

Essentials of Expressionism and August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*: A Theoretical Study in Context

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study August Strindberg's A Dream Play within the perspective of Expressionist theatre. The unconventional features of theatrical expressionism like; dreamlike atmosphere, setting, disjointed plot, typification, rhapsodic and poetic dialogue, etc. are thoroughly studied in context. One of the main objectives is to illustrate Strindberg's mode of weaving together the form and content in the 'spirit of a dream' by employing dreamlike form and strikingly framing the content that itself reflects on dreamlike vanity of human life. This accentuates that the clueless flashes in a dream are tantamount to the otiose human strive in real life. Sigmund Freud's view of a dream being true to real and 'an expression of repressed drives' is applicable on A Dream Play due to its semi-autobiographical merit which, featuring as an element, is itself at the core of expressionist theatre. This theoretical paradigm, thus, is used to argue Strindberg's way of giving expression to his 'personal neuroses' and the appropriation of otherwise intriguing title of this drama. Use of symbols also characterizes expressionist theatre which comes handy in A Dream Play. This paper, therefore, is also an effort to analyse such symbols remarkably significant in both the form as well as in the content of the play under study.

Keywords: Expressionism, dream, unconventionality, neurosis, suffering, symbol, subjectivity.

“The direct origin of Expressionism may probably be found in the later work of STRINDBERG: [A] *Dream Play* overtly tries to translate into drama the logic and movement of the dream...”
(Taylor 1966, 100).

INTRODUCTION

Modern Drama, generally, is wrought with innovative forms marking an escape from the hackneyed patterns of classical and neo-classical theatre. It ranges from realistic to anti-realistic movements in theatre with one common thread, i.e. experimentation of something ‘new’. With modern drama a cliché, ‘mushrooming of isms’ is often used. Expressionism is one such ‘ism’ which remarkably wobbled the world of drama. Emerging largely from Germany in 1910, Expressionism radicalized the spirit of theatre shifting emphasis from exterior “to show inner psychological realities” (Cuddon 2013, 261-62) of a modern man. The Expressionist Theatre in its essence has been a revolt against the theatre of realism escaping from its objective strands and emerged as a movement bent with the subjective slant towards human life. J. L. Styan in his book *Modern drama in theory and practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (1981) unequivocally observes:

Now the stage had a term which could identify any play or production that departed from realism and showed life in a highly personal, idiosyncratic manner, the form of the play ‘expressing’ its content, and it was particularly applicable to the perfervid movement which gripped the German theatre in the 1910s and early 1920s (Styan 1981, 2).

In an expressionist drama an artist centres the imagination on the characters’ psychological makeup representing the individual as well as the collective human emotion. A typical analysis of the expressionistic form of the drama is vouchsafed in the book titled, *The Collected Essays of Arthur Miller* (2015) as, “it is a form of play which manifestly seeks to dramatize the conflict of either social, religious, ethical, or naked roles, rather than to present psychologically realistic human characters in a more or less realistic environment” (Miller

2015, 96). An intrinsic notion about Expressionist theatre is that a dramatist focuses on the conflicting; social, religious, ethical forces etc. having caught an individual, “standing alone and afraid in an industrial, technological and urban society which is disintegrating into chaos” (Abrams 2012, 117).

The Expressionist theatre emerged with an anti-realistic ardour in modern theatre which, “featured shocking and gutsy dialogue, boldly exaggerated scenery, piercing sounds, bright lights, an abundance of primary colours, a not very subtle use of symbols, and a structure of short, stark, jabbing scenes that built to a powerful (and usually deafening) climax.” (Cohen 2003, 253)

J. L. Styan in *Modern drama in theory and practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (1981) observes the following characteristic features of an Expressionist drama:

- I. Dreamlike atmosphere; unrealistic aura and lighting.
- II. Unconventional setting; wrought with bizarre shapes and sensational colours.
- III. Disjointed and episodic plot.
- IV. Typification of characters; identified by nameless designations and types.
- V. Poetical and rhapsodic language and dialogue (Styan 2003, 4-5).

