

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN STRINDBERG'S THE RED ROOM

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by

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Strindberg's novel, The Red Room (Röda Rummet, 1879), has been mainly discussed in the secondary literature with reference to the autobiographical elements and the thematic complex: the isolation of the writer, the quest for identity in a hostile society, the encounter between innocence and experience, the defeat of idealism and the subsequent escape into nihilism. Accordingly, the novel has been placed in the tradition of the "Bildungsroman" and in the genre of the social satire or critique inspired by Dickens (The Pickwick Papers), Balzac (Père Goriot), and Mark Twain.<sup>1</sup> Although the novel can be analyzed validly from these approaches, the structural aspects, such as narrative technique, which contribute to a greater understanding of the novel as a whole, have been largely neglected or at most, only alluded to in Strindberg studies in the English language.<sup>2</sup> An analysis of the narrative techniques would establish a clearer relationship between the author's approach (satiric critique of society) and the thematic complex.

The Red Room presents a social, political and economic panorama of the Swedish society in the 1870's. Strindberg attempts to expose the truth about this society's nature, which is veiled in the hypocrisy of social conventions and institutions. In view of this approach, the revelation of the general truth about the entire society through the use of satiric devices, one must pose

the question of how the author is able to encompass all aspects of society in his representation. The present study addresses itself to this question and proposes to analyze those narrative techniques, which contribute to the realization of the author's intention to present a comprehensive review of the social complex.

The narrative techniques considered in this study comprise the means by which the author is able to unmask the entire social structure: the depiction of the microcosm of the social, economic and political spheres as representative aspects of the entire society; the picaresque technique, which moves the protagonist through the multifarious rooms of society; the use of economic and political intrigue to expose the covert social network upholding the social structure (also referred to as the concept of the "secret society"<sup>3</sup>). Although it is difficult to separate the individual narrative techniques, as they constitute interdependent aspects of the composite and interwoven structure of the novel, a comprehensive analysis of these techniques, in reference to certain of the thematic elements, would contribute to another dimension in the interpretive studies of Strindberg's novels.

The Red Room, however, is not solely a socio-political portrait of society. The major themes reflect deep concern with the psychological and existential dimensions of individuals in conflict with imposed social values, specifically the conflict of the artist in society. Since the novel appears to transcend the boundaries of a naturalistic/realistic study of society, the elements of symbolism in the novel will be discussed with reference to the narrative techniques. Although The Red Room

has been characterized as a naturalistic work,<sup>4</sup> the prevalence of symbolism can not be ignored. It is possible to see the symbolic elements in The Red Room as integral parts of the novel's approach, as well as an anticipation of Strindberg's symbolistic period.<sup>5</sup> This study will also attempt, therefore, to illustrate the correspondence between the symbolic imagery in The Red Room and the symbolism in A Dream Play (1901), a representative work of this later period.

The present study has been divided into three sections. The first section will consider the novel in its historic context, as a reaction to the conditions of its times, with reference to the satiric approach and the preponderance of the "public lie" concept.<sup>6</sup> The second section will analyze the narrative techniques which contribute to the unmasking of society and the realization of the thematic aspects of the novel. Finally, the third section will discuss the elements of symbolism and their function in the novel, as well as their anticipation of Strindberg's later symbolistic period.

## I

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

If one defines satire as an "indirect aggression against a target or targets which are made to seem blameworthy within a given context," stimulated in part by the author's "desire to reform, or to correct foolishness or vicious sets of ideas or attitudes,"<sup>7</sup> then it is also necessary to analyze the ideas and attitudes of the period, as well as the satiric approach.

Strindberg's satire has been often characterized as good natured and humorous because of its exaggerated caricatures of social institutions and its willingness "to portion out the blame for the evils of the world."<sup>8</sup> However, the undercurrent of pessimism in the novel is at times reflected in the sardonic satirical accounts of society, as Strindberg wished to express the frustrated expectations of his generation. In his approach, Strindberg employs a combination of direct and indirect satirical devices. The overstatement (exaggeration), a property of direct satire, is used in conjunction with the indirect statement, or insinuation (verbal or non-verbal implication). For example,



the exaggerated and perhaps humorous portrait of Parliament in session is played against the final serious words of the chapter (VIII), "The country was saved. Poor country." words which insinuate a meaning not directly stated. (88) This approach of using contrasting devices, which intensify the effect of the indirect statement (satiric insinuation), makes it possible for Strindberg to reveal the discrepancies in the actual motives and the facade of official ideals and values inherent in the social conventions and institutions.

The vantage point of the satirist lies outside the confines of social constraint, where he is free to pass judgement. Strindberg's target is society-at-large and many chapters are devoted to the unmasking of various social institutions. He exposes the Civil Service as a ludicrous bureaucracy (I), reveals the fraud in the financial speculations of the period, using the "Insurance Company Triton" as a humoristically exaggerated example (XII), depicts the stagnation of the "liberal" Parliament (VIII), gives insights into the manipulation of public opinion by the fickle Press syndicates (X), and the enterprising publishing firm of Mr. Smith (V), and unmasks the commerciality of popular religion and pretensions of charity by the fashionable (VII). These are just a few examples of the targets towards which Strindberg's aggression is aimed, yet the mixture of satiric viewpoints produces an indirect evaluation (in contrast to a direct invective) of the Swedish social climate of the times. This evaluation or critique of society does have moralistic implications, in the sense that Strindberg was motivated by the

desire to rid society of hypocrisy, a desire to reform the attitudes which perpetrated the social lies. This moralistic tone is in contrast to other social writings of the times. Balzac's social commentary in Père Goriot does not moralize, but rather views hypocrisy and social lies as necessary aspects of the social structure.

The satiric approach in The Red Room is a reaction to the actual social conditions of Swedish society in the 1870's. The objective of revealing the truth about society appears to be symptomatic of the conflict between literature and society in this period, when contemporary writers were concerned with the concept of the "public lie." A brief historic overview of the period and the general attitudes will facilitate the discussion of this concept and its relation to the novel.

Sweden during the 1870's was experiencing the stimulating effects of industrialization (1860's-1870's). The rising middle class supported a liberal government which was somewhat favorable to the economic demands in export-import trade and home production. As a result, great strides were made in the sphere of economics. The achievement of the long-awaited constitutional reform of 1865 contributed to the democratization of Sweden by abolishing the system of Estates, creating a broader division of power. However, as Anderson remarks on the subsequent period of the 70's: "All this seething activity both intellectual and economic had virtually no impact on Swedish parliamentary life during the first 20 years after the reform of the Riksdag." It appeared that the new Parliament, whose members "evinced a markedly conservative

tendency," (the majority belonged to the agrarian class), had not instituted any obviously progressive measures. Thus, social reform and development had not kept pace with previous liberal expectations.<sup>12</sup> The ramifications of this apparent political stagnation were reflected in the dissatisfaction of the intellectuals. The reaction of the radical young authors is witnessed in the consolidation of social critical aims in a movement known as Young Sweden.<sup>13</sup> Although Strindberg was not directly involved with any movement, his novel is a product of the prevailing sentiments of dissatisfaction exemplified by the radical segment of the intelligentsia of that period.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, the historical picture is not complete unless one considers the general European social climate as well. Industrialization in Sweden facilitated increased contacts with Norway and Denmark, as well as with the Central European countries, "... where the tendency towards realism fostered by political and social dissatisfaction had already found expression both in theory and practice."<sup>15</sup> On the literary scene, the critical essays and lectures of the brothers Georg and Edvard Brandes played an important role as intermediaries of radical ideas emanating from various continental schools of socio-economic criticism, (Lasalle, Marx).<sup>16</sup> The plays of Ibsen and Bjørnson in the Scandinavian realm, in conjunction with the naturalistic trends in France (Zola), also contributed to the growing critical temper in Sweden.

