughes, for this generation, “the task was to penetrate behind the fictions of political action . . . “ to reveal who were “the actual wielders of power and the political elite” (65). “One of the great survivors of the period,” whom Hughes does not further identify, claims that the consensus among this cadre of young intellectuals was that “politically things were going down, [while] intellectually they were going up again” (43). Lastly, the great faith their forefathers had in the tradition of reason’s “ultra-intellectual doctrines” became a defiant philosophy of “radical anti-intellectualism” for their inheritors. Their philosophical attack, explains Hughes, was directed at “positivism . . . a general term [that] was interchangeably with ‘materialism’, ‘mechanism’, and ‘naturalism’” (37) which tended “to discuss human behavior in terms of analogies drawn from natural science” (36).

Robert Wohl describes the reactionary identity that these young intellectuals adopted in *The Generation of 1914* as the embodiment of “a culture of anti-necessity” (16). As much as the generation of 1900 wanted to leave the positivist tradition behind, there was still a “painful contradiction,” as Wohl describes it, that this generation had to acknowledge that although “man was free to create his own life, as the novelist creates fiction . . . [he] was yet slave to the material conditions of his existence” (17). Raymond Williams speaks to this same issue for playwrights of the period, for example, the focus of this paper, August Strindberg, who, like all intellectuals of the period, could sense a “dramatic tension . . . between what men felt themselves capable of becoming and a thwarting, directly present environment” (335). However, as illusory the idea of escaping into a world of dreams may have been for those of the era that was evident in “their synthesis of neo-idealism and biological determinism, their elitism, their pessimism about the future of Western culture, [and] their critiques of democracy and socialism” (Wohl 18), there was a unanimity of sentiment and argument that it was necessary.
The answer to prosaic positivism, as many of these intellectuals perceived it, lay in a more poetic "reorientation of thought" that replaced the "cult of material progress" (Hughes 41) with a "cult of instinct and sentiment [and] an affirmation of the supremacy of the forces of life and the affections" (Sternhell 23). The search for order was replaced by the freedom of randomness as the accepted mode of thought. Yet as much as there was movement forward into a "new sense for the fragmentary and problematic character of modern life" (Hughes 43), there was an attraction to the past in a longing for romantic values and the vitality of the preindustrial "organic" society. These "new perceptions" that Walter Benjamin discusses (cited earlier in this paper) were realized "since it had apparently proved impossible to arrive at any sure knowledge of human behavior . . . [and], "if one must rely on flashes of subjective intuition or on the creation of convenient fictions, then the mind had indeed been freed . . . to speculate, to imagine, to create" (Hughes 66).

Benjamin, however, contributes another perspective as to the cause of the new consciousness as exemplified in the development of new technologies in the arts. One of the most notable successes of nineteenth century liberalism was the discovery of advanced technologies that had a significant effect on the nature of art for both artists and its audiences. For Benjamin, art in the "age of mechanical reproduction . . . represents something new" (218). The ability of technology to reproduce copies of art in mass quantities had the effect of separating artist and art from long held cultural traditions. "By making many reproductions," explains Benjamin, "it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (221). This loss of "uniqueness" was further exacerbated by reproductions of art being brought home to be appreciated by any "beholder or listener in his own particular situation" (221). What the mechanical reproduction of art achieved, according to Benjamin, was a mass audience for art and a connection of art to everyday life; what was lost, however, was its "aura" (226). The
aura of art, Benjamin explains, that originated with art’s involvement in the religious rituals of the Middle ages (224) was maintained in a more secular sense in the nineteenth century through concepts such as “creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery” (218). The reaction to the “commodification” of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, however, was to separate art if at all possible from its ever-increasing social and political popularization. Thus, as Benjamin points out, movements such as *l’art pour l’art* sought as a goal to divorce art, as much as possible, from the everyday world. Thus, the necessity for artists, as well as for others from diverse epistemologies, was to turn inward to subjectivity, to feelings and instincts, to the unconscious, and as August Strindberg did, to dreams.

Thus, the initial neoromantic (Hughes 35) stirrings of the revolt of the new consciousness against a general sense of the loss of “aura” were first visible in a “new aesthetic in which personal sensibilities replaced the objective aesthetic of representing external nature” (Paxton 41). As reason and order gave way to subjective interpretation, “progress insofar as it existed, only took place in individual’s minds” (Wohl 16). Such a turn to the subjective was apparent even in the need for redefinition of time “to free experience from the determinism of sequence” (Wohl 16). According to H. Stuart Hughes, this new aesthetic manifested itself in multifarious forms: in the “unconscious strivings” (34) of Fredrich Nietzsche, as well as in Henri Bergson’s metaphysical / magical philosophical inquiries into the relationship between time and history (34). Bergson also piqued the interest of the turn of the century generation “in the role of the “unconscious” in his first book *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* in which he postulated that “the depths of consciousness . . . followed a logic of its own” (63) Moreover, Hughes explains that Bergson “had come to the conclusion that the world of dreams might offer a clue to this secret and unexplained realm” (63).
It was the work of Sigmund Freud that most popularized “a theory of the unconscious to which the life of dreams offered the key” (Hughes 64). The degree to which bourgeois society viewed Freud’s theories as threatening social order can only be seen in the attack and isolation Freud received from the scientific community during his lifetime. Rather than considering reason as guiding determinism of human behavior, Freud revealed “how dependent rational conscious thought is on the unconscious mental life” (Paxton 40). Similar to Bergson, Freud asserted that through psychoanalysis “the importance of dreams as a source of what guides our behavior” (Paxton 40) could be realized. From the influence of Bergson, Freud and others, the “psychological process had replaced the external as the most pressing topic for investigation” (Wohl 66).

Positivism faced an even greater challenge as the scientific community took up the call of the new consciousness. As in psychology and the social sciences, the irrational nature of phenomena rather than the rational drew the attention of those in the sciences. Even in terms of methodology, the mind’s irrational and unconscious responses were felt to be valid modes of inquiry. Paxton explains that “the physicist’s intuition and something akin to aesthetic flair became essential to the elegant mathematical language with which the universe was interpreted, a language incompatible with the kind of material certainty science had once seemed to embody” (37). Thus, if positivism used data to reveal a rationalistic order in the universe, scientists of the turn of the century sought irrationality: Niels Bohr discovered the “randomness” of sub-atomic particles, while Werner Heisenberg “proposed the theory that atomic structures were ‘indeterminate’” (Paxton 36). Across the intellectual spectrum, thinkers became “obsessed . . . [and] intoxicated with the non-logical, uncivilized, and inexplicable” (Hughes 35).

The turn to irrationality, the unconscious, and subjectivity as sources of
inspiration had even far more effect on the art and artists of the turn of the century who staged an open revolt against the traditions of the past. The revolutionary goals of artists of the period were to break art's long standing representation of the external world, to abandon a dependence on acquired technique (in schools often sponsored and approved by the state), and to find artistic inspiration in "childish spontaneity... [and] primitivism" or anything "outside the realms of reason and learning" (Paxton 38). Artists devoted to abstraction and the expression of emotions, such as Wassily Kandinsky, sought "to create an art of pure inwardness without any reference to nature"; other artistic rebels such as the Fauves ("wild beasts") in Paris desired to "smash the slickness of over-refined art," while the Cubists distorted nature through the use of a variety of perspectives (Paxton 37, 38). Revolutionary irrationalism, in its break with existing thought and defiance of the social institutions, especially with colleges and universities that maintained the positivist / rationalist tradition, was not without negative impact as well. As Zeev Sternhell posits in *Neither Left nor Right: Fascist Ideology in France*, the lack of restraint of the revolt of the new consciousness in some areas of thought led to ominous conclusions. Sternhell differentiates between what he considers the necromantic irrationalism "that affected only the world of arts and letters" and irrationalism in the social sciences that contributed an ideology that supported the rise of fascism in Europe (24).

