



## BERLINER BEITRÄGE ZUR SKANDINAVISTIK

Titel/  
title: *Nietzsche's Ocean, Strindberg's Open Sea*

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Kapitel/  
chapter: »Conclusion: Are Nietzsche and Strindberg Our Contemporaries?«

In: Stern, Michael J.: *Nietzsche's Ocean, Strindberg's Open Sea*. Berlin:  
Nordeuropa-Institut, 2008

ISBN: 3-932406-28-1  
978-3-932406-28-7

Reihe/  
series: Berliner Beiträge zur Skandinavistik, Bd. 13

ISSN: 0933-4009

Seiten/  
pages: 255–281

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## Conclusion: Are Nietzsche and Strindberg Our Contemporaries?

As we leave Axel Borg, he sails for the horizon, and several questions remain: are we still living in an era where we are forced to choose between sailing towards the open sea and clinging tremulously to the shoreline? Are the tides still governed by the fractious twins, Prometheus and Christ? Are we still subjected to the collisions between internalized discourses of secular expansionism and a promise of salvation that awaits us only upon the event of our demise? As we enter the third millennium, do the contested aspects of nineteenth century modernists still speak to our condition? Are we still living in »die Zeit der Tragödie, die Zeit der Moralen und Religionen« (the age of tragedy, the age of moralities and religion) as Nietzsche put it?<sup>1</sup> Is there any alternative?

Despite the theoretical battles of the late twentieth century, with the subsequent disputes over definition and forms of dissemination, I am inclined to postulate that the tragic condition of subjectivity, the collision between secular and religious discourse under the sign of nihilism's weak truth claim still speaks to our conditions of possibility. Therefore the purpose of this conclusion is twofold: to test the hypothesis that the *genealogy of self* as a process of subject formation that applies to both a religious and a secular perspective, and to discuss the contemporaneity of the concept for us.

I will conduct this test through a reading of two »autobiographical« texts: Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and Strindberg's *Inferno* (1897). The commonality of the formal aspects of the genealogy are severely put to the test in this analysis, as *Inferno* is a text depicting a religious awakening and *Ecce Homo* is known for its atheistic conclusion. More importantly for this study, I will demonstrate how the absent father, the dead father's position is colonized by Nietzsche and how sacred narrative conflates with family drama in Strindberg's late drama, *Till Damaskus*.<sup>1</sup> It is my contention that the subject, who oscillates between tragedy and parody, that is between inescapable risk and the safety of the already written, between the new and the familiar, is an aspect of the *bourgeois uncanny*

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<sup>1</sup> NIETZSCHE: 1988c, KSA 3, 370, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. The English translation is from NAUCKHOFF and DEL CARO: 2001, 28.

found in both writer's work.<sup>2</sup> In addition, my understanding of the contemporaneity of the *genealogy of self* will be informed by a reading of the Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo. Vattimo's work emphasizes an aspect of a contemporary resonance of Nietzschean thought, namely the weakening of the truth claim of an interpretive act. His discussion of hermeneutics is our point of entry.

### Hermeneutics, »The Fabling of Being,« and »The Death of God«

The title of this conclusion asks the question: Are Strindberg and Nietzsche our contemporaries? While the title in question is broadly formulated and runs the risk of initiating an excursion into a circular argument, the potential circularity inherent in its formulation is purposeful. For the question of the contemporary relevance of nineteenth-century letters has been a circular process for twentieth century scholars. In other words, it has been a hermeneutic question. I employ the term hermeneutics in the sense that Vattimo defines the term in *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*.<sup>3</sup> His main argument rests upon the claim that the commonality found in late twentieth-Century philosophical thought can be found in the dominance of hermeneutics and the subsequent weakening of any claim to truth. True to form, Vattimo defines hermeneutics in a weak sense himself, as the family resemblance of a wide variety of theories, all of which have rejected positivistic science and posit that there are no facts, only interpretations.<sup>4</sup> According to Vattimo, the notion that »each experience of truth is an experience of interpretation is almost a truism in today's culture.«<sup>5</sup> For him, »Hermeneutics is not only a theory of the historicity (horizons) of truth; it is itself

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<sup>2</sup> I define the »bourgeois uncanny« as the moment when one recognizes that his or her individuality is a collectively held and historically determined notion. Hence the uncanny feeling that one's subjectivity is both one's own and part of a collective narrative.

<sup>3</sup> VATTIMO: 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Vattimo discusses Habermas' theory of communication, Derrida's deconstruction, the late Heidegger, Rorty's philosophy of contingency, and Gadamer's hermeneutics. He posits the commonality of a weakened truth claim for each of these theories.

<sup>5</sup> VATTIMO: 1997, 5.

a radically historical truth«. <sup>6</sup> Hermeneutics, then, is a theory that forwards a truth claim that is contingent upon its historical moment. In other words, any hermeneutic theory lacks a foundation, as the interpretation it presents is conditioned by the historical environment in which the interpreting subject resides. It follows that hermeneutics is a way of thinking that factors in contemporaneity, and hence the hermeneutic circle in all its self-referentiality is born. <sup>7</sup>

This hermeneutic self-referentiality entails that the interpreter's view of history is dependent on his self-perception as a subject in the contemporary historical environment he or she describes. The negotiation between the historical past and the understanding of the interpreter in his interpreting moment depends upon the assumption that the horizon of the past constitutes a part of the horizon of the present. The past, history as culture, has been internalized by the interpreting subject and reconstructed in dialectic of self-identification. This dialectic of self-identity is interpretative, as the interpreter needs to consider the historical locus of his own subjectivity in order to posit himself as interpreter. This process animates the past within the horizon of understanding in the present. The interpreting subject is not limited to an adherence to the past, however, as he makes the past contemporary through the process of reconstruction, which is in a necessary relationship to his construction of self as a historical subject. For inherent in this reconstruction of the past is a construction of the self as interpreter in the moment. We have already discussed how this works for Strindberg and Nietzsche in the fifth and sixth chapters of this book.

Vattimo claims that the radical historicity of the hermeneutic process results in the weakening of any claim to truth. This weakening has theological implications, which in turn, have an effect on the interpreter's understanding of the genesis of his own subjectivity. Vattimo asserts that the most illuminating example »for an argument of this kind is Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God«. <sup>8</sup> Vattimo does not read Nietzsche's »announcement« in a metaphysical sense. He argues

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>7</sup> This self-referentiality of Vattimo's conception of the hermeneutic circle is certainly not the only understanding present in our intellectual environment. I am using Vattimo as an example of just one trajectory of thought in order to illustrate an aspect of the Nietzschean legacy in our times.

<sup>8</sup> VATTIMO: 1997, 5.

