

Chapter Two

Writing Out and Repetition

The psychical process which originally took place must be repeated as vividly as possible; it must be brought back to its *status nascendi* and then given verbal utterance.

– *Studies on Hysteria*

One other thing! Because both my stories concern people in quarantine, you must not think that this is my own story or stories -that is more deeply buried!

– The Quarantine Officer's Stories

I

In his study of Romantic literary theory, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams examines a tradition in which the nature of art is predicated in terms that 'turn on a metaphor which, like "overflow" signifies the internal made external', and he remarks in particular upon the way in which, with Romanticism, the Aristotelian notion of the relief which art affords the spectator becomes 'silently shifted to denote the healing expenditure of feeling in the poet himself'.¹ He quotes Byron's blunt comment, 'If I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad', and draws attention to John Keble's Oxford Lectures in which the thrust of much earlier thinking is impressively reformulated. Keble, who follows Hazlitt and anticipates Freud in observing a relationship between poetry and the fulfilment of ungratified personal desire, distinguishes primary poets as those 'who, spontaneously moved by impulse, resort to composition for relief and solace of a burdened and over-wrought mind', and discerns in poetic creation 'a safety-valve preserving men from actual madness.'²

With his desire 'to write a book about the lot of us in order to liberate myself' (XI:300), Strindberg's writing has been widely regarded as an unusually transparent instance of such a venture, whereby he effects an often immediate and sometimes tempestuous emotional discharge of the excitations accumulated in everyday experience. Sustained by the daily therapeutic practice of literature, it is argued,³ he converts his life into language and so removes affects that would otherwise remain strangulated and occasion pathogenic results. Indeed, Strindberg stresses the cathartic nature of writing on his own account, and readily identifies with the tradition discussed by Abrams. In *Alone*, for example, he quotes Goethe on the relief to be gained from 'transforming whatever delighted or distressed me into a poem or image... in order to bring peace and order to my inner life' (38:198). Like Keble he regards poetry as a

safety-valve ('My habit of converting experiences into poetry opens the safety-valve (*säkerhetsventilen*) for an excess of impressions, and replaces the need to speak' (38:192)); and in the account of Johan's discovery of his... vocation as a writer, in *Time of Ferment*, he provides a paradigmatic description of the cathartic action of creation upon the creator. Although Johan has already attempted to satisfy his need for self-expression in a number of ways, he finds them all (declamation, painting, acting) at least partly inadequate. For while it will often be painting that eventually helps him to 'show himself to himself' when 'the small, cramped letters on the page lay there dead' (19:18) and he could not write, it did not as yet enable him 'to express what he wanted to say'. Equally, while he may occasionally stumble upon a role in another man's text that corresponds with the words he would himself like to utter (in both Schiller's Karl Moor and Wijkander's Lucidor 'he had discovered his inner feelings expressed in print, and therefore he wanted to speak with their tongues' (18:313)), he discovers that as an actor he is normally called upon 'to shout out empty meaningless words' (18:332), since what a character says does not carry the burden of his own unexpressed ideas and feelings.

Disappointed in the theatre, therefore, and denied advancement there, he seeks to save face and re-establish his 'battered, wounded, torn' self by escaping into the imaginary world of *The Army Surgeon's Tales* (*Fältskärns berättelser*), a popular collection of stories by the Finnish writer, Zachris Topelius. But whether by accident or subsequent design (and it certainly fits the crucial retrospective episode of *The Son of a Servant* precisely), the story he reads reminds him of his own familial situation at a moment in his life when he is at odds with his father and his stepmother, yet longing 'for reconciliation and peace'. To achieve a vicarious satisfaction, therefore, and to amend reality, he 'spins' a daydream in which his stepmother reconciles him with his father, a scenario which is accomplished 'by organizing memories from the past, removing some things and adding others' (18:340), or as Freud was to define the process, in 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', 'the wish makes use of an occasion in the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future.'⁴ Once this is accomplished (and the Narrator doubts if something so effortless and irresistible 'could be called work, for it went of its own accord, and was none of his willing or doing' (18:341)), it only remains to write it down. The relief is then immediate and comprehensive. It felt (and the image is typical of the bodily metaphors, either surgical or purgative, to which Strindberg often resorts in order to describe his compulsion to write) 'as if years of pain were over, as if an abscess had been lanced' (18:341).⁵

However, the role and function of Strindberg's conception of writing as catharsis has never been thought through in relation to his accomplished work, which raises a number of insistent questions especially as regards the margin of

overlap implicit in the frequently drawn comparison between his attempt 'to see as deeply into a soul as can be seen' (VI:298) and the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, which Freud, in one of his first attempts at an adequate metaphor for the abreaction of repressed material, compared to 'the opening up of a cavity filled with pus, the scraping out of a carious region.'⁶ What in fact does the often aggressive desire to speak out ('att tala ut') represent? Does it remove the effects, as Strindberg often suggests, or is the material with which he works only fastened the more securely as he returns each day to his life in writing? Is his attempt to reveal himself in words a symptom or its cure, or is the language in which he formulates his life only a means of solace, like the chemical formulae with which he manipulates the natural world in his scientific essays, where exactitude is often sacrificed to the consonance of mathematical harmony? Moreover, given Strindberg's ability as a consummate player as well as creator of roles, how far may the autobiographical writing, which prompted the psychologist Gösta Harding, to maintain that 'apart from his genius as a dramatist, the most remarkable thing about Strindberg seems to me to be his capacity for self-treatment—auto-psychotherapy',⁷ be regarded as consonant with the talking cure developed by Freud from Breuer's fortuitous discoveries in the case of Anna O, and what, if anything, is to be made of the striking synchronicity wherein (as Gunnar Brandell points out) 'Strindberg during his Inferno crisis to some extent carried out a self-analysis, albeit presented in religious and moral terms, at virtually the same moment as Freud was embarking upon the self-analysis which forms the basis of *The Interpretation of Dreams*'?⁸

The problem is therefore twofold: the questionable nature and efficacy of Strindberg's attempt to meet his claim that suffering may be expunged merely by writing it down (e.g. XIV:217) raises what Guy Vogelweith calls 'le problème si délicat des rapports entre psychanalyse et littérature',⁹ and at precisely the moment when the former discourse was taking shape, a point which lends further encouragement to the tempting notion that the endeavours of Freud and Strindberg run parallel to one another. For there is, certainly, a remarkable degree of shared ground. As heirs to an impulse in European thought that Henri Ellenberger terms 'the unmasking trend... the systematic search for deception and the uncovering of underlying truth',¹⁰ they both detect in man not merely a deliberate intention to lie, to himself as well as to others, but a powerful inner resistance to truth, which is sustained by the fiction of a world that corresponds to our desires. Strindberg's insight into the mechanisms of repression and self-deception, for example, often suggests Freud's shrewd and intricate explorations. He knows we punish ourselves for hidden wishes, what he calls our '*önskesynd*' (46:193), as well as for the crimes and peccadilloes we actually commit, and he recognizes that man has 'an ability to keep obnoxious

impressions from him, which borders upon the miraculous' (48:854), while in his later works he frequently dramatizes the dilemma to which Gerda confesses in *The Pelican*, when she responds to her brother's ruthless unmasking of family secrets by crying, 'I knew it all along, and yet I didn't know it... It didn't reach my consciousness, because it was too awful' (45:253).

More immediately, however, the kinship between Strindberg and Freud is largely a matter of the precursors and contemporaries they have in common. For both in detail and in its general tenor their work inhabits an intellectual milieu which is populated by Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Taine,¹¹ and in the 1880s Strindberg, like Freud, became conversant with contemporary psychology. By his own account he consumed 'a whole literature of insanity' (VI:78), and the writings of Ribot, Maudsley, Galton, Bernheim, and Binet figure in his letters, his libraries, and his works, as he sought to implement the current demand, articulated here by Maudsley, in *The Pathology of Mind*, for 'a scientific demonstration of the strict order and necessity of the chain of events of the person's life history by a patient unfolding of his action on circumstances and of their action on him'. 'Sane or insane,' Maudsley continued, 'a man's history is his character, and the full and exact explanation of his position in life, whether eminence or madness, would be the full and exact disclosure of his character,'¹² and by combining autobiographical and religious traditions of introspection with contemporary psychological theory, Strindberg attempted such a disclosure in *The Son of a Servant*, just as other developments in the field, for example Bernheim's work on hypnosis and suggestion in *De la suggestion et de ses applications à la thérapeutique* and Charcot's research into hysteria at La Salpêtrière, are as significant for what Strindberg called his 'artistic psychological writing' (VI:335) in *Short Cuts (Genvägar)*, 'The Romantic Organist on Rånö', *Vivisections*, and *By the Open Sea*, as they are for the contribution of Charcot's student and Bernheim's German translator, Freud, to *Studies on Hysteria*. Conversely, Freud, as Brandell suggests, may well have read Strindberg's study of the hysteric, Tekla, when *Short Cuts* was published in the *Neue Freie Presse* in 1887,¹³ and the influence he subsequently exerted upon literature is in any case only a reversal of the situation in the early days of psychoanalysis when Freud was caught up in the literary as well as the scientific developments of the period. As Brandell points out, in his stimulating study, *Freud – A Man of His Century*, the Paris to which he came in 1885 to study with Charcot, at a time when Strindberg had just embarked upon *The Son of a Servant*, was the centre of 'a general ideo-historical and literary context, which may be called that of psychological naturalism', and 'Freud's new system of psychological understanding and his self-analysis during the 1890s are, from one point of view, the culmination of a long-lasting collaboration between humanistic men of letters on the one hand, and doctors and researchers on

