

**DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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**THE TRUTH BEHIND THE DOOR –STRINDBERG AND EXISTENTIALISM**

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I declare that this Dissertation is the result of my own independent investigation and that all sources are duly acknowledged in the Bibliography.

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis is to examine the connection between August Strindberg's drama and Existential philosophy. I will attempt to identify the main concepts of Existentialism, and demonstrate how these concepts were explored by existential thinkers such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. This work will examine Strindberg's earlier period of drama predominantly influenced by Nietzsche's ideology and his later period of drama intrinsically influenced by Kierkegaard's philosophy. In this thesis I will use Strindberg plays such as *Miss Julie*, *The Father* and *The Creditors* to illustrate Nietzsche's concepts of „will to power“ and „perspectives“. Nietzsche's rejection of all established values, his nihilism, and „the power battle“ evidently share underlying themes of Strindberg's naturalistic plays. Kierkegaard's concept of the „true individual“ and the existential idea of repetition, clearly manifest themselves in Strindberg works such as *The Dance of Death*, *A Dream Play* and *The Chamber Plays*. I will also present that Kierkegaard's belief that one can only attain authentic truth through „passionate inwardness“ plays a significant role in Strindberg's drama. I will demonstrate that human development, spiritual development and „becoming“ are bound to progress through a state of sickness, fear and trembling. These notions were emphasized in Kierkegaard's writings and prevail throughout Strindberg's works. This case study will highlight that Strindberg's beliefs were predominantly influenced and anticipated by Existentialists such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. The results of this thesis show that although Strindberg is mainly associated with such movements as Naturalism and Expressionism, his drama significantly focused on existential exploration.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The following thesis is a study which scrutinizes the relation between the dramatic works of 19<sup>th</sup> century Swedish playwright August Strindberg and the philosophical and literary movement Existentialism which is principally associated with such philosophers as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Strindberg is best known as a playwright whose earliest drama is associated with naturalist plays that studied people at the intersection point of psychological and political forces. While the connection between Strindberg and Naturalism has been examined by many critics; the correspondence between Strindberg's works and Existentialism has not been undertaken and still remains underdeveloped. The essence of Existentialism concentrates on the concept of the individual's freedom of choice, as opposed to the belief that humans are controlled by pre-existing omnipotent being, such as God or Fate. Such themes as freedom, decision, and responsibility are prominent in all existentialist philosophers. These matters constitute the core of human being. Existentialism is a humanism in a sense that it is very much concerned with human and personal values, and with the realization of an authentic human existence. This thesis will focus on Strindberg's means of expressing his beliefs which were predominantly influenced and anticipated by Existentialists such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.

## CHAPTER ONE- EXISTENTIALISM

### **1.1.Existentialism**

Existentialism is mainly associated with the works of the late 19th- and 20th-century philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger who focused upon the analysis of human existence in the world. Despite different doctrines/beliefs these philosophers attempted to investigate the human being's awareness of his own being and the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience. A central proposition of existentialism is that *existence precedes essence*, which means that existentialists believed that man is the being who can be conscious of, and as a result of this responsible for, his being („existence“) therefore, one's identity is not constituted by culture and is not fixed by one's type or what labels or roles the individual fits („essence“). Jean Paul Sartre argued that, „What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be.“ (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*) In other words, to existentialists- human beings- through their consciousness form their own principles, values and ideas; thus, they verify a meaning for their life. This means that life has no meaning unless people give it meaning. Significantly, the term *existence*, coming from the root ex-sistere, means literally „to stand out, to emerge.“ (May, p.50) Because an individual has the capacity to become aware of his own being, he is truly an exceptional being, as this awareness and consciousness is what distinguishes the human being from other beings. The growth of individual consciousness, for instance through education, is contributing to how the developing person sees himself. He is

not merely a part of race or tribe but a highly distinguishable and important individual. Existentialists proposed that each individual has a freedom of choice and is responsible for the consequences of his acts. The sense of responsibility one bears for one's life inevitably revolves in conflict and frustration. Existentialism is associated with the existential themes of anxiety, absurdity, dread, despair, mortality and alienation of man from himself and his society. In fact, the last half of the nineteenth century was characterised by breaking up of personality into fragments. The familiar existential theme of the „alienated“ self, the estrangement of the self both from the world and from itself was foreseen by Søren Kierkegaard, who is considered the father of existentialism. As an exceptional spectator in life, Kierkegaard observed the results of this disintegration upon the inner emotional and spiritual life of the individual: endemic anxiety, loneliness, separation of one man to another, and finally the condition that would lead to ultimate despair, and man's alienation from himself. Nevertheless, an individual must remain authentic and „true to his essence“ by taking full responsibility for his potentials without fear and without allowing himself to be submerged in the sea of collective responses as with bees and ants, where an individual is expected to sacrifice himself eagerly for the good of the group. In a similar manner as Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche argued, that „man must organize the chaos in himself by thinking back to his true needs““desiring „all his honesty, all the sturdiness, and sincerity in his character, to help him revolt against second-hand thought, second-hand learning, second-hand action.““ (Nietzsche, TS, II,10, F.A. Lea, p.80) This means that an individual's journey in search of the self, in order to bring back a new truth is significant. Moreover, the importance of the uniqueness of the individual person against the crowd, the community or the mass society was emphasized by existentialists as the best measure of individual's freedom to choose his own path.

German-American philosopher, Walter A. Kaufmann noted that, „Man“s task is simple: he should cease letting his „„existence““ be „a thoughtless accident (...) Man“s fundamental problem is to achieve true „„existence““ instead of letting his life be no more than just another accident.““ (Kaufmann, p.133-134) In addition to this, Rollo May scrutinizes „Anxiety and Guilt as Ontological“ arguing that „if an individual locks up potential in himself, he will be guilty against what is given him in his origin, in his „core““ (May, p.113) Because a human being is that particular being who knows that at some future point he will not be, he is as Rollo May inferred „the being who is always in a dialectical relation with nonbeing, death.““ (May, p.97) As a result of this, human being confronts his own fragility, the vanity and unpredictability of life where „death is the most obvious form of the threat of nonbeing.““ (May, p.105) Consequently, this leads to the question of whether life has any meaning which is essential to existential philosophy. The sense of being is invariably connected with the questions that are deepest and most fundamental- questions of love, death, anxiety and caring.

In the face of the threat of meaningless people seek reassurance and confidence. Particularly, the function of religion and the notion of God have a key role in providing the meaning and worth of life for many people. However, we cannot test for the presence of God, thus, „since, the atheistic position is a real possibility people are faced with an existentialist dilemma.““ (Hans Kung, pp.575f; Pailin, p.175) Although existentialist thought encompasses the uncompromising atheism of Nietzsche and Sartre and the agnosticism of Heidegger, its foundation is found in the intensely religious philosophies of Pascal and Kierkegaard. Both determine the diversity of existentialism and may be distinguished as: Atheist existentialism (atheistic existentialism) and Christian existentialism. First, Atheist existentialism strongly diverged from the Christian works of the Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard whose existentialist approach developed within the context of an atheistic

worldview. Second, Christian existentialism is theo-philosophical movement which takes an existentialist approach to Christian theology and deeply relies on Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity. However, whether Existentialists are Christians or atheists they have in common the same beliefs that existence comes before the essence and that human reality/subjectivity are the most significant.

In essence, Existentialism put emphasis on the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. Indeed, in many ways „Existentialism is the unique and specific portrayal of the psychological predicament of contemporary Western man.“ (May, p.48) but it is often mistakenly considered to be a modern philosophical movement because it became prominent after World War II. The anxiety of 20<sup>th</sup> century dominated by wars and conflicts caused the breakdown of values and brought uncertainty of everyone's fundamental belief about society. However, one can find anticipations of the existential way of understanding human beings in the thought of Socrates (in his dialogues) or in St. Augustine's *Confessions* -his depth-psychological analyses of the self („Where, should I go to escape from myself, Where is there where I cannot pursue myself?“) (Augustine, p.60) More significantly, existential choices and values were demonstrated in the works of pre-modern philosophers and writers.

Of particular note, the beautifully philosophical and didactic *The Book of Ecclesiastes* in the Bible also scrutinizes the essential motive of humanity and undertakes the fundamental question about the meaning of human existence and the happiness of mankind. „Vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas“ – „Vanity of vanities, all is vanity“ - says the Preacher Koheleth. The motif of vanity mostly appeared in the medieval period and the Baroque epoch but can also be found in many other epochs. Significantly, the motive of vanity was intrinsically linked with evanescence and fragility of life connected to existential philosophy. Koheleth reflects on

the limits on human power and the meaningless of life, yet his contemplations provide the existential way of understanding human beings. Koheleth encourages people to live their life to the fullest; simultaneously, reminds that all human beings face death.

