

Inferno: The Human Mind Inflamed

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Abstract: *Many writers have been inspired by Dante's Inferno; Tennyson, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Seamus Heaney. August Strindberg's own Inferno, does not only record personal suffering and mental torture, but a period of doubt, when assailed by feelings of desperation and estrangement he set himself up as a scientist. It also casts some of his dramatic works, as The Father, Miss Julie and others, in different perspectives, allotting them alternative readings.*

The dictionary defines 'inferno' as "hell; the nether regions" (Philip D. and Andrew T. Morehead, 1981: 278). The Bible designates it as a place of fire, torture and punishment for souls that have sinned. Dante's *Inferno* is doubtlessly the most famous literary treatise of that fearful abode in Hell; its images and descriptions of the countless modes of suffering beyond all imagination. Strindberg was forty-eight when he wrote his *Inferno* in 1897. A novel of an autobiographical nature, it records his life during the years, 1894-1897: "The major transitional period in Strindberg's life was formed by the years leading into and out of his *Inferno* experience" (Sprinchorn, 1988:16). Writing *Inferno* was in all probability a therapeutic; a means to thrash out his personal conflicts. In it he asked himself about the sins, crimes and follies he had perpetrated and what he regarded as appropriate punishment or at other times torture beyond human endurance; a hell on earth:

After 1897, it was his crimes that concerned him ... in *Inferno*, *Legends*, *Jacob Wrestles* and *To Damascus* ... The obstinate attitude towards God that was so characteristic of the latter part of Strindberg's life—his bookkeeping system of crime and punishment, his revolt against God at moments when he thought the punishment too hard—all these reactions were determined by his new moralistic outlook (Brandell 1974:130).

August Strindberg narrates in his *Inferno*, his own personal agony and despair during this critical period of his life. He had decided to end his literary career, his writing, especially for the theatre. His sensitive and proud nature drove him to abandon any endeavor in which he met criticism and his books for some time had been under attack; charged at times with blasphemy, as *Getting Married*, or for political statements as in *The Red Room*, a satirical portrayal of political corruption in Stockholm.

The publication of *The Red Room* made Strindberg the logical standard-bearer for radical opinion in Sweden, but he had a difficult time adapting himself to the role... "I am so lonely that I am dying", he wrote to Edvard Brandes on 19 January 1881. "Those who share my views are so cowardly that they keep silent" (Meyer, 1987: 88).

The first volume of *Getting Married*, published in 1884, a collection of 12 stories, had caused Strindberg to be put on trial. However, on arriving in Stockholm, he was met by a large crowd and the young generations hailed him as a hero, so that he was quickly acquitted. The second volume of *Getting Married* was, unlike the first volume which had not evinced any hostility towards women, full of bitterness, disillusion, and antagonism towards women, brought on by his marital discord during this period. It portrayed women as vampires who sucked the blood of their hard-working husbands and considered men their natural enemies. In the preface he blamed on women all mankind's calamities and wars and termed marriage a form of prostitution by contract, whereby the husbands are subjected to abject slavery.

Strindberg's wife, Siri von Essen, was deeply offended by this second volume. One story in particular, "The Breadwinner", seemed to be a direct reference to her and Strindberg's own marriage. It is the story of a writer who works hard to provide for his family but his wife stays out all day, drunk with a lady friend, leaving her children uncared for. The publication of this second volume of *Getting Married* caused the rift between him and Siri to increase, as she felt, and rightly so, that readers would conclude that she, his wife, was a shrewish woman and that the stories in the volume portrayed his own marriage.

Strindberg and Siri von Essen had been married for thirteen years. When he first met her, it was as the wife of another man but he was struck not by her beauty, but by her striking figure, crown of golden locks and seeming innocence:

What struck me about the Baroness was her girlishness. Although she might have been about twenty-five years old, her appearance was that of an adolescent. She had the head of a schoolgirl, an engaging face, completely ringed by unruly locks as fair as ears of wheat (Landquist, 1912: 44; qtd. in Meyer, 1987: 58).

Her husband's unfaithfulness and Strindberg's ardour drove her into his arms and when she was finally divorced they were married. Siri had also wanted to be an actress and Strindberg encouraged her, even seeking roles for her. Their first years of marriage had been happy and he was a devoted husband and father, displaying great affection for his children. His daughter, Karin, remembering those happy times, wrote: "He used to take little Hans on his knee ... how his soft voice would say, "Come here, children ..." (Ahlström, 1959:184; qtd. in Meyer, 1987:160). Siri remained his great love and even after they were divorced and he was married again, he seems to have retained his love for her. His second wife, Frida, was surprised when during their honeymoon he took out of his bag a photo of Siri and said in the tone of a proud owner, "That's how she

looks; she is aristocratic, beautiful, slender and refined” (Strindberg, Frida. 1937:169-70).