The economic events of the European countries had a great impact on Sweden's socio-economic development. The general

crisis of the late 1870's, caused by overspeculation during the boom era of industrialization, had grave financial repercussions in Sweden, culminating in a total economic crisis in the early 80's. The appearance of literary works with financial themes, such as bankruptcy (Björnson, A Bankruptcy), reflects to some extent the conditions of the times. Strindberg, himself, suffered bankruptcy in the late 70's, which perhaps accounts for his sardonic exposure, in The Red Room, of the corrupt financial speculations involved in the "Marine Insurance Company Triton." The formation of these stock companies represents a new set of economic morals, dealings with impersonal entities, which clashed with the former financial behavior of the upper classes.

Together, the financial instability and political stagnation, evident in the conservative tendencies of Parliament, provided ample ammunition for a satiric social critique. However, these are only surface aspects of the social condition; Strindberg also wished to attack the very foundations of middle class society. The satiric depiction of all levels of society--social, economic, and political--is stimulated by the disillusionment with the social lies; the hypocrisies of social values and conventions of the petty bourgeoisie. Strindberg viewed the bourgeoisie's rise to power as an expanding network of interrelated connections, which controlled and manipulated all aspects of society for its own gain. The bourgeois ideals of honesty, hard work, responsibility, honor and respect appeared to him as mere façades of social institutions, meaningless, yet effective as social constraints.

Strindberg's later formulation of this view in his work, The New Kingdom (1882), as the concept of the "public lie," pertains to the tenacious existence of these values as the official moral code perpetrated by the middle class.<sup>17</sup>

In The Red Room, the portrayal of false honor through association (names were picked from the Social Directory to make the "Insurance Company Triton" appear more impressive), the love of formalities and titles in order to gain prestige, the crippling debt of family pride and ideals (Arvid Falk and Rehnjelm both suffer the constricting effects of family socialization), the pretensions of charity (the Crêche Bethlehem venture), and fraudulent financial speculation expose the true essence of this honored value system. Yet, the irony of this issue is that these pretensions, these false values, were well known to society-at-large, but accepted, as they formed the very fibers of the structure, hence the term "public lie."

Strindberg was not alone in this estimation of social values. Nietzsche, in his essay "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn" (1873), acknowledged the existence of social lies, and generally concluded that they were intrinsic and necessary to any social system.<sup>18</sup> Other contemporary writers, such as Ibsen, in his plays (The Pillars of Society, 1877; A Doll's House, 1879), had also tried to expose the "public lie," the social façades, and unmask society. However, as the writers continued their attempts to reveal the truth about society, their attitudes toward the possibility of such a

revelation changed. The question of whether the social structure could sustain the truth tended to be answered in the negative, as it became increasingly clear that society was dependent on lies. In Ibsen's play, An Enemy of the People (1882), Dr. Stockmann's situation of revealing the truth about the polluted waters of the new Baths reflects the sentiment, that the truth can cause destruction--in this case, the financial destruction of an entire town.<sup>19</sup> It is possible that Strindberg had already taken this question into consideration when he chose a satiric approach which indirectly chastized society, rather than delivering a caustic invective.

Another idea represented in the works of Strindberg and other contemporary writers, which is directly related to their conception of the "public lie," is that of the underlying and all-pervading social network; the "secret society" of interrelated connections. The members of this social network mainly belonged to the rising middle class (e.g. the enterprising Nicholas Falk), but also included others, who shared contacts throughout society (e.g. the Baron who owned the worker's paper "The Worker's Banner"). Society is viewed in terms of the intrigues of this social network, an idea which is also mirrored in the narrative techniques of The Red Room, to be discussed in Section II. The description of the Civil Service employees, who occupy more than one position, functioning in various capacities in the different departments, serves as a microcosm of this social network, an element which recurs throughout the novel. (6-10) The portrayal of the intrigues

of this network also appears in Ibsen's plays on a smaller scale, (Werle's connections in The Wild Duck, 1884). The 19th century journalistic ambition to look into the workings of society is reflected in the novels of both Balzac (Père Goriot) and Dickens (The Pickwick Papers), where the inner rooms of society and the network of interrelating connections are revealed. The social network then appears to be a part of the "public lie," that system which is responsible for maintaining the social façade, a conscious conspiracy to uphold the values of society:

There are silent agreements, public secrets, which are keeping society together. Reveal them, lift 20 the curtains and society as a whole will collapse.

The concept of the "public lie," as formulated here in Strindberg's work, The New Kingdom, is reflected in his earlier novel by Arvid Falk's observations concerning the guests at his brother's social gathering:

What had Professor Borg, that man of great scientific renown, in common with his uneducated brother? They were share-holders in the same Company. What was the haughty Captain Gyllenborst doing here? . . . And the President? And the Admiral? Here were invisible bonds, strong and perhaps unbreakable. (215)

The microcosm of the social network, the system of "invisible bonds" and the intrigues that transpire within this network form integral elements of the narrative technique in The Red Room.

## II

## NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

As was discussed in Section I of this study, Strindberg was concerned with revealing the truth about society in the novel of The Red Room, that is, depicting the discrepancies in the actual motives of society and the projected façade of official ideals. Johannesson comments on this predilection for truth in reference to Strindberg's novels in general: "Strindberg's novels represent, in fact, a life long dialogue with truth, in the process of which the entire spectrum of belief and un-<sup>21</sup>belief of his age passes in review. Within this spectrum, Strindberg presents the hypocrisies of society, the "public lies" and the covert social network intrinsic and necessary to the maintenance of the social structure of the period.

It is one thing to discuss the intellectual concepts which are used to expose society. It is quite another, however, to identify the techniques which are instrumental in producing the spectrum of society in the novel. How does Strindberg encompass the entirety of a social structure within the confines of a few hundred pages. Certainly the picaresque technique of allowing



a character to pass through the various rooms of society, coming into contact with a wide variety of social institutions, and the idea of social and economic intrigues used to reveal the underlying network of relationships are both instrumental in exposing the true nature of the vast social complex. But above all, the selection of certain representative aspects, microcosms of the social complex, achieves the panoramic dimensions of this view into society.<sup>22</sup> The discussion of the narrative techniques effective in the novel as vehicles for the realization of the author's intention, (the unmasking of society), will be concerned with the microcosmic technique as well as with the techniques of the picaresque and intrigue, the latter being viewed as interrelated aspects of the microcosmic technique itself.

Strindberg selects and focuses upon social institutions, conventions and social types, microcosms of the social mechanism, which representatively mirror the activities and ideology of society as a whole. The technique of creating a microcosm reduces the multifarious aspects of the social system to a manageable core of representations, which reflect the essential inconsistencies in the appearance and concrete reality of the social structure and ideals. The application of this technique permeates the structure of the novel and functions on two levels.

On the first level the reader is presented with the exterior aspects of the social system, the institutions. In the first chapter, "Stockholm--A Bird's Eye View," Arvid Falk's critical depiction of the Departments of the Civil Service can be understood as a microcosm of bureaucracy, representative of all

"comprehensive and well-organized" government departments found in the society of the period, where the chief concerns revolved around paper shuffling and supply orders. (6-10). Although this image of the bureaucracy appears stereotyped and possibly trite to the modern reader, this comic satirical portrayal of the ludicrous bureaucratic system must have been quite disconcerting to the public of the 19th Century, as Civil Servants enjoyed considerable prestige (note the deference Struve shows to Falk by addressing him with his title of Assessor). (4) The effect of this technique is not only realized in the focus on representative aspects of the social complex, but also in the selectivity of this focus, as Strindberg singles out those institutions which are the mainstays of the social structure.