»Nietzsche is not trying to say that God is dead because we have finally realized that ›objectively‹ he does not exist or that reality is such that he is excluded from it.«<sup>9</sup> Vattimo understands Nietzsche's statement as a postulation about the possibilities of interpretation in his philosophical/historical moment. These possibilities for ›truth‹ exclude any reliance on the foundation of a first philosophy and

draw us closer to the theme of nihilism. If hermeneutics, as the philosophical theory of the interpretative character of every experience of truth, is lucid about itself, as no more than an interpretation, will it not find itself caught up in the nihilistic logic of Nietzsche's hermeneutics. This ›logic‹ may be encapsulated in the statement that there can be no recognition of the essentially interpretative character of the experience of the true without the death of god and without the fabling of the world, or which amounts to the same thing, of being. In short, it seems impossible to prove the truth of hermeneutics other than presenting it as a response of the history of being interpreted as the occurrence of nihilism.<sup>10</sup>

The experience of truth exemplified by Nietzsche's announcement of the »death of God« goes hand in hand with the »fabling of being,« the creation of the self as narrative. Vattimo's claim can be seen in the light of Max Weber's postulation that modernity occurs in a world abandoned by the Gods, that is to say, a disenchanted world, and Nietzsche's notion of the fabling of being can be understood as an attempt to re-enchant this world through the construction of a self who is aware of the metaphorical status of its own narrative. Relative to my own claim that hermeneutics demands the construction of an interpreting subject who is aware of the historicity of his self-construction, this self-construction needs to factor in an absence of guarantee of a divine origin, and consequently be aware of the interpretative quality of his own notion of self-hood. The construction of a self who both interprets and is created by self-interpretation depends on a re-enchantment of the world where the self is substituted for the divine. This self-understanding entails a positioning of the subject in a secular notion of his own history. The self, in turn, is not a foundation, but a play of forces subject to interpretation in the moment.

Following this line of thought and adhering to a critical trajectory exemplified in the work of Karl Löwith and notably opposed by Hans Blumenberg, Vattimo asserts that modernity itself is a secularization of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 7.

the eschatological impulse of Western religious thought.<sup>11</sup> It is in this way that Vattimo traces the pre-history of modern hermeneutics to its original function as biblical exegesis and justifies the break between hermeneutics as bible-study and modern hermeneutics as a general theory of interpretation.

In other words, modern hermeneutics is born in Europe not only because here is a religion of the book that focuses attention on the phenomenon of interpretation, but also because this religion has as its base the idea of the incarnation of God, which it conceives as *kenosis*, as abasement and, in our translation, as weakening.<sup>12</sup>

Vattimo goes on to assert that despite the initial religious impetus of hermeneutic inquiry, aesthetic and historical experiences have replaced biblical exegesis as the dominant concerns. Vattimo thereby connects modern hermeneutic philosophy with an aesthetic modernism in revolt against both the natural sciences and religious dogmatism. By employing secularization theory and tracing modern hermeneutics to its primal scene in section 108 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Gay Science)* Vattimo locates the origins of what he claims to be the dominant way of thinking in our time in the late nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> For him, the hermeneutic aspects of a species of modern historical thinking must factor in self-consciousness about the reconstructive process of historical thought itself. This present-tense aspect of the historical enterprise was born in the rejection of both a divine history and positivistic historiography.

And so the question, »are Nietzsche and Strindberg our contemporaries?« has a bearing on my preliminary thesis: *An aspect of the legacy of the Nietzschean project can be found in Vattimo's assertion that hermeneutic inquiry dominates an arc of contemporary western thought.* I will take this one step further. Hermeneutic inquiry itself is a negotiation between the construction of different temporal horizons of understanding based on a historicized construction of a self that understands itself to be located within a stream of constant change and created in the absence of

11 See LÖWITZ: 1949 and BLUMENBERG: 1983.

12 VATTIMO: 1997, 48.

13 See NIETZSCHE: 1988c, KSA 3. Section 108 can be found in the third book on pg. 467 of this edition. It reads: »Neue Kämpfe. – Nachdem Buddha todt war, zeigt man noch Jahrhunderte lang seinen Schatten in einer Höhle, – einen ungeheuren schauerlichen Schatten. Gott is todt; aber so wie die Art der Menschen ist, wird es vielleicht noch Jahrtausende lang Höhlen geben, in denen man seinen Schatten zeigt. – und wir – wir müssen auch seinen Schatten siegen!«

a divine foundation. This postulation leads to another question: If the philosophical environment of modernity is constrained by hermeneutics in its »nihilistic« moment, what is the status of the subject in the absence of a valid claim of a foundation? In other words, how does the subject create itself in the absence of a creator?

### Ecce Homo and the Substitution of Self for Christ

With this in mind, I will now turn to an analysis of our texts: Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and Strindberg's *Inferno*. This analysis provides us with the opportunity to develop further the concept of the *genealogy of self* and to illustrate how Vattimo's understanding of Nietzsche's »announcement of the ›death of God‹« posits a subject in a process of aesthetic self-generation whether or not said subject seeks religious salvation. These two tasks are intimately connected and together illustrate one theoretical conception of the predicament of self-assertion. An understanding of aesthetics as an intersubjective embodiment informs my utilization of these two seemingly contradictory texts to test the hypothesis that the commonality found in Strindberg's and Nietzsche's projects is the conflation of autobiography and history in a hermeneutic process of self-construction. The *genealogy of self* is a hermeneutic device for the reconstruction of the subject in that it factors in the contemporaneity, regards the past as a text to be interpreted, and has a truth claim that is weakened by the absence of »God, the father«. I employ the term as a sub-category of and in opposition to the notion of autobiography understood as an excavation of the past. A *genealogy of self* is a performative overcoming of origins in the moment. Unlike autobiography, it lacks a telos. There is little sense of »I was, so now I must be«. Instead, the *genealogy of self* self-consciously highlights the »fictionality« of the past through the employment of a metaphorical complex made up of agnostic elements. It emphasizes the struggle between contradictory forces: between heredity and self-creation, and between an internalized social order and individual experience. The *genealogy of self* is an attempt to re-enchant the world through a »fabling of being,« but the performer of this process is ironically aware of the fictional process of self-construction. It is an affect of the phenomenon that Vattimo connects to hermeneutics through his reading of Nietzsche's announcement of the »death of God,« and what I call the bourgeois uncanny.

On the surface, Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* is an attack on Christianity, while Strindberg's *Inferno* is most often regarded as a document of religious conversion. This discrepancy in the reception of the two texts is a formidable test for any hypothesis that is concerned with establishing their commonality. *Ecce Homo* is a problematic text. Published posthumously, it is often read either as a sad and puzzling document that points to Nietzsche's imminent mental collapse or as a beautifully written but curiously flawed autobiography. If one were to read *Ecce Homo* as an autobiography, he or she would be left with Nietzsche's hyperbolic claims, little information about the philosopher's life, some self-critique, and a series of paradoxical statements. Read as autobiography, the title smacks of hubris, and the last line can be understood as a simple restatement of Nietzsche's opposition to Christianity. But if one reads the text as a *genealogy of self*, as a performative hermeneutic construction, this picture changes shape. In order to illustrate this claim, I will analyze three points of entry to this text: the title, the last line, and a riddle.

The title reads: *Ecce Homo. Wie man wird, was man ist.* (Ecce Homo. How one becomes, what one is.)<sup>14</sup> This two-part title provides us with a point of entry. The first part: »Ecce Homo« is a biblical citation. It appears in *John 19:5* and can be translated as *behold the man* or *here is the man*. The phrase comes from the story of the *Passion* and is uttered by Pilate. The context is as follows: Jesus has been beaten and given a crown of thorns to wear. He is »arrayed in a purple robe« and is presented to the people. Pilate shows Jesus to the crowd and proclaims that he finds »no crime in him,« but the priests cry out for his crucifixion. After a short discussion, in which Jesus is accused of the crime of misrepresenting himself as »the son of God« and condemned to death, he begins his walk to Golgotha.<sup>15</sup> In John, the phrase, *Ecce Homo*, signifies

<sup>14</sup> NIETZSCHE: 1988d, KSA 6, 255.