Rumours about Siri’s infidelity and lesbian tendencies soured their marriage after six or seven years of connubial joy. A staunch refusal to believe these rumours was Strindberg’s initial response, but in time he was beset with doubts and suspicions, which soon developed into a fierce hatred for Siri and a deep misogyny, for which he was to be known for the remainder of his life, in spite of his great love and need for women. In a letter to Brandes, concerning his play, *The Marauders*, he writes:

That I have now portrayed a mean and dishonorable woman is no more unjust and unaesthetic than Ibsen’s and the sisters attacks on the male sex. It is now becoming evident that woman is by nature mean and instinctively dishonest ... Actually my misogyny is purely theoretical, and I can’t live a day without deluding myself that I warm my soul in the glow of their unconscious vegetable existence (ibid: 170).

Influenced by the French novelist Emile Zola, Strindberg depicted his characters and their lives with scientific objectivity. A Nietzschean concept of life as a succession of contests between wills dominates his pre- *Inferno* plays. The female characters of his Naturalist dramas are demons that destroy their male partners and usurp their traditional dominant roles and drain their creative and intellectual powers. A letter to Axel Lundegard, who was to translate *The Father* into Danish, emphasizes this view-point, brought about by marital discord and Strindberg’s suspicions concerning his wife’s infidelity. It also demonstrates that Strindberg had begun to develop an interest in modern methods of acting:

A deceived husband is a comic figure in the eyes of the world, and especially to a theatre audience. He must show that he is aware of this, and that he too would laugh if only the man in question were someone other than himself. This is what is modern in my tragedy ... Subtle, calm, resigned—the way a normally healthy spirit accepts his fate today ... he symbolizes for me a masculinity which people have tried to pond or wheedle out of us and transfer to the third sex! It is only when he is with the woman that he is unmanly, because that is how she wants him, and the law of adaptation forces us to play the role that our sexual partner demands (ibid:180-81).

Misogyny, fury and agitation brought out the best in Strindberg, observed in the writing of *Miss Julie* and *The Father*. Not only do the female figures attempt to usurp male superior roles but reveal themselves as either evil or weak and psychologically unstable. Miss Julie whips her fiancé; when he jilts her she shifts her attention to Jean, her man servant, who deftly shows her who is master. Her humiliating defeat, sad but inevitable, is pitifully portrayed in her robotically maneuvered suicide. In the preface to *Miss Julie*, an important document in theater history defining his theory of modern drama, Strindberg states:

Since they are modern characters, living in an age of transition ... I have drawn my people as split and vacillating ... agglomerations of past and present cultures, scraps from books and newspapers, fragments of humanity, torn shreds of once fine clothing that has become rags, in just the way that a human soul is patched together ... I believe that what most interests people today is the psychological process (ibid:195).

During this period of his life Strindberg began to experience doubts about what was real or fanciful. This stage precedes his Inferno period, during which he was retained for some time in a hospital for the mentally disturbed, which he depicts in *To Damascus*, his first post-Inferno play.

It seems to me as though I walk in my sleep—as though reality and imagination are one. I don't know if *The Father* is a work of the imagination or if my life has been ... Through much writing my life has become a shadow-play; it is as though I no longer walk the earth, but hover weightless in a space that is not filled with air but with darkness (ibid:182).

Strindberg consulted a specialist concerning his mental stability, because he was convinced that Siri was planning to have him confined to a mental asylum, as Laura had committed her husband in *The Father*. He also suspected her of having several lovers and even doubted his fatherhood of his children and requested his translator, Lundegard, to: “Arrange pensions for my children, who, whether they are mine or not, were adopted by me” (qtd in Meyer, 1987:182).

Strindberg now turned away from drama to alchemy and chemistry. It was a sad, painful time for him, following two divorces. Strindberg had been married three times in his life; to Baroness Siri Von Essen, to whom he was married for 13 years; then briefly to the journalist Frida Uhl and finally to the actress, Harriet Bosse. In his plays he included stormy scenes and tense conflict from his marriages, claiming “that a writer's task was to be a social reporter and documentary analyst, and argued that the one document a person could use as an authority was his own life” (Steene, 2008: n.pag.).