Among the institutions which form the "pillars of society," to use an Ibsenian term, the microcosm of the bourgeois family is represented by the figures of Carl Nicholas Falk and his wife, Mrs. Falk. Carl Nicholas, the brother of the protagonist, Arvid Falk, typifies the enterprising man of the rising middle class. He is out for financial gain and prestige, a fact which he disguises beneath the veneer of middle class honor and honesty. His wife, a former member of the lower middle class, is climbing the social ladder, as indicated by the ostentatious display of wealth and her pretentious involvement in the supposedly philanthropic venture, Crêche Bethlehem. The marital relationship is one in which every action is motivated by economics, somewhat similar to a business transaction, where both partners are scheming to gain control:

Each of the couple felt ill at ease in the other's company. They knew one another's thoughts and they knew that the first of them to break silence would say something stupid, something compromising. (91)

This view into the inner chambers of the middle class family exposes the hypocrisy of the social values vested in the sacred institution of the family.

Another mainstay of the social structure is depicted in the portrait of Parliament, the microcosm of the state. In the chapter entitled "Poor Country" (VIII), the parliamentary proceedings are revealed as the designs of private interest groups, whose petty concerns obscured necessary and important legislation. Strindberg is critical of all political parties when he depicts the disinterested reaction to the speech of the impartial "man of honor" (Sven Svensson--Mr. Average Swede), who was speaking on behalf of the oppressed: "No one opposed the speech; it had led to no action; it was as if it had never been made." (84) The composite portrait of the state's legislative body reflects the political stagnation of the period, where the liberalist movement had degenerated into petty power plays, indifferent to the needs and the maintenance of the state. 23  
Here again the inherent official value system proves to be but a thin veneer, concealing the actual motives. At one point, the lobby for the "Insurance Company Triton" moves that the state assume responsibility for all of the joint stock Companies it has sanctioned, an intrigue which is meant to disguise their own swindle. (86-88)

A reproduction of the entire society is created through the

use of the microcosmic technique. In addition to the basic social institutions already discussed, Strindberg includes microcosms of various other institutions which contribute to the maintenance of the social system. The media, represented by the newspaper syndicates ("Red Cap" and "Grey Cap"), is described as a vehicle of public opinion engineering, often fickle in its manipulation of opinions, as indicated by the change from liberal to conservative attitudes in the "Grey Cap" for the sake of popularity. (94-95) The official rhetoric, illustrated by the catalogues of rhetoric in the reporting of the parliamentary proceedings, is exposed as pure sham. (81-82) The publishing syndicate, controlled by the capitalist, Mr. Smith, represents society's control over literature, as his reputation is derived from the power and influence he has in making a name for a writer, irrespective of talent (" . . . the redoubtable Smith with his thousand arms, who could make an author in twelve months, even out of pretty bad stuff."), for the purpose of financial gain. (49) Pastor Skare's religious clearing house is the epitome of a social religion which has been made fashionable, as "This man had made salvation fashionable." (74) This caricature also represents the exploitation of religious sentiments for the purpose of gaining personal prestige. The economic situation of the period, produced in part by the enterprises of the rising middle class, is epitomized in the figure of Carl Nicholas Falk, whose financial transactions in promissory notes have converted his small family business into a large-scale enterprise. The microcosm of these

financial dealings is also illustrated in the formation of a joint stock Company, "Marine Insurance Company Triton," a new concept of financial interaction for the times, mentioned in Section I of this study. This microcosm of financial speculation typifies those Companies that were often established without capital and acquired gains by defrauding the public.<sup>24</sup> Art's relationship to society is also included in this compendium of microcosms, and is reflected in the figure of the practical Lundell, a more pragmatic member of the artist group. Lundell prostitutes his art by painting portraits of the fashionable, because it insures an income, but most of all because it gains him prestige. And finally, the artists outside of society who refuse to accept the traditional values and conventions: Sellén refuses to paint in the traditionally accepted style; Ollé drops out of art completely because it appeared to him as "selfish pleasure." (262) This group forms the microcosm of a counter-culture, albeit a deromanticized caricature of this life style.

Before continuing with the analysis of the microcosmic technique, one must first consider the means by which Strindberg presents these microcosms of the social system in his novel. Strindberg's desire to incorporate all aspects of society in his critique necessitates a comprehensive presentation of all social constellations. This is accomplished by introducing a picaresque character in the figure of the journalist, Arvid Falk, who, by virtue of his occupation, has access to society's many rooms. Picaresque is defined in this context as the

free movement of the protagonist through the social universe, thematically passing from a state of innocence into that of experience.<sup>25</sup> Falk's experiences as a journalist bring him into contact with many microcosms of social institutions and social types: newspaper and publishing syndicates, fraudulent dealings of the "Marine Insurance Company Triton," a popular religious clearing house, the Swedish Parliament, meetings of the Worker's Association,<sup>26</sup> financial speculators, the petty bourgeoisie and the coterie of Bohemian artists. The episodic nature of Falk's movement through these stations or rooms of society, an aspect of the picaresque technique, allows for a composite view of the multifarious social spheres.

The overview of society, implicit in the journey through society's rooms, and in the encounters with the various members of the social network, is completed when Falk, disillusioned, re-enters society at the end of the novel. Falk has been reintegrated, even if only superficially, into the society he chose to leave at the beginning of the novel, (there is reference made to his membership in a "secret society," (274), which will be discussed later in this study.). The picaresque technique, in conjunction with that of the microcosm, has contributed to a panoramic representation of Swedish society in that period.

Returning to the discussion of the microcosm, one can focus on another level of application. The depiction of the institutions, conventions and social types constitutes the exterior level of application, discussed above. The reflection of the inner turmoil

experienced by Falk, in his attempt to reject the hypocritical social values imposed upon him by society in the first chapter, is illustrative of the interior microcosm, which mirrors and anticipates his recurring psychological state throughout the novel.

In the first chapter, the idealist Falk, who has just renounced his position in society and is intent on "throwing himself into the arms of literature," (11) encounters the realist Struve, who momentarily crushes his ideals with the pragmatic advice, that Falk should give up his idea of becoming a writer and should be adaptable instead. Falk's psychological state after this encounter is reflected in the imagery of the bruised bird:

He felt like a bird that had flown against a window-pane believing that it was spreading its wings to fly straight out into freedom, and now lay bruised upon the ground.... (12)

and also in that of the chained boats:

There lay twenty, thirty boats moored beside the quay, tugging at their chains and poking up their heads one above the other . . . Wind and wave seemed to urge them on and they rushed forward . . . but the chains jerked them back.... (12)

Both sets of images symbolize the abortive attempt to break free from the bonds of social pressure, both images portray the futility of such an attempt, a theme which recurs throughout the novel. The interior level of the microcosm reflects and anticipates Falk's future psychological situations.

Johannesson suggests this aspect of the microcosmic technique, without employing the term, in his comment on the symbolic nature

of the first chapter: "A characteristic feature of Strindberg's novels is the introductory episode that in a symbolic form anticipates the action and the theme of the novel as a whole."<sup>27</sup> It is correct, as Johannesson implies in the term "symbolic form," that the first chapter creates a microcosm of the entire novel, wherein all the major themes are introduced; innocence encountering experience, the idealistic quest for sincerity, the disillusionment in the realization that appearance does not correspond to reality (evident in Falk's ironic description of the intrigues which transpire in the Departments of the Civil Service and his later frustrations with the social lies), the subsequent defeat of idealism and the tendency towards nihilism (as symbolized by the imagery of the bruised bird and the chained boats).