the other.¹⁴ Indeed, the resemblance between the two domains was at times so close that in both *Studies on Hysteria* and the Case History devoted to 'Dora', Freud found it necessary to distinguish his compelling and ingenious narratives from the psycho-pathological studies in which contemporary fiction abounded,¹⁵ an endeavour of some urgency when literature aspired to the status of 'scientific analysis' and employed 'all the tools of the new science of psychology' (MD:17). *The Son of a Servant*, Strindberg maintained, was not 'an *Ehrenrettung* or book of exculpation, it is a soul's analysis, anatomic psychology' (V:356), and he told Ola Hansson that Naturalism had brought literature to the point where invention had been superseded by psychology: 'Don't you see yourself that you are moving from synthetic literature into the psychological thesis!' (VII:248). Thus when he attributes his own technique to Axel Borg in *By the Open Sea*, the account reads (apart from the final modest disclaimer) as a striking anticipation of the course Freud would take when he added his self-analysis to the library of Naturalist case histories and thereby transformed the genre: 'And in order to verify the correctness of his observation he used himself as a psychological preparation, cut himself up living, experimented on himself, constructed fistula and fontanelles, subjected himself to an unnatural, often repulsive spiritual diet, but then – paying careful attention to the bias exerted by the presence of the experimenter in the experiment – avoided using himself and his life to establish a norm for others' (24:65).

This analytic standpoint was in fact endemic in Naturalism, which affords many instances of a *dédoublement* similar to the investigations undertaken in *A Madman's Defence* and *Inferno*. Stressing the split into experiencing self and observing consciousness, the Naturalist writer often presents himself as a spy upon his own mind, someone who watches himself live and then composes a report on what he has seen. Thus Alfred Binet records Alphonse Daudet's response to an investigation into the nature of thinking, where Daudet describes the 'horrible analytic and critical faculty' underlying his writing and argues that it is 'like an internal watcher, impassive and unmoved, a *double*, inert and cold, which in the most violent broadsides of *Le Petit Chose* was observing all, taking notes and saying the next day: *A nous deux!*'¹⁶ Directed outwards, moreover, in the Vivisector's role which Strindberg cultivated in the late 1880s, this faculty not only permitted the writer to use his inner life as 'a carcass for dissection' (V:364), but also foreshadowed the analytic situation. Thus, in his one-acter, *The Stronger*, Y's silence enables X to talk herself into understanding the past, and in *Creditors*, as Strindberg pointed out to his French translator, Georges Loiseau, 'Tekla, qui mène une existence inconsciente comme les femmes... est emmené par Gustave de réfléchir sur elle-même, devient dévoilée devant soi-même, est rendu consciente.' (X:76)

But of course the similarity here is superficial. Gustav, 'l'assassin psychologue' (X:77) reveals what is concealed in Tekla's discourse to its speaker only because he is personally involved in the drama. His mastery of the situation depends upon deception. Spurred on by his own hidden wound and motivated by a desire for revenge, the past he reconstructs by encouraging others to talk of it, is as much a part of his experience as it is of theirs. For as his author repeatedly discovers, 'one is not alone in the possession of one's experiences' (V:356): the past, that is, is not singular but shared with those among whom one lives, and out of the web of conflicting interpretations the Vivisector therefore seeks to establish the primacy of his own account: as Strindberg informs his publisher, concerning the third volume of *The Son of a Servant*, 'I analyse an event from a psychological point of view, and I relate it in my way, after others have related it in theirs' (VI:86).

Nevertheless, his desire to 'peer down into the hidden' (24:35) and bring 'life in the hidden' (37:68) to light is an undertaking he takes seriously, and the technique of allowing 'his memories to run through the history of his personal development, as far back as he could trace it, in order as it were to seek his way up to his self and be able to read in the past stages his probable fate' (24:44), to which Strindberg often refers, is again one that seems to derive from Freud rather than precede him. Each such 'refresher course' (24:65) represents an attempt on Strindberg's part to review his past, bring it back into the present, and transpose it into language, and as in Freud's advocacy of a similar procedure, his method bears traces of another literary movement, Romanticism. Both writers inherit what Philip Rieff calls 'the Romantic insight that equated artistic creativeness with the process of unconscious truth-telling in general,'¹⁷ and Freud's idea of the discourse in which the patient might circumvent repression and reclaim his past is, like Strindberg's conception of writing as the immediate transcription of experience, authenticated by the notion of inspiration which frequently accompanies a view of poetry as the cathartic expression of overpowering emotion. Indeed, in many respects inspiration emerges as another royal road to the self, and both Freud and Strindberg take encouragement from the same predecessors, notably Schiller, who is quoted at length in later editions of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and serves to authorize inspired discourse in *The Son of a Servant*,¹⁸ and Ludwig Börne, whose sketch 'Die Kunst in drei Tagen ein Original-Schriftsteller zu werden' caused Freud to write the clarificatory 'A Note on the Pre-History of the Technique of Analysis' (1920), and supported Strindberg's case in the theory of writing he sent Siri von Essen: 'Reproduce what you have experienced, I wrote to her, for you have lived a life with harrowing changes; get hold of a pad of paper, a pen; be frank and you will become an author, I quoted, following Börne's recommendation.' (MD:50) For although Strindberg initially enlisted Börne to combat a conception of genius

which granted the elevating visitation of inspiration to an exceptional few (this, he argued, was ‘an out-of-date falsehood’ (I:187) since the spread of literacy made literature accessible to anyone who wished to write, much as Freud’s account of the artistry displayed in dreaming was also sometimes taken to suggest that art itself was thus open to all), he in fact suppressed his mistrust of inspiration’s improper ease and believed ‘that in his fever the writer is led in the right direction’ (VI:103). ‘The artist’, he stated, ‘works unconsciously, creating like nature by chance with an incredible wastefulness, but in the moment when he, *post festum*, tries to think his work over, to analyse it, he wakes from his half slumber, and falls to the ground like a sleepwalker’ (27:630), and by employing images of somnambulism and hallucination, he depicted the writer as a medium awaiting a visitation (‘But it doesn’t come to order, nor when I please. It comes when *It* pleases’ (54:472)), just as Freud sought to establish the most favourable conditions for the unconscious to reveal itself in the patient’s discourse. Abandoning in turn both hypnosis and suggestion, he arrived at Free Association where, he concluded, *It* spoke most clearly.

And it was when Strindberg made a virtue out of the fact that he wrote best when he hallucinated (IV:80), and deliberately submitted himself to the drive of his fantasies (as he wrote to his friend, the botanist Bengt Lidfors: ‘I often put myself into a state of unconsciousness, not with drink or the like, for that awakens a host of memories and new ideas, but by distractions, games, play, sleep, novels, and then I let my brain work freely, without bothering about the outcome or consequences, and something then emerges which I believe in, just because it has grown inevitably’ (VIII:239–40)) that he arrived not merely at the most remarkable prefigurations of Freud in his writing, but also at a method which resembles Freud’s technique and anticipates the shift from a linear to an associative autobiographical mode that is implicit in Freud’s theories, and in the example of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Firstly when painting according to the technique of *skogssnufvism*, which he introduced in 1892 (IX:40 – the name, literally ‘wood-spiritism’, is derived from a folk tale concerning a boy who mistakes a tree trunk for the wood sprite, so displaying the kind of double vision demanded by his own works, with their dual exoteric and esoteric meaning), and then in the seminal essay of 1894, ‘Des arts nouveaux!’ où Le Hasard dans la production artistique’, in which he develops a theory that is implemented in literary texts such as ‘Deranged Impressions’ and the letters he wrote to Torsten Hedlund during 1896, he deliberately lays himself open to chance (‘that propitious chance, which has made so many discoveries’ (27:130)) and adopts a random manner of creation, a ‘free-hand drawing’ (X:206) or associational method (X:64), which he believes nature also employs, in order to penetrate what he terms ‘le rideau du conscient’ (VR:66) and read the

normally invisible deeper syntax that underlies the calligraphy of the surface. As he describes the process in 'Des arts nouveaux!':

Dégagé de la peine de controuver les couleurs l'âme du peintre dispose de la plénitude des forces à chercher des contours, et comme la main manie la spatule à l'aventure, toutefois retenant le modèle de la nature sans vouloir la copier, l'ensemble se révèle comme ce charmant pêle-mêle d'inconscient et de conscient. C'est l'art naturel, où l'artiste travail comme la nature capricieuse et sans but déterminé. (VR:58)