<sup>15</sup> *The Holy Bible: containing the Old and New Testaments*, Revised Standard Edition (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1952), 854: »Pilate went out again, and said to them, ›Behold I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no crime in him.‹ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ›**Here is the man!**‹ [Ecce Homo]. When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, ›Crucify him, crucify him!‹ Pilate said to them, ›Take him yourselves for I see no crime in him‹ The Jews answered him, ›We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.‹« (my emphasis)

Pilate's presentation of Christ for judgment, and the subsequent narrative irony.

The irony of this narrative moment can be explained by the status of the Bible as a central text and Nietzsche's utilization of the citation. The biblical narrative is written with an audience of believers in mind. Christians believe already that Jesus is the »son of God« and so his presentation to the crowd by Pilate is a moment of misrecognition: his crime is the claim to be the »son of God« and for that he is crucified. Yet, the crucifixion and the subsequent resurrection are the keys to this narrative of Christ's »divinity«. The irony of the story of the *Passion* becomes apparent: Jesus needs to be misrecognized in order to attain his preordained status. Nietzsche isolates this moment of Jesus' misrecognition and condemnation by the priests for reasons that are congruent to his project. There are four levels to note. On the first level the use of this citation as a title was a continuation of his critique of Christianity, of what he regards to have been the »victory of Judea over Rome« and the establishment of the values of *ressentiment*. On the second level, by entitling his own story with the phrase, »Ecce Homo,« Nietzsche was pointing to his own misrecognition and the potential attack on his own production by the »priests« of the *ascetic ideal*. On the third level, Nietzsche, who in the same book declared »ich bin, auf griechisch, und nicht nur auf griechisch, der Antichrist« (I am, in Greek, and not just Greek, the *Anti-Christ*),<sup>16</sup> was writing himself into the position of Jesus while simultaneously declaring himself to be his opposite. This is the key to the irony in *Ecce Homo*. The textual subject that exhorts its reader: »Hört mich! denn ich bin der und der. Verwechselt mich vor Allem nicht!« (Listen to me! I am the one who I am! Above all, do not mistake me for anyone else!)<sup>17</sup> shows himself to be »der und der,« a compound metaphor that is dependent upon misrecognition in order to establish »himself« as a stand-in for an extra-textual subjectivity. On the fourth level, he announces himself, and by doing so, writes himself temporarily into the position of Pilate by enunciating »Ecce Homo« thereby intimating that the performative act of saying »who you are« entails the announcement of an internalized collision where one is neither Pilate nor Jesus, as one oscillates between the position of announcing and being delivered to the public. For

<sup>16</sup> NIETZSCHE: 1988d, 302. Translation NORMAN: 2005, 102.

<sup>17</sup> NIETZSCHE: 1988d, 257. Translation: NORMAN: 2005, 71.

Nietzsche, one becomes a subject as he speaks, wandering into the collective poetics of the »I,« entering into a tragic discourse, where the moment of emergence is also fraught with danger.

The subtitle of the book reads: *Wie man wird, was man ist*. (How one becomes, what one is.)<sup>18</sup> Given Nietzsche's position that life is eternal becoming, and as echoed in his statement that Dionysian philosophy found its bearings in »das Jasagen zu Gegensatz und Krieg, das *Werden*, mit radikaler Ablehnung auch selbst des Begriffs ›sein‹« (saying yes to opposition and war, *becoming* along with a radical rejection of the very concept of ›being‹),<sup>19</sup> if we factor in his objection to the concept of being, it is not hard to imagine that the comma in this statement is significant. The punctuation in the sentence – »Wie man wird, was man ist« – juxtaposes the two concepts of becoming and being, thereby emphasizing the process and movement between the two terms.

A parallel is established by the title and the subtitle. The reference is clear: Christ becomes who he is by walking the road to Golgotha. What awaits him at the end of his journey is the crucifixion that establishes his identity. Nietzsche entitles his *genealogy of self* so as to write himself ironically into the position of Christ and into the position of the one who announces the demise of Christ and therefore his salvation. This is certainly both a biblical parody and the performance of a tragedy, as Nietzsche describes himself through the moment of his own *untergang* (down-going). The textual journey leads to the last line which reads: »Hat man mich verstanden? – Dionysos gegen den Gekreuzigten ...« (Have I been understood? – Dionysus versus the crucified ...)<sup>20</sup>

While this line certainly *can* be read as an expression of Nietzsche's approaching madness, as a megalomaniac proclamation of opposition to the moral order of the Christian world by a man who considered himself to be a destiny, my own reading is different. It factors in the irony inherent in *Ecce Homo* and sees the text as a performative process in which oppositions are ranked and ordered to produce a compound metaphor of self. I understand the last line to mean that Nietzsche has written himself into both positions, he is recurrent through tragic de-individuation and through crucifixion. »Nietzsche« is »ein Jünger des Philosophen Diony-

18 NIETZSCHE: 1988d, Title page for *Ecce Homo*, 256.

19 Ibid., 313. The English translation is from NORMAN: 2005, 110.

20 NIETZSCHE: 1988d, 374. English translation: NORMAN: 2005, 151.

« (a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus)<sup>21</sup> and he is the Antichrist. He is both »ein decadent« (a decadent) and he is »auch dessen Gegensatz« (also its opposite).<sup>22</sup> The story of the self is a story of a process of becoming and the self is represented by the internalization of both positions. The re-enchantment of the self in a world where »God is dead« is performed by the writing of the self into the position of both the dead God and that which is to replace him. However, this claim of the dual origination of the metaphor »Nietzsche« demands further elaboration.

Das Glück meines Daseins, seine Einzigkeit vielleicht, liegt in seinem Verhältnis: ich bin, um es in Räthselform auszudrücken, als mein Vater bereits gestorben, als meine Mutter lebe ich noch und werde alt. Diese doppelte Herkunft, gleichsam aus der obersten und der untersten Sprosse an der Leiter des Lebens, *décadent* zugleich und *Anfang* ...

(The happiness of my existence, perhaps its uniqueness, lies in its fatefulness; to give it in the form of a riddle: as my father I am already dead and as my mother I am still alive and growing old. This double birth, from the highest and lowest rungs on the ladder of life, as it were, simultaneously decadent and *beginning* ...) <sup>23</sup>

The chapter, »Warum ich so weise bin« (Why I am so wise), continues to describe this doubleness as a condition of being both a decadent and its opposite. »Nietzsche« claims that this dual origin is a source of his unique perspective, and it acts as his »Stimulans zu Leben« (Stimulation to Life).<sup>24</sup> In his ensuing description of the *healthy* individual, which for Nietzsche was the opposite of a decadent, he states, »er ist ein auswählendes Princip, er lässt viel durchfallen« (he is a selective principle, it lets much fall by the wayside).<sup>25</sup> This principle of selection implies that the *healthy* individual is a locus of interpretation where competing principles, internalized elements of his own inheritance, are transformed by the experience of interpretation. This transformation is the process of self-creation. For if one is both a decadent and a healthy individual, both alive and dead, and subject to the absence of a stable foundation for the

21 NIETZSCHE: 1988d, 258. The English is from NORMAN: 2005, 71.

22 NIETZSCHE: 1988d, 266. Also see my earlier discussion of this passage in Chapter 5.

23 Ibid., 264. Translation NORMAN: 2005, 74–75. A comment on the translation – Nietzsche uses the word »Herkunft,« which Norman translates as birth. I would like to emphasize the word in the sense that it also designates an origin, in the many senses of the word.