He had always been interested in science and as a young man had studied chemistry but had failed the oral exam. He then decided to abandon his scientific studies and work in the theatre, first attempting without success to be an actor, then devoting himself to dramatic and literary writing. Now past forty, he again applied himself to science, as well as alchemy, trying to produce gold. Strindberg also manifested a deep interest in magic, mysticism and other forms of ‘the occult’.

Strindberg worked on experiments with sulphur and the transmutation of carbon and other elements and in 1893 published his first work of speculative natural history, *Antibarbarus*. But his approach to science was anything but orthodox, causing scientists to cast a critical eye on his scientific work. Strindberg's strong belief in the laws of transformation of objects, elements and reality dominated his work in various fields, versatile as he seemed to be. He believed he had achieved the dream of all alchemists; the transformation of iron into gold, which he published in his article, “The Synthesis of Gold.” in the

French alchemical journal, *L'Hyperchimie*. He even indulged in occultism, putting himself in states of unconsciousness. "Sometimes I think I am some sort of medium, for it comes so easily, half unconsciously ..." (Falck, 1935: 80-81). He also began to interpret chance incidents, signs and various occurrences as omens. The sight of his initials, A.S, in a shop window, was taken as a positive omen. Dreams, visions and signs became a constant obsession, some of which he later incorporated in his literature. In the basin he used in his gold experiments, he envisioned a landscape of hills, trees, orchards, a river and the ruins of a castle. It was only months later, during a visit to his daughter, that he recognized his vision as the landscape of his mother-in-law's house.

During his *Inferno* period Strindberg also dabbled in painting, producing stormy seascapes. He published two essays, again confirming his absolute belief in the laws of transformation and the ability of the mind to envision reality multifariously. "The New Arts, or the Role of Chance in Artistic Creation." and another article, "Deranged Sense Impressions," deal with the curious power of the mind to alter its perceptions; in a word, to 're-create' reality. Describing painting forms of his own, he explains how objects can change and evolve before our very eyes, a prelude to his *Dream Plays*:

The boy going through the woods catches sight of the wood-spirit. She is lovely as the day with emerald-green hair. He approaches her and she turns her back to him ... the boy has seen nothing but a tree-trunk, and his lively imagination has invented all the rest (Strindberg 1968: 99).

Strindberg took large amounts of absinthe during the *Inferno* period. It was not only powerful, but also addictive, its habitual use resulting in anxiety, fear and hallucinations, all symptoms clearly experienced by Strindberg, which could explain such amazing transformations. However, Dada and Surrealism, in the 20th century, would expound the theory that reality can change and alter and that chance affects what we experience. Working with art and alchemy, transformations were wrought within Strindberg's mind as it burned in the flames of his *Inferno*. He described his writing as a fever developing into a trance like state, in which he would be receptive to visions. Gauguin, the artist, was his friend, especially in the interval when he professed to be an artist for some time, attempting to make a living by selling some landscape canvases. Strindberg wrote a letter to Gauguin, which he began by expressing his disapproval of Gauguin's bizarre, strange art forms and unconventional style, but ended it with an epiphany:

I cannot understand your art and I cannot like it ... Who is he? He is Gauguin, the savage who hates the encumbrance of civilization, a kind of Titan who, jealous of his creator, creates in his lost moments his own little world ... who defies and challenges God, preferring to see the sky as red rather than, like the mob, as blue. Upon my soul, as I warm to these words, I begin to feel a certain understanding of the art of Gauguin ... People have reproached a modern writer for not portraying real human beings but simply creating ones of his own. Simply! ... I too begin to feel an immense need to turn savage and create a new world (Söderström, 1972: 281-2; qtd. in Meyer, 1987: 312).

This letter, written after Strindberg's release from hospital, where he had been treated for psychological disturbance, suffering from hallucinations and persecution mania, indicates the alchemical alterations wrought within Strindberg himself during his Inferno crisis. Before a brilliant and successful dramatist, though constantly hounded by the critics, he now had to endure the flames and the pangs of isolation, humiliation, deprivation, doubt and fear of the Unknown Powers, as he called them, and referred to in *To Damascus*. What is of interest here is the interdependence and interaction of all the multifarious occupations, which Strindberg took up during his Inferno crisis, such as painting, photography, alchemy and science. Strindberg was not simply a writer and playwright but also a painter, scientist, alchemist, occultist and philologist:

Strindberg-studies until recently tended to dismiss the playwright's pursuit of non-literary activities as insignificant digression. The currently emerging criticism, however, keeps shedding new light on his contributions to literary and theatrical modernism by placing his work within a wider cultural and interdisciplinary context. Strindberg's uniqueness lies not in great achievements in all these various areas but in his eagerness to experiment and to break down barriers between genres, views, and fields of experience. (Szalczer, 2001: 33).