Thus he evolved a type of 'naturalistic clairvoyance' (28:59) which encourages what he later termed 'the appearance of the unconscious' (46:190). By improvisatory techniques either adopted or invented, he essayed a type of 'art fortuite' (X:177) in which customary mechanisms of repression were suspended and his unconscious life was free to reveal itself. Perhaps taking his cue from Leonardo, to whom he refers in *A Blue Book* (46:190), and responding during the 1880s to Max Nordau, whose collection of essays, *Paradoxes*, includes the description of a child's game in which a series of random dots are linked to form the image of a person or object, Strindberg describes how 'a painter (can) see figures in the sawdust which is strewn on the shop floor by arbitrarily linking one point with another, seeing figures in other words where there are none' as early as *Flower Paintings and Animal Pieces* (22:269). Not surprisingly, too, he showed an interest in automatic writing, in the Rorschach blot, and in Kerner's 'kleksography' which revealed 'the operator's very innermost unconscious thoughts, even such as he didn't wish to recognize as his own, but nevertheless must' (46:191). Moreover, attributing substance to his fantasies and to his dreams ('Nothing comes from nothing, and fantasies, like dreams, possess full higher reality' (XI:236)), and fashioning an instrument of exceptional sensitivity in what he termed his 'inner eye' (XI:268), he was able, although still confined to the discourse of romantic fiction, an occult world of doubles, ghosts, and mesmeric suggestion, to discover a fresh autobiographical dimension in the 'strange occurrences' that composed themselves into the significant pattern of life with the aid of free association and skilful interpretation. It is as if he employs the method outlined in his proposal to illustrate the book of Job 'in an occult manner' (XI:288) and lays a fine paper over events to catch their imprint, extracting from the trivia of his daily life, its chance encounters, the detritus of the streets, his haphazard reading, and obsessive images, a gigantic *frottage* wherein he can trace his life's design. 'I believe that if one only refrains from hardening one's heart a great deal is revealed' (XI:157), he confided to Hedlund; esoteric meaning was to be found even in the gutter of everyday Parisian life; and as Marcel Réja remarks, in his informed preface to the first French edition of *Inferno*, on which he worked with Strindberg, by observing

la législation du hasard... tous les petits détails, les incidents fortuits que nous ne jugeons pas dignes d'un seul moment d'attention, il les dépiste avec un soin jaloux, les confronte et les fait hurler de force à nos oreilles, qui veulent être sourdes, et les fait briller violemment à nos yeux qui veulent être aveugles.

Il combine en système inquiétant ce que nous éliminons systématiquement du domaine de notre attention. Tandis que nous les mettons sans plus d'enquête sur le compte du hasard, il adopte ces enfants abandonnés, et cherche à leur constituer une famille, une signification, un but.¹⁹

Or as The Unknown explains, in *To Damascus*: 'Life, which was earlier a great nonsense, has gained a meaning, and I perceive a purpose, where before I only saw chance' (29:10).

Thus, as Göran Printz-Påhlson points out, Freud and Strindberg are also united 'by their experience that in the inner life nothing is wasted, everything comes back in one form or other.'²⁰ 'To throw light on things by tracing what is manifest back to what is hidden,'²¹ delights them both; they share a passion for interpretation and discern in fortuitousness a key to a more deeply inscribed reality where the play of chance becomes a determined network repeatedly producing 'a coincidence which cannot be chance' (X:153). At much the same moment they become alert to the intermittenencies of conscious life through which another order of being may be glimpsed, to what could be gleaned from what Freud once termed 'the rubbish heap... of our observation',²² in the seemingly banal details and *objets trouvés* out of which Strindberg fashions his *Occult Diary*, *Inferno* and *To Damascus*, and which forms much of the material in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud's second psychoanalytical book and the one in which, by a nice stroke, he quotes Strindberg for the only time.²³ For what Strindberg unveils in the *Inferno* material is very much 'our double existence, obsessions, our nocturnal existence, our bad conscience, our momentary baseless fears' (XI:293) as they manifest themselves in the action of what the Surrealists would call *L'hasard objectif*. As in Breton's post-Freudian narrative, *Nadja*, or Aragon's novel, *Le Paysan de Paris*, a predominantly urban environment casts up images and objects that accord with the writer's unconscious desires and fears, and if the language in which Strindberg conveys his findings is sometimes less precise than Freud's measured tone, it is nevertheless continually reaching out to accommodate comparable insights:

My inner being is mirrored in my dreams and so I can use them as I use my shaving mirror: to see what I am doing and avoid cutting myself. The same applies to certain 'occurrences' in waking life – but not all. For example, there are always bits of paper lying in the street yet not every bit of paper catches my attention. But if one of them does, then I pay

attention to it, and if there is something written or printed on it that has some connection with what is occupying my thoughts, then I regard it as an expression of my innermost unborn thoughts. And I am right to do so. For if this bridge of thought between my inner self and this outer thing did not exist, a transfer could never take place. (38:135)²⁴

It is this tension between apparent randomness and a concealed personal order which dictates the emergence of a radically new form of autobiography in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where a life is no longer written according to the causal, chronological sequence that the rational consciousness extracts from the remembered past, but is reclaimed from the data of dream by association and analogy, regardless of temporality and no longer impeded by a concern to distinguish between what is fantasy and what is real since, as Freud later makes plain, what we remember is all we possess and our ‘phantasies possess *psychical* as contrasted with *material* reality.’²⁵ Even in the process of remembering, the past becomes dismembered, as Freud realizes in his account of the dissection dream (“The task which was imposed on me in the dream of carrying out a dissection of *my own body* was thus *my self-analysis*’)²⁶, and individual identity as the continuity of consciousness through time thus becomes no longer so certain or essential a principle of autobiography. Meaning is not enchained, as the nineteenth-century mode adopted in *The Son of a Servant* suggests, in successive events that are conveyed by a narrative where temporal sequence is elevated into a causal one, but embedded in the obsessions, repetitions, and intermittencies cast up in the course of narration, during which the self reconstitutes itself around patterns of memory, complexes of association, and correlations in literature and myth. For, as John Sturrock remarks, in an essay on the autobiographer whose practice has responded most thoroughly to Freud, Michel Leiris: ‘the power of association, of bringing into the light mnemonic instead of temporal contiguities, has infinitely more to tell us about our permanent psychic organization than the power of chronology.’²⁷

And this is a major aspect of the Inferno process. Having placed his experience under the control of contemporary psychological theory and taken introspection to its respectable limits in *The Son of a Servant*, Strindberg now submits himself to conditions in which he contrives, firstly to experience the derangement which others had only studied, and then to write his own case history.²⁸ In his experimental records, the Hedlund letters, *The Occult Diary*, the first drafts of *Inferno*, and *Inferno* itself, he re-explores the data of his life according to his experimental associative technique until, in *To Damascus*, where ‘everything recurs’ in the form of ‘dead men and beggars and madmen and human destinies and childhood memories’ (29:45), he projects himself on to the mirror of The Unknown and is able to monitor his experience with a subtlety that sets ajar that door to the past to which he, like Freud, so often

refers,²⁹ through which his guilt and neurosis emerge with unprecedented complexity, not as a single extended strand but in a web of metaphor and myth, a network of interrelationships wherein the past reveals its continued potency in the present and the present re-illuminates the past.

But if these manifold similarities encourage the notion that by transposing his life into language Strindberg achieves not only a temporary release of effects in words but mastery over their causes as well, it is more likely that he stops where Freud began, namely at the point in the 'Preliminary Communication' to *Studies on Hysteria* where Freud and Breuer describe how:

The injured person's reaction to the trauma only exercises a completely 'cathartic' effect if it is an *adequate* reaction – as, for instance, revenge. But language serves as a substitute for action; by its help an effect can be 'abreacted' almost as effectively. In other cases speaking is itself the adequate reflex, when for instance it is a lamentation or giving utterance to a tormenting secret, e.g. a confession.³⁰

For while he may bring the buried past back into his texts, Strindberg does not perform the labour of interpretation which Freud came to regard as the necessary extension of the talking cure if the latter is to be effective, a development in his thinking which marks the methodological shift from catharsis to psychoanalysis, whose 'aim was no longer to abreact an affect which had got on to the wrong lines but to uncover repressions and replace them by acts of judgement which might result either in the accepting or in the condemning of what had been formerly repudiated.'³¹ Indeed, Strindberg is not looking for a cure; he wants to go on writing since, as he remarks, 'I found existence pure bliss so long as the writing continued, and do so still. It's only then that I live' (54:467). Moreover, it is not necessarily the deepest or the most remote layers of his personality that this unburdening process is directly engaged in tapping, but a recent, often minor, affront to his self-image (a day's residue in fact) that demands prompt relief. And while Strindberg perceives the process by which an affect can be abreacted through language as clearly as Freud and Breuer (in both *A Blue Book* and *Black Banners* he relates an anecdote in which an acquaintance had, by speaking, 'freed himself from a painful impression so completely that it was erased from his memory' (41:128)), the solace which writing affords is shortlived and normally confined to the effacement of immediate discomfort. It offers a means of redress in times of adversity and its habitual practice renders the present endurable, but as a type of secondary revision of experience, it does not substantially modify the personality. Rather, the narrative or drama in which fragments of the past arise is a recreation which repeats and adapts the autobiographical material, and the text, like the last stage of the dream work, connects the disconnected,

systematizes and reshapes the mnemonic data which is already, as Freud notes in his essay on 'Screen Memories', formed 'unconsciously – almost like works of fiction',³² and establishes relationships between the manner and the matter of the utterance whereby it conforms to expectations of an intelligible whole that are often already fulfilled by the genre in which it is cast, and which, to the extent that it is conventional, depersonalizes what is entrusted to it. To employ a formula of Philippe Lejeune which is particularly apt when applied to Strindberg: 'C'est une tentative d'alchimie poétique, plutôt que de chimie analytique.'³³