24 NIETZSCHE: 1988d, 267.

25 Ibid. See also my discussion of this selection process in Chapter 5.

understanding of self-hood, how does one overcome the unhealthy elements that have been internalized? »Nietzsche« answers: »Wohlan, ich bin das *Gegenstück* eines *décadent*: denn ich beschrieb eben *mich*.« (Well then, I am the *opposite* of a *decadent*: because I have just described *myself*.)<sup>26</sup>

In *Ecce Homo*, the self is constructed through agon and a self-affirmative narrative, through a hermeneutic economy of self-referentiality and internalized historical conditions. The »death of God« acts as a springboard for the construction of an identity whose creation is initiated by a substitution of the self for the absent God. The nihilistic self overcomes the vacuum of self-creation *ex-nihilo* by interpreting the text of the past in a way that makes it contemporary. This is a gesture of the *eternal return* in which »I was« is interpreted as »I will it to be such«. And so the old gods are brought back to life as a conglomeration. Dionysus and Christ merge to form a compound metaphor for the hermeneutically constructed self, aware of his own metaphorical status. This metaphorical status derives from a textual journey, a narrative.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche created a self in response to his conception of Western history as the advent of nihilism. This self-construction is a hermeneutic process in that it is contingent upon the internalization of its historical moment, its »truth« is expressed metaphorically as a merger of opposing forces organized internally within the horizon of the present, and the past is treated, not as fact, but as text subject to an interpretative process. The inter-textuality of Nietzsche's self-construction was so radical, that he commented upon his entire body of work. *Ecce Homo* is not an autobiography, it is a *genealogy of self*, a performance of a hermeneutic self-interpretation of a textualized past regulated by differentiated repetition. It seems to be that Nietzsche's conception of the »death of God« is a tragic conception, one born of collision. It is also clear from that collision that the »death of God« is not a statement of finality, but an existential gesture, a pausing before decision. For Nietzsche does not eradicate the presence of Christ (his culture's God), but shows the subject to be an amalgam that includes his internalized narrative. As I stated in my introduction, Nietzsche interpreted himself as being born posthumously as his dead father.

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26 Ibid., 267. English translation from NORMAN: 2005, 77.

My preliminary thesis stated that the answer to the question of whether Strindberg and Nietzsche were our contemporaries lies in how the subject creates itself in a *disenchanted* world. Following Vattimo's line of thinking about the meaning and the impact of Nietzsche's »announcement of the death of God« and extending it to the realm of identity formation, I claimed that if the experience of truth is to be satisfied with an interpretation, then the self, lacking a foundation displaces the notion of a divine narrative with the genealogy of its own construction. This genealogy is a gesture, as it states two originary positions in opposition and pauses before the decision of being one or the other.

### Inferno and the Split between Love and Knowledge

Strindberg wrote *Inferno* in Lund between May 3 and June 25 of 1897. Originally written in French, the manuscript was translated into Swedish by Eugène Fahlstedt and first appeared in November of the same year. It was also published in France by the publishing house, Mercure de France, in 1898. *Inferno* tells the story of Strindberg's last residence in Paris, his separation from his second wife, Frida Uhl, and his journey back to Sweden through Austria. In the 1909 preface to *Tjänstekvinnans son IV*, Strindberg dated the book in 1898, and grouped it with *Legender* and the play *Advent* both dated 1899. He remarked:

Stora krisen vid 50 år; revolutioner i själslivet, ökenvandringar, ödeläggelsen, Swedenborgs Helveten och Himlar. Icke influerad av Huysmans' *En Route*, ännu mindre av Pèladan, som då var Förf.okänd, liksom « *En Route* », utan byggd på personliga upplevelser.

(The great crisis as I turn 50; revolutions in my spiritual life, wanderings in the desert, devastation, Swedenborg's hell and heaven. Not influenced by Huysman's *En Route*, even less so by Pèladan, who was then not known by the author, similar to *En Route*, except built on personal experiences.)<sup>27</sup>

In *Levande död: Studier i Strindbergs prosa*, Ulf Olsson devotes a chapter to *Inferno*, which he dubs »Det redan skrivnas text« (The Already Written Text).<sup>28</sup> Olsson claims that *Inferno* operates on both an allegorical and realist level of narration. This results in a tension between the already written texts of religious conversion and the historically bound

27 STRINDBERG: 1996a, 266. Translation mine.

28 OLSSON: 1996. The chapter on *Inferno*, »The Already Written Text,« can be found on pp. 305-394.

bourgeois notion of subjectivity. For Olsson, this results in the depiction of a struggle between meaning and the vacuum, and in Strindberg's assumption of the positions of both Christ and Antichrist. Though Olsson posits that the ideology of *Inferno* is informed by Nietzsche's *Wiederkunft des Gleichen* (Eternal Return of the Same), he does not elaborate fully on this claim. However, the notion of a substitution of the self for both Christ and Antichrist provides us with a point of entry from which to explore the commonality between *Inferno* and *Ecce Homo*. Olsson's notion of »The Already Written Text« allows us to interrogate the hermeneutic aspects of the former. The struggle between the bourgeois and religious notions of selfhood leads to analysis between the split between love and knowledge that culminates in a *mise-en-abyme* in which these two forces merge. I will address each of these points in turn.

Despite its religious overtones, *Inferno*, like *Ecce Homo*, is a response to the »death of God«. Like »Nietzsche,« the narrating »Strindberg« constructs a subjectivity in response to his understanding of this cultural/historical phenomenon. Despite the presence of »the powers,«<sup>29</sup> the construction of self in the text is a process of negotiation between the antagonism of already existing positions, and the overcoming of this antagonism through a creation of the self as a compound metaphor.<sup>30</sup> These already existing positions are recreated through interpretation. The »powers« act upon the narrator in an economy of internal and external signification; there is never any indication of a self that is solely created by external forces. The self is a site of interpretation. Self-knowledge, the »fabling of being,« is derived through an interpretation of signs in an occult manner. The »powers« do not provide a foundation for the construction of the self; in a sense they act as a personification of Nietzsche's *organizing idea*, providing a type of grammar for the random interpretation of signs in the absence of any correspondence between an absolute truth and experience. Like »Nietzsche,« the narrator of *Inferno*, despite his religious *pilgrimage*, does not enact an imitation of Christ, but rather performs the substitution of self for Christ in an attempt to re-enchant a

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29 Strindberg used the term »d'ordre des puissances« in French which was translated by Fahlstedt as »makterna« in Swedish. These terms were used to describe invisible forces that watched and reacted to »Strindberg's« daily life.