One of the early German expressionistic dramas is *The Son* (1914) written by Alter Hasenclever. This was followed by *Man & The Masses* (1921) and *The Machine Wreckers* (1922) by Ernst Toller (1893-1939). Another foundational figure is George Kaiser (1878-1845) best known in this genre for his play *Morn to Midnight* (1918). Though expressionism had its origin in Germany it had a far-reaching impact on the European and American Theatre. Eugene O’Neil’s plays like *The Hairy Ape* (1922) and *Emperor Jones* (1920) and Elmer Rice’s *The Adding Machine* (1923) are phenomenal in the American context.

Nonetheless, the above mentioned theatrical pioneers had their predecessor in Swedish August Strindberg, “the most modern of moderns, the greatest interpreter in the theatre of the characteristic spiritual conflicts which constitute the drama – the blood! – of our lives today.” (O’Neil 1923) Besides his exquisite theatrical works like; *The Father* (1887), *The Comrades* (1888), *Miss Juliet* (1888), *The Ghost of Sonata* (1907); *A Dream Play* (1902) is quite outstanding,

fraught with diverse theatrical ideals. According to Elena Balzamo, “when it was published in 1902, the play seemed an exotic flower among ‘ordinary’ plants, and although it grew up in the same soil, it was totally different from them” (Balzamo 55).

August Strindberg centres *A Dream Play* on Agnes, daughter of the Vedic god Indra, who descends on earth to witness the varied issues concerning human life. Agnes, called as The Daughter in this drama, descends with a duty assigned by Indra i.e. to explore and judge if the relentless complaining of people on earth is justified:

The Voice: I fear me not – for even their mother tongue
Is named complaint. A race most hard to please,
And thankless, are the dwellers on the earth—
[...]
Descend, that you may see and hear, and then
Return and let me know if their complaints
And wailings have some reasonable ground — (Strindberg and Bjorkman 27).

The Daughter incarnated as a beautiful girl starts her earthly experience by marrying The Lawyer who along with The Officer and The Poet forms a trio which is the main focus in this drama. Right from the beginning she experiences terrible human misery in which almost all the forty characters, she meets, are subjected to. She feels the trauma and agony of the people which makes her realize that “men are to be pitied”. She prays to god to consider the pathetic state of humans and let them get rid of their suffering, “Everlasting One, hear them! Life is evil! Men are to be pitied!” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 67). After thoroughly experiencing the miserable human condition The Daughter rids herself off from the mortal world and ascends back with a promise not to forget humans but would take their grievances to god:

The Daughter: Farewell! To all thy fellow-men known
That where I go I shall forget them not;
And in thy name their grievance shall be placed
Before the throne. Farewell! (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 104).

Therefore, in this otherwise mythical frame Strindberg marvellously reflects on human suffering; vexed relations, poverty, class struggle, etc.

The current study attempts to examine *A Dream Play* as a representative work in view of the features essentially employed in Expressionist theatre enumerated by J. L. Styan in his work *Modern drama in theory and practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (1981), largely common to what Robert Cohen has mentioned in his magnum opus book *Theatre* (2003) and almost to all other critics of the Modern Drama.

TRACING EXPRESSIONISM IN A DREAM PLAY

All the above discussed features are corroborated by Strindberg in *A Dream Play* a succinct account of which is given in the book titled, *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism* (1965) as:

A Dream Play...is an exquisite expressionistic drama. It is well rounded out with all the characteristics of expressionism: and there are, furthermore, well moulded into the art-product. Typification, autobiographical data, dream character, distortion, contrapuntal method and other factors leave not the echo of suspicion that *A Dream Play* can be anything but an expressionistic drama (Dahlstrom 1965, 193).

The above account proves that *A Dream Play* is an exemplary expressionist venture. In fact an expressionist drama cannot be acknowledged without these fundamentals. In effect, they create a remarkable distinction between expressionist and all the other types of dramas. An elucidation of the featuring of such essentials in *A Dream Play* is given below:

DREAMLIKE ATMOSPHERE; UNREALISTIC AURA AND LIGHTING

The atmosphere in this play abetted by unrealistic lighting is manifest right from the prologue wherein a celestial ambience is patterned with the constellations of ¹Leo, Virgo, and Libra:

¹ Leo, Virgo and Libra are the constellations of Zodiac, an area of the sky that extends approximately 8° north or south of the ecliptic, the path of the sun.