The microcosmic technique, however, has greater implications than just that of the anticipatory function ascribed to it by Johannesson. In his desire to encompass all aspects of society, Strindberg chooses techniques which reflect the nature of the concrete reality. The delineation of society's nature through the use of the microcosm and the interrelated techniques of the picaresque and intrigue (discussion to follow) determine the form of the narrative in the novel. If, for example, Strindberg viewed society as a series of intrigues (which in fact he did), then he would attempt to incorporate this aspect in the structure of the narrative. Thus the motivating concept behind the portrayal of reality becomes in effect, the narrative structure, so as to make content (the intrigues) and form (the use of intrigues as a



technique) almost indistinguishable.

To continue this example of the merging of form and content, the use of intrigue as a narrative technique proves illustrative. Since Strindberg did, in fact, view the inner workings of the social system in terms of social, political and economic intrigues, he presents microcosms of the secret machinations of those in power. The financial dealings of Nicholas Falk, who was engaged in private money lending activities are one such intrigue. His schemings with promissory notes gave him power over other individuals, all of which transpired under the pretense of a respectable business. His business is just a front for his other activities, and the reduction of his trade was explained differently to different people; to business associates he claimed he was actually dealing in wholesale trade and the shop was for purposes of advertisement, but to his acquaintances ("the notary and the magistrate"), the reduction in trade--the bad times--was due to parliamentary reform. (14) It is for this reason that Arvid Falk, the brother of the finance shark, renounces society, because "It is not based on mutual trust; it is a web of lies...." (11) This "web of lies," reminiscent of the concept of the "public lie" discussed in Section I, and the intrigues that transpire between members of the social network in the concrete reality, becomes the content and the form of the narrative structure in the novel. <sup>28</sup>

As a technique, the intrigues, the covert transactions between various members of the differing social spheres, illuminate the existence of an underlying social network; that system

of "invisible bonds" which is comprised of interrelated connections, having a mutual interest, usually of a financial nature. Arvid Falk refers to this network when he comments on the diversity among the guests present at his brother's annual social gathering:

Moreover, the whole occasion seemed to him a masquerade. What had Professor Borg, that man of great scientific renown in common with his uneducated brother? They were share-holders in the same Company. What was the haughty Captain Gyllenborst doing here? Did he come for the sake of the dinner? Impossible, even if people are prepared to go out of their way to eat well. And the President? And the Admiral? Here were invisible bonds, strong and perhaps unbreakable. (215)

The reason for the diversity is the common bond of financial intrigue as share-holders in the "Marine Insurance Company Triton", a corporation of "invisible bonds", a microcosm of the social network. The concept of covert machinations of a secret society has already been anticipated by Arvid Falk's schematic depiction of the inner chambers in the "Board for Payment of Civil Service Salaries", where the same people appeared in different departments. (I) In the configuration of the Insurance Company, the motif of intrigue recurs with regularity, exposing the interconnections of the social network. Because of their intrigues, certain individuals, who would otherwise have nothing to do with one another, come into contact: Secretaries, Actuaries and the President of the Civil Service Departments, Mr. Smith, the publisher (who is also acting Managing Director of the Insurance Company), Carl Nicholas Falk and anonymous Admirals and Captains and even Barons. These individuals consistently reappear,

bound together by their common interests in the context of intrigue throughout the novel.

The chapters of the novel also provide an insight into the social network. They come to represent the individual rooms of society, different microcosms of social life through which Arvid Falk passes as a journalist. As mirrors of the entire social system, they also reflect the web of relations in the social network. It appears as if they are motivated by the intrigues which transpire within them. Certain chapters can be identified as rooms in which intrigues occur; the various chambers of the Civil Service in Chapter I, the session in Parliament in Chapter VIII, the Board meeting for the Insurance Company "Triton" in Chapter XII, and the social gathering at the home of Carl Nicholas Falk in Chapter XXIV. Others represent the rooms where intrigues are made; Nicholas Falk's back room of his shop in Chapters IX and XXIII, the publishing firm owned by Mr. Smith in Chapters V and XII, the inner rooms of the newspaper syndicate "Grey Cap" in Chapter X and also those rooms of the "Worker's Banner" in Chapter XXV. In the above analysis, one can see that the repeated glimpses into the covert machinations of the social network, illuminated by the technique of intrigue, indicate the extent to which the social network is present in all aspects of society and in the novel as well. The implication of a final intrigue at the end of the novel (Dr. Borg's suggestion that Falk is a member of "one of those secret societies that the reactionary and iron rule have given rise to on the continent." (274) gives

a circular impression of the narrative progression. The novel begins and ends with an intrigue.

The discussion of the narrative techniques allows for a skeletal view of the separate reality that Strindberg has created in his fiction.<sup>29</sup> Although the techniques of the narrative are usually viewed as the mechanics of the novel, it has been illustrated here how the approach can cause a merging of content and form, reflecting the two as one. The interdependence of these techniques, and their complementary use by the author contributes to the cohesiveness of the narrative. Although Strindberg does introduce chapters in which the protagonist, Falk, is not involved, and appears to change main characters with the Rehnholm episodes,<sup>30</sup> the consistent use of the interrelated techniques, in conjunction with the parallels in the thematic complex insure unity of objective; the revealing of the true nature of the social condition. A discussion of the complementary function of symbolism will follow in the next section.

### III SYMBOLIC MOTIFS

Strindberg's early period of writing (novels between 1879 and 1887) has generally been characterized as naturalistic, because of the emphasis on socio-political and economic elements and the concern with the individual's integration into society. However, as Martin Lamm points out in his study, August Strindberg (1948), Strindberg's narrative style is not to be characterized as "programmatically faithful to naturalism or realism."<sup>31</sup> Although Strindberg's social satire produced the same powerful impact, in its blatant exposure of social hypocrisy, as the French naturalistic works, Lamm further states that "Strindberg made no attempt to adopt the naturalists' documentary technique and scrupulous investigation of reality."<sup>32</sup> This view point is also shared by other scholars who hesitate to classify the novel in the strict tradition of the French naturalists led by Zola. These critics find other stylistic elements, such as romanticism and impressionism, in the novel.<sup>33</sup> Mortensen and Downs emphasize the difference between Strindberg's approach and that of the strict naturalists: "Strindberg does not, like Zola, analyze his scenes as if he were

making a business inventory of the furniture, the costumes, the individuals."<sup>34</sup>

Yet, in spite of this aversion on the part of Strindberg scholars to classify the novel as a work illustrative of a definite period or style (naturalism or realism), much of the analysis of this work concerns itself with the work's naturalistic and realistic traits.<sup>35</sup> The work was first characterized as a naturalistic work because it exhibited a concern with describing the true nature of society. While it is now recognized that this novel does not adhere to the strict naturalistic doctrine, it still appears to be analyzed with criteria generally attributed to naturalistic works.<sup>36</sup> Stylistic elements such as symbolism are rarely considered in an analysis of this early novel. This symbolic characterization appears to be reserved for Strindberg's later works, written after the Inferno crisis and exemplified in such works as Inferno and the numerous plays of his symbolistic phase, of which A Dream Play is considered representative. To reserve this characterization for a later phase in Strindberg's creativity is to overlook an important narrative aspect of this earlier work.