30 This process has already been discussed in chapter 6. Strindberg employed this technique as early as 1885 in the writing of *Tjänstekvinnans son*. The salient example is Johan's dual inheritance.

disenchanted world. The narrator's substitution of self for Christ factors in the position of the Antichrist. Like »Nietzsche's« conception of the decadent and its antithesis, this is a compound metaphor for a fluid subjectivity.

Jag stannar hänryckt inför den symboliska synen men då jag vänder blicken därifrån varseblir jag till höger om mig en skylt till ett färgeri vid rue de Fleurus. Sannerligen! visionens verklighet är oförneklig. Målade på butiksfönstret finner jag initialer till mitt namn: A.S. svävande på ett silvervitt moln och därövan en regnbåge. *Omen accipio* och jag påminner mig ett ställe i Genesis: »Jag skall sätta min båge i skyn och den skall vara tecknet till förbundet mellan mig och jorden.«

(I stand enraptured before that symbolic sight, but when I turn my gaze from it I perceive to my right a paint store's sign on rue de Fleurus. Truly! the vision's reality is undeniable. I find my initials, A.S., painted on the store's window, hovering on a silver-white cloud and above that is a rainbow. *Omen accipio* and I remind myself of a passage in Genesis: »I shall place my rainbow in a cloud and that shall be a sign of the pact between myself and the earth.«)<sup>31</sup>

There is a distinct hermeneutic economy in the text. The world, as text, is interpreted, and internal states are reflected by and projected upon the world. Everything speaks to and of the narrating self.

In *Inferno*, the contingency of this process is emphasized. The narrator opens books at random, his chance encounters in the world display internal conditions, and his own past is re-interpreted in order to generate a narrative of self-selection. The radicality of this interpretative process, which treats all experience as a text, exemplifies the relationship between the accidental self and necessity.<sup>32</sup> This explains the two levels of reading in *Inferno*. The process of interpretation conflates the internal and external worlds, and is shown to be an arbitrary process, yet at the same time, this conflation is intrinsic to the creation of the narrator's subjectivity. A good example of how this works comes on page 61 when the narrating »Strindberg« receives his publisher's corrections of his

<sup>31</sup> STRINDBERG: 1994, 35. English translation from SANDBACH: 1988, 116.

<sup>32</sup> The exploration of the seemingly contradictory notions of chance and necessity is another point of commonality in Nietzsche and Strindberg's work. With regard to the Nietzschean corpus, one only has to think of his valorization of the random lawlessness of the world and his notion of *Amor fati*. In Strindberg's authorship, the best example is here in *Inferno*: the relationship between the necessity exemplified by the »powers« and the radical contingency of the interpretation of occulted signs performed by the narrator.

scientific exploration, *Sylva Sylvarium*.<sup>33</sup> The pages are found to be disordered and the disorder is interpreted. The attempt to order the world through a scientific explanation is negated by chance, upon return; the disorder is re-interpreted as a sign that is a part of a process of the construction of a new self through narrative. There is no sense of causality to this process, there is only a constant process of the order, disorder, and re-ordering of chance events.

There are many examples in *Inferno* that illustrate how Strindberg employs the external world as a series of signs interpreted according to internal imperatives. Street signs, burning coal, initials on a store window, the configuration of twigs on the ground, all reveal the narrator to himself. The relationship between the radical arbitrariness of interpretation and the necessity represented by the »powers« emphasizes the struggles that accompany the hermeneutic experience of truth as the »fabling of being« confronts the nihilistic moment of modernity. It is here in *Inferno* that the self-referentiality of the hermeneutic interpreter seemingly attains its most extreme level of irrationality. If we remember, however, that hermeneutics posits a radically historical experience of truth; this seeming irrationality becomes a startlingly clear example of how the *genealogy of self* is a location that highlights the conflation of the irrational and rational impulses, which are used in the creation of the self. »Strindberg« reads the contingency of signs against the backdrop of the necessity of the »powers«. The inexplicable randomness of the world is internalized and organized according to the historically conditioned imperative of self-creation. »Autobiographical« narrative and historical conditions conflate and separate in an ironic ebb and flow where the historical is set against the foreground of an occulted existence. This process is hermeneutic, that is to say, interpretative, and the narrator is aware of his own historicity. In other words, what is highlighted in *Inferno* is the conflation of autobiography and history. I will now turn to a *mise-en-abyme* to illustrate this claim.

Utan bestämd avsikt kommer jag till Gare Montparnasse och tar tåget till Meudon. Jag stiger av vid själva byn som jag besöker för första gången. Går uppför stora gatan, viker av åt höger i en gränd som är omgiven av två murar. Tjugo steg framför mig höjer sig över marken en romersk krigare i järngrå rustning till hälften nedgrävd i jorden. Ehuru figuren är mycket tydligt ut-

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33 STRINDBERG: 1994, 61. *Sylva Sylvarium* is a »scientific« exploration written by STRINDBERG in 1895.

formad, men i miniatyr, undgår det mig inte att den är av obearbetad sten. Då jag kommit ända fram visar sig föremålet vara en synvilla, men jag hejdar mig och fasthåller med flit illusionen som roar mig.

(Without specific intention, I arrive at Gare Montparnasse and take the train to Meudon. I get off at the village itself, which I am visiting for the first time. Go up the main street, turn to the right into a lane that is surrounded by two walls. Twenty steps in front of me, a roman warrior raises himself above the ground. He is in iron gray armor, half-way buried in the earth. Although the figure is in miniature, it is very clearly formed and it doesn't escape me that it is of unworked stone. When I have finally come forward to it, the object shows itself to be an optical illusion, but I stop myself and maintain industriously the illusion that amuses me.)<sup>34</sup>

»Strindberg« travels randomly to Meudon. He sees a stone in the road and imagines it to be a roman warrior. He is not concerned with its reality, but persists in his illusion. Treatment of this episode demands a return to the theme of the opposition of love and knowledge, with which the book had opened. On the level of realist narration, the text opens with the narrator sending away his wife and rejoicing about his decision. By the end of the page, there is a dark sense of foreboding. »Ställd i valet mellan kärlek och vetandet hade jag bestämt mig för att söka nå kunskapens höjder, och i det jag försakade mina känslor glömde jag den oskyldiga som offrats på altaret för min ärelystnad, eller min kallelse.« (Forced to choose between love and knowledge, I had decided to seek the heights of the intellectual achievement, and in renouncing my feelings I forgot the innocent who would be sacrificed for my ambition, or my calling.)<sup>35</sup> The theme of the opposition continues to appear throughout the narrative, manifesting in the narrator's interpretation of external events and his attribution of the seeming randomness of the universe of signs to the incomprehensible plans of the »powers«.