This verbal alchemy already colours the most immediate of the ways in which Strindberg formulates an affect in words, his letter writing, where even more promptly than by writing for the press, he could perform what Torsten Eklund sees as one of the essential tasks of his project: '... to keep the public up to date with his more or less private misfortunes and sufferings.'³⁴ At times, indeed, he keeps selected correspondents informed on chosen aspects of his life by almost daily reports, each letter taking up the tale even as it is unfolding, and in some cases, for example in the letters to Pehr Staaff in 1887 on the disintegration of his first marriage, it is clear that he is discovering, or inventing, or recomposing this life in the very act of writing about it. It is as if he allows the words to have their say, following them where they care to take him, in what is effectively a trial run for the novel they conjure up, *A Madman's Defence*.

Given the importance he placed on letter writing as the model for writing in general, the letters are obviously of particular relevance to a project in which the boundaries between different written discourses tend to dissolve into a single life of scription. They represent perhaps the quintessential method of self-representation since they afford a true *multiplicité du moi* in the different projections each correspondent elicits, and he frequently uses an extended correspondence as a mirror in which to observe and analyse himself. But his practice resembles a soliloquy rather than the dialogue which an exchange of letters normally evokes. As he reminds one of the first in a series of reflectors with whom he enters into a sometimes entirely written relationship, 'You are used to my speaking in the first person Singularis' (I:27), and in telling both his youthful confidant, Eugène Fahlstedt, and Jonas Lie that they need not answer the letters he intends sending them (I:122, IV:180), he acknowledges that his correspondence is not intended for a full and reciprocal communication.

At its most intense this practice produces a form of externalized inner monologue, a type of public self-address in which Strindberg analyses his situation and inspects himself. In a succession of correspondences, he deftly secures a balance between intimacy and distance that permits him to concentrate on himself, and especially in relation to Torsten Hedlund he is

able, in the crucial stages of the Inferno crisis, to use the other as a screen on to which he projects his inner turmoil in order to interpret it. He arrives, in short, at a remarkable complement to the analytic situation, or rather, at the almost contemporary situation contrived by Freud in relation to Wilhelm Fliess for the conduct of his self-analysis. 'I need you as my audience,' Freud wrote to Fliess,³⁵ much as Strindberg required Hedlund to be the distant intimate of his intellectual isolation, and Paul Roazen's remark, 'On the one hand, Freud needed his own isolation, even if he grumbled about it; yet he also sought an uncomprehending blank screen in Fliess,³⁶ could as easily be applied to Strindberg's relationship with Hedlund, who was enlisted to receive what Strindberg extracted from himself by experimental techniques involving introspection and free association, and then transferred to paper: 'Read what I write without criticism, without resistance, and don't prevent me from running on,' he instructs Hedlund, 'for I am growing as I write this, and perhaps you will too' (XI:240). And yet, quite clearly, Hedlund was forbidden to place his own constructions on the material Strindberg offered him. As always, the latter's resistance to other interpretations of his experience remains firm: he refuses the transference which Freud came to see as part of the psychoanalytical situation, and when Hedlund comes too close, he breaks off with a letter that confirms the one-sided nature of their entire correspondence: 'Your appearance in my life always seemed to me like a mission, and your person, which I don't know and have never seen, remained an abstraction to me the whole time' (XI:393).

This abrupt end, and Strindberg's subsequent return to literature in order to alleviate his conflicts in art, helps to distinguish the writer from the subject in analysis. It belongs to the nature of the pact under which an analysis is carried out that the subject lies on a couch and talks, suppressing nothing, however trivial or exceptional, that comes to mind. He is in the presence of a listener, the analyst, who receives this discourse, responds to it with questions, and prompts the subject towards an interpretation of his own words, returning them to him in order that he may amend and augment them. Moreover, this interruptable discourse is not only modified by the immediate response it elicits; it is also supported or betrayed by the other eloquent signs emitted by the subject. As Freud observed, as early as *Studies on Hysteria*, the gestures, intonations, facial expressions, and silences of the subject can be as revealing as his words.³⁷ Although it is tempting to compare the analyst to a blank page on which the analysand writes his story, the actual situation is thus one in which spoken discourse is clearly distinguished from the written, however direct or immediate. It is a question of unveiling the hidden and unknown discourse transmitted by the subject, a discourse conveyed and audible only in the words he nevertheless speaks with the conviction that they mean what he says, to a listener who helps him to bring it into the open, recognize himself in it, and

accept it as a more faithful account than the one he is accustomed to tell. The subject has need of the other so that the opaque material of his discourse may achieve clarity and coherence. He presents it to another in order that it be given back to him, that eventually in the exchange of words, he will possess his own discourse instead of being possessed by it, that he will, as Bernard Pingaud points out, in his essay 'L'Écriture et la cure', 'enfin parler sa propre parole au lieu d'être parlé par elle.'³⁸

Conversely, the writer's language, which is normally produced at a desk and consigned in silence to the page, is addressed to an absent reader, whose response does not modify the text. Although the features of the reader whom the author would like to see elaborate its codes are often implicit in the text, there is no guarantee into whose hands, or when, it will fall, and whatever the writer imagines he has intended with his text, this intention is not only impossible to impose but actually not recoverable as such by the potential reader, who may well discover that the text embodies meanings at variance with what the writer believed himself to have written. The situation of the autobiographer in particular is irremediably narcissistic. Engaged in the creation of his own image he is, irrespective of any desire to surmount his resistance and unearth the aetiology of his character, left to his own linguistic devices, without the assistance of an interlocutor. Alert to the constraints of form and genre, and to the determinacies of other books and lives, he is occupied with composing a discourse that is shaped and closed, not untidy and open-ended, as in analysis. And where the endeavour of psychoanalysis is to penetrate the image which the subject has formed of himself, the autobiographer elaborates a specular image in a narrative given over to the establishment of order and coherence, consciously manipulated, highly crafted, and felicitously expressed. Moreover, the object of the cure sought in analysis is deliverance, which means that having said all that matters the subject may be silent and move on, whereas the writer continually returns to his writing and multiplies the texts. Hopefully, the patient finally becomes himself; the writer, however, achieves the status of a subject only vicariously by projecting his personal myth in a work that is then detached from him in order to embark upon its own career. As Pingaud observes: 'La personnalité conquise de l'écrivain, c'est l'oeuvre elle-même.'³⁹ But once conquered this personality is immediately lost again, as a product now external to the self which produced it. Once written, the text and its author part company, so compounding the sense of lack and misprision with which his committal to a written existence may in any case impart to the writer. To recapture himself he must begin again and then again, only to lose himself in each set of words he leaves behind. For if the cure is singular, the work is plural and may therefore be, as Pingaud suggests, 'le modèle de toute fixation', since even when he seeks to deliver himself from obsessive themes and images,

the writer only succeeds in fixing them outside himself, in the now foreign monument of the text, where it is the words and not their substantial producer that are 'l'objet même du discours'.⁴⁰

II

Certainly, Strindberg's attempt to write out the past assumes, for its author as well as for the reader or spectator, every sign of a fixation. From the *Inferno* period onwards, the phrase 'Allt går igen' (Everything repeats itself) constantly recurs to point the structure of plays where repetition is a major organizing principle for transforming an otherwise unbridled reality into significant pattern, and pure contingency into interpreted, meaningful sequence. Sometimes proffered as the wisdom of experience ('Anyone aged forty, knows everything; life functions so simply; everything is repeated, everything comes again'),⁴¹ repetition reveals how the unexpected consistency of events prompts what Freud describes as the uncanny 'idea of something fateful and unescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of chance.'⁴² 'Then no matter how life shaped itself, I always found continuity or repetition,' the Stranger observes, from amidst the ashes of his childhood home, in *The Burned House*: 'there are scenes in my life which have occurred many times' (45:98). And the ageing Strindberg, whose obsession with chains of significance and networks of correspondences sometimes leads him to find a consolation in a mode of thinking that Freud would consider regressive in its propensity to animism and the narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes, generally goes out of his way to re-encounter the past. This is one facet of a repetition compulsion that permeates the *Inferno* material, where it continually suggests a fate arranged, although not always consciously, by the author himself, and which also directs his steps in the account in the *Occult Diary* of a walk through Stockholm on 22 September 1906 along streets that remind him of his past, and which concludes: 'Then went home to Karlavägen; and I thought: this is really like an "Agony" or the very moment of death, when the whole of life passes before one, and I decided to write about this morning walk, during which, in an hour and a half, I had been given a review of my life until now.'