This is not to say that literary necromantic irrationalism did not have a political impact on the era. As Marxist literary critic, Terry Eagleton argues in *Literary Theory*, literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries always possessed an ideology that served either as a force to establish and maintain the political status quo, or to provide a political alternative in a form of creative imagination to transcend it. Eagleton explains that literature developed into an ersatz religion in the mid-Victorian era due to the anti-metaphysical nature of the prevailing rationalism. What was recognized
among the bourgeois elite was that literature possessed many of the same qualities of social control that formal religion did in its appeal to the affective nature of consciousness: “Like all successful ideologies, literature, [like religion] works less by explicit concepts or formulated doctrines than by image, symbol, habit, ritual, and mythology.” Moreover, Eagleton states that the protean nature of literature, from highly intellectual and complex works to simple sentimental stories, worked in a similar fashion to religion in its ability to unite people from all classes as readers. Thus, literature as a form of religion acted as a palliative for social tensions and unrest, by “providing the social cement, the affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class society can be welded together” (20, 21).

Similarly, for Eagleton, literature in its evocation of “emotion and experience”, was able to serve the bourgeois society in a more “secular” and utilitarian fashion as “the pill of middle class ideology was to be sweetened by the sugar of literature” (22). The goal of literature, as Matthew Arnold explained it, in terms that Eagleton praises for their lack of hypocrisy is “to cultivate the middle class to underpin their political and economic power with a suitably rich and subtle ideology” (22). Essential to this ideology, according to Eagleton, was a sense of the “wholeness” of society; a feeling of comity was attained through literature that “humanizes” its readers by focusing on “universal” values rather than localized political ones and also reinforces the “moral riches of bourgeois civilization . . . and a reverence for the middle class” (23).

Furthermore, the reading of literature provided a “solitary and contemplative” form of distraction that not only reduced any disruptive tendency to “collective action” but also produced a means of escape through the vicarious experience of literature for those whose mundane and routine lives were “impoverished” of vital experience (23).

The new consciousness in literature of the nineteenth century that traces its roots back to early romanticism defined the modern concept of literature. Eagleton
claims that romanticism of that period was a "literary radicalism . . .[that] signifies a concept of human creativity which is radically at odds with the utilitarian ideology of early industrial capitalist England." In opposition to "prosaic" utilitarianism, romanticism asserted the value of the "imagination" and the "imaginative vision" that is evident in the writing of poetry (16). Eagleton claims that the "visionary hopes and dynamic energies" of the bourgeois revolution expressed in early romantic literature conflicted with the transformation of that vitality into "crassly philistine Utilitarianism . . . that as the dominant ideology of the middle class, fetishizing fact, reducing human relations to market exchanges . . . dismiss[ed] art as unprofitable ornamentation (16). Thus, for romantic writers and readers, literature became an "enclave of creative values . . . [in which] an image of non-alienated labor" survived. Romanticism was a victory of the "intuitive, transcendental mind" over rationalism and empiricism that were "enslaved to fact"(17). According to Eagleton, the literary imagination, in its poetic expression by Blake and Shelley, became a "political force . . . that sought to transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies"(17).

As Robert Paxton explains in regards to the visual artists of the turn of the century period, the subjectivity inherent in irrationalism not only separated its believers from tradition, but also left them "subject to the loneliness and anxiety of being adrift in a meaningless universe"(42). This held true for the romantic writers as well who "deprived of any proper place within social movements which might have transferred industrial capitalism into a just society . . . [were] driven back into the solitariness of [their] own creative mind[s]"(Eagleton 18).

Daughter. So be it. I descend. Come with me, Father!

Indra. No. I cannot breathe their air.

Daughter. Now the cloud sinks. It's growing dense. I suffocate!
This not air, but smoke and water that I breathe,
so heavy that it drags me down and down.
And now I clearly feel its reeling!
This is surely not the highest world.

Indra. Neither the highest, truly, nor the lowest.
It is called Dust, and whirls with all the rest,
And so at times its people, struck with dizziness,
live on the borderline of folly and insanity . . .

Courage, my child, for this is but a test!

Daughter, [on her knees as the cloud descends.]

I am sinking! (199).

II. The Revolt of The New Consciousness in Dramatic Naturalism

If literary romanticism protected the sensibilities of the artistic imagination from the ravages of utilitarianism and positivism by allowing it to escape into an subjective “enclave of creative values,” then the naturalist movement explored the fate of consciousness on the objective earthly plane. The basic concepts of naturalism were drawn from the social and intellectual changes of the nineteenth century: “mechanization and urbanization, democratic reform, and the rise of the physical sciences” (Bentley 23). Used as criteria with which to view critically the relation between individuals and their environment, these concepts were analyzed in a literary work that served as a “clinical lab” (Zola qtd. in Bentley 6) to examine “scientifically and dispassionately” the effect of “heredity and environment” (Bentley 25) on human behavior. For philosopher and writer, Emile Zola, who is credited with outlining the goals of naturalism in the preface to his play, Théresa Raquin,
the task of the playwright was “to reproduce man’s environment, endow it with human life and show that one produced the other, and what [that] happened had seemed small and insignificant could be important and urgent” (Styan 8). As British literary critic, Raymond Williams, explains, “naturalism was also an inherently critical form; it showed the world as unacceptable by showing directly what it was like, and how impossible it was when people tried to change it” (340).

It was Zola’s belief that by dedicating itself to the drama of ordinary people through the “experimental and scientific spirit” of naturalism, theater, as an art form, which he believed had been long since rendered impotent as a force for artistic and social change through its dependence on melodrama and sentimental comedy would find its “salvation” (Bentley 27). The ultimate goal of naturalism in the theater for Zola was to explore the truth of real life no matter how difficult or “pessimistic” (Styan 6) the experience would be for audiences. Of course, that truth for each playwright was as varied as the forms of naturalism itself; however, playwrights of the period were not afraid to seek the truth in subject areas long since considered “taboo in middle class culture - sex, religion, and economics . . . all displayed freely on the stage” (Bentley 27). Moreover, these naturalist writers believed that the truth lay beyond the style of the simple reproduction of “photographic” reality that was most commonly associated with naturalism. For Strindberg simply “sketching a piece of nature in a natural manner” amounted to “fake naturalism”; “true naturalism seeks out those points of life where the great conflicts occur” (qtd. in Williams 333). Similarly, for Yeats, naturalism explored a consciousness which did not appear in “photographs . . . [but] in a group of figures, symbols, images [that] enable us for a few moments into a deep of the mind” (Williams 333). Regardless of interpretation, what united the naturalist playwrights was a “passion for truth in strictly human and contemporary terms” (Williams 334). Zola’s “essential requirement [was] that theater should not lie” (Styan 10), and his desire to
ground theatrical naturalism in the scientific determinism represented an effort to indemnify that goal. For Zola, the soul of naturalism was a probing of the relationship between human experience and environment: “art and literature should serve the inquiring mind, investigating, analyzing, and reporting on man and society, seeking facts and the logic behind human life” (qtd. in Styan 10).