By the time he journeys to Meudon, »Strindberg« is convinced that his choice of knowledge over love is absolute, excluding the possibility of love itself. Then he sees the »illusion« of the knight. He persists in his vision and describes it in detail. The gaze of the knight peers at an inscription on one of the surrounding walls. The narrator's eyes follow and he sees that the letters F and S are written in charcoal. He interprets these letters as the inscription of his own initials and those of his wife. He ex-

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<sup>34</sup> STRINDBERG: 1994, 69. Translation mine.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 9. Translation mine.

claims, »Hon älskar mig fortfarande!« (She still loves me!)<sup>36</sup> In the next moment, this illusion transforms and the letters read FE and S, the signs for iron and sulfur, the alchemical ingredients for the manufacture of gold. He then finds two lead stamps on the ground, one that is inscribed with the royal crown. Love, knowledge, and sovereignty merge in an illusion, to which the gaze of a historical figure directed the narrator. The agonistic elements of a self in turmoil are united in his interpretation of signs in the context of his imaginings that re-construct the idea of a historical figure. Symbolically, history conflates with the construction of the compound metaphor of self, the representation of which is the result of the internalization of a personal and a cultural history. The opposition between love and knowledge is overcome in a metaphorical union comprised of both elements. In this scene, the economy of self-representation in *Inferno* reveals itself to be a *genealogy of self* as the »fabling of being« connects to history. This self-construction, aware of its status as an illusory representation conflates the interpreting self and that which is interpreted through a negotiation between the necessity of self-creation and the contingency of experience. In *Inferno* as well as in *Ecce Homo*, the »truth« of the self is hermeneutic.

### The Significance of Recurrence

Now I will return momentarily to the question proposed by the title of this conclusion: Are Nietzsche and Strindberg our contemporaries? According to Vattimo, the philosophical possibilities for the late twentieth-century were limited by a hermeneutic imperative where truth is experienced as interpretation. The primal scene of this truth is Nietzsche's »announcement of the death of God«. The question is whether this late twentieth century formulation speaks to those of us now living just beyond its cusp.

In their *genealogies of self*, Nietzsche and Strindberg initiated a construction of subjectivity by substituting the self for the divine. The lack of a divine guarantee is internalized and transformed into a principle of psychological necessity. This necessity is then negotiated through the contingency of narrative as this absence is made manifest through language. The origination of the self is posited to be inaccessible; it is merely

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Translation mine.

contingently negotiated through an agonistic process that obeys the structural imperative of giving a name to the unnamable. In many ways this process, the substitution of the symbolic for the real anticipates psychoanalysis. For many the trajectory of thought that runs through the work of Nietzsche and Strindberg moves forward in an arc through the Freudian notion of the attainment of mental health through narrative and the inaccessibility of the *real*. This process is dependent upon the hidden connections between associations and is, in essence, a hermeneutic process. For both Strindberg and Nietzsche, the hermeneutic of self-formation was dependent upon an internalization and transformation of external imperatives. The location held by the dead God, the dead Father has been read by many modernists as the primary psychological signifier, as the phallus that produces the very language that names it. As Jacques Lacan wrote, »the true formula of atheism is not God is dead [...] the true formula of atheism is God is unconscious«.<sup>37</sup>

However, I would like to propose an alternative. Is the death of God truly a linguistic formula; is it a product of our dreams? For Lacan, there is a moment where »[d]esire manifests itself in the dream by loss expressed in an image at the most cruel point of the object«.<sup>38</sup> For psychoanalysis this moment of loss is the moment where language is born as a function of the differentiated repetition of symptom. Is it not so, however, that we, with the word God, reduce wonder to discourse and repetition to symptom? Is this not one of the reasons that the ironic Nietzsche chose *Ecce Homo* as the title of his self-genealogy? For »Ecce Homo« is a citation from John, which begins: »In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.« For if we believe as Lacan, the unconscious is structured like language and the truth of atheism resides therein, then perhaps the paramount importance of the structuring authority of the Father in psychoanalysis can be explained by this as well. This certainly raises the question of whether this perspective is part of modernity's misreading of itself as a secular age and the misreading of Nietzsche's confrontation of Christ with Dionysus as atheism instead of a moment of collision. For modernity is/was, I will avoid this tired debate, not simply a secular age, but an age of tragic collisions and the internalization of this agon.

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37 LACAN: 1981, 59.

38 Ibid.

One could argue further that the equivalence of word and God, and God as incarnation revealed through word commits the sin of an ontological fallacy, the collapse of being into text. It repeats the mistake of collapsing the doer into the deed, of ignoring the retrospective anticipation of *Hinzudichtung*, of poeticization. It is as if Nietzsche chooses John because he wishes to critique the reduction of religion to magic, to a form of representation based on an absence that it effaces through illusion. It is a critique of modes of representation that claim a fidelity to loss; it is a critique of nihilism.

In an environment where the most provocative of thinkers wrote about the draining of meaning from institutional forms, the possibility of transcendence was annulled in favor of a repetitive process where competing versions of events are negotiated. Perhaps the message inherent in the Nietzschean genealogies speaks to the need of seeing the other without *ressentiment* acting as the regulation force of repetition. It is important to remember that when Nietzsche claims to be the philosopher of Dionysus, he is asserting the primacy of that which cannot appear without the aegis of that which gives form. It is my claim that Nietzsche's original form-giving principle, the Apollonian, which he paired with the Dionysian in *Die Geburt der Tragödie (The Birth of Tragedy)*, has now been replaced by the cultural historical aspect that he felt gave form to a nihilistic western notion of subjectivity, Christ. Nietzsche's critique of modernity defined religion as its limit, as the conditions of possibility for the recurrence whose linguistic affect creates the poetics of subjectivity. Strindberg's notion of recurrence is born within this context also, a context colored by the collision between two forms of return, one born of circularity and the other born of anticipation. This is congruent with Nietzsche's notion of a collision of the two Gods who return, Dionysus and Christ. This formulation, which Strindberg shares in other words, shows us one mode of description of the limits of nihilistic modernity. He also shows us something that Nietzsche excludes: that in the realm of the quotidian, a sense of nihilistic modernity delimits the possibility for the recognition of repetition; and therefore repetition appears in the form of a denial, while its architecture is ironically displayed. This manifests as the fetish for the new.

Let us look at an example. Strindberg's *Till Damaskus* I (1898) re-tells a story told in *Inferno*, the narrator's trip to Donau, where he visits his daughter and stays with his in-laws. The scene in *Inferno* begins with the

narrator's departure from Berlin. He had just returned and wants to kill off his past, to have his Berlin memories remain »begravet för att lämna rum för nytt« (buried in order to leave room for the new).<sup>39</sup> He then exclaims:

Jag lämnar detta Berlin som blivit mitt andra fädernesland, där jag genomlevat min *secunda primavera* och min sista. På Anhalt-bangården lämnar jag jämte minnena varje hopp om att på nytt få uppleva en vår och en kärlek, som aldrig, aldrig skall återkomma!

(This Berlin that I was leaving had been my second fatherland. In it I had lived through my *secunda primavera*, which was also to be my last. At the Anhalter Bahnhof I left behind me not only my memories but all hope of renewing a springtime and a love that were never, never to return again.)<sup>40</sup>

Eugéne Fahlstedt's Swedish translation from Strindberg's original in French does not quite capture the denial of repetition in its utterance as the original citation ends with »jamais, jamais,« emphasizing that the narrator's dashed hopes for re-experiencing happiness is enunciated as a passionate stammering.