For rather than fade into forgetfulness, the past becomes increasingly tenacious the more Strindberg writes and the older he grows. Thus, ever more aware of himself as the sum of his years, the Strindbergian protagonist in the guise of The Unknown, The Stranger, The Hunter, or the Narrator of *Inferno*, relives and re-examines, repeats and replots the constituents of a life which is continually doubling back upon itself and is always inclined to return to its origins: as the Lawyer tells Indra's Daughter in *A Dream Play*, 'Life consists of doing things again.... you must retrace your steps, return by the same path, and suffer all the horrors of the process, the repetitions, the repetitions, the

repetitions' (36:290). Indeed, repetition is the principle upon which a number of important late works (*To Damascus*, *Crimes and Crimes*, *A Dream Play*) are organized, and in so far as the principle underlying his writing is also the governing principle of a life in which Strindberg creates situations, engineers coincidences, and contrives to 'bring about events which never or very rarely happen in fact,⁴³ his later autobiographical texts are uncanny arrangements of what in Freud's terms is already 'uncanny' experience. Thus *Inferno* emerges as the accurate account of a life previously lived through the purposeful creation of 'Das Unheimliche'.

Many allusions indicate the intellectual provenance of Strindberg's idea of repetition. Apart from the popular conception that at the moment of death the dying man's life passes before him in review,⁴⁴ he frequently alludes to Kierkegaard's concept of *Gentagelsen* (Repetition), to Swedenborg's idea of a *post mortem* 'livsrevy' (review of life), and to his own often articulated notion of life as an infernal scene of torture for crimes committed in a previous existence, a notion which he readily combines with the image of an inexorably grinding mill in order to endow the insistent retention of the past with a meaningful moral context, as when *The Unknown* describes how he 'saw my whole life unreel as in a kind of panorama from my childhood, through my youth, right up to ... and when it came to the end of the reel, it began all over again; and the whole time I heard a mill turning... and I can hear it still... Yes, now it's here too!' (29:100). According to one of his glosses on Swedenborg's correspondences, the mill, an obvious metaphor for remorse and conscience, represents 'scrutiny' (47:530), and its implicit purifactory aspect is clearly expressed by the Teacher, in *The Isle of the Dead*, who describes how 'all you have lived, small as well as large, both good and evil, is ground in the mill of memory, ground and ground until the gray husks, and chaff are sifted out and blown away by the wind. Then only the fine meal remains, which is baked into the snow-white bread of life for eternity.'⁴⁵

But in all of Strindberg's obsessive bids to discover a sensible pattern in his life there is, whether here in the study of its insistent repetitions or previously in his many early attempts to interpret his destiny in what he sees as the ravaging effect of Nemesis upon those he encounters, a passionate desire for coherence that precedes all theory. As Brandell points out in his reading of *To Damascus*, the continual rerun of the past, either as a reminder of events from which he cannot free himself ('I have moments when the memory of everything horrible I have experienced collects as in an accumulator' (X:219), he tells his friend, Littmansson), or as the duplication of actual situations, is standard neurotic practice, and Strindberg is characterized both by an acute sensitivity to coincidence, parallel, and repetition in everyday life, and an inclination to repeat entire situations, to discover himself in familiar circumstances where

the same roles are distributed to new protagonists. 'When I encountered *that* person, I remembered *that* one from the past' (45:98), the Stranger explains, in *The Burned House*, and Brandell rightly remarks upon the way in which Strindberg conflates his first two marriages in the text of the play, where the lineaments of his earlier relationship are uncovered in his rapidly foundering second attachment.⁴⁶ In retrospect Strindberg might try to turn the persistence of his memories and the sense that experience is a 'circulus vitiosus' into the claim that he had foreseen his fate at twenty 'when I wrote my play *Master Olof*, which has become the tragedy of my own life' (28: 191);⁴⁷ in practice, however, the tendency of the same material to reappear across many years reveals not merely the tenacity but the impermeability to writing of certain pathogenic recollections. With their overlapping lists of titles, motifs, and references to episodes from a past already given frequent expression, the surviving papers in the Royal Library in Stockholm demonstrate how the same topics recur as if each fragment were somehow seeking its place in relation to all the others, whereby the whole constellation of headings would eventually add up to a life. Thus, for example, the episodes of the wine bottle and of his late arrival at Klara school, which are both treated extensively in *The Son of a Servant*, reappear once again among the jottings for later works, and he finds it necessary to retranscribe the Biblical narrative of Hagar and Ishmael which, as a determining aspect of his self-image dating back at least to the mid 1880s and already explicit in the title of his first volume of autobiography, was a story which he must by then have known by heart.⁴⁸

Most pertinent, however, is the evidence in these papers that the episode which haunts his writing more than any other, what he on one occasion calls 'The Irremediable' (*Det Ohjelpliga*) and on another merely 'Affaire W----!',⁴⁹ remains the least written off of all his preoccupations. At any moment material from his relationship with Siri von Essen and her first husband, Carl Gustaf Wrangel, is likely to nudge its way into a text, and for all the artistic mastery of two such central achievements of his 'artistic psychological writing' as *Creditors* and *A Madman's Defence* in which he explores this material, he does not gain a corresponding psychological mastery over the situation they encompass. Invariably associated with feelings of guilt, shame and self-reproach, which provoke him to repeated and vehement denials of what he considers the prevailing view of him as a seducer, a role Strindberg repeatedly evokes in order to repudiate it with elaborate casuistry,⁵⁰ it is, moreover, clear that the special potency of the Wrangel material resides in its ability to activate the archetypal Oedipal scenario, with its *a priori* role for the remainder of his life. The return to Norrtullsgatan 12 that is depicted in *A Madman's Defence*, when Wrangel, with Siri von Essen at his side, opened the door of what had been Strindberg's childhood home from 1864–67, and again in 1871–72 (and for once he could

be excused the characteristic exclamation, 'What a freak of fate' (MD:28) in his re-telling of the encounter), reconstitutes the framework of a family around the rootless young man of letters, whose 'raw dissipations' are dispelled by an atmosphere of 'family peace' and 'homely comfort' (MD:28). 'The austere memories which were associated with the house where she lived' (MD:34) awoken; 'the lost child' becomes 'a member of the family' (55:22, 65); and past and present fuse in his memory as he discerns a rival in the (to him) strikingly masculine baron, and an object of desire in the 'virgin mother I had dreamt of' (MD:44). 'Gradually mother's pale face fused with the baroness's exquisite features' (MD:78), Strindberg writes, as what appears a caprice of destiny gives way to its real determination in nature and the narrator at last possesses the woman of his dreams, only to ask: 'Is it an abnormal instinct? Am I a product of nature's whims? Are my feelings perhaps perverse, since it is my own mother I possess? An unconscious incest of the heart?' (MD: 135)

Once incurred, moreover, the guilt or debt (*skuld*) demands repayment, and the currency at Strindberg's disposal is writing. The possession of Siri and the destruction of his new family ('I could never separate you in my thoughts,' he wrote in dismay to Wrangel, 'I always saw you together in my dreams' (1:304))⁵¹ feeds the treadmill of his mind, where it quickly takes its place on the plane of myth, first as one among the innumerable repetitions of the Fall that Strindberg, like Rousseau, inserts into his own history, and then as the inescapable harbinger and burden of his entire destiny. 'It was thus written "Norrtullsgatan"', he notes; and then, more fully: 'Affaire Wrangel was foreseen, foreshadowed, therefore necessary. Firstly I am forced and tempted to the first divorce; then I am punished because I obeyed the command. The unreasonable (*oefterrättlige*)'.⁵² And while the impression he likes to give, both in the early letters and in the Inferno material, of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some daemonic power, owes as much to the legacy of Byronism as to a personal fate neurosis, the duplication and triplication of this experience in successive marriages, each marked by a characteristic exogamous object choice, demonstrates a compulsion to repeat experience whose underlying drive he in fact noticed himself. For when, at the dress rehearsal of *To Damascus* in 1900, a relative observed that the Norwegian actress, Harriet Bosse, who played The Lady, and who was shortly to become Strindberg's third wife, 'was just like Aunt Philp (my sister Anna)', he rapidly perceived a whole train of likenesses for The Unknown's partner, each one more revealing than its predecessor:

ß (Bosse) is like (1) my second wife (who she has played in Damascus); (2) my sister Anna; (3) my mother (4) Mlle Lecain, the beautiful English woman who wanted to capture me in Paris; and who was like them all: often made a warm motherly impression, so that at Mme Charlotte's

I often wished myself under her warm beautiful woollen coat as in a mother's womb.⁵³

Thus if *A Madman's Defence* affords the clearest articulation of the preoccupation with incest that often surfaces in Strindberg's account of himself, the identification between his sister Anna, his mother, and sometimes one or all of his wives to date, as here, in *The Occult Diary*, indicates material that is never worked through. Already present in *The Son of a Servant*, in the contrast he draws between his 'sisters, of whom the eldest resembled his mother' and 'sexual love' (19:127), it appears in *The Cloister*, where he describes how 'everything erotic' in his feelings for Miss X 'had been repressed' because she resembled 'his own eldest sister' (C:34), and again in a late note where he recalls both how he had been taken for Siri von Essen's brother, and that 'Gunnar Heiberg found my sister like my second wife.'⁵⁴ Evidently he cannot 'cross out and go on' (34:108) any more than the Captain in *The Dance of Death*, whose advice this is,⁵⁵ and it becomes clear that, as he writes, 'Everything is dug up, everything repeats itself!' (30:215).