Lamm does come close to an acknowledgement of symbolism in The Red Room when he discusses Strindberg's technique of personification: "There is no aspect of Dickens' technique that Strindberg assimilated more completely than this ability to blend setting, action and character, and to give inanimate objects a fantastic fairy-tale lustre."<sup>37</sup> But he goes on to note that this personification, this emphatic imagery, does not yet constitute symbolism in regard

to this novel: "During later periods of Strindberg's life, these objects acquired mystical lives, becoming portents and symbols, but in The Red Room he (Strindberg) was content simply to personify them."<sup>38</sup> Lamm has apparently overlooked the symbolic personification of the wind in the first chapter, a transmitter of the fresh air of renewal, and that of the chained boats compared to an excited pack of hounds, a symbolic representation of Falk's present and future psychological state. The representative function of many of the microcosms also suggests symbolic value, as well as the symbolic foreshadowing of the entire first chapter, in its anticipation of events to follow. These and other elements (to be discussed) must be recognized as elements which transcend a naturalistic/realistic portrayal of society.

Going further in his analysis than Lamm, Johannesson suggests the symbolic potential of Strindberg's imagery in his reference to the anticipatory function of the first chapter: "A characteristic feature of Strindberg's novels is the introductory episode that in a symbolic form anticipates the action and the themes of the novel as a whole."<sup>39</sup> However, he does not explore the further significance of this "symbolic form," Johannesson is, of course, referring to the entire chapter, in which the satirical exposure of the Civil Service as a corrupt bureaucracy and the reflection of the psychological situation of the young idealist Falk, through the use of personified images, appear as the salient symbolic features.

This apparent oversight in regard to the recognition of

symbolic motifs as an aspect of narrative technique is most probably, it seems, the result of a desire on the part of some theoreticians to adhere to a tradition of categorizing and defining works within definite, accepted periods or styles. The concept of period here "serves to interpret a style which reached its peak during a certain section of time."<sup>40</sup> Guillén comments on this tendency towards periodization in reference to literary history, as being at times monistic in its classification of works, often excluding the existence of parallel elements or styles belonging to the same section of time.<sup>41</sup> This desire to find a dominant style in the classification of literary periods (naturalism, realism, symbolism, etc.) can also be seen in the classification of individual works within certain periods. Just as the dominant literary style within a section of time "in no way coincides with all of the valuable artistic work of the moment," by analogy, the dominant stylistic elements of a work can not be considered to the exclusion of other contributing and parallel elements within the work itself. The failure to acknowledge the presence of symbolism in The Red Room can perhaps be attributed to a preoccupation with periodization: the association of stylistic approaches with certain literary periods, which may occur later than the work itself. Strindberg's earlier works (works before his so-called symbolistic phase) must be analyzed in respect to a blending of stylistic elements, which enable the works to transcend the limitations of a naturalistic/realistic approach and world view.

This section of the study proposes an analysis of the symbolic



motifs in The Red Room, some of which call to mind elements which are found in works generally accepted as symbolistic, such as A Dream Play. The treatment of these symbolic motifs in this early novel may not yet be as developed as that which is reflected in the works of the so-called symbolistic period. However, these motifs, in their initial application, function as narrative elements which transcend the boundaries of a realistic social commentary. The major themes of this novel, the quest for identity in a hostile society, the encountering of innocence and experience, the defeat of idealism and the escape into nihilism, reflect a concern with the psychological and existential dimensions of the individual, a characteristic trait of the later symbolistic works. Johannesson characterizes the symbolistic period (Symbolist School) with reference to the changing attitudes of the authors of this period:

Turning away from the social scene, and from what they felt to be a shallow and mechanistic conception of character, these novelists occupied themselves increasingly with the problem of human identity, with the complexities and contradictions of the self.<sup>42</sup>

The Red Room already reflects, to some extent, this change in focus. Midway through the novel one notices a shift from the overt social critique to a more analytic treatment of character (Falander, Ollé, Falk and Rehnholm).<sup>43</sup> After a discussion of the symbolic motifs which reflect the introspective dimensions in The Red Room, parallels will be drawn with some symbolic motifs which appear in A Dream Play.

The symbolic function of the first chapter, noted by Johannesson, has been discussed as an aspect of the microcosmic technique in

Section II of this study. Strindberg has compressed the major themes of his work into this introductory episode, in which Falk encounters the disillusioning figures of reality and experience. Falk, as the representative of innocence and idealism, is described as ". . . a child, for he still believed in everything, both fact and fairy-tales." (3) His realization of the corruption in the Civil Service is combined with a confrontation with the disillusioning pragmatic advice of the realist Struve: "One must be adaptable. And you don't know what a writer's position is. He is outside of society." (11) These insights which are forced upon Falk produce a turbulent psychological reaction; the feeling of being ensnared in society, because one is too dependent to exist outside of its boundaries. This response anticipates the action and the themes of the entire novel.<sup>44</sup> It is significant that Strindberg entitled the first chapter "Stockholm--A Bird's Eye View," as this term not only suggests the spatial perspective of an objective overview of society, but also an overview of the entire novel. In addition, it also foreshadows the psychological interpretation of this term from Struve's nihilistic perspective:

Practice taking a bird's-eye view of the world and you will see how small and insignificant everything becomes. Start with the view that the whole thing is a rubbish heap . . . then you will no longer be taken by surprise, no longer disillusioned. (169-70)

This perspective is suggestive of an underlying pessimism which permeates the entire narrative. Other representatives of this perspective are found in the characters of Falander and Borg.

Thus, the first chapter can be viewed as being divided into

two different levels, each symbolically representative of the entire novel. The first level presents an objective overview of society: a microcosm of the bureaucracy with its internal secret network reflected in the different Departments of the Civil Service, wherein the same people constantly reappear. Social corruption and "public lies", veiled in the semblances of official respectability, present in symbolic form the satirical unmasking of society to follow in the subsequent chapters. Exposure of other social institutions and conventions (the family, newspaper syndicates, Parliament, etc.) is anticipated and mirrored in the critical treatment of the Civil Service.

Symbolism functions on the second level in a presentation of Falk's introspection, a reflection of his emotional and psychological state after the encounter with Struve. Falk's initial attempt to break the bonds of social convention, by choosing the alienated position of the writer, is reflected in the image of the bruised bird:

He felt like a bird that had flown against a window-pane believing that it was spreading its wings to fly straight out into freedom, and now lay bruised upon the ground. (12)

This abortive attempt to break away from society and gain freedom anticipates Falk's repeated, futile endeavors to reject a society, whose false values he can not accept. The bird's failure to realize that the window was closed symbolizes the illusiveness of the ideal, specifically the ideal of freedom, and ultimately the impossibility of achieving this ideal. This pessimistic view of idealism is substantiated throughout the work in the defeats

that Falk suffers, resulting in a defeat of idealism and his compromised re-entry into society.

Complementing this image is the symbolic linking of boats chained to their moorings with the image of an excited pack of chained hounds straining to break free. The futile efforts of the boats (and the dogs) also suggest an abortive attempt to break free of society. This imagery is further illustrative of Falk's inner turmoil, experienced because he can not yet effect a complete break with his past dependence on society:

Wind and wave seemed to urge them (the boats) on and they rushed forward towards the bridge like a pack of excited hounds, but the chains jerked them back and so they champed and kicked as if eager to break away. (12)

Falk's desire to break free of society's hypocrisy is thwarted by his dependence upon society. The chains represent the bonds of socialization and pressures of social conventions imposed upon the individual since childhood. Because of his tendency towards idealism, Falk is constantly jerked back into the reality of his situation by the chains of his disillusionment. Even when Falk resigns himself to society's demands (his re-integration), this conflict of idealism and reality is still present, as implied by Borg's description of him in the last chapter: "Falk is a political fanatic, who knows he'd burn up if he fanned the flames, and so he smothers them with hard dry work." (274) Falk, himself, is aware of his chaotic inner condition, as he contemplates his reaction to a later meeting with Struve:

. . . he failed, and he wasn't even clear as to who had been in the right. He began to wonder if the whole thing--

the cause he had made his own--that of the oppressed--was just an illusion. The next moment he condemned his cowardice and the fanaticism that always glowed within him burst once more into flame. (173)

These images and the description of Falk's existential state transcend the naturalistic/realistic description of an individual. They also assume a greater function than just that of anticipation (as Johannesson suggests), as they embody symbolic value in themselves.

