

**A DREAM PLAY: AUGUST STRINDBERG'S
EXPRESSIONIST PILGRIMAGE
IN SEARCH OF GOD**

**ABSTRACT OF
A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGE**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS**

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October 1974**

August Strindberg referred to himself as a man standing between two epochs at odds with each other. He was born in mid-nineteenth century, a time in which the previously sacrosanct institution of the church and its teachings were being threatened by the emphasis on scientific theory. The result was a profound sense of insecurity in an artist who desperately wanted to accept the positive existence of God and the relationship of a Divine Being to man.

Strindberg's passionate search for God was a motif that shaped the course of his personal life as well as his artistic career. He sought a supreme and omnipotent force to whom he could subjugate himself and from whom he could gain a sense of power that would alleviate his own feelings of weakness and inadequacy. His childhood experiences of paternal rejection had fostered an ambivalence toward authority and determined the character of his search for God. Strindberg spent a lifetime seeking a loving authority figure but could never entirely accept the idea of God without the fear that he would ultimately experience the rejection that was implicit in his first experience with authority.

The influences of such nineteenth century literary currents as neo-romanticism and naturalism were important in Strindberg's development of dramatic expressionism. The

neo-romantic view of man as a near celestial being and its antithesis, naturalism, which viewed man as a "human animal" whose behavior could be understood scientifically, were synthesized by Strindberg who sought to better understand the soul of man by subjecting it to careful scrutiny.

Perhaps more than of any other writer, it has often been noted that Strindberg "wrote himself" and it was through his art that he not only reflected his personal struggles with life but also attempted to resolve them. As the artist approached his middle years, he underwent an intense emotional and spiritual crises which he referred to as his Inferno Crisis. After this time, his works became more introspective in nature. He no longer accepted science as a valid method in seeking reality and his literary style reflected a change from naturalism to expressionism--from a focus on outer reality to that of inner reality.

His poignant expressionist work, A Dream Play, utilized the dream form as a means of exploring the "reality of the soul." In this clearly autobiographical work, Strindberg deals with the meaning of man's suffering. He concludes in this work that God pays heed to the suffering of man and that through these sufferings man purifies himself and is ultimately saved. Despite this affirmation of God and the meaning of suffering, a current of doubt and anxiety runs throughout the play.

Strindberg's double need--to affirm the meaning of life and at the same time to question its seeming

contradictions and absurdity--is clearly expressed in A Dream Play. The expressionist style of this play offers Strindberg an effective vehicle for pursuing the desperate search for God that was the focus of much of his life and works.