As detached and objective as the naturalist literary work claims to be in its inquiry into “human life,” there is an undeniably passionate defense of the ordinary person as a victim of society (Styan 6). Raymond Williams in the conclusion of Drama from Ibsen to Brecht provides an excellent metaphor for the conflict between the individual and society explored in naturalist drama. Building on the insistence of Zola and other naturalist playwrights for exact representations of the interior settings in their plays, Williams depicts the basic conflict that a character faces in a naturalist work as one in which a person, “a uniquely representative figure,” (338) is trapped in a room (visible on stage), and left only “to stare from a window at where one’s life is being decided” (336). Caught between two worlds, a “world of action, in which an environment is made and a world of consciousness in which a consequence is realized” (338), the person “discovers a humanity” that a “relatively leisure society” is found to be “frustrating or destroying” (335, 337). Williams explains that these rooms devised by the naturalist playwrights are not on stage simply to “define the people” but rather to “define what they seem to be, what they cannot accept they are” (336). Williams further states that there exists a subtle irony in the conflict between the individual and contemporary society represented in naturalist drama. In a liberal era that extolled the virtues of individualism, naturalist drama expressed the “individual revolt against an orthodox individualist society” or as Williams characterizes it, a “bourgeois revolt against the forms of bourgeois life” (337).

Naturalist drama’s attempts to rescue consciousness through a form of literary
empiricism concluded pessimistically for audiences and artists alike. One only has to think of the endings of a representative sample of plays of the era, especially those of Ibsen and Chekhov to realize the futility experienced by those "trapped in the rooms." If naturalism offered no place in the world for the expression of the new consciousness in dramatic literature, its only recourse was to turn inward to subjectivity and the expression of neoromantic dreams, fantasies, myths and vision as sources of inspiration.

The walls of naturalism's "rooms" were artistically dissolved as "Strindberg, in a younger generation . . . abandoned the given environment and made a dramatic form out of internal struggles" (Williams 338). Strindberg was one of those rare artists in whom long held currents of content, form, and style merge and reappear as recognizable but irrevocably altered and revitalized. August Strindberg, who championed what he described as "the modern psychological drama", transformed theater through a "major new innovation, a dramatic form made wholly from the already isolated consciousness . . . the drama of a 'single mind'" (Williams 338). Thus, drama as an art form, constrained by what Zola described as its "hidebound conventions" (Styan 8), finally joined the other arts in their turn toward subjectivity as a result of finding no solace for their new consciousness in the external world. For Strindberg and other artists of the period, truth became their own truth, an artist's inner conception of the world. An external vision of the world, achieved by "peering through windows" was replaced by "inner vision and external distortion" (Williams 339).

Through the plays of Strindberg, the new consciousness that was emerging in all areas of thought around 1900 finally made its appearance on the stage.

Because of Strindberg's relevance to a particular moment in both history and developments in the arts, his "early expressionism" that is so apparent in A Dream Play should not be considered unusual. According to Raymond Williams, "it is not then
really really surprising that two apparently different forms, serious naturalism and psychological expressionism should have come to exist in the same drama . . . “(339). Fortunately, Strindberg’s exact notions of his “early expressionism” are detailed in his extended preface to Miss Julie. Formally considered by most critics as Strindberg’s definitive statement on naturalism, the preface extends far beyond the limits of “pure” Zolaist naturalism. Strindberg’s naturalism, or “nyanaturalism” (Gilman 90) as he described it, is more inclusive of the trends in intellectual thought of the period. “The stage, he [Strindberg] remarked during this period, was ‘reprehensible’ in its impermeability by the new consciousness . . . ” (Gilman 90). In order to create a place for nyanaturalism in the theater, Strindberg felt it necessary in his preface to critique the theatrical status quo: the bourgeois theater, an “outworn form” that exist[ed] as a stagnant provider of illusory entertainment for the middle-class audiences who possess[ed] a “primitive capacity for deceiving themselves and letting themselves be deceived” (61). According to Strindberg, theater was not keeping pace with the revolution in thought apparent in other countries, particularly in England and Germany, where drama . . . “is dead” (61). “No new form has been devised for these new contents,” explains Strindberg. “The new wine has burst the old bottles” (61). It was in his two “domestic dramas,” The Father and Miss Julie, that Strindberg first attempted to put theory into practice in order to “modernize the form to meet the demands, which may, I think, be made on this art today” (62).

Strindberg’s nyanaturalism, however, did not abandon all the formal principles of naturalism. In his exhortation to abandon “feelings which become harmful and superfluous” in favor of a more reasoned reaction to his plays, Strindberg asserts naturalism’s emphasis on a scientific perspective of his works (62). For example, feelings of pity aroused due to the fate of the Strindberg’s heroine, Miss Julie, may provoke the influence of “outside forces and powers” (Williams 334). For Strindberg, a
member in the audience “with a belief in the future may actually demand some suggestion for remedying the evil - in other words some kind of policy” (62). The implication is that an “outside force or power” in the form of political or religious ideology needs to be present in the play to mollify any negative reactions to the drama. Any such attempts to make his work less “depressing” were excoriated by Strindberg.

In more or less a Darwinist terms, Strindberg responds that in his domestic dramas the “downfall of one family is the the good fortune of another . . . [and] the alternation of rising and falling is one of life’s principle charms” (62). For Strindberg, to expect theater to provide “the lovers of the commonplace” with anything resembling the illusory “joy of life” (63) experience was absolutely untenable. In contrast, the nyanaturalist perspective is to find the joy of life in the “strong and cruel struggles” in which Strindberg finds, as he suggests to others in the preface, a “pleasure in learning” (63).

In Strindberg’s nyanaturalism, as an expression of the new consciousness, is an inherent belief in the validity of subjective interpretation. The subjective perspective is what Strindberg recommends as the proper mode of inquiry with which to approach an analysis of Miss Julie. Strindberg insists there is no one, simple interpretation of the play and that each point of view is equally valid: “I see Miss Julie's tragic fate to be the result of many circumstances” (63). The theme of Miss Julie, according to the playwright, is “neither exclusively physiological or psychological. I have not put the blame wholly on the mother, nor on her physical condition at the time, nor on immorality. I have not even preached a moral sermon” (64).

Strindberg’s most direct critique of the theater of the era, his “critical naturalism” (Williams 81), is directed toward the bourgeois positivism’s representation of fixed ideas and certainties that have been translated into ossified theatrical conventions. Such rigid conventions of form, character and plot in the theater served to reinforce a
sense in audiences of the stability and order of bourgeois society during the
nineteenth century (Eagleton, *Marxism* 64). Strindberg cites the development of the
concept of character in this regard. He explains that the original meaning of the term
"character" was closer to a "dominating trait of the soul . . . often confused with
temperament" (64). The objectification of character into character types was the
responsibility of bourgeois society:

Later it [character] became the middle-class term for the 'automaton,'
one whose nature had become fixed or who had adapted himself to a
particular role in life. In fact, a person who had ceased to grow was called
a character, while one continuing to develop - the skillful navigator of
life's river sailing not with the sheets set fast, but veering before the wind
to luff again - was called characterless, in a derogatory sense, of course,
because he was so hard to catch, classify and keep track of. This middle-
class conception of immobility of the soul was transferred to the stage
where the middle-class always ruled. A character came to signify a man
fixed or finished . . . (64).