There are other elements in the first chapter which take on the character of portents or symbols. The use of the sea, for example, represents the longing for escape, refuge from social pressures. In Strindberg's later writings, the sea assumes symbolic proportions, often spiritual, of escape; man's isolation from the chaos of society and ultimate freedom in death, as portrayed in the novel By the Open Sea.<sup>45</sup> In The Red Room, the sea primarily represents temporary refuge from society as it allows him to escape into his dreams. After the encounter with Struve, the calming effect that the sea has upon Falk, mirrored in the dissipation of the wind and the waves, supplies the needed contrast to Falk's inner turmoil:

There he sat until midnight, while the wind fell asleep, the waves sought their rest, the captive boats no longer tugged at their chains . . . (12)

and allows Falk to return "dreaming to his lonely attic . . ." (12) Throughout the novel Falk is to seek the soothing refuge that water, (not always in the form of the sea), represents to him.

Water, at several points, is just a representative of the entire nature complex, a symbol of innate freedom. Along the way

to Lill-Jans, Falk stops by a duckpond and briefly experiences reprieve from the pressures of society:

The thought that he could commune with nature freely and at will made him happy, for he understood nature better than he understood human beings, who had done nothing but ill-treat and wrong him, and all anxiety left him. (22)

Here nature comforts Falk and the pond water merely appears as one aspect of the entire nature complex. Later, in the depths of despair, while working for "The Worker's Banner," Falk even considers setting out to sea, escaping physically, but the insolence of the ship workers deters him. (231) For brief moments Falk gazes longingly at "a few waves of the Mälar, glittering in the sunlight," while he is busy at his tedious and distasteful editing job, but the noises and the stench of daily life rudely interrupt him. The image of healing waters, representatives of escape, are again significant, when Borg attempts to cure Falk's political fanaticism (his idealism) by secluding him on the Island of Nämndö. This seclusion allows Falk time to himself, withdrawn from the outside world, spending his days on the beach, swimming out to the fjord, "as if he never meant to come back."<sup>46</sup> In these surroundings, Falk manages to calm himself and restore his mental, as well as physical health. Here he has found, temporarily at least, refuge from the conflicts of his duties and the demands of society. As early as The Red Room, the motif of the sea functions as a symbol of refuge and, at times, suggests escape into the self, an initial concern with the state of the psyche, which becomes a dominant aspect of the post-Inferno symbolic works.

The motifs of wind, light and fresh air are combined in symbolizing renewal, openness, a purging of the past. In the first chapter the activities of the birds, who were "struggling with fragments of rocket-cases from last autumn's fireworks" and gathering "hairs left by dogs that had not fought there since last Josephine's Day" suggest, on the one hand, the remaining traces of the past. The advent of Spring suggests, on the other hand, a renewal, the hopeful beginning of a new season. The wind, in its journey through the city, brings with it the fresh air of Spring to those windows which had been closed up for the winter: "A frightful stench of dripping, beer dregs, pine needles and sawdust burst out and was carried away by the wind." (2) The fresh air of renewal, which refreshes and cleanses, also suggests the new life that Falk has chosen for himself and his attempt to free himself from the past.

In another episode, fresh air symbolizes a purging of the past and a new start, as Carl Nicholas Falk opens a window to rid the room of the past evening's stuffiness, firmly convinced that he is going to make a new name for himself. He believes himself to be disgraced because of Arvid's alleged activities as a scandal writer, an activity falsely attributed to him: "He (Carl) would wipe out the disgrace that had fallen on his family; he would rise, he would become a noted figure, an influential man." (48) After encountering the members of the social network at his brother's social gathering, Arvid leaves to attend a meeting of the Worker's Association, describing his

his anticipation of mingling with the workers in terms of fresh air: "Oh, I think it will be like fresh air after that stuffiness--like going for a walk in the woods after being laid up in the hospital." (216) Here the analogy of the freshness and openness of nature (the woods), in conjunction with the need for a change in social air suggest that the entire society is in need of fresh air to rid it of the staleness of stagnating conventions and values. Falk recognizes this need and feels himself choked by the stale air of society, closed in by the feeling that there is too little fresh air. As his feelings of despair grow, while working in the lower levels of journalism, so does his need for a change of air, since the stench of the social condition appears to be closing in around him: "He opened a window and put his head out for a breath of fresh air, but was met by stupefying fumes from the gutters." (237) Finally, the feeling of being closed-in almost overwhelms him:

Falk felt an inexpressible desire for fresh air. He opened the window on to the yard, but it was such a dark, narrow, high-walled yard that it was like a tomb . . . He imagined he really was sitting at the bottom of his grave among the brandy fumes and smells of food, attending a feast at the funeral of his youth, his good intentions and his honour. (244)

Oppressed by this suffocating feeling, Falk longs for fresh air, for everything around him reeks of decay and his environment fills him with disgust. But he is at this moment too weak to seek his own escape. The oppressive air of society has almost crushed him, robbed him of his ideals and his hope, forcing him to give into the unscrupulous activities of the two scandal



mongers who are seated beside him (they are in the process of slating a drama performance which they have never seen). (243-44) Borg comes to Falk's rescue and removes him from the closedness of his social setting into the openness and freshness of the sea and the Island Nämndö. It is in this environment that Falk gradually regains control of himself and suppresses his rebellious tendencies. With this symbol of fresh air Strindberg implies the need for change not only in Swedish society, but in any society that chokes individuals with the repressiveness of worn-out social values and conventions.

There are other symbolic motifs which blend with the realistic settings, such as the description of the old Napoleon clock in chambers of Parliament, "... whose newly gilded imperial emblem symbolized the rehash of something old." (78) That the clock is an old Napoleon clock suggests the parallel with the French liberalist movement of another age, one that had since degenerated, just as Strindberg perceived the so-called liberalist movement in Sweden to have done. The newly gilded imperial emblem refers to the disguising of the old attitudes, long since designated as conservative or even reactionary, by a superficial change of color (liberalism).<sup>47</sup> This attempted, new image is actually a "rehash of something old," the piecemeal reform of a government persisting in its old ways, under the guise of the newer and more fashionable attitudes of liberalism. Strindberg elaborates further on the symbolism of the old decrepit watch-guard of the times: "Its hands, pointing to ten minutes past ten, ironically

symbolized something else, as the doors at the back were flung open and a man walked in." (178) The irony implied here is revealed further on in the passage, when the man mentioned looks at the clock and remonstrates it for being fast; the irony that something which symbolizes a retardation of time (the old clock--the government) could possibly be considered to be ahead of time.

Without mentioning all of the symbolic motifs in the work, this brief survey has demonstrated that there is a considerable amount of symbolism in The Red Room, which has been overlooked by previous studies. By taking a work which is generally acknowledged as belonging to the symbolistic period, A Dream Play, and comparing some of its features of symbolism with those which have been found in The Red Room, it should be possible to arrive at some parallels which suggest that the initial symbolic motifs in this early work of Strindberg's anticipate those in his later symbolistic works.