The work of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is of some importance here and in particular his story of another journey to Berlin that ended in a denial of repetition. While Strindberg addresses his countryman, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, more directly in this time period, my interest is in depicting the conditions of possibility for recurrence in relation to modernity, and suffice it to say for now, while Swedenborg enjoyed a particular sense of certainty, was convinced that his visions allowed for a direct observation of the spirit world, Strindberg was not so sure. I believe that this can be understood when we consider that Swedenborg did not understand himself to be living under the sign of nihilism while Strindberg did. Kierkegaard, who also believed himself to be living in nihilistic times, shows us how this works.

Kierkegaard was extremely interested in repetition as an existential possibility. His enigmatic text, *Gjentagelsen (Repetition)* (1843), written under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius, leaves us with a rather ironic conclusion. While Constantin denies that repetition is possible, his own story involves a return to Berlin, which despite all the outward signs to the contrary fails to produce the kind of repetition that he seeks, a

39 STRINDBERG: 1994, 189. Translation mine.

40 Ibid. Translation from SANDBACH: 1988, 203.

repetition that provokes transcendence. He understands this failure as the failure of staging as he arranged scenes and objects but found them to be lifeless, which he interpreted as proving that there was no repetition. Of course, when we realize that Constantin's premise is dependent on an arbitrary distinction between the predominance of recollection in ancient philosophy, and his hope for the ascendance of repetition as a category for the modern, we can understand, remembering Mircea Eliade's work on recurrence, that his blindness originates from an inadequate understanding of modernity. That is modernity as a discursive moment that distinguishes between moments of development and its other. In his *The Myth of the Eternal Return*<sup>41</sup> Eliade claims that we must consider that there is a distinct difference between the way a traditional society and a modern society address the reality of an object. A pre-modern society, he argues, acts on the principle that there is a transcendent reality and that »the object appears as the receptacle of an exterior force that differentiates it from its milieu and gives it meaning and value«. <sup>42</sup> He goes on to claim that the meaning of human acts in such a society »is not connected with their crude physical datum but with their property of reproducing a primordial act, of repeating a mythical example« and that because of this dynamic, »life is a ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others«. However, it is important to remember that Eliade makes his argument based on the notion that repetition derives from a belief in what he calls a »celestial archetype,« the repetition of a primordial act that resulted in the creation of the world. In modernity, in the nineteenth century, repetition was intimately connected to the creation of a subjective interiority. This leads to the question: What is the significance of repetition in a world in which notions of creation and transcendence have become internalized and the external force that bestows meaning upon objects and actions is perceived to have exited the stage. Considering that Strindberg, post-Inferno, imbues the objects of his world with a strong hermeneutic resonance and that he thematizes the notion of regulating spirits, or unseen powers by reading random objects in his environment and animating them with auto-biographical significance, how are we to explain Strindberg's notion of recurrence?

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41 ELIADE: 2005.

42 Ibid., 4.

It is clear that Strindberg is very aware of living under the sign of modernity and that he does not simply attribute transcendental qualities to the objects that he interprets, and he is never quite certain about the transcendental status of his experience of recurrence. Kierkegaard's Constantine, as a self-conscious modern, also lived in an environment where an exterior force did not animate the objects in his life, and the experience he had of repetition was not regulated by a re-creation of the world. His expectation of transcendence was thwarted by his modernity, his concept of repetition delimited by the banality of everyday life. This is further indicated by the story of his correspondent, the young man who does experience repetition as a paradox, as a loss that returns his self to him. Of course when we realize that Constantin created the young man, designates him as a »primitive,« and uses him as an example, we realize that the text is ironically showing us that the conditions of possibility for repetition as a modern category disallow for a certainty about the content of recurrence, while assuring us that the desire for repetition is what allows us to commute between the of realm existential actuality and the stage architecture that promises an ideal. Repetition is a state of anticipation in the face of uncertainty. Repetition is also more significantly denied on the level of the bourgeois intellectual who is blind to the desire to repeat as the exoteric aspect of repetition and even blinder to the occulted significance of the denial of repetition as its confirmation. For Kierkegaard, and for Strindberg, this occurs because of their understanding of modernity as an occurrence of nihilism.

Kierkegaard's *Literary Review* of 1846 describes the present age and the emptying of meaning from the social structure and the predominance of reflection.<sup>43</sup> For Kierkegaard, modernity is the moment of the empty gesture, of leveling, reflection, and an inward turn. This inward turn is for Kierkegaard where the possibility of religious experience resides. But it is important to remember that for Kierkegaard, the religious subject appears as the bourgeois subject, his movement towards a repetitive transcendence is opaque, indistinguishable.<sup>44</sup> Though for Kierkegaard, the subject is the site of collision between the chatter of secularity and its double the passion of religious discourse. This thought is further reinforced by a

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43 See KIERKEGAARD: 2001.

44 See Kierkegaard: 2006.

notebook entry from 1854, where Kierkegaard writes about primitivity and inwardness.

Primitivity is part of every human being's constitution, since primitivity is the possibility of spirit – God, who has made it so, knows the best. All earthly, temporal, worldly wisdom relates to killing one's primitivity. Christianity relates to following one's primitivity.

Kill your primitivity, and in all probability you will get along very nicely in the world, perhaps even be a success – but the eternal does not honour you. Follow primitivity and you will be shipwrecked in the temporal, but the eternal accepts you.<sup>45</sup>

In Kierkegaard's text, Eliade's notion of archaic discourse remains as an internal possibility; the discourse of modernity internalizes the discourse of its other. Recurrence becomes a site where the discourse of reflection (modernity) collides with the discourse of transcendence (circular recreation of a religious possibility). This leads to two competing notions that collide within the individual. This how the setting of the scene sublates; in an attempt to re-animate the nihilistic environment of modernity, the desire for repetition is posited and then denied, the dialectic retaining the desire for repetition which re-emerges discursively in the form of its denial.

And so it is for Strindberg on the level of staging, where the denial of repetition occurs despite the architecture of recurrence. This denial then re-animates the stage, filling it with powers unseen and all knowing, who bring up his past to him as a *deus ex machina* assuring repetition. On the level of motif, it is as if Marx's remark that history occurs twice, the first time as tragedy and the second as farce, is internalized and re-staged in a private arena of tragedy and parody. In a way, this explains the re-writing of the narrator's trip to Donau as *Till Damaskus* 1. In *Inferno*, he describes this trip as a pilgrimage; in its re-writing in the drama, it takes on the form of a parody where the discourse of the other is inhabited, in this case Saul as he becomes Paul. Here in the play, the discourse of denial is replaced by the Nietzschean thematization of recurrence as the structure of a Dionysian theater, where the beginning of the tragedy doubles as the beginning of the parody and the protagonist pauses before decision, retaining the indeterminacy of eternal recurrence and infinite becoming.

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<sup>45</sup> KIERKEGAARD: 1996, 603.