For Strindberg, any such "summary judgments" of character by authors "should be
challenged by the Naturalists who know the richness of the soul" (65). Strindberg
describes his own characters as "characterless," (64) who, with an almost a post-
modernist sensibility, represent a pastiche of "virtues and vices" from the "past and
present stages of civilization, bits from books and newspapers, scraps of humanity,
rags and tatters of fine clothing . . ." (65). Strindberg's "characterless" characters who
resist classification express the world of the new consciousness that surrounds the
playwright. These characters personify a culture transforming itself from the stasis of a
materialist determinism of the world to the dominion of the irrational unconscious. The
unpredictability of Strindberg's characters expresses a tension that stems from the
knowledge that what was once certain is no longer predictable. As Strindberg
explains, he fashioned his characters as such “because they are modern characters
living in a period of transition more feverishly hysterical than its predecessor, I have
drawn my figures vacillating, disintegrated, a blend of old and new”(65)

In addition to his stated opposition to theater’s participation in creating an
illusory view of the world outside the theater, Strindberg is equally adamantine in his
desire to rid theater of the artifice present in its past conventions, most specifically the
concept of the “well-made play.” For Strindberg, the “modern psychological drama”
represents an inquiry into the hypostasis of life and seeks to fulfill the needs of the
modern mind that is “no longer satisfied with seeing things happen . . . [but] must know
how it happens”(69). In an effort to better explore “the psychological process”,
Strindberg limits his number of minor characters and focuses the drama on the
relationship between just a few, since this is “what interests people most today”(69).
Traditional development of plot is abandoned by Strindberg, which he feels disrupts
the flow of the play as well as the concentration of the audience, in favor of his
experimental one-act form. Strindberg also introduces other “art forms” into naturalist
theater: the monologue, mime and dance - to disorder not only the audience’s
preconceived expectations for drama, but also to allow for more of an “organic”
connection between the actors and script through improvised movement and
dialogue(70).

Furthermore, Strindberg emphatically opposes any theatrical artifice in acting,
such as the contrived dialogue, exhibited in “well-made” plays, for its “symmetrical,
mathematical construction” that often consists of characters asking “stupid questions in
order to elicit a smart reply”(68, 69). Again, Strindberg’s insistence on fluidity of
speech patterns by letting his characters speak as “irregularly . . . as they do in real
life”(69) exposes the ossified speech patterns of popular theater as illusory. Naturalism
in acting technique in the form of less “playing with the audience” in favor of more “playing to the audience” is another goal of Strindberg’s dramaturgy; for Strindberg, nothing would please him more than to “see an actor’s back throughout a critical scene”(72). Similarly, he stridently exhorts the rejection of theatrical devices like excessive make-up and footlights that distort the actor’s natural image into something created for a more stylized, “theatrical” performance(72). As for scenic design, Strindberg favors the “asymmetry” and “economy” of form exhibited in the works of impressionist painters that “strengthens the illusion”(71). Attempts to achieve stage realism are futile, according to Strindberg, because of the inherent problems with the construction of stage walls and doors that shake and move upon contact (71). It is interesting to note than when illusion is used to deceive or simply to entertain in the theater, Strindberg opposes its use; however, when illusion serves the new consciousness by “arousing the imagination”(71) he is very much its proponent. What the revolution in thought and practice that Strindberg’s preface represents is a blueprint from which Strindberg hoped “a new dramatic art might arise”(73).

Daughter. Continuing the Poet’s bitter words.

“And then the journey’s course begins,
over thistles, thorns and stones.
If it should touch a beaten track,
comes at once the cry: ‘Keep off!’
Pluck a flower, straight you’ll find
the bloom you picked to be another’s.
If cornfields lie across your path
and you must pursue your way,
trampling on another’s crops,
others then will trample yours
that your loss may equal theirs.

Every pleasure you enjoy
brings to all your fellows sorrow,
yet your sorrow gives no gladness.

So sorrow, sorrow upon sorrow
on your way until you’re dead
and then, alas, give others bread.

III. Nyanaturalism in Strindberg’s A Dream Play

It is one of those rare “cultural coincidences” that while Sigmund Freud was
writing The Interpretation of Dreams, Strindberg was experimenting with the dream as
content and form for several of his plays(Gilman 110). In A Dream Play, the form of the
dream itself is Strindberg’s attempt to release the artistic imagination from the
restraints of bourgeois order and reason reflected in the conventions of popular
theater. As Strindberg explains in the two-paragraph Author’s Note for A Dream Play,
the dream has its own “logical form” in which “anything can happen; everything is
possible”(193). This form is delimited only by the dreamer’s unconscious and the
Freudian superego; the dreamer freely associates between the products of the
imagination and feelings of conscience contrived by the “social” self. As Strindberg
explains in the Author’s Note, sleep, the transmitter of dreams, can act as either a
“liberator” or “torturer,” and more often than not, produces “more pain than
pleasure”(193) for the dreamer.

The interrelatedness of the dream elements in A Dream Play originates from a
“single consciousness [that] holds sway”(193); however, within the context of the
dream, the freedom of form that Williams describes as an “early expressionism” merges with the naturalistic content of the dream itself in a manifestation of Strindberg’s “nyanaturalism.” The subjective form of the dream, evidenced by its “external distortion” (Williams 339), defies any traditional sense of the theatrical unities of time and place (Gilman 108). The fluidity of the form and the randomness of associations are uninterrupted by the theatrical contrivances of acts and scenes. One setting “dissolves” into the next or simply “blacks out,” while other locales “vanish” or “disappear.” Settings and props also transmogrify: the “Growing Castle” is transformed into the Officer’s room, which in turn changes into his parents’ living room. The lime tree that grows outside the clover-leaf door in the opera’s corridor becomes a coat and hat stand in the Lawyer’s office and later a candelabra in the church. The dream imagination expresses itself in a aesthetic variety of fantastical elements often emblazoned in brilliant colors: a giant chrysanthemum, boats shaped like dragons, and a ghost ship. Similarly, characters in the subjectivity of the dream world “split, double, and multiply; they evaporate, crystallize, scatter, and converge” (193). The theater crowd that waits for the clover-leaf door to open becomes the the crowd of clients waiting for service at the Lawyer’s office. The Officer himself appears throughout the dream, not only in the context of his life but also in the context of the lives of the Lawyer and Poet as well. All these elements collectively express one consciousness freed by the form of the dream to explore, imagine and create.

However, Strindberg’s naturalist perspective, the “internal reality” of A Dream Play, explores more earthly concerns, specifically the numerous contradictions of living in the modern world. Trapped within these many contradictions, humankind is seen as alienated from whatever is necessary to find spiritual fulfillment. This alienation is exemplified by the separation of the universe into two worlds: the world of spiritual light (new consciousness), represented by the Hindu god, Indra and his
Daughter; and the world of material darkness (bourgeois society) experienced by those on earth. In her journey to earth, the Daughter will attempt to merge these worlds. Her spiritual quest is to prove to her skeptical father that humans are simply “victims of society” (Zola qtd. in Styan 6) whose “lamentations and complaint are justified” (198). The Daughter’s journey is in one sense a “test,” (199) as her father describes it, (in almost Zolaist “laboratory” sense) in which the Daughter, a pure, rarefied example of consciousness, unsullied by any of the “infections” (228) of the material world will attempt to empathize with those who “live on the border line of folly and insanity” (199).

As the Daughter leaves one setting on earth and enters another, alternating in persona from the goddess, Indra’s Daughter, to her human form, Agnes, she learns from the men who accompany her on her journey the nature of life on earth. Her first desire is to free the Officer, whom she finds imprisoned in a “Growing Castle.” The Officer, a personification of a “trapped consciousness,” exemplifies the human need for illusion as a remedy for the alienation of the human spirit. The Officer’s prison is his room in the Growing Castle, a metaphor for modern civilization. This castle / fortress has separated itself from the natural world by rising above the “forest of giant hollyhocks in bloom” that exist beyond its walls, and the primitive mud comprised of “straw” and “stable muck” that surrounds the foundation of the castle (199). The ideals of civilized society are brandished within the castle: the gilded roof signifying its materialism, and a fecund flower bud “that crowns its summit” (199) symbolizing the elevation of libidinal energy from its primitive state to that of civilized love. Similarly, the Officer is divorced from his own true nature. The Officer’s prison, however, is far more than just the castle, but rather his dependence on illusions. Upon meeting the Officer, Indra’s Daughter offers to free him from his room (200). For the Officer, who believes he “has been waiting for this” (200), the reality of freedom is a threatening
Daughter. The castle is strong-it has seven wall-but it shall be done. Do you want to be be set free-or not?