This archaeological metaphor, so similar in scope to those in which Freud depicts the subterranean nature of traumatic memory traces, is often employed by Strindberg to indicate the relationship of the present to the past. For example, in *Creditors*, Gustav identifies 'the secret wound' from which Adolf suffers with a 'corpse in the cargo you're hiding from yourself!' (23:203), and before he ruthlessly brings what is buried to light, he indicates the more normal process, which is to 'work, grow old, and pile masses of new impressions over the hatchway, so the corpse remains still' (22:204), an idea to which he returns in both *The Dance of Death* (34:40) and *Fagervik and Skamsund* (37:9). But Strindberg's own predicament is more complex, for the writing by which he lives is both a means of laying the past to rest and the route whereby it re-enters the present. In spite of a hopeful suggestion in the material related to one of his late self images, the hero and poet Starkodd, that activation of the repressed is only a temporary effect of language ('the latent memory rises up only when he sings, but he forgets afterwards'),⁵⁶ Strindberg generally acknowledges that there 'is no drink which extinguishes memory without stifling life' (45:276). Memory is exempt from the decay that afflicts the body (44:74), and as in *To Damascus*, where The Unknown exclaims 'Burn! Quench! Burn! Quench! But what won't burn is unfortunately memory – of the past!' (29:212), the burden of the past resists destruction even by what Strindberg calls 'the terrible business of writing, which threatens to burn me alive' (IV:239). Indeed, as he tells Siri, it is precisely 'When one becomes warm from a memory [that] the words come by themselves, one doesn't know from where' (I:197), and like memory or 'the infernal coal fire' of sexuality, which is 'lit to burn right to the grave' (28:362), the writing to which he is committed (and which he so frequently associates

with fire)⁵⁷ is similarly unquenchable because ultimately it is not required to uncover or excavate the past but to cover it over and bury it in words.

The process is described in the *novella*, 'The Romantic Organist on Rånö', an apparently slight tale which sketches, in its account of the apprenticeship and aspirations of the young church organist, Alrik Lundstedt, and his later service in the poor parish of Rånö, the portrait of an artist whose practice, if not his achievement, resembles Strindberg's. For in allowing his 'all re-creative mind' (21:236) to transform whatever he sees or experiences into something else, Lundstedt's behaviour conforms substantially to the definition of the poet as 'a man who possesses imagination, that is an ability to combine phenomena, see connections, arrange and sort out' (22:269), in *Flower Paintings and Animal Pieces*; and as Karl-Åke Kärnell demonstrates, in the final chapter of his stimulating study of Strindberg's imagery, *Strindbergs bildspråk*, when Lundstedt 'relates things to one another in similes and metaphors through free association on the basis of some likeness between the things',⁵⁸ he uses a method that Strindberg employs in the majority of his scientific writings as well as in his fiction.

Characterized by a word which Strindberg frequently adopts as a synonym for art, Lundstedt is endowed with the 'gift of playing' (*att leka* - 21:254). That is to say, the playful pursuit of likenesses, in which he habitually indulges, not only allows him to people his solitude and enrich his impoverished daily existence; it also provides him with a means of interpreting and so disarming the world. With the aid of metaphor and simile, he is able 'to knead the whole of creation according to his fancy' (21:243), so as to master its multifariousness, subordinate it to his desire, and reduce the power of the unknown and the unfamiliar to disturb him. Normally inhibited and (like Strindberg) constrained in his speech, metaphor affords him an 'outlet for his feelings' (21:215) and compensatory 'shivers of respect for his own greatness and power' (21:236), while an ability to discover analogies between diverse phenomena or between past and present, normally permits him 'to play the disturbing impression away' (21:240). In the opening paragraph, for example, he eases the anxiety of his departure for Stockholm by transforming the moon into 'a large, friendly face, with a broad, good-natured smile' (21:194), which he then applies to the aspect of his employer, of whom he is afraid, and the calm induced by his transposition is also evident in a later episode, in his encounter with the organ in Jacob's Church, 'which bore no resemblance to anything else in nature or in art and therefore disturbed him, oppressed him, and made him feel he was under this work of man's hand' (21:218). Disturbed by the anomalous and fearful of a chaos he cannot control, Lundstedt therefore resorts to metaphor and simile as he seeks 'to trace its forms back to other things and thereby to draw near to it, bring it down to him and be calm' (21:218).

What underlies and prompts Lundstedt's artistry, however, is not merely a delight in playing but the desire to forget, a compulsion to conceal the past. 'Playing, a way of concealing' (21:250), the Narrator defines at one point, with the subterfuges of everyday life in mind, and in the analytical seventh chapter, where the summary of Lundstedt's past shifts the Hoffmannesque, Romantic narrative in the direction of a modern case study, it is stressed that the ability 'to play' only began after the disappearance of his mother, as a means of allaying the guilt, which her obscure and violent death had provoked in the young child, beneath a mound of memories.

Strindberg's insight here is twofold. Firstly, he provides a striking account of the aetiology of a mental trauma, and of the way in which Lundstedt gradually represses his feelings of guilt beneath

a thick covering of earth and stones, a whole cairn of other memories, to prevent it from rising up again. And when the trivial events of his drab little life could not provide material fast enough, he played events into being, masses of impressions, and piled up fabrications, hallucinations, imagined sounds in order to construct a thick layer that would cover the dark spot. And as soon as an impression had become a memory, it assumed reality, and was placed like a new stone on the cairn over the one there buried, which was unable to rise up. And so what was buried became as unreal or as real as if it had never occurred, dissolved, evaporated, and disappeared for long periods at a time. (21:245–6)

In demonstrating Strindberg's understanding of the subtleties of repression, this passage combines, as Göran Printz-Påhlson has pointed out, the folk image of the way in which the restless dead are supposed to be prevented from returning to haunt the living by the placing of a stone on the disturbed one's grave each time it is passed, with an analysis that clearly prefigures the use of archeological metaphor by Freud.⁵⁹ But having described how Lundstedt conceals the past beneath inventions contrived in play, he draws the narrative closer to his own experience in relating how 'a kind of urge (had arisen) in Alrik to mix the real and the unreal, a desire to deceive himself had been implanted, a need of avoiding any confrontation with reality had grown up in him' (21:246), thus evoking the testamentary letter to Lundegård in which he makes the often-quoted remark 'I don't know if *The Father* is a work of the Imagination, or if my life has been', and adds the less frequently observed rider, 'If light is shed on this darkness, I will collapse in pieces' (VI:298). By losing himself in roles, Lundstedt prevents the discovery of his secret and blocks the past off from himself, and yet, just as Strindberg finds relief in the practice of literature, he, too, finds a way of relieving himself of his feelings by relating his story in a manner no one else could understand: 'He had discovered an

expressive outlet for his own feelings and perceptions in music, through which he could tell his story, without anyone else understanding what he said or becoming suspicious that he had a secret.' (21:246)

But secondly, and even more prescient than the way in which Strindberg depicts how Lundstedt secures forgetfulness of an all too faithful memory, is his account of the dramatic collapse of these defences wherein the past surges back and overwhelms the present. It is evident that the advances made to Lundstedt by the housekeeper on Rånö, Miss Beate, are open to a sexual interpretation, at least in Lundstedt's troubled mind, and that, in forging a link between past and present by the repetition of what passed on some earlier occasion, her encouraging gesture to the tongue-tied young man somehow makes it impossible for the obscure events surrounding his mother's death to remain repressed: 'He had been woken up and could not go back to sleep.... What had struck Alrik most forcibly was that the stranger's eyes could have the same expression, that her arm could make the same gesture, when she laid her hand upon his knee, and this similarity stretched like a thread between the past and the present and everything between ceased to exist' (21:247). And whether or not Strindberg intended the connection to be made, the malfunctioning of Lundstedt's strategies of repression, in which 'face to face with a powerful reality he could not contrive to play the disturbing impression away' (21:240), illuminates several of the more light-hearted episodes earlier on in the story. For whatever the nature of Lundstedt's involvement in his mother's death (and it is difficult not to concur with Harry Carlson's suggestion that the idea, if not the fact, of incest plays a role, since this would also fit Strindberg's other explanation of Lundstedt's behaviour, namely the atavistic amorality which the isolation of life in the skerries fosters (21:190)), it is evident that even in the first part of the narrative, Lundstedt's 'play' has been of particular importance for his relationships with women. Seated at his post in Jacob's Church, he had elaborated an entirely imaginary relationship with a beautiful girl in the congregation, whom he calls Angelika, and when, later on, his defences are penetrated by Miss Beate and reality overwhelms him, his forlorn wish remains 'to rather have Angelika for ever than the house-keeper on the manor for life' (21:243). Real women, as the narrative indicates on several occasions, always render him speechless, which is why, in the solitude of his organ loft, he elaborates his Angelika fantasy in the first place. As Carlson observes, 'real women provoke irruptions from his unconscious where memories of the past collide with deep urges from the present, and where guilt and anxiety reside,⁶⁰ and when the onanistic retreat which had once preserved him from the blandishments of the whores of Tyska Prästgatan is dispelled by Miss Beate's importunate gesture (and the gulf between past and present dissolves when he perceives her similarity as a woman who 'wanted him' (21:243) with

the women of the town), the memory of his mother is metamorphosised, as woman so often is in Strindberg, into a whore.