The background represents cloud banks that resemble corroding slate cliffs with ruins of castles and fortresses. The constellations of Leo, Virgo, and Libra are visible, and from their midst the planet Jupiter is shining with a strong light. (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 25).

The planet Jupiter is shining with strong light which does lend this drama a bizarre expressionistic atmosphere.

Significantly, atmosphere at length is dreamlike. The title of this play itself suggests its dreamlike nature. This drama is quite unique in adopting a dream-like mode as a genre thus, conforming one of the features of Expressionist theatre which Dahlstrom reckons, i.e. “dream character”. Adopting a mode pertains to the dream-like structure hence, the title of this play is appropriate. To substantiate this view the reference to *A Reminder* in Edwin Bjorkman’s translation of Strindberg’s dramas titled, *Plays* (1913), is remarkable:

...the author has tried to imitate the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream. Anything may happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist...The characters split, double, multiply, vanish, solidify, blur, clarify. But one consciousness reigns above them all—that of the dreamer; and before it there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples, no laws (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 24).

The above account implies the form of this play as fragmented and in such a sequence Strindberg has succeeded in connecting the ‘fragments’ of varied characters and ideas together substantiating Sigmund Freud’s idea that, “the dream renders an account of the connection which is undeniably present between all the portions of the dream thoughts by combining this material into unity as a situation or a proceeding” (Freud 1899, 305).

However, a reader comes across an underlying ambiguity in this play. The title invites readers to figure out the ‘dreamer’ only to lead them in a conundrum. Owing to this intricacy, ambiguity and mystery in this play; in its title, structure and the way the theme is patterned, Elena Balzamo terms it as a “theatrical monster” adapted by directors “relatively few [though] the commentators are legion” (Balzamo 55). According to J. L. Styan it, “was considered

unstageable, and a production was not attempted until 1907, when it was taken off after twelve performances” (Styan 1981, 28).

Juxtaposing form with content

In this play the form and content are uniquely weaved together. Martin Lamm argues, “the play tries to reproduce as closely as possible the structure and the mechanisms of a dream, but without losing its relationship with the reality behind the dream-like sequences” (qtd. in Balzamo 56). Thus, dream-like form is yoked with the content i.e. reality of life as a dream and this reality implies meaninglessness, nothingness or absurdity of human endeavour. Strindberg seems to incorporate the idea that life, owing to its complications, endorses absurdity, hence it has the dream-like nature sans any tangible purpose. To a large extent, dream at commonplace posits nothingness. Strindberg asserts this view through the perspective of *The Daughter*, “thus the world, existence, mankind, are nothing but a phantom, an appearance, a dream image!” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 100) Strindberg’s artistic brilliance is evident in this juxtaposition of dream and reality. Both the structure and theme are patterned together in a dream. Dream works in both ways, as form and equally as the content. A recourse to Martin Lamm about the reality of life as a dream implies:

...we have to accept the writer’s statement according to which our existence here on earth is merely a dream. In order to illustrate it Strindberg presents reality in dream light. The mysterious somnambulists on stage are connected by perfectly concrete ties, still each of them is simply dreaming about others. Sometimes their dreams coincide with those of the spectator, and the result is a fabulous web of different dreams, an inextricable nightmare of our earthly existence (qtd. in Balzamo 57).

The reflection of the absurdity, meaninglessness or nothingness of human existence is a case in context. An idea artistically framed through a series of characters, which for Lamm are the “somnambulists”. The writer makes the reader to peek into the lives of these somnambulists, sleepwalking and daydreaming i.e. experiencing their misery. Dream in this context is the living experience. It is reality experienced by different characters. This view

is supported by Einhorn also, averring, “that [it] is not the dream of a single character.” (qtd. in Khan 2017, 169) Interestingly, Strindberg has translated the title of this play into French as “Reverie” which means a ‘daydream’ (Balzamo 57). This is again in-line with Strindberg looking into the absurdity of life dramatizing through the idea that life is like a dream. Thus, reverie is an apt translation. Characters experience this absurdity in dream, not common, but a reverie.