Officer. To tell you the truth, I don’t know. Either way I’ll will suffer. Every joy has to be paid twice over with sorrow. It’s wretched here, but I’d have to endure three times the agony for the joys of freedom (200).

The Officer’s self-imprisonment is that of social man who, imprisoned in the castle of civilized society with its rules and restrictions to his freedom, learns to accept the illusion of security the castle provides rather than face the prospect of a free self unbounded by society’s walls.

The Officer’s room dissolves into his parents’ living room, revealing another source of the Officer’s illusory self-imprisonment. Set against his Mother’s disclosure that she must face the reality of her death, the Officer has concluded that life is unfair simply because he was falsely accused of taking some money as a child. The Officer is unable to free his consciousness from the conflicting feelings of revenge and guilt over the incident, which he describes as “that piece of injustice [that] gave a twist to my whole life”(202). Only the Mother, guided by her closeness to death, is able to see through the illusion of such a singular judgment of life. She attributes the Officer’s conclusion that life is never fair to the workings of “small minds,” urging her son to cease “harping” on it . . . spoiling the best of your life” over the incident, and “to never quarrel with God”(202, 203).

“Ah, this life!” exclaims the Mother to the Daughter, who has observed the incident. To which Indra’s Daughter responds, “Human beings are to be pitied”(203). What the Daughter proffers the Officer as an alternative to the false consciousness of illusions is her absolute belief that love can solve the problems of mankind: “Yes, life is hard,” explains the Daughter. “But love conquers everything. Come and see” (203).
However, as the Daughter appears in a corridor outside the stage door of the opera house, she witnesses love as a force that alienates and harms rather than one that unites and heals. Instead of liberating humans by “conquering everything,” love traps them in its illusions. The reality of love’s disappointments is echoed throughout the corridor scene. For the Doorkeeper, who sits with her shawl of suffering over her head, crocheting her life away, love has separated her past self from the present. “She was the prima ballerina,” the Billsticker explains, “but when he went away, it seems he took her dancing with him . . . so she never got any parts” (204). While the Doorkeeper futilely continues to crochet a star-patterned coverlet in the hope her lover will return, the Singer, who the Doorkeeper notes was not “engaged” for the next season by the opera, cries into her handkerchief as she faces the reality her dream is over (205). The sad irony of the Billsticker, who waits fifty years to possess his beloved “fishnet and green box” only to realize that the fishnet was “not quite what I had in mind” (209) is reflected in the Officer’s patient waiting at the stage door for his ideal woman, his fiancée, Miss Victoria, a singer with the opera. As the seasons pass for the Officer, and he gets older and older, eventually to become young again and restart the cycle, he rests assured in his fantasy that Victoria hasn’t left the opera yet without him “because she loves me” (211). For the Officer and the others waiting in the opera corridor, the illusion of love is a way of escaping life’s inevitable disappointments: “nothing ever is as one imagined it - because one’s mind goes further than the act, goes beyond the object” (209). Thus, without such illusions, mankind is left with only the unforgiving realization of who they are, as opposed to who they wish to be. As the Quarantine Master explains to the Officer when he visits Foulstrad, there is self-protection in hiding behind illusions: “I so often wish I could forget - especially myself. That’s why I go in for masquerades, fancy dress, and theatricals” (225).

As the voice of illusion in A Dream Play, the Officer presents dreams and
fantasies as a mode of escape from the conditions suffered by humankind for whom Indra’s Daughter feels that life is pitiable. After receiving his Doctor’s degree from the Chancellor and the four Deans of the Faculties - Philosophy, Theology, Medicine and Law, the Officer trusts that he now has control over his own life: “All paths are open to me. I have set foot on Parnassus, the laurels are won. Immortality, fame are all mine” (222). His future plans are far more pedestrian, however. The Officer desires to take a teaching position, where he ostensibly will find security teaching boys “the same lessons I learnt all through my manhood . . . until I get a pension and have nothing to do but wait for meals and newspapers, until in the end I’m carried out to the crematorium and burnt to ashes” (229). He proposes to the Daughter to accompany him on a trip to Fairhaven, “where it is summer, and the sun is shining. Youth is there, children and flowers, singing and dancing, feasting and merrymaking” (222).

What they find when the Officer and the Daughter appear in their new destination is that the path to the paradisical Fairhaven (illusion), with its “beautiful wooded shore . . . [and] little Italianesque villas, pavilions, kiosks, and marble statues” (223) is accessed only by gaining entrance through its apparent opposite (reality): the sulfury inferno, Foulstrand, where the sick and gluttonous rich dwell along with those “who have some misery to hide” (224), and young lovers and their roses wilt in the noxious atmosphere. As the Officer and the Daughter flee Foulstrand for Fairhaven, they learn that the “peace and happiness” they had expected to find there really do not exist. At the dance at the Assembly Room, the Daughter notices a girl, Edith, who “buries her face in her hands” because she realizes her ugliness kept her “sitting there for three hours without a dance.” “What cruel pleasure,” observes the Daughter (230). They encounter the Blind Man who is “the most envied man in the place,” for he is the “owner of hundreds of Italian villas . . . bays and creeks and shores and woods” (235). For all his wealth, the Blind Man loses what he loves the most, his
son, who drowns while on a voyage. Apprehensive that Fairhaven is a chimera, the Daughter beseeches the Officer: "Isn’t there one happy person in this paradise?" (235).

The Officer suggests the apparently blissful Newlywed Couple. For the Newlyweds, however, happiness is threatening. They are adamant in their desire “to die together, now at once” since they “fear happiness, the deceiver . . . [who] in the midst of happiness grows a seed of unhappiness” (235).

For the Officer, Fairhaven also is a destroyer of his dreams. In a flashback to his experiences as a boy in school, the Officer realizes his dream of a life in education is "dreadful, really dreadful" (232). While under the stern gaze and badgering of the Schoolmaster, the Young Officer, confidence shaken, attempts to apply simple logic to answer a problem in arithmetic. The Schoolmaster uses the opportunity to berate the Young Officer continually for being immature, an opinion which the Young Officer begins to internalize. The Young Officer and the boys join in revolt against their teacher and defy the Schoolmaster to explain the concept of "time," which he cannot do. Backed into a philosophical corner by his students, the Schoolmaster must admit that the Officer’s explanation is “quite correct according to the laws of logic, although it is absurd” (234). “Then logic is absurd.” concludes the Officer (234), who “matures” in realizing that for the Schoolmaster and others like him, their absurd world which is “back to front” (234) is the truly illusory one.

Strindberg’s symbol of illusion for all in A Dream Play is the clover-leaf door which sits in the corridor of the opera house. The excitement exhibited by all the characters at the opera house who gather as soon as they learn that “the door is going to be opened” (211) represents their desire to uncover a secret and greater meaning to life. While they await the door’s opening, the Officer stresses its significance, for “a moment such as this does not recur in a lifetime” (211). When the secret of the door is about to be revealed, a policeman intervenes, and “in the name of the law,” (212)
forbids the opening of the door. In doing so, he embodies society's wish to keep the characters "within the castle" by maintaining the illusion of hope. Finally, before her assent to heaven, the Daughter summons all to see "the answer to the riddle of the universe [that] is locked up in there" (250). The belief that there is any meaning to life in the world of *A Dream Play* is exposed as self-deluding when all that is visible behind the clover-leaf door to the gathered characters is nothingness.