To everything there is a season,  
a time for every purpose under the sun.  
A time to be born and a time to die;  
a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted;  
a time to kill and a time to heal ...  
a time to weep and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn and a time to dance ...  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to lose and a time to seek;  
a time to rend and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silent and a time to speak;  
a time to love and a time to hate;  
a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

More compelling is that the existential way of understanding human beings has some precursors in Western history, such as René Descartes or Pascal. Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum* – „I Am, therefore, I think“ (reference) or Pascal's „I am afraid, and wonder to see myself here rather than there; for there is no reason why I should be here rather than there, now rather than then.“ (Pascal, p.36) are deeply influential reflections about human existence which laid the grounds for a fundamental thought of existentialist philosophy. But, the roots of the problem of existence in its contemporary significance lie in the work of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's approach was certainly more dynamic because they attempted to „portray the human being not as a collection of static substances or mechanisms or patterns but rather as emerging“ (May, p.50) thus evolving. In other words, these existentialists took it a step further proposing that human beings are not merely thinking subjects but acting, feeling,

living human individuals whose existence refers to coming into being, becoming. Nietzsche's concept of a „man of power“ and Kierkegaard's concept of „true individual“ are endeavours to see human being as someone whose only limit is the one he/she imposes on him/herself. However, the rigidly atheistic philosopher Nietzsche and the sternly Christian writer Kierkegaard were as divided as the poles and as close as twins. Both were brought up on Christian morals and values, relied upon religion in their works and studied theology, but Kierkegaard demonstrated ideas of morality throughout his writings by critiquing the State Church rather than denouncing the spiritual presence of God (as Nietzsche did). They were lonely, anticonformist in the extreme, believed that the deepest torments of human existence joined with anxiety, despair, and isolation and asserted the idea that „the crowd is untruth“. Both opposed themselves to the culture of the day and returned to the philosophy of Greeks. H.J. Blackham stressed that „Kierkegaard cast himself for the role of Socrates for the salvation of the age; while Nietzsche denounced the role of Socrates as the ruin of the age.“ (Blackham, p.23) More significantly, Kierkegaard's concept of „repetition“ and Nietzsche's „eternal return“ predominantly result in a convergence upon the existential process of “Becoming”. However, they held opposing viewpoints and philosophical beliefs on how one should view and live one's life.

## **1.2. Soren Kierkegaard**

Soren Kierkegaard's work put emphasis on choice, subjectivity, despair, irony, anxiety, and isolation. This Danish writer is called the father of Existentialism as he inaugurated the critique of rationalism from the standpoint of individualism. His critique of contemporary Christianity attacked the German idealist Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's notion of an „objective science of human spirit for obscuring the nature and place of Christian faith.“ (Urmson&Ree, p.164) The most conspicuous characteristic of the Kierkegaard-Hegel relationship is a blend of great

respect and rejection of the objective Idealism of Hegel, which pervades Kierkegaard's writings. Kierkegaard rejected Hegel's philosophical belief that one gains an objective understanding of the whole existence if one has a perfect understanding of comprehensive system of logic and reason. In order to overturn Hegel's attempt to „encompass“ religion at the metaphysical level, Kierkegaard emphasized that two paradoxes lie at the heart of Christianity which cannot be incorporated within philosophy: firstly, the *object* of faith is paradoxical, and secondly the *act* of faith is paradoxical. He argued that religion involves an aspect of deep irrationality that no amount of philosophical thinking can resolve, so Hegelian attempts to include religion within philosophy must fail. (Teichman & White p.53) Thus, while for Hegel the content of religion could be made rational, so that no act of faith would be required, for Kierkegaard the truth of Christianity remains paradoxical, because it is rooted in a subjective certainty based on inner conviction. An act of faith helps an individual to achieve „the release of guilt, the sense of commitment, and the acceptance of a vocation“ (Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, p.16) without second thoughts or strings attached. Because we need a certain point of reference, something to refer to, „this leap (of faith) rests on our need to overcome the separation of finite and infinite, of death and eternal life, and on our inability to do so rationally.“ (Teichman & White, p.56)

For Kierkegaard there are truths for us alone, which no one else has reason to accept. Central among these subjective truths are our religious beliefs, „for which the believer recognises and demands no objective, rationally defensible warrant.“ (Teichman & White, p.56) Nevertheless, Kierkegaard emphasized the importance of individual's subjective quest for truth:

„If initially my human nature is merely an abstract something, it is at any rate the task which life sets me to become subjective, the uncertainty of death comes more and more to interpenetrate my subjectivity dialectically. It thus become more and more important for me to think it in connection with every factor and phase of my life; for since the uncertainty is there in every moment, it can be

overcome only by overcoming it in every moment... An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth." (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.183)

For Kierkegaard „the man is (...) essentially an existing individual, whose essential task is to concentrate upon inwardness in existing; while God is infinite and external.“ (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.195) Kierkegaard believed that „to exist“ meant to become conscious of one’s self through self-commitment to the choices one makes as a free subjective individual. In doing so, one must look at himself and his life not through the eyes of the crowd but he must search to attain authentic truth through „passionate inwardness“ and the passion is precisely the truth. (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.183) Therefore, Kierkegaard focused on the significance of choice and commitment in the establishment of one’s selfhood which are fundamental to the „existing individual“. The isolation of man from the crowd and the heightening of his consciousness as an individual are the central themes of his works. Despite Kierkegaard’s view that thought is not superior to nor a substitute for existence, he „was not antirational, nor should he be confused with the „philosophers of feeling“ or the „back to nature“ evangelists. Rollo May argues that Kierkegaard „attacked not reason but *mere* reason, and he attacked it in the arid, fragmentized, rationalistic form it assumed in his day.“ (May, p.75)

Kierkegaard’s response to Hegel and Shelling (who was known for his oppositions to the ideas of Hegel) was *Either/Or* (1843), the series of „pseudonymous“ works by Kierkegaard. In this extraordinary work covering philosophy, literature and psychology Kierkegaard „focused on the task and adopting an ethical in preference to a consciously hedonistic or „aesthetic“ way of life.“ (Urmson&Ree, p.164) The central argument of *Either/Or* is that the good that we choose in the religious context may force us to decide against the good of the merely civic life,

and in doing so, the ethical can be suspended by faith. Significantly, for Kierkegaard the ethical must remain at the level of individual choice, and cannot be objective and universal. (Teichman&White, p.58) Kierkegaard argued that, „the act of choosing is essentially a proper and stringent expression of the ethical. Whenever in a strict sense there is a question of an either/or, one can always be sure that the ethical is involved. The only absolute either/or is the choice between good and evil“ (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* II, pp.170-1) Within months, Kierkegaard published *Repetition* and then *Fear and Trembling*. *Fear and Trembling* embodies the notion of actual conflict/ act of choosing between ethical and divine duties. Kierkegaard argues, using the story of Abraham („the Man of Faith“) that the ethical outlook is suspended within the religious context. (Urmson&Ree, p.164) Abraham contemplates the murder of his son in obedience to God’s command. The main argument lies in the question: are his actions justifiable? According to purely human standards Abraham contemplated an immoral act; he decided to go against the moral law and civic morality. In suspending the ethical (by determining to kill his son) Kierkegaard saw that Abraham embodied the true individual; who realises the isolating power of his utterly self-governing choice. Despite the grief and horror that he must have been experiencing, Abraham was actually about to murder his only son Isaac, before being stopped by God. Therefore, Abraham „as a single individual he became higher than the universal. This is the paradox, which cannot be mediated.“ (Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p.66) However, „this paradox“ has been re-examined in Jean-Paul Sartre’s work *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1945). Sartre stressed that man is in anguish when he chooses because he cannot escape a deep responsibility for all humanity. „This is what Kierkegaard called the anguish of Abraham. You know old story: An angel commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. But anyone in such a case would wonder straight away, is this an angel? Am I the Abraham? If we hear voices from the sky, what proves that they come not from hell, or the subconscious, or some pathological state? Who proves that they

are addressed to me? Each man must say to himself: am I right to set the standard for all humanity? To deny that is to mask the anguish.” (Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*) As a result, Kierkegaard anticipated Existentialists’ beliefs that a person should be forced to choose and be responsible without the help of laws, ethnic rules, or traditions.

In *Repetition* (1843) the broad question Kierkegaard poses is how a sense of meaning and direction in life can be regained as we suffer its absence. The novella’s pseudonymous author is obsessed with the question as to whether repetition is possible, that is, whether we can have the same experience twice over. For instance, Kierkegaard argues that it is not possible for an individual to repeat particularly enjoyable experience, because the original pleasure is often lost in the repeating. The idea of repetition is influenced by Greek theories. In the first half of the book Kierkegaard’s narrator Constantine Constantius establishes the contrast between „repetition” and the ancient Platonic concept of recollection:

„When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence. If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise. Recollection is the ethnical view of life, repetition the modern...” (Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, p.317)

Hence, recollection is associated with the motionlessness and the past, while Kierkegaard’s theme of repetition is coupled with the constant movement/progress and is linked to the ethical future. Kierkegaard believed that modern view must seek freedom forward and must look at eternity, regarded from the point of view of the moment, through the future, and not through the past (as for the Greek outlook). (Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, p.317). In contrast, According to Kierkegaard „Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is

recollected forward.””(Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, p.131) Nevertheless, for many people a life is a chain of repetitions, ordinary comic daily routine from which they cannot escape. People tend to reduce the existence to function or „pass the time“ by habit or routine to cope with the existentialist dilemma of the dread or anxiety of their existence, but this sort of approach merely leads to a vapid existence characterized by lack of concrete self-awareness. Since existence exists in movement, „the difficulty facing an existing individual is how to give his existence the continuity without which everything simply vanishes.””(Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 284-285) The answer is: „The goal of movement for an existing individual is to arrive at a decision, and to renew it (...)””(ibid) In doing so, an individual provides him/herself steady ethical reality by forming and renewing him/her in critical decisions which are a total inward commitment. For instance, one must find a courage to venture into a little-known waters and take a decisive step as to vocation, marriage or faith „in the uttermost intensity of subjective passion and with full consciousness of one’s eternal responsibility (which is in capacity of every human being).””(ibid: p.284-285)

### **1.3. Friedrich Nietzsche**

The existential concepts originated in Kierkegaard’s writings are intrinsically linked to Friedrich Nietzsche’s ideas developed four decades later. However, Nietzsche never read Kierkegaard, and he was very different from Kierkegaard in temperament. In his writings Nietzsche questions what is necessary for human society and what threatens human survival. He wrote about the place of science in nineteenth century life, and about war, and race, and evolution and also about the relations between sexes. For many people religion, morality, logic and epistemology are the most significant truths they relate in order to find the meaning in life. Nietzsche claimed the Fiction of Absolute Truth. This means that, for Nietzsche all our fundamental ideas, particularly the idea of believing in God’s reality, are fictions and illusions.