What eventually permits Lundstedt to rediscover ‘the gift of playing’ and so ‘be calm afterwards’ (21:251) is the knowledge that others, too, ‘possessed their secret corners, where they hid bodies, covered them with words, hid them under flowers, wreathes, ribbons, showy texts’ (21:250). By recognizing that subterfuge is general, and that words often provide ‘the protective disguise’ (VII:138) on which it depends, ‘The Romantic Organist on Rånö’ anticipates a theme that dominates much of Strindberg’s production after *Inferno*, when his life-long experience in the manipulation of language confirms that men live not in the real world but in their imaginative projections. That Strindberg himself uses language ‘to bury’ the past and so escape a sense of guilt is something he virtually admits when, in a letter to Harriet Bosse during the writing of what would become *A Dream Play*, he recalls: ‘I am writing ‘The Growing Castle’, great, beautiful as a dream... I wander here like the Organist on Rånö and transform ruins’ (XIV:131). Elsewhere he goes further. In *Legends*, for example, he writes openly of the use he makes of dream: ‘Do you know what makes life bearable for me? That I sometimes imagine it is only half-real, a horrible dream, which has been inflicted on us as a punishment’ (28:316); and in a *A Blue Book* he argues that ‘in order to be able to live one must be like a sleepwalker and one must also be a poet, dupe oneself and others’ (46:142). For many of the characters of the later works, the past is covered by a veil they are reluctant to part; to them the ability ‘to play’ or ‘poetise’ (*dikta*) is essential, as an exchange in *The Dance of Death* indicates:

Kurt: I’ve noticed how you’ve fabricated (*diktat*) your life, and fabricated what surrounds you, too.

Captain: How else could I have lived? How could I have stood it?...

Then there comes a moment when the ability to fabricate, as you call it, stops. And then reality stands forth in all its nakedness!... It’s terrifying. (34:108–9)

It is a view which the Captain (like the Father, a writer in uniform) shares with his author: as Strindberg wrote to his old confidant, Littmansson: ‘And besides, when reality fails you, then invent an existence for yourself, as I have invented a person when I became tired of myself (XIV:217).

More immediately, however, it is possible as Kärnell suggests, to relate Lundstedt’s practice to Strindberg’s general method in the years preceding the *Inferno* crisis. If, in explaining how ‘I live in my work, looking before me, sometimes looking behind me, in my memories, which I can treat like a child’s building blocks, making all kinds of things out of them, the same memory serving in all kinds of ways for one imaginative structure’ (38:173),

he eventually clarifies the playful use to which he puts voluntary memory (and as he adds, 'since the number of arrangements is limitless, I derive a sense of infinity from my games'), a comment of Goethe's, also quoted in *Alone*, suggests that writing in general provides him with the means 'both to rectify my conception of the outer world and to bring order and calm to my inner life' (38:199). Where writing affords 'a sense of infinity', it lends events 'an impression of premeditated design' (38:192), and in reading his life or accounting for any single event in it, Strindberg is continually engaged in 'seeking likenesses everywhere'. For Strindberg everything must signify, and intent on extracting a meaning from each fragment of experience, he is driven by the 'imaginative and emotional need for unity, a need to apprehend an otherwise dispersed number of circumstances and to put them in some sort of order,'⁶¹ which Edward Said sees as inherent in narrative, to seek the universal design that encompasses his life, to accomplish, in the discovery of what he terms 'analogies = correspondences = harmonies' (27:357), the tranquil formula of peace for which he strives. For disorder pained him and the unexplained offended. They instilled 'a disharmony which makes me ill' (28:145), a sensation in which mental turmoil manifests itself in physical discomfort. Confronted by the composition of nitrogen, for example, which he describes as 'formless' (27:164), he writes to Lidfors of 'a certain discomfort at the thought of the current view of the composition of air and water; I feel a lopsidedness (*snedhet*) in the whole of my being when I think of the contemporary theory of air, an oppression which I never experience when I regard a natural object' (VIII:239). Similarly, he tells the Norwegian novelist, Alexander Kielland, that 'when I see something go haywire or a stupidity or injustice take hold, I am askew (*sned*) in my body until I can sort out the question' (VI:110): it offends the sense of beauty referred to in *A Dream Play*, where the spectator is invited to draw a comparison between unaligned candlesticks and the moral and intellectual disorder of a house 'gone off the rails' (*på sned* – 36:257), and of which he writes, in a late note on 'The Imperfections of Life': 'If one is born with a sense of beauty which begins with order, and if one is brought up to complete orderliness, the whole of existence thus becomes an affliction... If I lose a coat button, and get an ill-matched button sewn awry (*på sned*) so that my coat is twisted, I become ill, I can't help it!'⁶²

But whether he writes of his own life, the natural world, the history of Sweden, world history, or the moral order he attempts to discern behind them all, Strindberg's desire is 'to perceive the coherence of the disordered' (24:51). What he seeks is a 'Homogeneous cosmos' (46:231), as he entitles one section of *A Blue Book*, and behind the superficial scientific rigour of the still Naturalist discourse of *By the Open Sea*, there is, in Axel Borg's 'scientific equations which could from what appeared to be only a few premises (or which seemed few,

because the links had been forgotten) draw new conclusions, where as in a chemical compound two older ideas merged with one another and formed a new conception' (24:50), already a theory of metaphor metaphorically conveyed, that supplants the chain of evolutionary theory in which he had previously tried to locate himself. Proceeding by associative leaps and metaphorical couplings rather than by patient deduction and the methodical accumulation of data, he delves into his memory to organize the world ('only through his enormous accumulation of memories could he relate all the things he viewed to one another' (24:42)) and discovers, like Lundstedt, how 'to make nature intimate with himself (24:126). 'It makes me calm [*lugn*] to know' (24:126), Borg admits, and in its stress on peace or calm his remark suggests the many occasions on which Strindberg's own speculations prompt him to exclaim 'How calming [*lugnande*] it is to be able to explain everything!' (27:599) or admit that 'with this premise there is order and calm in nature!' (27:174), speculations, moreover, which sometimes lead him to abandon the words in which he formulates his life for other formulas of peace. The not over-scrupulous manipulation of chemical formulae, of atomic weights, and of the comparative measurements of phenomena, both man-made and in nature, are, like his recourse to the Kabbala, number magic, and theories of periodicity in history and the individual life,⁶³ speculations in 'Celestial Arithmetic' (46:274), in 'the formulae according to which the plans for the work of creation are drawn up for our planet' (27:538), and all these attempts to decipher the code of 'the master builder who has created the world with number and proportion' (46:403) and read his signature in such 'messages to earth' (27:234) as meteors, stones, the wings of butterflies, the petals of flowers, the flight of birds, and the formation of clouds, are ultimately intended to instil calm in the author of the script in which all these communications appear, Strindberg. 'The thought that we are everywhere at home and a part of the cosmos provides a feeling of homeliness and security' (46:231), he asserts in *A Blue Book* (a comment arrived at by a method glossed by Freud in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* when he observes: 'analogies, it is true, decide nothing, but they can make one feel more at home'),⁶⁴ and the complementary discovery 'to the knowledge that 'everything repeats itself,' namely that 'everything is in everything, everywhere' (allt är i allt, överallt - 27:262), abolishes chance and reveals 'the endless continuity in the apparently great disorder' (27:560). Thus the hidden order and beauty of 'la cryptographie celeste' (27:246) intimates to Strindberg that his life, too, must possess a meaning if only he reads (and writes) it aright.