Some critics and biographers have pointed out that many of the incidents in *Inferno* did not entirely take place as described but had been dramatized by Strindberg, establishing beyond a doubt that he had never really abandoned the world of drama. Thus he repeatedly mentions seeing figures watching him in the dark, electrocuting him in his bed and attempting to poison him. Strindberg did actually suffer from hallucinations, suspicions, doubts, and fears, which assailed him furiously during this period. In reply to one friend who accused him of suffering delusions and persecution mania, he writes: "Hallucinations, fantasies, dreams, seem to me to possess a high degree of reality ... what I see in my pillow, which is made of birds' feathers, once bearers of life ... is soul, creative power, and reality, as I can draw these shapes, show them to others (Strindberg, 1968: 56). He also inflicted pain on others, filled with a strange hatred for many who had helped him and loved him. Friends and acquaintances now became in his eyes demons, sent by the Powers to show him the error of his ways. Each night he suffered anxiety attacks in which he suffered the vicious attacks of his torturers. He had read both Swedenborg's description of Hell and Dante's *Inferno*, but maintained that Hell already existed on earth, in the various forms of pain and suffering humans are subjected to, as well as various forms of unpleasantness.

We are already in Hell. It is the earth itself that is Hell, the prison constructed for us by an intelligence superior to our own ... the image of Dante's Hell rose up before me, the coffers, the sinners being baked red hot ... was it a nightmare? No, it was a commonplace reality that was made perfectly plain by a horrible stink, a stream of mire, and a chorus of grunts coming from the pig-sty (Strindberg, 1979: 211-13).

Reading Swedenborg re-invigorated Strindberg's faith. It was these strong Christian beliefs that dominated the writing of *Inferno* and his subsequent literary production; better known as his post-*Inferno* plays; *To Damascus*, *The Ghost Sonata* and *A Dream Play*. Strindberg had acquired his religious beliefs from his mother, being deeply pious as a young boy, though claiming an uneasy lack of faith during his adult life. His mother had died when he was 13 years old. "Throughout his life he felt a sense of loss and longed for an ideal maternal figure ... He worshipped his mother in all the women with whom he fell in love during his lifetime" (Lamm, 1971: 56). A mother figure appeared in his mother-in-law, Frida's mother, who is also placed within *To Damascus*, his initial post-*Inferno* play, which depicts a journey to salvation, similar to the one traversed by Saul, he who hated Christ and all he stood for and was converted, at the end of the road, the journey, into Saint Paul, the great disciple of Christ. The mother figure in *To Damascus* explains to Strindberg's alter ego that he must make his peace with God.

Strindberg recycles Biblical material into his *Inferno*. He cries out in pain, awaiting liberation from his agony and an end to his suffering: "I began again to imagine that I was Job, the righteous and blameless man, put to the test by the Eternal, in order to demonstrate to the wicked how well an upright man can endure suffering unjustly inflicted" (Strindberg, 1979: 216). There are other moments when he confesses his sins and crimes, expressing penance. His misery in *Inferno* carries a note of contrition, allowing a ray of hope to pervade his post-*Inferno* drama.

To Damascus, *The Ghost Sonata* and *A Dream Play* were all produced after his *Inferno* period, which began with defiance and arrogance but ended in submission and an acceptance of divine authority. Although their reception by critics and theatre audiences of his time was a mixture of bewilderment, derision and outright claim that they could not be staged, they are now acknowledged to be forerunners of Expressionism, Surrealism, and the Theater of the Absurd. Martin Esslin acknowledged Strindberg's effect on the Theater of the Absurd:

The first to put on the stage a dream world in the spirit of modern psychological thinking was August Strindberg. The three parts of *To Damascus* (1898-1904), and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) are masterly transcriptions of dreams and obsessions, and direct sources of the Theater of the Absurd. In these plays the shift from the objective reality of the world outside, surface appearance to the subjective reality of inner states of consciousness—a shift that marks the watershed between the traditional and the modern, the representational and the Expressionist projection of mental realities—is finally and triumphantly accomplished (qtd. in Stockenström 1988: iv).