Nietzsche examined the consequences of the collapse of any theistic support for morality. Despite the fact that Nietzsche's father was a Lutheran pastor Nietzsche was an atheist and asserted the „death of God“. This famous announcement that „God is dead“ is a concise emblem for Nietzsche's rejection of all established values. What is more, he reflected on nineteenth-century culture stressing that the „highest values“ had begun to „devalue themselves“. Nietzsche's „radical relativism of truth“ (Crosby, p.18) implies that there are no objective truths and that the truth is completely relative to each human subject. This presupposition correlates with Kierkegaard's emphasis on the individual's subjective quest for truth. However, for Nietzsche each human representation or claim to truth is, just one more „perspective“ or manifestation of the „will to power“. As a result, Nietzsche highlighted the important role of Art, and encouraged the artists, musicians and painters of the nineteenth century to fully express their passions and drives.

Nietzsche argued that Art must take on a new and double role to create a new system of values and a new culture. Furthermore, one must re-establish one's values and the way of being by giving unique shape to his/her drives and passions. In order to this, one must recognise responsibility for one's life and the significance of his/her freedom. But, if an individual is weakly constituted he may fall victim to despair in the face of nihilism, the recognition that life has no intrinsic meaning. On the other hand, for a „strong“ individual nihilism presents a liberating opportunity to take responsibility for meaning. Nietzsche's devotion to the will to truth as „his innermost desire and profoundest need“, as he described himself, „developed into a passion, which does not shrink from any sacrifice, and at the bottom fears nothing but its own extinction.“ (Nietzsche, JW, 2 & D, 429; Lea, p.104) Significantly, his Dionysian nihilism, his euphoria and eventual madness are noteworthy. In *The Specter of the Absurd* Donald A. Crosby asserted that „Nietzsche's views on morality hold conventional moral

standards in contempt, seeing life as a perpetual struggle for power, self-expression, or self-aggrandizement, where all the rights belong to the creative and strong.” (Crosby, p.18)

Donald A. Crosby elaborates on different types of nihilism such as political, moral, epistemological, cosmic, and existential, commenting on their interrelations. Nietzsche’s epistemological views oblige us to come to terms with life as it is, with all its terrifying strife and change; yet, his presuppositions support and enhance the life-force, creative self-expression and the individual’s freedom. Crosby classifies Nietzsche’s nihilism as „an active nihilism that stands in sharp contrast with the resigned, despairing mood of passive nihilism.” (Crosby, p.21)

While, the scientific naturalists of the nineteenth century suggested that human lives depend on outside forces of which we might not be fully aware and over which we might have little control (psychological and political forces which determine our lives), Nietzsche believed that all our actions are determined by the Will of Power. This means that although, our lives depend on the sum of many different things: our will and our fate, which control us; we can change a fate because we are the ones who utterly choose the path. In the ninth part of *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche claims that human beings have a „will to power”. According to Nietzsche, „It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule ( *Will to Power*, Nietzsche p.267), (...) the value of the world lies in our interpretation... previous interpretations have been perspective valuations by virtue of which we can survive in life, i.e. in the will to power, for the growth to power...” (ibid; p.330) This statement is vital to Nietzsche’s philosophy. According to Nietzsche, „will to power” will „endeavour to grow, to gain ground, attract to itself and acquire ascendancy” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, par.260) The Will of Power manifests itself in the conscious and unconscious desires of individuals and races to dominate, defeat and enslave other individuals and races. In fact,

there are the unconscious, unreasonable sources of man's power and greatness as well as his morbidity and self-destructiveness. Rollo May asserted that „the most devastating loss is the individual's consciousness of himself“—a loss to be expressed later in Freud's symbol of the ego (the human consciousness negotiating between the id and the superego, or conscience) as weak and passive, „lived by Id,“ (the anarchic desire to gratify basic instincts) having lost its own self-directive powers. (May, p.74) H. J. Blackham noticed that „since the ego, the knowing subject, is also a process [of becoming] for Nietzsche, the effort is a falsification, not truth but will, not knowledge but power, for there is strictly no recurrence and therefore strictly no general knowledge, only unique individual relations, perpetual perspectives, interpretations, evaluations.“ (Blackham, p.24)

However, Nietzsche admires the Will of Power when it appears in strong, straightforward men and races, and despises it when it takes devious forms. According to Jenny Teichman „while the Will to Live (the concept explored by Schopenhauer) must be common to all animal species, the Will to Power is found only in some individuals and in some races.“ (Teichman, p.89) In his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1884/5) there is a portrayal of a man, in fact, a „superman“ whose „will of power“ is utterly remarkable. Nietzsche's „superman“ does not attempt to „fit“, belong, and satisfy people's expectations but is someone who merely stands out; who can become his own hero and God like figure if he only desires to. In short, his concept of „will to power“ implies self-realisation and self-actualisation in the fullest sense. Ironically, Nietzsche's viewpoints turn out to be profoundly optimistic; when an individual faces his weaknesses one may realise his full potential. Nevertheless, Nietzsche classified human races and human types into the superior and the inferior, masters and slaves. This view is analogous to Darwin's naturalistic theory that revealed a struggle to exist, competition between individuals and the final survival of the fittest. F.A. Lea notes that, Nietzsche takes the ethical,

the religious and the aesthetic experience, granting its reality, „at the same time proposing a completely naturalistic explanation, that the most exalted states of our mind, can be derived from the simple instinct of self-preservation- from the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain.“ (Lea, p.115) However, Nietzsche’s beliefs are quite opposite to naturalistic and „Darwinians“ theories. Rollo May argues that what we may find in Nietzsche is „continues denial of the common idea that survival is the highest value of life. He heaps scorn on those who think they are Darwinians and who fail to see that man seeks not to preserve his potentiality, but rather to express it.“ (May, p.82)

Although Nietzsche sees life as fundamentally tragic, he insists that we must say „Yes“ to life. In pursuing this idea, he developed another myth. Another of Nietzsche’s significant ideas is the metaphysical supposition that everything that happens occurs over and over again- „the idea of eternal recurrence.“ It is a proposed test of courage that asks us: could you accept life even if your own life, with all its pains and failures, loneliness, disappointing friendships etc. were to occur again and again, forever and forever? According to Nietzsche these people who answer „Yes“ are better and more courageous than those who answer „No“. More compelling is that Nietzsche’s reality of becoming cannot apply to logical explanations and precise formulations. He holds that, the coexistence of two perfectly identical things is impossible, nothing repeats itself; „in truth every atom is unique“ and „even in chemistry we ought to speak of „similar“ qualities, and not „of the same“. (Nietzsche, N, XII, 28; Lea, p.123) This means that for Nietzsche there are no experiences that are exactly the same; nothing can ever happen twice and no day copies yesterday. Nietzsche’s critique of space and time bears a resemblance to Kierkegaard’s concept of repetition, which is coupled with the idea of constant movement/progress. Ultimately, all existential means of becoming conscious of,

thus, responsible for one's existence are superbly supported in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's writings.

## **CHAPTER TWO: STRINDBERG EARLIER DRAMA**

### **2.1. Strindberg and Nietzsche**

Overall, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche could be considered as anticipators of August Strindberg's work. Johan August Strindberg's (1849-1912) international reputation as a dramatist is usually connected with two enterprises. Before the so-called Inferno crisis in the mid-1890s, he is a prominent representative of naturalist drama in which he experimented with Darwinian determinism. During his post-Inferno period, Strindberg wrote his pre-expressionistic and religious plays which are identified as unrealistic „subjective dramas“. Strindberg, an acute analyst of French the naturalistic school was familiar with Zola's *Therese Raquin* and startled the Scandinavian public with plays of such uncompromising realism such as *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888) and also *Creditors* (1888). However, in his truthful portrayal of human relations Strindberg went beyond the naturalistic means of viewing life and focused on existential exploration. Sartre distinguished the difference between Naturalism and Existentialism, arguing that for existentialists: „It is only reality that counts, not dreams, expectations or hopes (...) Unlike Zola's [naturalistic] characters are shown to be the products of heredity or environment, you cannot say of ours „That is what we are like, no one can do anything about it.““ The existentialist portrays a coward as one who makes himself a coward by his actions, a hero who makes himself a heroic.“ (Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*) In order to examine the psychic destabilization and the irrational and unexplainable nature of humans, Strindberg embraced existential ideas remaining under the considerable influence of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Significantly, Strindberg's drama portrayed reality as a spiralling

vortex, displaying the illogical labyrinths of the human psyche. Evert Sprinchorn asserted that, „The bedrock of Strindberg’s philosophy lay in the conviction that life was to be viewed less as a struggle against heredity and environment, as the naturalists insisted, than a struggle of minds, each seeking to impose its will on other minds. Powerful minds were like charged particles attracting weaker particles, thus building up magnetic fields of influence.“ (Spinchorn, p.26) A portrayal of a man’s striving for power and their experiencing of fear is acutely embraced in Strindberg’s works.