Among the major symbols of A Dream Play, (the growing castle with its chrysanthemum bud on top, the cloverleaf opening in the corridor door, the Doorkeeper's shawl and the figures of Indra's Daughter and Victoria), are other elements which contribute to the symbolic imagery of the play.<sup>48</sup> The overall symbolism of "earthly living and the release of the human soul or spirit through death, the riddle of this life, the accumulation of the burden of human suffering and the transience of physical life,"<sup>49</sup> also reflects several motifs which have their origins in Strindberg's

earlier work, The Red Room.

Water, usually in the configuration of the sea, while symbolizing escape from the pressures of society and solace for Falk, assumes an extended meaning in A Dream Play. Here water suggests the ultimate spiritual release, freedom from the unending misery of humanity. In the scene between the Poet and Indra's Daughter in Fingals' Cave, the washing of the waves of death (death imagery implied by the sinking ship and consumptive characteristics of the waves),<sup>50</sup> awakens in the Daughter her submerged spirituality.<sup>51</sup> The Daughter's divine nature (as the Daughter of the god Indra) has been numbed by the human aspects of physical existence in the natural world: "My thoughts cannot fly any more; there's clay on my wings . . . soil on my feet . . . and I myself--I'm sinking, sinking . . . I am earthbound!" (ADP, 70) Prompted by the waves, the Daughter comes to the realization that she must immolate herself in order to achieve spiritual cleansing. Thus the waves suggest life, a spiritual life gained only through death, the destruction of the physical existence which binds man to the earthly plane.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand the death/life message of the waves does not instill in the Poet the desire for spiritual freedom, as his thoughts are still torn between the physical world and the lofty heights of his creativity:

Daughter: Don't you want to be set free?

Poet: Yes, of course, I do, but not now . . . and not in water.  
(ADP, 73)

The Poet is entrenched in the mire of physical existence, "with his head in the clouds and his feet in the mud,"<sup>53</sup> and, thus, is not

ready to experience the freedom of divine truth in spiritual life. From the basic symbolism of refuge in The Red Room, water assumes a further significance as the messenger of spiritual life and freedom in this later play.

Strindberg also continues the symbolism of fresh air, which suggested the suffocating aspects of a repressive society in The Red Room. In the scene between the Lawyer and the Daughter, whose marriage is threatening to break up, the house maid is pasting up the windows, closing out the air, while the Daughter cries for fresh air:

Kirstin: I paste! I paste!

Daughter: You're shutting out the air! I'm suffocating!

Daughter: Air, air! I can't breathe! (ADP, 41)

The worldly marriage is closing in on the Daughter and threatens to crush her. Once the symbol of the stale and stupefying air of society, this motif now represents the discord in an earthly marriage. The stifling disjunction and infernal heat (closing in the heat by pasting the windows shut) of a union in the natural world proves love to be at the same time, "The most delightful and the most bitter, . . . the highest and the lowest!" (ADP, 40) The oppression the Daughter is experiencing is the result of love's manifestation in the natural world, where, "It is . . . a mockery of the divine, a mirror . . . of reality in which true spiritual union does not exist at all." <sup>54</sup> Thus the need for fresh air can be viewed, in both works, as suggestive of renewal and openness.

There is also the correspondence of the waiting scene in both

works. Falander's description of his long wait for success (ten years) has certain affinities with the Officer's life-long wait for his ideal woman, Victoria. Both suggest the idea of waste and suspension of life until the ideal is achieved, although Falander had since become a nihilist. The final achievement of success, however, is not greeted by gratification but rather by dissatisfaction. Falander, relating his life story in allegorical form to Rehnjelm, comments thusly on his success as an actor:

" . . . and he (Falander) was amazed that now good fortune had come, it didn't make him happy." (RR, 135) These same sentiments are uttered by the Bill-poster in A Dream Play, who had waited a lifetime for a green dip net and a green fishing post, and now,

". . . the dip net was good enough, but not just the way I'd wanted it . . ." (ADP, 32) The officer reiterates these sentiments:

"Nothing is the way I'd wanted it . . . because the idea is greater than the act--superior to the object." (ADP, 32) The impossibility of achieving true satisfaction in the natural world reflects an aspect of Strindberg's concept of spiritualism, that material happiness is transient and that true happiness can only be gained through a spiritual experience. Although the spiritual implications of worldly transience are not yet fully developed in The Red Room, the idea, that happiness in the corporeal world is transient, has been established.

Strindberg's tendency to embody individual details of concrete reality with symbolic significance also appears in this later work. The significance attributed to the hairpins dropped by the Daughter

in A Dream Play suggests a symbolic value somewhat reminiscent of that of the old Napoleon clock in The Red Room. Both objects have a function on the realistic, as well as, symbolic level. The newly gilded clock, in Strindberg's words, "symbolized the rehash of something old." (RR, 78) In itself, it is the instrument of measuring forward-moving time. Its symbolism ironically suggests the degeneration and stagnation of a political situation. By the same token, the hairpin also has a realistic value, being an instrument which holds things together. Because of its shape, forming two prongs from one piece, it ironically symbolizes the perfect union of two individuals, a mockery of the marriage in the natural world, specifically the marriage of the Lawyer and the Daughter:

Lawyer: There are two, but, but it's only one! If I straighten it out, there's only one! If I bend it, there are two without ceasing to be one.  
That means: the two are one! (ADP, 46)

However, the symbol of unity is then destroyed when the Lawyer breaks the hairpin into two pieces, an act which suggests the impossibility of spiritual accord in an earthly union. The use of such realistic objects as significant vehicles of symbolism can be viewed as a continuing trait of the later Strindberg.

The above analysis has attempted to illustrate that The Red Room reflects the use of symbolic motifs to such an extent, that the work can not conceivably be categorized as illustrative of a definite stylistic period. The narrative is actually comprised of a blend of stylistic approaches, both realistic and symbolic traits are evident (as well as romantic and impressionistic).

The parallels between symbolic elements in the earlier and later work reflect Strindberg's tendency toward experimentation with narrative techniques: symbolic motifs which were anticipated by those in The Red Room appear fully developed in his later symbolistic plays. That Strindberg was to later concentrate fully on the inner life, (" . . . the projection of the world of introspection and feeling."), leaving the <sup>55</sup>emphasis of the social scene entirely, is an aspect which was also anticipated in his treatment of the themes and various characters of The Red Room, reflecting, perhaps, his tendency toward symbolic expression.

## CONCLUSION

In his satiric social critique, Strindberg presents a compendium of society's multifarious aspects. The view into the inner workings of society includes the exposure of social hypocrisies, the "public lie," the covert machinations of the social network and the financial intrigues, which provide impetus for the further maintenance of the social structure. This comprehensive view into society is achieved through the use of various narrative techniques. The microcosmic technique contributes to the expansiveness of the overview, by providing microcosmic representations of all aspects of social institutions and conventions. This technique selectively concentrates on such basic institutions as family, church and state. Thus, it is this technique which enables Strindberg to reveal the system of false values which supports the social structure.

The picaresque technique, which provides the main character access into the inner rooms of society, also contributes to the impression of an extensive, panoramic view of the Swedish social world of that period. With this technique, Strindberg penetrates the traditionally accepted façades which veil the inner workings of the social network. Complementing this technique is that of the social and economic intrigues, mirroring what Strindberg perceived to be the basic machination of the social structure in



concrete reality; the daily intrigues. Through the use of this technique, content and form appear to blend into each other and, at times, are indistinguishable. The technique is a means of revealing the extensiveness of the social network, as well as, the sum of what actually transpires behind the scenes (the actual intrigues in the novel). Although these techniques are interdependent elements of an interwoven and complex narrative structure, the individual analysis of each contributes to a greater appreciation of the way in which the novel functions as a whole.