It was the staging of this 'subjective reality', the inner states of consciousness, that incapacitated the production of Strindberg's post-*Inferno* plays, especially *The Ghost Sonata* and *A Dream Play*. Only in modern times, in the 20th century, could this BE achieved when modern stages, technology and new approaches to

drama could bring Strindberg's futuristic drama to life, a magic realism, where a projection of fantasies, memories, dreams and imagination could be realized on stage. "One of the sturdiest myths that has attached itself to Strindberg's work, both in his own time and in ours, has been the notion that his plays—particularly the great experimental masterpieces of his post-Inferno period—are somehow unperformable" (Marker & Marker, 2002: ix).

In *To Damascus* the painful journey of the protagonist is set against a spiritual landscape; a voyage of discovery into a realm where no values are constant, and where reality changes shape; a fearful nightmare set against a background of Hell and Heaven. It deals not only with conversion and atonement, but more importantly with the spiritual and emotional journey of the protagonist, who is initially rebellious and arrogant though revealing doubt and self-torment, as he is Strindberg's alter-ego. The protagonist also represents Adam, who is created free of sin then punished for his sins with Eve.

To Damascus was conceived during Strindberg's inferno period; a time when his troubled mind and agitated spirit sought answers to the purpose and meaning of man's existence, sin and punishment. He suffered a troubled conscience that demanded answers to these questions, for in essence he was a man of strong beliefs, which he had discarded during his erratic life style, but which had a stronghold in his soul in spite of his denial of them. Perhaps it is the most important of his post-Inferno dramas in that it reflects his exorcism. "The action of the play centers around the struggle between the Unknown and the Unseen One. The Unknown desires to grasp essential reality and the Unseen One demands humility and resignation" (Dahlsröm, 1980: 154).

Strindberg's alter-ego, the Unknown, calling his wife Eve, rather than by her name, Ingeborg, is significant. It places the play on two levels; a small village on earth; secondly, someplace in Heaven, with Hell lurking in the background. In *To Damascus*, the Unknown, Strindberg's alter-ego, talks of being punished, but is reassured it is part of the treatment he must receive to be cured. The name, the Unknown, is significant in revealing that Strindberg was striving towards the 'Other' within himself, groping his way through the maze of life, his mind inflamed by his Inferno; a Hell of his own creation, leading the way for future dramatists.

The Lady tells the Unknown, that she and her former husband laid the curse of Moses upon him. Strindberg always felt that he was cursed no matter what he did or how hard he tried to atone for previous mistakes and sins. All these are portrayed in the play as he represents Adam, who is created free of sin then punished for his sins with Eve. Hence, the Lady represents both Eve, the mother of all sin and the cause for man's eternal suffering, and the Madonna, the virgin mother, an icon of innocence and purity.

LADY: And now I see how evil you are, and why I am to be called Eve. She was a mother and brought sin into the world: it was another mother who brought expiation. The curse of mankind was called down on us by the first, a blessing by the second. In me you shall not destroy my whole sex. Perhaps I have a different mission in your life. We shall see! (Strindberg, 2009: I. viii).

The Unknown is ill in a convent, again an allusion to Strindberg's personal life, when during his Inferno period he suffered blood poisoning as a result of conducting scientific experiments without the adequate instruments and protection. At the Banquet, an important scene in the play, the Unknown, as in a dream, finds himself cast, into the inferno of disgrace and degradation. Every triumph or happiness the Unknown has experienced in life: love, marriage, children, success, are all suddenly transformed into bitterness as he realizes his sins. He sees faces that seem to be apparitions or ghosts, for they appear "waxen and corpse-like, their whole appearance queer, their gestures strange." They all represent either Strindberg's family, kin, acquaintances or even different phases of himself. Thus, his impoverished, proud self that refuses to admit its beggared state is there as the Beggar; his temporarily insane self is present as the Madman; his wife and children whom he abandoned, and his second wife, Frida, from whom he also escaped from, are all there. The dramatization of his troubled conscience for sins incurred on those he loved is powerfully enacted in this half real, half dream state; a judgment he has brought upon himself. The Banquet is a terrifying nightmare of humiliation:

... a dream-within-the-dream that is watched with horror by the sleepwalking protagonist. Its ruling irony lay in the sense that the ridicule and scorn heaped upon the dreamer are always made worse by his own gnawing suspicion that they may after all be justified and represent the truth about himself (Marker and Marker, 2002: 49).