Through the Dane George Brandes, the dominating critic in Scandinavia at the time, Strindberg came in contact with the writings of pioneering existentialist thinker Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s rejection of all established values and his announcement of the “death of God” are emblematic of Strindberg’s crisis of belief which he experienced during Inferno-crisis, after which he immediately returned to the Church. Sharing Nietzsche’s misogyny, in his works Strindberg was considerably unsympathetic towards women, thus, he is often perceived as sexist. The short stories and essay published around 1890 such as *The Battle of the Brains*, *Hallucinations*, *Nemesis Divina*, *Mysticism-So far*, and *Psychotic Murder* (an analysis of Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm*) reveal the Nietzschean ideology Strindberg embraced at the time. In his essay *The Battle of the Brains* Strindberg argues that „It is the mind of the politician, thinker and author which sets other people’s minds in automatic motion.(...) All the political, religious and literary disputes seem to me nothing but the battle that an individual or party has to impose their view upon others by way of suggestion, in other words, to mould opinion, and that is merely the struggle for power which today takes place between minds, now that physical battles have fallen out of use.“ (Strindberg: 1996:p.25) Nietzsche’s concept of „will to power“ manifest itself in Strindberg’s idea of the battle of the brains and his constant reconfiguration and recreation of psychological „monsters“ on the stage. People, as Nietzsche would claim, have a will to power;

but the power grab is never held for long. The conflict consists of the continuous struggle between strong and weak. While a stronger person may temporarily destroy the weaker, the status of power shifts abruptly, and the weak assume power quickly, only to lose it again, and regain it again. Strindberg's work was also influenced by Nietzsche's notion of „perspectives“ and the multiplicity of motives which allowed him to create a complex and insightful portrayal of human relations. What is more, David Krasner noticed that, „Strindberg heralded a new aesthetic invested in self-consciousness. Following Nietzsche, he maintained the self as multiple.“ (Krasner, p.99) It is evident that his characters suffer from many traumatic experiences or psycho-sexual „abnormalities“. In fact, the dramatist's psychic trauma may be found underneath the surface of his plays. Unquestionably, Strindberg's plays are linked to ideas of scientific objectivity and Nietzsche's observation of causality can be taken as Strindberg's credo: „What happen, at bottom? The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of „aim“, the concept of „unity“, or the concept of „truth“. Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not true, is *false*. One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a true world.“ (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p.13) Each power battle in Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, *The Father* and *Creditors* as well as a character's interpretation or claim to truth is played through perspectives or expression of will. The absence of a true world and the feeling of valuesness are splendidly captured in Strindberg's naturalistic plays.

## **2.2. Miss Julie**

In *Miss Julie* the explosive battle of the sexes results in a total collapse of a set of values/morals, the breakdown of conventional tradition and a brutal conflict between the social classes. This play is a powerful psychological study of eroticism; the brutality of language,

violence and suffering. Count's daughter Miss Julie, servant Jean, and a cook Kristin participate in a battle of brains and throw conflicting perspectives against each other. Jean, a servant believes that Julie is the key to unlocking the door that will lead to his self-actualisation. Jean desires to improve his social status, as a result, he dreams of „climbing up“ which is a source of his unconscious, repressed desire. He is adaptable, has initiative, and sexually he is the aristocrat „I was not hired to be your plaything,“ he says to Julie; „I think too much of myself for that.“ Jean learns French, drinks wine, speaks of opening a hotel in a northern Italy and becoming a count like Miss Julie's father. In contrast, Miss Julie is the counterpoint: a relic of a crumbling European aristocracy on the decline. She confesses that in her dream she is „climbing down“ from her social position. Styan argues that „Julie maybe mistress in the class struggle, but Jean is master in the sex war“. (Styan, p.41) *Miss Julie* explores notions of sexuality, violence and the tragic outcomes of a vicious relationship.

„MISS JULIE: Lackey, servant, stand up when I speak to you!

JEAN: Lackey's whore, servant's tart, shut your mouth and get out of here! How dare you go and call me crude? No one of my sort has ever behaved as crudely as you have this evening. Do you think any of the girls around here would approach a man the way you did? Have you ever seen a girl of my class offer herself like that? I've only seen the like among the animals and prostitutes.

MISS JULIE[crushed]: That's right; hit me; trample on me; I've deserved no better. I'm a miserable wretch; but help me! Help me out of this, if there is a way. (Strindberg, *Miss Julie*, 1998:p.91-92)

Significantly, Miss Julie and Jean's relationship is a power battle; the tug-of-war- which is a mind game with deadly consequences. What is more, Miss Julie experiences ambivalent feelings of hatred and of lust towards Jean.

„MISS JULIE [screams convulsively]: (...) I'm falling, I'm falling!

JEAN: Fall down to me, and I'll lift you up again.

MISS JULIE: What a terrible power drew me to you? Was it the lure of the weak to the strong? Or of someone falling to someone rising! Or was it love? Do you know what the love is?

JEAN: Me? I bet I do! Do you think this was my first time?

MISS JULIE: You say and think such awful things.

JEAN: It's what I've learnt; that's the way I am." (Strindberg, *Miss Julie*, 1998: p.89)

Miss Julie's and Jean's love act has no meaning; they behave like animals and are reduced to just a primitive drives. The brutal scene when Jean kills the canary becomes symbolic of Miss Julie's death drive. Additionally, this scene turns out to be Julie's psychological sex fantasy about John and his „entire sex“ swimming in blood. „Miss Julie (screams): Kill me too! Kill me! You, who can slaughter an innocent creature without tremor! O, I hate and detest you! There is blood between us now! I curse the moment I set eyes on you, I curse the moment I was conceived in my mother's womb!(...) I should like to see your blood, your brains, on a chopping block- I'd like to see your sex swimming in a lake of blood- I think I could drink from your skull, I „d like to bath my feet in your guts, I could eat your heart, roasted!“ (Strindberg, *Miss Julie*: 1964, p.139) Miss Julie's sexual desire and shame have served as driving forces and give structural momentum to the play. As David Krasner notes that, „The self as a field of coadunate forces and drives is a premise of Freud's, whom Strindberg anticipates.“ (Krasner, p.99) Miss Julie is the aristocratic girl, although confused about her social and cultural identity. She desires her own degradation; she drinks beer instead of wine, and submits sexually to a valet, Jean. Her fall becomes the symbol of decaying upper classes. She carries the strength of the whole aristocratic tradition, but as a woman in Strindberg's view, she is inferior to Jean's natural superiority and strength. By her one-night stand, she becomes Jean's subordinate, finally taking orders from him: „Miss Julie: (...) Oh, I am so tired! I can't feel anything, I can't repent, can't run away, can't stay, can't live-- can't die. Help me! Order me, and I'll obey you like a dog. Do this last service, save my honour, save his name!“ (Strindberg, *Miss Julie*, 1964: p.145)

The notions of madness and hysteria are clearly seen in *Miss Julie*. The famous scene of hypnosis at the end of *Miss Julie* joins them in their submission to the Count's authority whose absence is even more absolute. Julie desires her own fall and eventually slips into a „hypnotic state“, a trance-like condition that people associated with hysterics. The magical power of Julie's father sends Julie to her death:

„Miss Julie: Then pretend that you are he, and I am you. You acted so well just now, when you went down on your knees-then you were an aristocrat –or- haven't you ever been to the theatre and seen a hypnotist? (Jean nods). He says to his subject: „Take the broom!“, and he takes it, He says:“ Sweep!“ and he sweeps-

Jean: But the subject has to be asleep.

Miss Julie( in ecstasy): I am already asleep- the whole room is like smoke around me-and you look like an iron stove-which resembles a man dressed in black, with a tall hat- and your eyes shine like coals, when the fire is dying- and your face is white smear, like ash- (The sun's rays have now reached the floor and are shining on Jean). It's so warm and good-! (She rubs her hands as though warming them before a fire).And so bright and peaceful-!

Jean (takes the razor and places it in her hand). Here's the broom. Go now- while it's light-out to the barn-and (He whispers in her ear).““

(Strindberg, *Miss Julie*,1964: p.145-146)

The relationships in *Miss Julie* are based upon a variety of motives for every action and their dialogue seems to engage the mind of another like they were present only in their inner psychodramas. In his well-known „Preface“ to his play *Miss Julie*, Strindberg prescribes the mental processes of his characters that informs his dialogue, letting „minds work as irregularly as they do in real life, where no subject is quite exhausted before another mind engages at random some cog in the conversation and governs it for a while. My dialogue wanders here and there, gathers material in the first scenes which is later picked up, repeated, reworked, developed, and expanded like theme in a piece of music.“ (Strindberg, p.42-43)

David Krasner argues that, all that drives *Miss Julie* and Jean is „the Schopenhauerian will, which is little more than a feedback loop of lust and disgust, sadomasochism, and magnets

attracting and repelling. Strindberg's characters go against all principles, laws, morality, all standards of dignity. The play can be considered entirely as „fornication- throughout each moment the characters are making love with language by probing each other's erotic zones, making words bump and grind, and trying new ways to satisfy. "" (Krasner, p.107) The characters grasp the moments of passion, lust, cravings, and disgust to manipulate each other in a fiercely sexual-power-mind game:

„JEAN: (...) I must confess the conquest was altogether too easy to be really intoxicating. Nails had black edges, and your handkerchief was dirty even though it smelt of perfume. All the same, I'm sorry that I was myself aspiring towards wasn't something higher or more worthwhile; I'm sorry to see you sunk so low that you're far beneath your cook. It's as if I was watching the flowers being lashed to pieces by the autumn rain and turning into mud.

MISS JULIE: You speak as though you were already above me.

JEAN: I am too. You see, I could turn you into countess, but you can never make me a count.

MISS JULIE: But I'm a count's child- that's something you can never be.

JEAN: True. But my children could be counts- if - - -

MISS JULIE: But you're a thief; I'm not.