The use of symbolism as a narrative device can be viewed as Strindberg's initial concern with the dimensions of the individual which transcend the limitations of a naturalistic/realistic description. Although Strindberg's first novel contributed to the advent of naturalism in Sweden, we have seen that this novel can not be confined to one particular stylistic period. The Red Room provides a blend of stylistic perceptions and approaches, which almost defy any traditional classification. The comparison of symbolic motifs in both this early and later work suggests that the initial appearance of symbolism in The Red Room anticipates Strindberg's later symbolistic phase. The Red Room is not a naturalistic/realistic investigation of the social condition, but rather a combination of social commentary and concern for the existential plight of the individual.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Most of the secondary literature cites these authors as being influential. Note Eric Johannesson, The Novels of August Strindberg (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1968), pp. 30-33.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Otto Reinert, "Selected Bibliography" in Strindberg: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Otto Reinert (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> This term was used by Lars Gustafsson to indicate the social network in his seminar, "The Public Lie in the 19th Century;" University of Texas, Fall 1974.

<sup>4</sup> The naturalistic period for Strindberg's novels is dated 1879-1887, Johannesson, pp. 14-21. However, Mortensen and Downs contend that this is not orthodox naturalism, see Brita M. E. Mortensen and Brian W. Downs, Strindberg: An Introduction to his Life and Works (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 160-61. Also Martin Lamm, August Strindberg, trans. and ed. Harry G. Carlson (New York: Blom, Inc., 1971), 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank Lars Gustafsson for the suggestion of this idea of the anticipatory aspects of the symbolic elements.

<sup>6</sup> Although this term is now standard, this citation refers to Strindberg's formulation in a chapter "Om den offentlige lögen, kanoniseringar och festtal" in Det Nya Riket, Samlade Skrifter, ed. John Landquist (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1912-13), X, 100. The work was written in 1882 and will be referred to by the English title, The New Kingdom.

<sup>7</sup> James W. Nichols, Insinuation (Paris: Mouton, 1971), p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Johannesson, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> August Strindberg, The Red Room, trans. Elizabeth Sprigge (London: Everyman, 1967). Further reference in the text are to this edition by page number. References to full chapters will be by roman numeral.

<sup>10</sup> This conclusion was reached after a discussion in Lars Gustafsson's Seminar.

<sup>11</sup> Ingvar Andersson, A History of Sweden, trans. Carolyn Hannay (New York: Praeger, 1956), p. 371.

- 12 Mortensen, p. 154.
- 13 Alrik Gustafson, A History of Swedish Literature (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1961), pp. 246, 252. This movement appears to parallel an earlier movement in Germany ("Junges Deutschland"), in the 1830's, as a result of the repressive measures of the Metternick government.
- 14 Anderson, p. 370.
- 15 Mortensen, p. 150.
- 16 Cf. Alrik Gustafson for influences emanating from the continent. pp. 246-48.
- 17 Strindberg, The New Kingdom, p. 100.
- 18 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn" in Werke, ed. Karl Schlechta (München: Hanser Verlag, 1960), p. 309.
- 19 R. Farquharson Sharp, trans., Four Great Plays by Henrik Ibsen (New York: Bantam, 1959), pp. 182-98.
- 20 Strindberg, The New Kingdom, p. 100. Paraphrase of the first section by Lars Gustafsson.
- 21 Johannesson, p. 9.
- 22 The discussion of narrative techniques was part of the lectures in Lars Gustafsson's Seminar. The term "microcosmic technique" is attributed to him.
- 23 Andersson notes the character of the parliamentary proceedings which for a time mainly concerned agrarian reforms, rather than obviously progressive reforms, because of the nature of the membership (agrarian majority). p.
- 24 Mortensen, p. 157.
- 25 Cf. Claudio Guillén, Literature as System (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 72-106., for a definition of the picaresque and its application to modern novels. The character of Arvid Falk could possibly be analyzed as a modern version of the picaresque hero, however the scope of this paper does not encompass such a study.
- 26 These Worker's Associations were not unions per se, rather an organization for educational purposes, instituted by liberals with philanthropic interests. See Andersson on the development of trade unions, p.
- 27 Johannesson, p. 25.

28 Strindberg uses this same technique in Inferno, except that the intrigues are now of a metaphysical nature; it is the "powers" that are plotting against him.

29 There are, of course, other narrative techniques which have not been considered by this study, such as narrative point of view. This study has mainly been concerned with techniques, which reflect the exposure of society.

30 The inclusion of these chapters and episodes has often been characterized as an inconsistency in the flow of the plot, contributing to the "loose structure" of the novel. Johannesson does concede that the chapters that do not involve Falk, and appear to "form independent units," bear a thematic relationship to the work as a whole, on closer examination. p. 29.

31 August Strindberg, trans. and ed. Harry G. Carlson (New York: Blom Inc., 1971), p. 69.

32 Lamm, p. 70.

33 Lamm mentions a strain of romanticism in reference to Strindberg's description of the "vagabond life" of the Bohemian coterie, but adds that Strindberg avoids false romanticizing. p. 71. Mortensen and Downs refer to Strindberg's description of landscape with its "patch of color" and "significant detail" as impressionistic. p. 155.

34 Mortensen, p. 155.

35 Naturalism is defined here as the view that man is influenced by biological and economic determinism, which render him a victim of environmental forces (social and economic forces beyond his control). The strict code of the naturalist, in the tradition of Zola, strived for extreme objectivity, often documentary, presenting a somewhat clinical view of nature. Strindberg's world view may be influenced by social Darwinism, however, his approach does not reflect the techniques of the naturalists' doctrine.

36 Johannesson places Strindberg's early works in the category of naturalism/realism. p. 21. Elizabeth Sprigge, The Strange Life of August Strindberg (New York: Macmillan Co., 1949), also reflects this tendency of categorizing Strindberg's earlier works under naturalism/realism. Cf. Otto Reinert, "Introduction," pp. 1-25.

37 Lamm, p. 73.

38 Ibid.

39 Johannesson, p. 25.

40 Guillén, p. 448.

- 41 Guillén, p. 427.
- 42 Johannesson, p. 229.
- 43 This change in focus occurs around chapter fourteen ("Absinthe"), when the Falander episode is introduced. The narrative begins to concentrate on the existential problems of the characters, the focus is more introspective.
- 44 Johannesson, pp. 25-26.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 168-69.
- 46 Here Borg is commenting on Falk's psychological escape and implies that Falk may be considering suicide, the ultimate escape, one that Ollé later chooses. p. 248.
- 47 Cf. Parliamentary proceedings in "Poor Country," The Red Room, pp. 78-88.
- 48 August Strindberg, A Dream Play, trans. Walter Johnson (Seattle: Uni. of Washington Press, 1973), "Introduction," p. 13. Subsequent reference to this work will be indicated by abbreviated title (ADP) and page number. Subsequent reference to The Red Room will also appear in abbreviation (RR).
- 49 Johnson, p. 13.
- 50 The waves sing a song of destruction and death: "We are like flames of fire/We are wet flames." ADP, 68. Their attributes also appear to imply life and death: "Quenching, burning/washing, bathing/breeding, bearing/" ADP, 69.
- 51 Evelyn Campbell Vincent, "Two Essays on Mysticism and Symbolic Literature," Diss. Uni. of Texas 1968, "Swedenborg and Strindberg's Later Plays," p. 66.
- 52 Vincent, p. 66.
- 53 Ibid., p. 65.
- 54 Ibid., p. 58.
- 55 Johannesson, p. 299.

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