But even in a world conceived in terms of repetition, where 'everything is in everything' and 'everything repeats itself,' writing offers a means of achieving a periodical renewal that it is easy to regard as a self-analytical cure. There is, first,

the confessional impulse evident in many letters (for example, those to Bjørnson in 1884 (IV:144) and von Steijern in 1892 (IX:29)) in which Strindberg seeks out an addressee to whom he feels an obligation to ‘ransack his heart’ (IX:29), a process that is also sketched in ‘The Romantic Organist’, where the Narrator describes how Lundstedt ‘bore his guilt and wished to be free of it. He wanted to go straight to the pastor and tell him how everything had happened, be spoken to firmly, take his punishment and then be calm [*lugn* – 21:251].⁶⁵ This process is largely a matter of the attempt, evident throughout Strindberg’s production, to alleviate the sense of guilt which is a fundamental constituent of his experience. ‘I long for a torture which will re-establish my sense of balance in my relationship to society, so that I don’t have to go on feeling in debt’, The Unknown declares (29:124), while the Narrator observes, of Johan, in *The Son of a Servant*: ‘He wanted to have a real punishment; it would restore the balance; it would relieve his remorse’ (19:88). The desire to achieve tranquility in this respect is conveyed in terms of debit and credit, of a need to balance the books, settle accounts, and draw up a balance sheet (*bokslut*) in which ‘he set off debt (or guilt – *skuld*) against debt’ (44:78). For as Ruskin noticed, in *Unto This Last*, the goddess of guilt and revenge, Tisiphone, was ‘a person versed in the highest branches of arithmetic and punctual in her habits’,⁶⁶ and Strindberg is able to evolve these ideas so neatly because the semantics of payment and debt and those of guilt are the same in Swedish as in several other European languages. They permit a link between morality and economy that allows the structural identity of guilt and debt, contract and duty, price and retaliation, in ‘this muddled account of in and out, debit and credit, which is called life’ (40:78). Moreover, both debt and guilt are retentive of the past like autobiography, and the idea of moral creditors, of accounts to be settled before life may proceed, is an insistent one in a project where justice and revenge are interchangeable terms.⁶⁷ Initially presented as components of a Naturalist justice in which what is written is employed to restore the balance violated by the experience of a life with no recourse to the divine (hence his boast ‘I take care of my Nemesis Divina myself’ (VII:298)), each book represents an instance of debt collecting, the consequence of an irrepressible need to speak out and ‘restore the balance’ (22:157): ‘Il fallait que je te dise cela!’, he tells Frida Uhl, as he will Harriet Bosse, ‘parce que chez moi la revanche est un sentiment inné, irrésistible qui joue le rôle de justice, un instinct de rétablir l’équilibre’ (X:299), and after each public inspection of accounts his impulse is often to remark: ‘A debt is paid and we were quits’ (22:157).⁶⁸

Thus the rhythm of Strindberg’s production frequently follows the sequence described in *Black Banners*, where the Naturalist writer, Zachris, conceives a book which explicitly recalls the writing and publication of the account of Strindberg’s first marriage, *A Madman’s Defence*:

There was now only one way to free himself from the poison: to write her out of himself; to put it all down on paper and then burn the manuscript, after it had been read by those closest to him, or if he was in need, to publish it in Germany. This thought revived him. To be able for once to say openly everything that had for years oppressed and pained him, at the same time unravelling the whole of this account which had simply run on without any reckoning being made; to be able to defend himself, and – why not? Be revenged!

It would be to begin a new life, wiping out all the old. (41:213–4)

This movement from a desire for self-expression, by way of a compulsion to unravel the past to drawing up a statement of accounts, defending himself, and finally, having obtained his revenge, to beginning a new life, is common to Strindberg's autobiographical writings, which are written 'in order to untangle my thoughts and free myself (XI:268). For renewal and the new are evidently at the heart of a process which is, particularly in *Inferno*, at once intellectual, moral, and artistic in its intended metamorphosis. Just as his attempts during the 1890s in his scientific writings to elide the distinction between the inorganic and the organic demonstrate his overriding preoccupation with immortality and the imperishability of matter, of 'life's existence everywhere' (27:228) where 'everything flows into everything else' (27:687) and 'nothing can cease to exist' (27:245), so the images of transformation and metamorphosis, which characterize this writing, indicate a concern with the idea of rebirth or immortalization which centres upon himself. Thus, from observing the transformation of a larva into a moth ('The larva is dead within the chrysalis, yet it lives and rises up... a higher form in beauty and freedom' (27:245)), Strindberg develops his conception of 'nekrobios' (XI:114), or life in death, which encourages him to hope that like Saul he too 'will be transformed into another person' (XI:157). 'Am I sloughing off my skin?', he asks, in the essay 'Deranged Sensations', 'am I in the process of becoming a modern man?... I am as nervous as a crab which has cast off its shell, as irritable as the silkworm in the process of transformation' (27:606), and in *Inferno*, where the modish discourse of the *detraqué* gives way to the no less up-to-dated is course of religious conversion, he relates the history of his 'education to a new life' (XI:283) as the outcome of a process he has actively promoted rather than passively undergone, a 'vita nuova' (XI:83) wherein he seeks simultaneous confirmation of his personal immortality, his moral salvation, and a form of art. Similarly, 'dead in both a physical, moral, and economic sense' (V:277), in *The Son of a Servant* he performs what he regards as an autopsy on his own corpse in order 'to begin again, undeluded, purged' (VI:69); 'écrit devant la mort' (IX:339), *A Madman's Defence* is also presented as an alternative to death (MD:9); and in *Alone* he describes how

... by cutting off my links with other people I seemed at first to lose my strength, but at the same time my ego began, as it were, to crystallize, to concentrate around a kernel, where everything I had ever experienced collected, was digested and then used as nourishment for my soul... This, at last, is to be alone: to spin oneself into the silk of one's own soul, to become a pupa and wait for the metamorphosis, which will not fail to come. Meanwhile one lives upon one's experiences, and by telepathically living the lives of others. Death and resurrection; a new training for something unknown and new. (38:128, 145)

Moreover, each succeeding autobiographical volume does not merely retrace the past. Rather, the process is a dynamic one, in which self-discovery, 'coming to terms with oneself and the past' (38:147), is continually renewed and constantly deferred. Each time he achieves 'the synthesis of all the hitherto unresolved antitheses of my life' (38:147), the result is not a final summation but a temporary halt, only to find that 'by studying the whole of my life I have arrived at discoveries which I did not expect' (VI:116). In contemplating the old self he has recreated in language, he finds that when the narrative catches up with the present it re-opens the fore closed future onto a new life which will in turn compel additional texts. Having written his own obituary, 'the corpse stands up and publishes his memoirs' (V:320), and it is by recovering his steps that Strindberg proceeds along the road to Damascus.

Repetition thus evokes the dialectic once formulated by Kierkegaard and pondered in that form by Strindberg, whereby 'what is repeated has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but precisely the fact that it has been gives to repetition the category of novelty... when one says that life is a repetition one affirms that existence which has been now becomes.'⁶⁹ For in the narrative discourse produced in autobiography, the repetition of the life once lived is imbued with difference: it is fashioned anew. And where Freud certainly identified a kind of destructive repetition which stresses 'the perpetual recurrence of the same thing',⁷⁰ with the death wish, a form of repetition that may well suggest Strindberg's continual reproduction of the same interpersonal situation, there is also a type of repetition that cannot be defined simply in terms of reiteration or mechanical replica, and which serves the pleasure principle rather than the drive to destruction. It is constructive and pleasurable because it transforms a passive predicament into an active situation, and in Freud's work the *locus classicus* for this type of repetition is the celebrated description of the child's game, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which a cotton reel attached to a piece of string is thrown away and then recovered to the accompaniment of the vocables 'fort' and 'da'. Here, Freud deduces, the passive situation of being overpowered by the absence of the mother is transformed by the child into an active mastery of the disagreeable experience by inflicting a simulacrum of

the event upon itself. In this game, which is 'repeated untiringly', and in all play in which 'the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game,'⁷¹ there is in miniature that constructive repetition which Freud had previously recognized in his essay 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through', where in describing the transference in which the patient repeats the repressed material as a form of contemporary experience rather than as the reconstruction of the past, he remarks:

We may say that the patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without of course knowing that he is repeating it... As long as the patient is in the treatment he cannot escape from the compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering.⁷²

In this discussion, repetition emerges not as a reproduction of a previous event, of something already present in the subject's mind, but as the production of a piece of real experience, and as Freud points out, in relation to such psychical processes as phantasies, emotional impulses and thought connection, the irony of this type of repetition is that what is repeated is something that is not recalled: 'In these processes it particularly often happens that something is 'remembered' which could never have been 'forgotten' because it was never at any time noticed – was never conscious.'⁷³

And it is on the ground of an analogous absence that Strindberg's autobiographical narratives constitute themselves. For although narrative (and especially autobiography) implies that it is the repetition of an antecedent presence, that it retraces ground already covered and repeats events that have already occurred, it is in fact the case that it 'repeats' by creating since, as Emile Benveniste has pointed out, 'Le langage *re-produit* la réalité. Cela est à entendre de la manière la plus littérale: la réalité est produite à nouveau par le truchement du langage.'⁷⁴ Thus the volumes of Strindberg's autobiography (and still less his novels and plays) are not the mere repetition of prior events, repositories in which the past is embalmed or interred, but the means by which he turns it to account and fashions himself anew in a text wherein the past he retraces also returns of itself to create an artistic web of analogies in which his life is no longer a succession of discrete events but a meaningful work of art whereby (like Alrik Lundstedt) he mediates his relationship with the world about him.