JEAN: There are worst things than being a thief. A lot worse! And besides, when I serve in a house I consider myself part of the family, like one of the children, and nobody calls it stealing when they take the odd berry from a heavily laden bush."" (Strindberg, *Miss Julie*, 1998: p.91-92)

Significantly, the play responds to the inflexible concept of „rising and falling, of higher or lower, better or worse, man or woman."" (Strindberg; 1998; p.57) Consequently, the power battles occurs through "perspectives" and manifestations of the „will to power"". Ultimately, Strindberg „determined to have his own plays deal in fundamental truths, like those of sexual relationship, the psychological conflict of wills and the bearing past on the present."" (Styan, p.38)

### 2.3. The Father

A striving for will and the battle of sexes which are fundamental laws of life and marriage are acutely portrayed in Strindberg's play *The Father*. Captain's wife Laura is a sophisticated and cunning woman who tortures his husband with an all-consuming desire for power by posing the question of paternity: „CAPTAIN [getting up]: Laura, save me and my sanity. You don't understand what I'm saying. If the child's not mine, I don't have any right over it, or nor do I want any. Isn't that what you're after? Well, isn't it? Or maybe you want something else? Power over child, perhaps, but with me kept on as the breadwinner? LAURA: Power, yes. What has this whole life-and-death struggle been about if not power?"" (Strindberg, *The Father*, 1998: p.34-35) She calculates control of her daughter's future to finally gain the power over her husband's consciousness, thoughts and sanity. „CAPTAIN: You have a truly satanic power when it comes to getting your own way, but someone who doesn't care about the means always does."" (ibid: p.21) Laura's answer is: „LAURA: Why try to fight with a superior enemy? CAPTAIN: Superior? LAURA: Yes! It's strange, but I have never been able to look at a man without feeling I'm his superior. CAPTAIN: Well, for once you're going to meet your match, and you'll never forget it. LAURA: That will be interesting."" (ibid:p.23) In this power struggle Captain is the weaker one and appeals only to Laura's self-interest. Laura's „perspectives"" build a tower of lies and manipulation she uses to obtain her goals:

„CAPTAIN: (...) Don't you see I'm as helpless as a child? Can't you hear me imploring your pity like a child its mother? Won't you forget I'm a man, a soldier, whose word both men and beats obey? I ask only the pity you would show a sick man, I lay down the tokens of my power, and beg for mercy, for my life! (...) My mother and my father didn't want me and so I was born without a will. So I thought I was making myself whole when you and I became one, and therefore I let you rule. In the barracks, on the parade ground, I was the one who gave the orders; with you I was the one who obeyed. I became part of you, looked up to you as to a higher, more gifted being, listened to you as if I were your foolish child.

LAURA: Yes, that's how it was, and therefore I loved you as my child. But you know, I suppose you noticed it, every time your feelings changed and you stood before me as my lover,

I felt ashamed. The ecstasy I felt in your embrace was followed by pangs of conscience, as though my very blood felt the shame. The mother became the mistress-ugh!

CAPTAIN: I saw it, but didn't understand. And when I thought you despised me for my lack of masculinity, I sought to conquer you as a woman by being a man.

LAURA: Yes, but that was your mistake. The mother was your friend, you see, but the woman was your enemy; love between the sexes is the battle. Don't go thinking I gave myself; I didn't give, I took- what I wanted. Yet you held the advantage; I felt that and wanted you to feel it, too.'" (ibid:p.36-37)

„CAPTAIN: Just one word more-about realities. Do you hate me?

LAURA: Yes, sometimes. When you act the man.

CAPTAIN: It's like racial hatred, this. If we really are descended from the apes, it must have been from two different species. We've nothing in common, have we?

LAURA: What are you getting at?

CAPTAIN: Only that in this struggle one of us must go under.

LAURA: Which one?

CAPTAIN: The weaker, of course!

LAURA: And the stronger is in the right?

CAPTAIN: Always, since he has the power!

LAURA: Then I am in the right.

CAPTAIN: Do you already have the power then?

LAURA: Yes, and as of tomorrow, when I've had you placed under a guardian, I'll have it legally.'" (ibid:p.38)

Overall, *The Father* is a play which reveals the real family drama which is, as Szondi emphasized „determined by the subjective perspective'" (Szondi,p.210) Hanno Lunin asserted that this naturalistic play seems to be an early experiment of „the self and its subjective perspective becoming, through what is spoken, understandable as the linking moment of unity instead of [a] plot-oriented or chronological context'" (Lunin, p.44) Like so many of Strindberg's plays, *The Father* is largely autobiographical where the main character confronts his past and present situation: „CAPTAIN: Your behaviour has succeeded in arousing my suspicion to the point where my judgement will soon be clouded, and my mind begin to

wander. This is the onset of the madness that you've been waiting for; it may come at any moment. The question you now have to decide is: am I more use to you sane or insane? Think about it. If I have a breakdown I'll lose my position, and there where would you be? If I die, you'll get my life insurance. But if I should kill myself, you'll get nothing. It's therefore in your interest that I live out my life". (Strindberg, *The Father*, 1998: p.33) The play is constructed from the standpoint of the title figure- the Captain who eventually faces his psychic downfall. On the other hand, Laura survives because she adapts; she is cruel and shrewd and that is her strength. Significantly, *The Father* shares the Darwinian concept and „shows us modernism's vitality and success-drive, its rational efficiency and flexibility, and its cunningness and ruthlessness." (Krasner, p.104) J.L.Styan notices that „the play becomes a starkly symbolic representation of the sexes in elemental conflict". (Styan, p.39)

#### **2.4. Creditors**

Strindberg's *Creditors* (1889) is a play about the deconstruction of marriage, and a portrayal of a fatal sexual triangle. The themes of *Creditors* mainly relate to love and friendships, and incurring feelings of indebtedness. Each character is seeking to impose its will on other minds. Strindberg's portrayal of a battle of wills where „perspectives" are used as „weapons" is compelling. For instance, Adolf's wife Tekla leads him to believe that she is the weaker one only to gain the strength she needs to leave him for Gustav, her former husband. Moreover, Gustav plays a mind game with his depressed friend Adolf by making Adolf understand that he must leave Tekla because of her infidelities. However, Adolf is not aware that Gustav once was married to Tekla and plays a game, and just like a creditor longs to take her back. Adolf's monologue is an extraordinary illustration of the battle of the brains between sexes he has experienced throughout his miserable marriage. Adolf says to Tekla: „(...) Do you remember how it was while the storm swept over us? Then you lay there like an infant in my arms and

just cried. Then you had to sit on my lap, and I had to kiss your eyes- to sleep. Then I had to be your nurse; had to see that you fixed your hair before going out; had to send your shoes to the cobbler, and see that there was food in the house. I had to sit by your side, holding your hand for hours at a time: you were afraid, afraid of the whole world, because you didn't have a single friend, and because you were crushed by the hostility of public opinion. I had to talk courage into you until my mouth was dry and my head ached. I had to make myself believe that I was strong. I had to force myself into believing in the future. (...) And so I brought you back to life, when you seemed already dead. Then you admired me. Then I was the man not that kind of athlete you had just left, but the man of will- power, the mesmerist who instilled new nervous energy into your flabby muscles and charged your empty brain with a new store of electricity. And then I gave you back your reputation. (...) I set you to rule me and my house. (...) When you reached that far, then my strength was used up, and I collapsed from the overstrain in lifting you up, I had pushed myself down. I was taken ill, and my illness seemed an annoyance to you at the moment when all life had just begun to smile at you and sometimes it seemed to me as if, in your heart, there was a secret desire to get rid of your creditor and the witness of your rise. Your love began to change into that of a grown- up sister, and for lack of better I accustomed myself to the new part of little brother. (...) by this time our years of common life had made twins of us. You were a shoot sprung from my stem, and you wanted to cut yourself loose before the shoot had put out roots of its own, and that's why you couldn't grow by yourself. And my stem could not spare its main branch and so stem and branch must die together." (Strindberg, *Creditors*, 44-45, p.23)

## CHAPTER THREE: STRINDBERG TRANSITIONAL DRAMA

### **3.1 Strindberg Transitional Drama**

During the 1890s Strindberg spent significant time abroad engaged in scientific experiments and a devotion to alchemy, occultism and scientific interests in Mesmerism which were heavily influenced by Nietzsche. A series of psychotic attacks between 1894 and 1896 led to Strindberg's hospitalization and return to Sweden. The Inferno crisis in the mid-1890s meant a break with Nietzschean ideals. After the Inferno crisis, and a five year pause in Strindberg's work, the subjective dramatist turned towards God and religion. Strindberg's most important spiritual guide the Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, influenced Strindberg's belief in „correspondences“ between an earthly existence and life beyond. Inspired by Swedenborg's writings Strindberg wrote about human suffering, „„seeing it either as a punishment for sins committed in a former existence or as an ordeal to make him worthy of a better life after death. In his later years, he often explicitly referred to life a purgatory or hell from which are released when we die, or a nightmare from which we awaken at the moment of death.““ (Sprinchorn, p.1293) More compelling is that during his post-Inferno period, Strindberg wrote his pre-expressionistic, religious and Chamber Plays which are bluntly experimental and unrealistic „„subjective dramas““. Peter Szondi notices that, in his post-Inferno crisis Strindberg becomes „„most concerned with the isolation and elevation of a central figure““ in his plays, „„who most often represents the dramatist himself.““ (Szondi, p.213) In his later plays, Strindberg's subjective theatre leads to the replacement of the unity of action by the unity of the self where the structure of the play is defined by the perspective from which the self faces the world. For instance, in *To Damascus*, The Stranger is an isolated individual who confronts his self-alienation. Paradoxically, The Stranger discovers that he is not alone: „„... I have no fear of death. It is loneliness I am afraid of- for the loneliness of life is peopled... I don't know whether

it is someone else or myself I sense- but in loneliness one is never alone.” (Strindberg, *To Damascus*, p.141) Strindberg’s *A Dream Play* (1901-1902) and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) share underlying themes of the present and the past; the confrontation of the subjective and the objective, and the meeting between the isolated and the alien world. His religious and Chamber Plays were deeply influenced by Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard’s philosophy. For Schopenhauer the world is a gruesome place where if humans succeed in relieving pain, it is merely temporary; it will reappear „as the sex drive, passionate love, jealousy, envy, hatred, anxiety, ambition, miserliness, sickness, etc.” (Schopenhauer, p.369). The endless cycle of burning desire and frustration is driven by our feckless and uncontrolled volition. However, during Strindberg’s post-Inferno period, Soren Kierkegaard’s influence prevailed, especially in Strindberg’s series of four dramas known as the Chamber Plays (*Thunder in the Air* (1907), *The Burned House* (also called *After the Fire* (1907), *The Ghost Sonata* (1907), *The Pelican* (1907) and *The Black Glove* (1909). The Chamber Plays put an emphasis on an individual’s journey throughout his/her life where dead corpses, burnt bodies and ghost-like figures living in empty houses appear as a metaphor for humans’ indifference and isolation. David Krasner points out that, „The presence of death and despair, and the power of faith that comes from accepting this is relevant to Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy and underlies Strindberg’s themes.” (Krasner, p.97) In fact, Kierkegaard writes that „despair is the sickness unto death” where one is „unable to die, yet not as though there were hope of life”, since „the hopelessness is that even the last hope, death, is gone.”, for only in infinite resignation can there be „talk of grasping existence on the strength of faith” (Kierkegaard, p.15) Noticeably, Strindberg was under the influence of Kierkegaard’s works which focused on the isolation of man from the flock, and his consciousness as an individual.