The hopelessness of illusions as a means of escaping reality that the Daughter experiences with the Officer reflects a similar despair that she realizes in her relationship to the Lawyer. The Lawyer, in his practice as the mediator of human antagonisms, elides the illusions of life for reality. Portrayed by the the Daughter as Christ-like (she puts a crown of thorns on his head), the Lawyer exhibits the suffering he has "absorbed from others . . . the vices, swindles, slanders, libel . . . on his chalk-white, furrowed and purple-shadowed" face that "mirrors all the crime and vice with which through his profession he has been involved" (212). In his offer to burn the shawl of suffering that the Daughter inherited from the Doorkeeper, as well as in his advocacy for those who "scrape along somehow by the skin of their teeth until they die" (213), the Lawyer represents the idealist who unselfishly and heroically acts on the behalf of others. It is the Lawyer, who recognizes the alienation of the material body of humankind, their actual living conditions and their spiritual consciousness that makes it "a misery to be human" (213). As he explains to the Daughter,

**Lawyer:** And what people live on is a mystery to me. They marry with an income of two thousand crowns when they need four. They borrow, to be sure, they all borrow . . . [but] who has to pay in the end? Tell me that!

**Daughter:** He who feeds the birds.

**Lawyer:** Well, if he who feeds the birds would come down to earth and see the plight of the unfortunate children of men, perhaps He would have
some compassion (213).
The observation of the Daughter that "it is a mad world" (216) upon realizing that the Lawyer was "discredited" before the four Deans of the Faculties and denied his "laurels" because he "defended the poor, said a good word for the sinner, eased the burden of the guilty,[and] obtained a reprieve for the condemned" (215) describes the contradictory world of *A Dream Play*. As both the Daughter and the Lawyer conclude, a world in which the "Law [serves] all but its servants" and "Justice" is reserved for the "just unjust" (216) is the inverted copy of the natural one.

Within the new setting of a Mediterranean resort, the Lawyer attempts to explain to the Daughter the inequitable material conditions and rancorous attitudes in society that have created such an inversion of the world. "Men have an instinctive dread of another man's good fortune," explains the Lawyer. "They feel it's unjust that that fate should favor any one man, so they try to restore order by rolling boulders across his path" (238). In juxtaposition to the villas, casino and orchards of the resort, described by the Daughter as "paradise," is a "huge heap of coal and two wheel barrows," the "hell" of the coal heavers who work there. The lives of the coal heavers exemplify the alienated worker who is trapped within the confines of "the system" (242). For these coal heavers, who consider their labor as "the foundation of society," (241) the system appears as an objectified power over which they have no control. Within this society, as the Lawyer explains, "nothing is free; everything is owned" (240), which applies to the coal heavers themselves. Unable to enjoy for fear of arrest the barest of luxuries, a simple swim in the sea to escape the heat, or fruit of a tree, the coal heavers find themselves chained to their labor by mere fact that they "were born of poor and pretty bad parents" (240). The only criterion that unites all the classes, observes the Lawyer, is the will to "sin" (237) against the system:

Daughter: Do you mean that everyone at some time or other deserves
imprisonment?
Lawyer: Yes.
Daughter: Even you?
Lawyer: Yes. (240)

The separation of this system from its humanity is visible in its rejection of those, like the Lawyer, who try to reform it by “all the righteous, all the respectable” (241). For such reformers, according to the Lawyer, there are only two alternatives: being sent to prison by the powerful, or being driven to the madhouse “by their own despair when they see the hopelessness of the struggle” (241). As the Lawyer further explains, for those that do not revolt, however, there is another kind of imprisonment: the system becomes internalized in the form of a codified set of expectations and behaviors. Life, as the Lawyer describes it, is reduced simply to “duties,” (237) a manifestation of the reality principle for which all individual pursuit of pleasure / happiness is subordinated to the needs of the reality of work:

Daughter: What are they [duties]?
Lawyer: Everything you abominate. Everything you least want to do and must. They are to abstain and renounce, to go without, to leave behind. They are everything that is disagreeable, repulsive, painful.
Daughter: Are there no pleasant duties?
Lawyer: They become pleasant when they are done (237).

Efforts to rebel against the system result are futile. What one enjoys, according to the Lawyer, when the duties are done, is considered sinful and is policed psychologically by the superego. “The next day”, states the Lawyer, “I have a bad conscience and go through the torments of hell” (237). For the Lawyer, “the worst thing of all” (237) is the cyclical nature of existence (the Officer’s endless pursuit of Victoria), which maintains

² from Sigmund Freud's concept of the reality and pleasure principles in Civilization and Its Discontents.
itself through endless "repetitions [and] reiterations" (237).

In the natural setting of the grotto, the Daughter proposes to the Lawyer that they "join their destinies" in marriage and "put it to the test" to see if their love, as the Daughter believes, can transcend the corrosive influence of the world. The Lawyer, although willing, is more skeptical; however, the Daughter firmly believes that even though the Lawyer's "antipathies may be [her] . . . sympathies," such conflicts can be "balanced"(217). The Daughter expresses the apotheosis of marriage:

Lawyer: Supposing we tire?
Daughter: Children will come, bringing ever new interests.
Lawyer: You? You will take me poor, ugly, despised, discredited?
Daughter: Yes . . . (217).

As the grotto dissolves into a room adjoining the Lawyer's office, and the Daughter / goddess becomes, Agnes, the earthly wife of the Lawyer, the spiritual sense of what a marriage can be that the Daughter and the Lawyer discuss in the grotto contrasts with the "unnatural" reality of their marriage. The maid's "pasting" all the cracks around the windows so as to keep fresh air out of the home is a metaphor for the absence of any natural life-giving forces in this marriage. The marriage between the Lawyer and Agnes is dominated by their material and economic living conditions which corrupt the "consciousness" of the relationship itself. The idealist Lawyer is transformed into the husband as economic head of his household who values Agnes for her ability to stop their child's screaming because it "frightens away customers"(218). Similarly, the maids pasting of the cracks in the walls, even though it creates a suffocating atmosphere for Agnes, is valuable since it prevents the warmth from escaping.

The conditions of poverty under which the Lawyer and Agnes live crush her spirit under their weight like a "poor little flower, without light, without air"(219). The
harmonic balance of their antinomic points of view toward marriage, “antipathy and sympathy” erodes into a dissonant polarity, “one’s pleasure is the other’s pain” as their “life together [becomes] torment” (220). What the reality of their marriage reveals is that love alone can’t transcend the material conditions that form consciousness. Using one of Agnes’ hairpins as a metaphor, the Lawyer describes marriage as the union of parallel lines, the two prongs of the hairpin. The marriage, therefore, is the synthesis of that dialectic formed by the individual partners; however, when vitiated by the external world, as the Lawyer describes, the hairpin may be bent into a straight line, resulting in a loss of individuality, or broken in two, effecting the polarization of both husband and wife.

Where the Daughter’s experiences of the contradictions of human experience finally lead her is to the embodiment of the artistic imagination in the Poet. It is through art that the Poet and Daughter realize the artistic imagination as a meta-reality that transcends the need for illusion and the reality of material conditions:

Lawyer: Of these things [the Daughter’s experiences] I once made poetry.
Daughter: You know then what poetry is?
Lawyer: I know what dreams are. What is poetry?
Daughter: Not reality, but more than reality. Not dreams, but waking dreams.
Lawyer: Yet the children of men believe that poets merely play - invent and fabricate.
Daughter: It is just as well, my friend, or else the world would be laid waste from lack of endeavor (245).