In the new style of play he inaugurated in *To Damascus*, Strindberg rejected naturalistic drama, with its basis in causality, logic, and psychologically motivated character. It was a new theatrical style on which he would base his other two masterpieces of the post-Inferno period; *A Dream Play* and *The Ghost Sonata*. In *A Dream Play*, the dilemma of resistance against God and submission is given dramatic expression. Strindberg had arrived at the conviction that suffering in this world is a necessary punishment imposed on mankind by God. As an advocate of humanity, Strindberg was indignant at human suffering, but feared God's wrath and punishment. He dramatized this conflict in *A Dream Play* through the character of Indra's daughter, a goddess, inspired by Indian folklore, who has come down to earth in order to find out how mankind lives, and discovers how hard life is. Unable to alleviate their pain and suffering, she returns to the sky once more, depressed and saddened at their condition. Strindberg realized that he had conceived a new form of drama but unfortunately, he had no success persuading the producers and director to follow his suggestions of creating an anti-realistic setting, suggesting space, architecture and landscape, to be effected through changing backdrops. All these were totally disregarded at the play's premiere (April 17, 1907), at The Swedish Theatre.

Awkward changes of scene and inept lighting techniques disrupted the play's mesmeric flow of fleeting, shifting images. What symbolism there was in the

endeavour seems to have been heavy-handed ... Generally rather baffled, the reviewers of this first production were inclined to address the play as a reading drama that defied adequate stage representation (Marker and Marker 2002: 57-58).

The Ghost Sonata suffered a similar fate at its premiere at Strindberg's Intimate Theatre, which had a small stage and seated only about 161 persons. It too, was considered unsuitable for performance and only twelve performances were given. The audience and critics were bewildered by Strindberg's peculiar style and only one critic, writer Bo Bergman, gave a favorable review of the play:

In the vision the chamber play wants to present on the stage the invisible becomes visible. The only law governing the play is the author's imagination. It is a dream that is to be recreated in flesh and blood, a very delicate matter theatrically. One has to retain the visionary element without losing touch with realities (qtd. in Törnqvist, 2000: 105).

The Ghost Sonata was not produced effectively in Sweden, till 1942, by Olaf Molander, who became the leading director of Strindberg's plays. He was highly interested in Strindberg's post-Inferno dramas, especially *The Ghost Sonata* and *A Dream Play*, insisting that:

The action must resemble a dream. Whatever seems grotesque in the play then receives meaning, for in the world of the dream all proportions are changed and the tiniest things become important. Yet, as long as the dream lasts it is experienced as reality. The dreamer does not realize that he is dreaming. Therefore the dream, when presented on the stage, must seem both unreal and real" (ibid: 114).

The Ghost Sonata is divided into three basic parts; The first takes place in the street, where the main character, the Student, Strindberg's alter ego, is introduced to the conniving Old Man in the wheelchair, the vampire, and his world of lost souls, living and dead. The second part presents the Ghost Supper, presided by the Colonel and his wife, also known as the Mummy. In the third part the Student pays court to the daughter of the house. In *The Ghost Sonata* Strindberg emphasizes a world made up of contradictions presented through antitheses. The Old Man and The Student's father are described as scoundrels and benefactors; the Old Man and his fiancée have promised to be eternally true to each other yet fail to recognize one another. The Student says the house is horrible but initially envisioned it as Paradise; he also speaks of the ugly and the beautiful; of good and evil.

There is something rotten here. And I thought that it was paradise when I saw you enter here for the first time ... I saw a Colonel who was no Colonel ... where is honour and faith? In the sagas and fancies of children ... Jesus Christ descended into hell; that was his wandering on earth,--this madhouse, this prison, this morgue on earth ... (Strindberg 1912-19: 208-210).

All the characters conceal hideous deformities, which slip out now and then. The Mummy flaps her wrappings on occasion and talks like a parrot; a nude

statue represents her youth. The elegant Dark Lady lifts her veil and an immense growth on her left cheek appears; her suitor, the Posh Man, dangles what looks like a loose vein from his mouth.

This terrifying gathering could be placed in a horror film; Strindberg's Hell on earth. "Strindberg's house of horrors is, to borrow from Henry James, 'no evil dream of a night.' It is a reality from which no one awakes, at least in this world" (Brantley, 2001).

Strindberg's post-Inferno plays dramatize the dream reality, horror and agitation which the dramatist had experienced during his Inferno period, as his mind and soul were subjected to the flames of an earthly Hell.

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