### 3.2. The Dance of Death

The uncertainty of identification and the familiar existential theme of the „alienated“ self, the estrangement of the self both from the world and from itself, are essential to existential philosophy and can be found in Strindberg’s works. Strindberg is a master in presenting truth about human reality. Influenced by Kierkegaard’s major works, Strindberg idiosyncratically incorporated the concept of repetition into his drama. Strindberg’s *The Dance of Death* (1900) is a tragic-comic portrayal of a long-married couple on an isolated island, who live a bitter life. On the surface, *The Dance of Death* named after the medieval idea of Death dancing with the living, seems to signify a return to the naturalistic dramas of the 1880s: one realistic set, three characters, and marital strife. However, its circular structure, the idea of repetition and the inevitable certainty of forthcoming death prominently defines it as a post-Inferno drama. Everything is said and done with an air of long repetition, the absence of expectation of anything new or stimulating to break the monotony: „CAPTAIN: What am I suppose to do? - - Haven’t you noticed that we say the same thing every day? Just now, when you made the same old reply, „In this old house“, I should have answered with my old, „It’s not just my house“. But since I’ve already given the same answer five hundred times already, I yawned instead. My yawn could mean I can’t be bothered to reply, or „You’re right, my angel“, or „Let’s leave it there.““ (Strindberg, *The Dance of Death*, 1998: p.121)

Noticeably, Strindberg’s characters dream about a life they long to have, yet every time they face the bleak reality only to find the object out of reach. This theme of the meaningless in life is fundamental to the philosophy of existentialist thinker Albert Camus. In his philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Albert Camus compares the absurdity of man’s life with the situation of Sisyphus, a figure of Greek mythology who was condemned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again.

What interested Camus the most was the moment of Sisyphus' return to push the rock up again towards the summit: „I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step towards the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing- space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lairs of the gods, he is superior of his fate. He is stronger than his rock.“ (Camus, p.108-109) *The Dance of Death* explores themes of regret, the painful feeling of wasted life and excruciating awareness of late-middle-age adults who confront their past mistakes and unfulfilled dreams. In *The Dance of Death II* Captain edifies his children: „THE CAPTAIN: (...) Yes, my children, that's the way life's see-saw goes. Now one's on the top, looking confidently around; then one's at the bottom, and then one comes again. And so on. That's how it goes.“ (Strindberg, *The Dance of Death II*, 2008:p.435)

In a similar manner as Camus's Sisyphus returns towards his rock „in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death.“ (Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, p.91) Strindberg's Captain and Alice look backward over their lives, seeking liberation from the past that they can never attain. For Strindberg love is a strife between opposites which generates power. „Love is yet, a supreme joy coupled to the most profound suffering, sweetest when it is most bitter? (...) The strife between the pain of pleasure and the pleasure that suffering brings... the penitent's anguish and the voluptuary's joys...“ (Strindberg, *A Dream Play*, 1998: p.243-244). As a result, Alice explains why she never divorced with Edgar:

„ALICE: For me he's a stranger, as much as he was twenty-five years ago. I know nothing about this man...(...) I've spent a lifetime in this tower, a prisoner, watched over by a man I've always hated, and now hate so boundlessly that the day he died I'd laugh aloud for joy.

KURT: Why haven't you separated?

ALICE: Good question! We broke off our engagement twice, since then not a day has passed that we haven't tried to part... but we're welded together and can't break free. Once we lived apart- in the same house- for five years. Now only death can part us; we know that, and so we wait for him as our deliver." (Strindberg, *The Dance of Death*: 1998, p.131)

Both Edgar and Alice are cursing and railing at the source of all their misery resembling the corpse-like figures, yet still alive. The characters seem to be trapped in a fallen world, experiencing an endless suffering and a vapid existence:

„KURT: It must be a pretty awful life for you all out here by the sea.

CAPTAIN: Yes, it's quite terrible! Life is terrible! And you who believe in a life after this, do you suppose we'll find peace then?

KURT: I suppose there'll be storms and strife too.

CAPTAIN: There, too- if there is any „there"! Far better annihilation.

KURT: Do you think annihilation's possible without pain?

CAPTAIN: I shall simply drop down dead, without pain. (...)

KURT: You don't seem to be very content with your existence?

CAPTAIN [sighs]: Content? The day I die, I'll be content.

KURT[ gets up]: You don't know that.--- But tell me, what are you two up to in this house? What's going on here? The walls smell of prison- one feels ill the moment one comes in. I'd rather leave now, if I hadn't promised Alice I'd stay. There are corpses under the floorboards; there's so much hatred here it's hard to breathe." (ibid:p.130)

Significantly, Captain and Alice are inevitably frozen in their existential imprisonment, and too inured by life's disappointments. In Strindberg's *Dance of Death*, the romantic notion of the play is juxtaposed with „the game of torment which takes on metaphysical as well as natural reality. The circular, repetitive structure of the play mimics the round shape of the tower, and both suggest the rings of hell." (Wallace, p.71-72) In other words, in *Dance of Death*, Edgar, Captain in the artillery, and Alice, his wife, an ex-actress encourage each other's fantasies and turn their lives into a hell of theatrical games which they invent to entertain each other during their boring marriage. In *Many Hells of August Strindberg*, C.K. Spivak notes that „in this play we can encounter a psychological hell. The living hell endured by the three main characters in *Dance of Death* is basically an existential concept." (Spivak, p.12) Their hell is ritualized and re-enacted every day on an isolated island, which Captain defines as „a community of idiots"

(Strindberg, *The Dance of Death*, 1998: p.117). Their old friend Kurt says: „I don“t know where I am“, Alice cries desperately: „This is hell!“ (ibid: p.139) In a similar manner as the lava blasts out of the volcano along with ash, rocks, and a cloud of a very thick dust, Captain explodes in the middle of this „game of torment“. The outburst occurs when Edgar tired of his monotonous existence makes a furious act of throwing his belongings out of the window (the pack of cards, his cigar boxes, his glasses, the keys of the piano). The characters“ vapid existence oscillates between the polarities of bleak and comic, worst and best, most and least, juxtaposing two ambivalent elements. Captain admits to a tragic-comic ambiguity about life: „I“ve never been able to figure out whether life is serious or just a joke. When it“s a joke it can be most painful, when it“s serious it can be quite tranquil and pleasant. - - - And then, when you finally take it seriously, along comes someone and makes a fool of you.““ (ibid:p.174)

### **3.3. A Dream Play**

The existential themes of suffering and the dreadful existence of human life are explored by Strindberg in his play *A Dream Play* (1901). In the midst of a mental breakdown, Strindberg's tortured psyche is superbly captured in the presentation and evolution of *A Dream Play*“s principle character: the Daughter of Indra (the king of the gods in ancient Hinduism). She travels from „the second world [and into] the third“ and comes down to Earth to try to understand human suffering:

„DAUGHTER: You are a prisoner in your own rooms; I have come to set you free!

OFFICER: That is what I“ve been waiting for, I suppose, but I wasn“t sure you would want to.

DAUGHTER: The castle is strong, it has seven walls, but we shall manage!--- Well, do you want to or not?

OFFICER: To be quite honest: I don“t know, I shall suffer either way! Enjoy joy in life has to be paid for with double the sorrow. Sitting here is hard, but were I to buy the pleasures of freedom I“d have to pay for it twice over in suffering(...)"“ (Strindberg, *A Dream Play*, 1998: p.182)

Indra's daughter, Agnes witnesses struggles in love, economics, politics and philosophy throughout her journey. Although Agnes does encounter the other people they remain strangers to her. Strindberg portrayal of humans is depressingly bleak as people are not authentic to their nature. For instance, Quarantine Master says: „I often wish I could forget, especially about myself; that's why I'm so fond of masquerades, dressing up, and theatricals.“ (ibid: p.209) The absence of truth and lack of authenticity prevail throughout the play and lie in a stark contrast to the existentialist's approach which encourages people to be themselves and to create their own system of values.

The main figures in *A Dream Play* are known by their social roles, rather than names: the Officer, the Lawyer, the Doorkeeper, the Poet which may signify that they throw in the towel adapting to the anxiety of their existence. An American existential psychologist, Rollo May asserted that, „The loss of sense of being is related to our tendency to subordinate existence to function: a man knows himself not as a man or self but as a token seller in the subway, a grocer, a professor, a vice-president, or by whatever his economic function may be.“ (May, p.95) Significantly, the absence of meaning and purpose in their lives gives rise to the assumption that „truth“ lies behind „the door“. Whether „the door“ is the symbol of the next world or one's hope for a better future is unclear. Yet, for each character „the door“ may signify his/her own unattainable goals or something utterly intangible such as one's own subjective quest for truth. Strindberg's characters must overcome the separation of finite and infinite and as Kierkegaard emphasized this must be done by taking a leap of faith. The Deans of Theology, Philosophy, Medicine and Law speculate what is the „question of the door“.