The role of the artistic imagination within the world is exemplified in the Poet’s “petition from mankind to the ruler of the universe, drawn up by a dreamer” (246), an endeavor which is facilitated by his relationship to Indra’s Daughter. The petition, at first, appeals
to God for an explanation of humankind’s conflicts with their own nature: “Why with anguish are you born?” “Why are we born like animals?” (246). The Poet then questions man’s social existence:

Pluck a flower, straight you’ll find the bloom you picked to be another’s. If cornfields lie across your path and you must pursue your way, trampling on another’s crops, others will then trample yours that your loss may equal theirs (247).

However, the history of man, explains the Poet, reveals man’s lack of desire to be free from these conflicts. Christ, as the mediator of man’s suffering, was crucified by “all righteous men . . . because He wished to set men free” (248, 249).

The hegemony of the “righteous” that makes humankind fear its freedom is expressed in the trial of the Daughter by the Deans of the Four Faculties. These four “Deans”: Medicine, Theology, Law, and Philosophy, who supposedly represent the order and reason of intellectual thought, expose in their fight for mutual exclusivity the chaos that belies the assurances of traditional ideologies. For their contradictions, the Daughter accuses them “of sowing the seeds of doubt and dissension in the minds of the young” (253):

- Philosophy: The truth is never dangerous.
- Medicine: What is truth?
- Law: Whatever can be proved by two witnesses.
- Theology: Anything can be proved by two witnesses if you are a pettifogger.
- Philosopher: Truth is wisdom, and wisdom and knowledge are philosophy itself. Philosophy is the science of sciences, the knowledge of knowledge. All other sciences are its servants.
- Medicine: The only science is natural science. Philosophy is not science.
It is mere empty speculation (253).
The Chancellor, as representative of the state, has no opinions on such a debate. The Chancellor is “merely appointed” to maintain the ideological status quo by preventing the four Deans from “breaking each other’s arms and legs in the Senate.” “Opinions,” he explains, “I take good care not to have any. I had a few once, but they were soon exploded” (252).

The condemnation of the Daughter by the ideologies of the world for challenging their authority symbolizes the alienation of the Daughter from humankind for whom she feels nothing but pity: “to be mortal is not easy” (257). As the personification of a spiritual consciousness, the Daughter attempts to free her consciousness from the “mud” of earth and to flee with the Poet “into the wilderness” (256). Her last conflict is with the internal restraint, the “pangs of conscience” imposed on her by the Lawyer, representing the voice of society, the “righteous,” for neglecting her “duty” to their child. But as the Poet reminds her, for the Daughter, as for the artistic imagination, there is a “vocation . . . the highest duty of all” (256). As she shakes “the dust from her feet, the earth, this clay” (259) in reaching for heaven, the Daughter unites with her human companions as they free themselves from the objects that signify their bonds to the world and the alienation of their spirit: the Doorkeeper burns her shawl; the Officer his roses for Victoria; Edith, her ugliness; the Lawyer, the report of the proceedings of the High Court; and the Poet, A Book of Martyrs, for whom “suffering [was] redemption and death deliverance” (259, 260). As she enters the Castle, it burns revealing civilization as “a wall of human faces, questionning, mourning, despairing” (261). Released from the restraints of the Castle, the forces of life reassert themselves; libidinal, life-producing energy bursts forth as the flower-bud blooms into a giant chrysanthemum.
Daughter. The parting time has come; the end draws near.
Farewell, you child of man, dreamer,
poet, who knows best the way to live.
Above the earth you hover,
plunging at times to graze the dust,
but not to be submerged.

IV. Conclusion: Strindberg as The Poet

The final words of the Daughter to the Poet as she enters the burning Castle echoes the voice of Strindberg in regard to the relationship between the new consciousness and the society from which it sought to separate itself at the turn of the nineteenth century. Although many critics, including one of Strindberg’s biographers, Elizabeth Sprigge, believe that Strindberg represented himself in each of the main male characters of A Dream Play, as well as a “female” self in the Daughter, clearly the Poet is the central personification of his artistic imagination, or as Sprigge describes it, “the earthly self that was closest to the heavens” (201). For Strindberg, the poet as dreamer fulfilled several of his personal and artistic needs: the dream afforded his artistic self the “best way to live.” His dreams were his “wings” that allowed Strindberg’s imagination to “hover above the earth” that grounded his literary imagination with conventional theater’s and even naturalism’s fetters.

Moreover, the dream as form, manifest in his A Dream Play, also enabled Strindberg to show the world as he believed it existed in 1901. It propounds the human experience as a fragmentary “conflict of opposites” resulting in the alienation of man’s material life from his consciousness, his spiritual self from his earthly existence.
A Dream Play represents a world that was so unreal, unpredictable and transitory to Strindberg and others during that era that they felt it could only be understood clearly as "a mirage, a reflection, a dream image" (257). Thus, through the subjective freedom realized in dreams, the unconscious, irrationality, and the artistic imagination, the new consciousness broke free of its earthly bounds allowing Strindberg and the rebellious young intellectuals of the generation of 1900 to soar above the positivism, materialistic values, and failed political ideologies of their forefathers, albeit briefly, before the horrors of mass destruction in the Great War caused them to tumble to earth once again.

V. A Dream Play in Performance: Production Notes

Figure #1 (next page) is of Max Reinhardt’s seminal production of A Dream Play, performed in 1921 in Stockholm, Sweden. Reinhardt’s staging of the play is considered one of the most innovative for its interpretation of the dream effect. Because of the structure of the play, with its many fantastical settings that merge and dissolve into each other, A Dream Play was considered “unstageable” and was not produced until five years after it was first published in 1902 (Styan 28). Although it has been produced a multitude of times since its first production in 1907, four productions represent significant interpretations of the staging of Strindberg’s A Dream Play. Strindberg was directly involved with the initial production, which was performed at his own Intimate Theatre. The play, which ran for over three hours in performance, was critically well received after its first performance, but “taxing” for audiences because of its length and complexity. The play “closed” after just twelve performances (Meyer 482). The second production, pictured in figure#1, was performed at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm and was far more successfully received, as were the
subsequent five productions of Olaf Molander in 1935 through 1955. In 1970 film
director, Ingmar Bergman, creatively adapted and redesigned *A Dream Play* for a very
successful production performed on Swedish television.

![Image](image-url)

Figure #1 represents the goal of all of these productions to present on stage the
atmosphere and mood of the dream which is so explicitly woven into the text and
imagery of Strindberg's play. Of the three modern productions, there was unanimity in
their use of the almost total absence of color in favor of black, white and gray as the
most appropriate "color scheme" to express properly the feeling of a dream. Color was
considered far more representational of "reality" than the unreal strangeness of the
black and white schema. Molander, however, did make use of "occasional touches of glowing colors" in order to stress the significance of certain properties in the dream (Holm 252).

The dream effect was sought in other technical areas as well. In his production of the play, Reinhardt used a variety of atmospheric "dream" sound effects; however, he insisted that his actors wear thick felt pads on their shoes to eliminate any natural sounds that may occur from their movement (Tornqvist 257). Building on the dream effect of reappearing props (e.g. the Officer's closet and the clover-leaf door) that Strindberg indicated in his stage directions, Molander used the same props from scene to scene to add to the estrangement of the dream. As Egil Tornqvist notes in Staging 'A Dream Play', "all the objects gradually became familiar - they were recognized as something that had been seen before, something known and, for that very reason, peculiar-looking in their new surroundings" (252).