The play has an architecture consisting of 17 scenes. The first eight are divided from the last eight by a scene called the asylum. The staging of the last eight scenes repeats the first eight in descending order. There are a few alterations to indicate that the repetition is differentiated and the characters react differently in each moment of repetition. The middle scene is called »The Asylum« and it is here that the motif of madness and religiosity merge.<sup>46</sup> The play begins and ends on the street corner with the main character, The Stranger, paused before a decision. The nature of his decision mirrors the play's architecture as he is trying to decide whether or not to attend a church, thus denying his own professed atheism. His subjectivity is suspended by his indecision. This lack of resolve reflects Strindberg's ambivalence about the title of the play as well. He was unsure whether to name it after an incarnation of the devil or not, but instead chose to name it after the conversion of Saul to Paul. This subversion of ontology is a modernist gesture, one in which tragedy is accentuated by the colliding discourses of *Robert le diable* and *Saint Paul*, the anti-Christian and the Christian exist side by side, and our protagonist who contains them both remains paused before decision at the play's close. The motif of the pilgrimage commutes from *Inferno* to *Till Damaskus*, where it is a discourse that conflates the religious figure of the chosen one with the secular discourse of the madman – both discourses of the individual set apart, the individual as the monstium, that which is to be warned against. This is the Nietzschean motif par excellence. Recurrence occurs as a movement towards parody, to a thematization of the collision of religious and secular discourse through the colonization of sacred narrative by the drama of bourgeois subjectivity. For certainly in *Till Damaskus* 1, the conversion drama of Paul is projected upon a family drama about the *Stranger*, the *Lady*, and the *Mother* (the Stranger's mother-in-law).

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46 STRINDBERG: 1991, 13. The Scene arrangement reads: »Akt 1: I Gathörnet/Hos Läkaren. Akt 2: Hotellrummet/Vid Havet/På Landsvägen/Vid Hålvägen/I Köket. Akt 3: I Rosenkammaren/Asylen/Rosenkammaren/Köket. Akt 4: I Hålvägen/Landsvägen/Vid Havet/Hotellrummet. Akt 5: Hos Läkaren/Gathörnet.« The English translation comes from STRINDBERG: 1986, 389: Act 1: On the Street Corner/At the Doctor's House. Act 2: In the Hotel Room/By the Sea/On the Road/In the Ravine/In the Kitchen. Act 3: In the Rose Room/In the Asylum/The Rose Room/The Kitchen. Act 4: In the Ravine/On the Road/By the Sea/In the Hotel Room. Act 5: At the Doctor's Home/The Street Corner.

On the level of character, Strindberg's use of doubling is often explained by taking recourse to the *Erinran (The Recollection)* that prefaces *Ett drömspel (A Dream Play)*. Usually the dream is read in Freudian fashion, with Strindberg's assertion that this fluidity of character is regulated by a consciousness that »står över alla, det är drömmarens« (stands over and above them all, the mind of the dreamer).<sup>47</sup> However it is important to remember that Strindberg never posited a unity of consciousness and that the term *medvetande*, in Swedish, implies that the reflexive knowledge of what we call consciousness is a knowing with an other. Our comparison with *Inferno* further illuminates this aspect when we recall that the narrator writes:

Min svärmor och min tant som äro tvillingar och fullkomligt lika varandra, Med samma karaktär, smak, och antipatier, betrakta varandra som dubbelgångare. När jag talar till den ena i den andras frånvaro, är den frånvarande genast inne i vad jag sagt så att jag kan fortsätta mina förtroenden med vem som helst av dem utan vidare. Därför gör jag ingen skillnad mellan dem i denna berättelse som icke är någon roman med anspråk på stil och litterär komposition

(My mother-in law and my aunt who are identical twins, exactly alike in character, with the same likes and dislikes, so that each appears to be the other's double. If I talked to one of them when the other was not present, the absent one always knew what I had said, so that I was able to confide in either without having to repeat myself. I don't therefore distinguish between them in this account, which is not a novel with pretensions to style and literary form.<sup>48</sup>

Here Strindberg, in a text that he claims embraces reality, denies character distinction by relegating it to the realm of fiction. In the staging of this event, the character of the mother remains and the character of the aunt drops out in favor of the young lady, the wife spoken about but absent in *Inferno*. It is curious that *Inferno* with its claim to actuality plays out a notion of character that is occulted, with the condensation of person to attribute. While the play *Till Damaskus I*, which allegorizes the trip to Donau, plays out this scene on the level of a domestic drama. This inversion is a form of the denial of repetition as it concerns ethical relations. Denial again points to an occulted repetition. Perhaps this helps to explain the repetition of the motif of the death of the primal father as the origin for the super-ego, as the regulator of ethical relations in the Freudian version of psychoanalysis.

47 STRINDBERG: 1988, 7. Translation: SPRINCHORN: 1986, 646.

48 STRINDBERG: 1994, 203. The English translation is from SANDBACH: 1988, 210.

With this in mind, I will conclude by invoking the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Two lines from Paul Celan form an epigraph that sits above the opening of Emmanuel Levinas's essay on Substitution.<sup>49</sup> The lines read: »Ich bin du, wenn/ich ich bin.« (I am you when I am I.) In a section of this essay, Levinas addresses a tradition of ontological depictions, stressing that our bourgeois understanding of subjectivity is blind to the subject as affect of recurrence. For Levinas, recurrence creates a consciousness of identity that »bears its name as a borrowed name, a pseudonym, a pronoun«.<sup>50</sup> He claims that recurrence creates »an expulsion of the self outside the self as its substitution for the other«. In other words, Levinas restates the problem of recurrence as the opportunity afforded by substitution, as the moment where the self sees itself repeated and cannot »stop at oneself, but goes to the hither side of oneself«. He continues »Recurrence becomes identity in breaking up the limits of identity, breaking up the principle of being in me ...«. In other words, recurrence becomes an identifiable repetition at an ontological cost; this is the moment of the famous Levinasian dictum that ethics precedes ontology as first philosophy. Levinas understands recurrence to open up the possibility of a notion of the self that subverts an ontology based on an essence, (on an I that is purely an I), of a self that resides as the regent of a unified consciousness. Of equal importance, Levinas concludes his essay about recurrence and substitution by making a theological claim, for him, the discourse of the secular subject opens up the possibility of perceiving the moment of infinity, what Kierkegaard called the fullness of time, a moment where the ironic condition of the self is founded by a relationship upon which it founders, a moment of collision between modern bourgeois subjectivity and the possibility of knowing a deity as absolute other.

Following Levinas, I would like to suggest that perhaps the ideology of recurrence in Strindberg's late production is as much about the destruction of the self and its re-establishment as it is about the conflation of the literary and the lived. Perhaps Strindberg's repetition is truly in opposition to both idealistic notions of subjectivity and in contradistinction to any therapeutic goals retroactively projected upon it. Perhaps, Strindberg's repetitions are less about an anticipation of psychoanalysis, and more about the discourse of recurrence before it was delimited to an

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49 LEVINAS: 1990, 88–125.

50 Ibid., 96

affect of a symptom, designated by Freud as the desire to return to the inorganic. Repetition cannot be reduced to representation's fair tribute to death, or to absence.

From my perspective, the issue at hand is how Nietzsche and Strindberg inform us about the repressed element of religious discourse, which has re-emerged in our recent history. Perhaps what Strindberg shows us is how we have entered a different age, where the repressed element is the discourse of secular humanism. For certainly we live in an age where politicians mistake their speech for the word of God, and God for the word. With this in mind, perhaps, each in the same way and each in their own, Nietzsche and Strindberg are our contemporaries, serving us as a warning against a notion of representation that mistakes the symbolic for the literal. Perhaps our contemporaries on the religious right mistake imperialism for progress, and Promethean expansion for the true word.