„The LORD CHANCELLOR and the DEANS of THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, MEDICINE, and LAW enter.

LORD CHANCELLOR: It is the question of the door, of course.- What do you think about it as Dean of Theology?

DEAN OF THEOLOGY: I don't think, I believe... *Credo*

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY: I think...

DEAN OF MEDICINE: I examine...

DEAN OF LAW: I withhold judgement, until I have proper proof and witness,

LORD OF CHANCELLOR: Now, they are going to start squabbling again! - - Well, what do you believe, as Dean of Theology?

DEAN OF THEOLOGY: I believe this door must not be opened, because it conceals dangerous truths...

DEAN OF MEDICINE: What is truth?

DEAN OF LAW: Whatever can be proved by two witnesses.

DEAN OF THEOLOGY: Anything can be proved with two false witnesses- by a law- twister!

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY: Truth is wisdom, and wisdom, which is knowledge, is philosophy... Philosophy is the science of sciences, the knowledge of all knowledge, and all the other sciences are its servant.

DEAN OF MEDICINE: The only science is natural science; philosophy is not science. It is merely empty speculation. ""(Strindberg, *A Dream Play*, p.237)

However, when the door is finally opened the characters must abandon all illusions they had, as what was hidden is merely revealed as nothing:

„ALL RIGHT-PEOPLE: Hurrah! The door is open!

LORD CHANCELLOR: What was hidden behind the door?

GLAZIER: I can't see anything.

LORD CHANCELLOR: *He* can't see anything! No, I can believe it!-- Deans! What was hidden behind the door?

DEAN OF THEOLOGY: Nothing! That is the solution to the riddle of the universe! - - - In the beginning God created heaven and earth out of nothing.

DEAN OF PHILOSOPHY: Nothing will come of nothing.

DEAN OF MEDICINE: Rubbish! That's all nothing!

DEAN OF LAW: I have my doubts!... There is a fraud here somewhere. I appeal to all right-thinking people!"" (ibid: p.239)

Significantly, the concept of nothingness plays a significant role throughout the play. Benjamin Katz asserted that „for the existentialists, „nothing“ is source of not only absolute freedom but existential anguish.“ (Katz, p.72) The Daughter discusses Hinduism and Christianity with the Poet and explains the source of all experience in Maya (illusion): DAUGHTER: The world, life, and mankind are therefore only phantoms, an illusion, a dream image“ (ibid:p.243) The subjective reality may be truly experienced in the state of dreaming where an inner world of fantasy and improbable events become the only existing reality. The view of life as nothing was discussed by one of the most renowned representatives of Existentialism- Jean-Paul Sartre. „In life man commits himself and draws his own portrait, outside of which there is nothing. No doubt this thought may seem harsh to someone who has not made a success of his life. But on the other hand, it helps people to understand that reality alone counts, and that dreams, expectations and hopes only serve to define a man as a broken dream, aborted hopes, and futile expectations.“ (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*).

This play embodies the themes of waiting and repetition where Officer is waiting for his beloved an actress, apparently absent for years, to come out the back door of a theater but she never appears. Strindberg's *A Dream Play* would set the stage for Samuel's Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, where the characters are endlessly waiting for Godot, whose absence plays a significant part. In a short foreword to *A Dream Play*, Strindberg explained his intention with the play „Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality, the imagination spins, weaving new patterns; a mixture of memories, experiences, free fancies, incongruities and improvisations.“ (Strindberg,1998: p.175) The repetition is emphasized by Strindberg as the most unpleasant thing people experience in life:

„LAWYER: Repetition! - - - Doing the same thing over and over again!!! - - - Going back over everything! Having to learn your lesson again and again! (...) LAWYER: Everything you

loathe! Everything you don't want to do, but must! It means giving up things, doing without, denying yourself, leaving things behind... everything unpleasant, repulsive and painful...

DAUGHTER: Are there no pleasant duties?

LAWYER: They become pleasant when you have performed them...

DAUGHTER: When they no longer exist.- - - So duty is always unpleasant! What is pleasant, then?

LAWYER: Sin is pleasant.

DAUGHTER: Sin?

LAWYER: Which must be punished, yes!- If I have had a pleasant day and evening, I suffer the pangs of hell and a bad conscience the following day.

DAUGHTER: How strange!

LAWYER: Yes, I wake up in the morning with a headache; and then the repetition begins- a repetition that perverts the past, however. Everything was beautiful, pleasant, and witty yesterday evening appears in recollection as ugly, vile and stupid. Pleasure turns sour, it seems, and happiness dissolves (...)

DAUGHTER: Oh, must I go through all that again?

LAWYER: That is what life amounts to, doing the same thing over and over again... look at the schoolmaster in there... Yesterday he was given a doctorate, a laurel crown, and a twenty-one gun salute, he climbed Parnassus and was embraced by the King... And today he's starting back at school again, asking how much two times two are, and he will go on doing that until he dies... However, come back now to your home!

DAUGHTER: I would rather die!

LAWYER: Die? That isn't allowed! In the first place, suicide is so dishonourable that even one's corpse is defiled, and then - - - it excludes us from grace- - - it is a mortal sin!

DAUGHTER: It's not easy to be a human being!" (Strindberg, 1998:*A Dream Play*, p.222)

Strindberg concluded his play by posing the existential question through the mouth of Poet:

„Tell me, though, before you go; what did you suffer the most from here on earth?"

Daughter's answer is: „From- just being alive; feeling my sight dimmed by these eyes, my hearing dulled by these ears, and my thoughts, my bright, airy thoughts bound in a labyrinth of fat. You have seen a brain, haven't you?... What twisting, crooked ways..." (ibid:p.244) (...)

Ah, now I know all the agony of living, So this is what it means to be mortal- - - One misses

even what one has not valued, One regrets even misdeeds never done... One yearns to go, and yet one longs to stay... So the heart's two halves are rent asunder, As if wild horses were pulling it apart, torn to pieces by contradiction, indecision, disharmony..." (ibid:p.247)

## **CHAPTER FOUR: STRINDBERG CHAMBER PLAYS**

### **4.1. The Thunder in the Air**

In Strindberg's *The Thunder in the Air* Strindberg portrayed isolated individuals in a city where as one of the characters, Mr Starck, observes: "...(...)—people don't know one another...Everybody keeps to themselves- it's as if they are hiding away from each other." (Strindberg:1996,p.17) Strindberg's characters are trapped in their isolated towers, their own worlds and claustrophobic flats: "...The Brother: People here don't have much to say each other." (ibid:p.17) (...) those red blinds look as if they are about to be lifted to reveal some bloody... drama...there is just a shadow of a palm on the blind. Apart from that there never seems to be any movement behind them." (ibid:p.18) The images of lifeless bodies disconnected from their existence are Strindberg's tragic heroes trapped in their own memories. They play games (Gerda plays chess) and watch the weather/seasons to pass the time, but nothing happens: "...The Man: (...) There was thunder in the air but no flash of lighting". (ibid:p.42) *Thunder in the Air* is a very dark play about anxiety, anguish and resentment. Strindberg's characters choose not to cope with reality; they prefer not to answer the phones; they wish they were deaf and blind "...because there is nothing worth looking at" (ibid,p.24) Moreover, their negativity and despair prevail throughout the play: "...The Brother: Why don't you try your hand at something else then? Mr Starck: Nobody wants me. The Brother: Have you tried? Mr Starck: There is no point. The Brother: I see." (ibid:p.27-28) *Thunder in the Air*

embodies Kierkegaard's concept of repetition: „The Man: (...) I only hope they won't come back. Repetition, repetition, forever repetitions.“ (ibid:p.56) „(...)And nothing will change until you come here with the cake for my funeral. When you get past a certain age, nothing really changes, everything around you stops, but you move on all the same like a toboggan down a steep slope...“ (ibid:p.34) The lack of concrete self-awareness is clearly seen as The Man evidently does live in the past and his memories are the only existing reality he does not seem to accept: „The Man: (...) She came here and demolished my beautiful memories of the past. She destroyed all the beautiful images I had hidden away and now there is nothing left.(...) Look, how empty it is in there. As if someone has moved out. And up there, it looks burnt out...“ (ibid:p.53) The Man reflects that the hope for change lies in the future: „There is no such thing as present. What we call the present is just vacuum; there is the future and the past, but I'd rather have the future because there lies our hope.“ (ibid: p.37) In fact, The Man's conclusion about life is rather optimistic as he is seeking to create a new future: „Shut down the windows and pull down the blinds, please. And we'll leave our memories in peace. The peace of old age... (*A long pause*) This autumn I shall move away from here.“ (ibid:p.58) In order to move forward one must accept and embrace his/her past. Strindberg's way of viewing life as a constant progress is noticeably associated with Kierkegaard's theme of repetition, coupled with the constant movement/progress and linked to the ethical future.