Figure #2 (next page) is a rendering of the Prologue, the Daughter's descent from heaven to earth, done by Carl Grabow for the 1907 Castegren production. How to stage the Prologue, which Strindberg added to the original text of the play five years after it was written to "stress the metaphysical dimension" (Tornqvist 258) of the play, was cause for concern for all who produced the play. The immediate question was whether it should be included at all. Directors and producers handled the Prologue in very different ways. Castegren, in the 1907 production included the Prologue but shifted the emphasis away from the Daughter to the audience as the dreamer of the action by surrounding the apron of the stage with "red poppies, the symbol of sleep" (Tornqvist 258). Molander and Reinhardt similarly included the Prologue; however, Reinhardt used the spotlight to highlight the Daughter in "crucial moments" of the play, such as the Prologue, where the "goddess" aspect of her character needed
to be emphasized (Holm 25). Thus, when bathed in light, the Daughter was seen as “sent from the Gods”; when in normal stage lighting, she was more easily perceived as Agnes (Holm 25). The Grabow sketch in figure#2, which depicts the landscape of the Prologue, uses light and darkness to emphasize heaven and earth. The Daughter emerges from the aura of light and descends into what are could be assumed as either thunder clouds or rock formations on earth (Tornqvist 260). Molander, who emphasized a “dreamy landscape of the Surrealists” over lighting effects for the Prologue, obviated the staging problem of the Daughter’s descent to earth by simply changing the Daughter’s dialogue to a voice-over similar to Indra’s (Tornqvist 264).
Figure#3 is a scene from the 1970 production in which Ingmar Bergman relocated the Prologue to just before the opera corridor scene. The Poet is on stage with Agnes while Indra and his Daughter appear on an elevated stage behind them. Bergman presented the Prologue as “theatrical illusion” with Indra and the Daughter assuming the roles as performers rather than Gods. Their presentation of the Prologue
received applause during the play.

Bergman’s interpretation of the Prologue shifts the emphasis from the metaphysical side of the *A Dream Play* to the artistic, which is embodied by the Poet. Moreover, Bergman’s adaptation extends the philosophical dimensions of the play to include even more of the synthesis of art, philosophy and spirituality that is consistent with the "new consciousness" of the era in which the play was written.

Figure#4.

Figure#4 is a rendering of the Growing Castle scene designed by Carl Grabow for the initial production of *A Dream Play* at Strindberg’s Intimate Theatre in 1907. The original design was to incorporate slide projections rather than conventional backdrops and free-standing scenery to facilitate smoother transitions between scenes. Strindberg maintained that a fluid pacing was necessary to achieve a dream
effect (Styan 28). Because of technical difficulties, the projections were abandoned in favor of traditional staging. After the play’s opening, Strindberg felt that the scene changes caused by the use of conventional scenery and too much “visual decoration” made the production seem too “slow and solid” (Styan 28). Molander, who used similar staging, (although projections were used in his productions) kept the action flowing through the use of a spotlight on characters to “isolate a episode” while the stage was darkened for set changes. The use of the spotlight for such transitional scenes enabled the action to flow much more smoothly.

Scene shift problems have been a concern of all productions of A Dream Play. The Bergman production in 1970 (see figure#8) resolved the difficulties in a fashion closest to what Strindberg himself suggested. Strindberg felt that almost a bare stage and a minimal amount of “visual decoration” would best represent the world of the play. Furthermore, simple props could be used symbolically to suggest locales: sea shells for the sea, or a hymn board for the church. Strindberg also believed that slide projections and lighting effects would greatly enhance the dream atmosphere of the play (Styan 29).

Figures#5, 6, and 7 (next two pages) illustrate simply the differences in interpretation of three productions. The two renderings and one photo are of the opera corridor scene, Figure#5 is the Carl Grabow sketch for the 1907 Castegren production. What the rendering reveals is the emphasis on realism given by that production. Metaphorical objects, such as the lemon tree and the dilapidated wall are rendered without any of the symbolic meaning that Strindberg explicitly gave them in his stage directions. Only the opening in the door that combines the clover-leaf with a crucifix as a symbol of hope, as Strindberg suggested, was retained (Tornqvist 266). Figure#6 is the rendering of Franz Dworsky of the opera corridor for the Reinhardt
production in 1921. The Dworsky rendering exhibits the “excessively gloomy and somber” mood that characterized that production (Styan 29). Lastly, figure#7 is a photo of the opera corridor from the set designed by Sven Skawonius for the Molander production in 1935. This scene is distinguished by its resemblance to the old opera house in Stockholm, a likeness that Tornqvist indicates would have been easily recognizable to audiences (267). The Molander production was heavily based on the biography of Strindberg; the actor playing the Poet was even made up to resemble Strindberg (Styan 30). As in the case of recurring props on stage, Molander felt that the familiarity of the local scenes in the context of the imaginary events of the play enhanced the dream effect (Tornqvist 268).

Figure#5.
Figures 6 & 7.
Figure#8 is the Fairhaven set designed by Lennart Mork for the 1970 Bergman production. Unlike most productions of *A Dream Play*, Bergman and Mork separated the images of Fairhaven and Foulstrand that usually appeared simultaneously on stage as indicated in Strindberg’s stage directions. In the Bergman production, the movement from Foulstrand to Fairhaven was accomplished by changing the entire set and costuming from black to white. Only the Poet, the dreamer in the Bergman production, remained in conventional costuming (Tornqvist 271).
Figures 9 & 10.
Figures 9 & 10 are of the Coalheavers’ scene from the Castegren and Reinhardt productions respectively. Tornqvist points out that the Coalheavers’ scene is often omitted from productions of *A Dream Play* since its setting in a specific locale, a Mediterranean resort and the social context of the scene do not “seem wholly integrated in the play” (271). The realistic renderings of the scene in figures 9 & 10 support Strindberg’s naturalist perspective of the social issues raised in the scene. Bergman incorporated the Coalheavers’ scene into the Foulstrand / Fairhaven scene, as the “blackened” Coalheavers easily conformed with the black and white design in the 1970 production (Tornqvist 273).

Figure 11 (next page) is the Lawyer in the Church scene from the 1921 Reinhardt production. By placing the Lawyer on the cross, in addition to the crown of thorns placed on the Lawyer’s head as indicated in the stage directions, Reinhardt emphasized a religious dimension of *A Dream Play*, which Molander extended in both of his productions in 1935 and 1947.
Figure #12 is of the final scene of the Bergman production in 1970. The ending of Bergman’s production contrasted sharply with the distinctly religious meaning of the final scene as interpreted by Olaf Molander. Instead of the giant Chrysanthemum bursting into bloom above the burning Growing Castle, Molander placed an altar with
two candles in front of a projection of the Castle which dissolved into "a collage of human faces of different sizes (Tornqvist 277). The 1947 Molander production reduced the metaphysical aspects of the play for a post-war context (Holm 253). Molander used the same projections; however, for this version the wall of human faces was transformed into "the black ruins of houses, reminiscent of those found in European cities bombed during World War II" (Tornqvist 277). The Poet was left on stage in front of a large wooden cross. Styan feels that such a shift in emphasis from a more metaphysical or primitive ending to a more religious one turned the play away from its intended meaning into a more "predictable . . . lesson in Christian faith"(30).

The Bergman production was distinctive from the others in its innovative revision of the final scene. Bergman abandoned the representational sets of the burning Castle for a symbolic treatment of fire through symbolic red designs on a screen. The final focus was altered from that of the Daughter to the Poet, who "spoke the final lines about the schizophrenic predicament of humanity: the desire to leave and to stay"(Tornqvist 280). As the lights dim on the Poet, attention shifts to Agnes, wearing her shawl of suffering, sitting alone on stage with her head in her hands, a pose that is "clearly a realistic understatement of Strindberg’s ‘wall of human faces . . . asking, sorrowing, despairing’(Tornqvist 280). Thus, Bergman fused a metaphysical perspective and a concern for humanity into a powerful expression of August Strindberg’s nyanaturalism.
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