#### **4.2. After the Fire**

*After the Fire* is a play which portrays a community of people who look like, „a wax cabinet of monsters“, ghosts and „grey-haired men.“ These people live in the past, unable to move forward after a fire accident and seem to be paralysed in their vapid existence which unavoidably leads towards death. Nursery-Man contemplates his dreadful existence: „I'm fed up with the whole thing... when you've struggled for fifty years and then everything vanishes

in a fire... I'm too old to start all over again, and it all happens at the same time, one thing after another. You know, I think I'll get away from it all... (*Exits*)" (Strindberg:1996, p.70)

Strindberg's characters are metaphorical „pigeons which built nests in the roof heading straight for the fire because they couldn't part from their old home" (ibid:p.97) In other words, their existence is dominated by things that should belong to the past, and which therefore prevent them from creating a new future. Overall, *After the Fire* is a tormenting hell of an existence, where misunderstanding and lies occur throughout the play. For instance, Matilda says to her future husband Alfred: „I can't get over the fact that father-in-law isn't the person I thought he was. Fancy playing games and cheating us like that. Perhaps you're like that as well. I don't know you either" (ibid:p.99) *After the Fire* embodies the existential themes of anxiety, absurdity, dread, despair, mortality and the alienation of man from himself and his society. Stranger explains why he attempted to hang himself in a wardrobe when he was twelve years old: „I was fed up with life. It was like going into vast darkness... I didn't know why I was here...and I thought the world was a madhouse." (ibid:p.80) Strindberg seemed to accentuate that life is fragile and must remain „true to his essence" and go back in search of the self to find a real happiness: „Stranger :(...) one has to be a pig to enjoy this sludge. And when one's had enough dust in one's eye, one turns one's eyes inside out and peers into the soul. That's something worth looking at. SISTER-IN-LAW: What do you see there? STRANGER: You see yourself. But when you've seen yourself, you must die." (ibid: p.102). When Stranger regains consciousness after being in a hospital and in the mortuary he thinks he was someone else: „I faced life with a cynical calm. That's how it should be, and the worse it got the more interesting it was too... I regarded myself as another person and I observed, studied this other man and his destiny and that made me insensitive to my own sufferings. But in „death" I had acquired new skills... I could see right through people, read their thoughts, hear their opinions. When I was with people I could visualize them naked..."

(ibid: p.80) As Peter Szondi argues, this „sudden transformation of energized subjectivity into the objective,“ means that the conscious views the unconscious as a stranger. (Szondi, p.214) Therefore, Stranger confronts his own fragility and the thread of non-being, simultaneously; he becomes more self-conscious and more alert about his life. Moreover, the idea of repetition prevails throughout the play. „Stranger: I don’t know but however my life turned out- and I’ve been both rich and poor, high and low... I’ve been in a shipwreck and an earthquake... whatever happened in my life, I always saw a connection and – a repetition. In one particular situation I saw the result of a previous event. Whenever I met someone I was reminded of someone else from the past. There are also scenes from my life which recur several times and I have frequently said to myself: I’ve experienced this before. And there have been events which seemed inevitable, or predictable.“ (Strindberg:1996: *After the Fire*, p.74-75) For Strindberg life is a series of events which constitute a secret pattern or code making each human being distinguishable and a unique being. „Stranger: Yes, it’s all the same, everywhere. When one’s young one sees the loom being set up: the parents, relatives, friends, acquaintances, servants... make up the warp. Later on in life one can see the weft; and the shuttle of destiny works the thread forward and back; sometimes it breaks but it can be tied together again and so it continues, the beams beat, the wool is forced into curlicues and then the tapestry is finished. In old age, when your eye sees, you realise that those funny figures make up a pattern, a code, an ornament, a hieroglyph which can only be interpreted when it’s finished: this is life. The word weaver has woven it.“(ibid:p.74) According to Michael Robinson, „Strindberg’s houses are thoroughly modernized. References occur throughout the series to the networks of modern life, such as railways and telephone lines, networks that sometimes appear to explain or represent the interconnectedness of life in the city, but at other are mythologized as a kind of fate.“ (Robinson, p.111) Fate or one’s destiny which consisted of good and bad moments in Greek mythology was predetermined by three women who spin a skein of wool which symbolizes a

person's life/destiny. The Fates controlled the metaphorical thread of life of every mortal from birth to death and seemed to spin the predestined course of events. For Strindberg every individual is creating and „threading“ one's destiny by choosing the life he longs to have.

### 4.3. The Ghost Sonata

*The Ghost Sonata* (1907) a play in three acts embodies the themes of crime, deception, falsehood, stagnation and lack of change. The play opens on a typical suburban Stockholm street scene; it is a bright Sunday morning and the church bells are ringing. The main character of *The Ghost Sonata* - a young student speaks to the ghost of a Milkmaid whom only he can see and encounters the mysterious old man in a wheelchair, Jacob Hummel who introduces him to a group of strangers in a stylish apartment building. In the course of the scene Hummel convinces the Student to take an interest in his illegitimate daughter, the Young Lady, who will later appear as the Hyacinth Girl. The Student discovers that the strangers who inhabit the mysterious household have tormented and betrayed each other for years. „BENGTSSON: You see, when a house gets old, it goes mouldy, and when people spend years tormenting each other, they go crazy. This little lady now- quite, Polly! – this mummy's been sitting here for forty years- same husband, same furniture, same relations, same friends.“ (Strindberg, *The Ghost Sonata*, 1998: p.266) The famous scene of the „ghost supper“ is Strindberg's metaphor for a life wasted in meaningless activity. People look like ghosts and vampires; they gather together to drink their teas and nibble their biscuits all of them at the same time sounding like „rats in the attic“ (ibid: p.265) saying the same things or „else keeping quiet so as not to be shown up.“ (ibid:p.265) They are trapped on Earth which is depicted as an existential hell „madhouse, prison, charnel-house the earth“ (ibid:p.285) However, as Strindberg's play continues one discovers that „Keeping silent for too long creates a pool of stagnant water, which rots.“ (ibid:p.285) Consequently, in the Colonel's apartment, Hummel humiliates the

Colonel (Mummy's husband) and asserts that the hyacinth girl is his child. Mummy takes revenge by exposing Hummel's disgusting past; as a result, Hummel hangs himself feeling shame and resentment. Strindberg reveals the hidden secrets of individuals, strips them of their hideous sins and portrays the bizarre house of strangers as self-deceivers. This search for the truth and Strindberg's continuous yearning to unmask reality (to discover „the truth behind the door“) prevail throughout the play. Characters' existences are essentially a mixture of silent days and random outbursts of anguish. For example, the mysterious, beautiful woman who is transformed into Mummy (kept in a closet and talking like a parrot) discusses the present and the past reminding the guests that human beings are imperfect: „MUMMY: [goes up to the clock and stops it; then lucidly and seriously] But I can stop time in its course- I can wipe out the past and undo what's been done, not with bribes, not with threads, but through suffering and repentance!- - [Goes up to the OLD MAN] We are poor miserable creatures, all of us; we have erred and we have sinned, like everyone else; we are not what we seem, for at heart we are better than ourselves, since we hate our faults (...)" (ibid:p.275)

Ultimately, *The Ghost Sonata* is a play about the confrontation of the subjective and the objective, and the meeting between the isolated and the alien world. *The Ghost Sonata* is the most frequently revived of Strindberg's chamber plays, „because it is consistently dreamlike, and more rigorously expressionistic than the others. It is also rich in sensational images that smack of a grotesque surrealism.“ (Styan, p.32) Significantly, Strindberg's expressionistic drama appeals to inner experience, unconscious feeling, anxiety and humans' dreadful existence which often appears analogous to a nightmare.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one of the keys of Strindberg's art, Carlson asserts, is this insightful mixture „of almost equal parts, Darwinian, Naturalism, Swedish folklore, Schopenhauerian pessimism,

1880s" psychological and political theories, Old Testament judgements and New mysticism." (Carlson, p.25-26) Caught between doubt and faith; between Nietzsche's ideology and Kierkegaard's philosophy, Strindberg's plays demonstrate the existential beliefs that everything in our lives is transient and impermanent. Strindberg anticipated Pascal's belief about human fragility: „„Man is only a reed, the feeblest reed in nature, but he is a thinking reed“ (Pascal, par 347, p.120). During both his naturalistic period and his expressionistic post-Inferno period, Strindberg shows his interests in the human being and his existence in the world. The process of „„becoming“; of evolving and the significance of change and repetition in one's life are intrinsically discernable in Strindberg's drama. David Krasner notes that, „„Strindberg's plays took in existential matters such as birth, love, loss, emotional turmoil, the search for one's identity, and the inevitable decline into death.“ (Krasner, *Strindberg's transition*, Chapt.3, p.110) In order to discover the meaning of life and true happiness Strindberg's characters confront their most intimate desires and the throbbing power of their self-consciousness. Overall, Strindberg's experiences, his passions, loves, trials, errors, faults, hopes and isolation are superbly expressed in all of his plays in which „„there are no such external corroboration but rather beliefs develop out of the twisted psychology of the characters.“ (Wallace, p.70) The lack of realization, the ignorance and the lack of responsibility are more threatening than death itself. In Strindberg's work, the realisation of our own nothingness inspires us not to live like corpse-like figures, because we are not dead yet. In fact, there is nothing to stop us living the life we want to live. Strindberg's beliefs were predominantly influenced and anticipated by Existentialists such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Nietzsche's „„man of power“ and Kierkegaard's „„true individual“ bear a resemblance to Strindberg's accurate portrayal of human reality/subjectivity. Strindberg attempted to see a human being as someone whose only limit is the one he/she imposes on him/herself. If we allow our existence to be merely a thoughtless accident our lives will turn out to be an endless

torment of an existential hell on Earth. For Strindberg human beings are only to be pitied when they let themselves dream about a futile future instead of living their lives to the fullest. According to John Gassner, Strindberg had the „capacity to make the unknown known, the hidden revealed, the unconscious conscious.“<sup>1</sup> Either writing in realistic, naturalistic, expressionistic, or symbolic forms, he endeavoured „to make subjective experience and vision objective“, evoking „order out of disorder“ (Grasner,xxii,xiv) Strindberg’s plays are deeply dark and heavy, yet powerful and profoundly inspiring. Significantly, his drama is intrinsically linked to Existential philosophy. Ultimately, Strindberg’s plays had an influence upon playwrights such as Sartre, Beckett, Ionesco, and Sarah Kane and other postmodernist playwrights who continue to see the power battle of the sexes saturated in a haze of lust and disgust.

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