They practice life as perpetually miserable hence, absurd like a dream. They are daydreamers experiencing life as a dream in a broad daylight. The below given conversation between The Daughter and The Poet is quite evident for this unusual juxtaposition of the form and the content:

The Daughter: The Blind Man? Fairhaven? I must have been dreaming of them. And the lover of Alice, “Plain” Edith, Foulstrand and the Quarantine², sulphur and carbolic acid, the graduation in the church, the Lawyer’s office, the passageway and Victoria, the Growing Castle and the Officer—All this I have been dreaming—

The Poet: It was in one of my poems.

The Daughter: You know then what poetry is—

The Poet: I know then what dreaming is. But what is poetry?

The Daughter: Not reality, but more than reality—not dreaming, but daylight dreams (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 85-86).

The Daughter experiencing human life with utmost suffering, terms this entire phenomenon as dreaming. The experience tacitly implies dreaming. In the above given textual account The Poet parallels dreaming with art which according to The Daughter is “more than reality—not dreaming, but daylight dreams—”. Thus, it is the essence of this play where the juxtaposition of real-life experience, art and dream is intrinsic. Martin Lamm avers, “Dream, reality, fiction – in fact, for Strindberg, these three words denote one and the same thing” (qtd. in Balzamo 57). To quote Dr Lone, “life is a dream is life” (Lone 7). Therefore, one can safely argue that *A Dream Play* is an artistic-

² Quarantine is a sanitary measure to prevent the spread of a contagious plague by isolating the infected for a specific period.

dream, or what critics would remark in view of expressionism, “is a kind of a scripted dream” (Styan 1981, 4).

***A Dream Play* and Carl Enoch Dahlstrom's idea of “autobiographical data”**

Dahlstrom's view in his book *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism* (1965) that *A Dream Play* is an expressionist drama given its reflection on “autobiographical data”, is quite appropriate, because this drama is based on August Strindberg's personal neurosis known as ‘Inferno Crisis’. This crisis resulted out of his three consecutive failed marriages and his experiment with occult in France, hence, dubbing this play as, “the child of my greatest pain” (qtd. in Kunhi 2014, 7862). This play is a semi-autobiographical due to its implicit representation of some important aspects of the playwright's own life.

The first such reflection is in the form of unsettled married life of its chief characters i.e. The Daughter and The Lawyer which represents Strindberg's own troubled married life with his three wives. The first marriage with Siri Von Essen, a Swedish speaking Finish theatre actress took place in 1877 and ended in 1891, the second with Austrian writer and translator Frida Uhl in 1893 and dissolved in 1895 and the third with Harriet Bose, a Swedish-Norwegian actress happened in 1901 and ended in 1904. This persisting anxiety in terms of his marriages is rendered artistically in *A Dream Play*. Soon after tying a knot with The Lawyer, The Daughter's domestic miseries start and at personal level she starts experiencing the wretchedness of human life. Their domestic life becomes torturous. The Lawyer has meagre means to make the ends meet. The place the couple lives in is chaotic. It is a small old and squalid house with cracks on the walls on which paper strips are pasted to keep away cold much to the chagrin of The Daughter who feels it suffocating (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 52). However, The Lawyer's poverty does not worry The Daughter much. The reproachable matter for her is the squalid house they live in. The suffocating environment in their house concerns her as she overtly avers that, “Poverty I was prepared for, but not for dirt” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 53).

Usually, in domestic life, any newly married couple wishes to have a child to fill their life with bliss. The child also becomes a potent

cause to amplify the love between the couple and to strengthen its bond as also in this play, The Daughter and The Lawyer agreed to get knotted despite much difference, for they thought that their children might play a role of a connecting link between them as The Daughter avers, “Then come the children and bring with them a diversion that remains for ever new” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 51). But, that too becomes a cause of suffering for them. The lawyer exhibits distress over the existence of their child as he believes that its “crying scares away [his] clients” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 52). He realizes and avers that, “the child that was to become a link and a blessing – it becomes our ruin” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 53).

In addition to the squalid place, the couple’s suffering continues because of their remarkable difference in the choice of meals. Each one of them has his own keen sense of taste. Owing to the meagre means of The Lawyer he could not afford fish as a meal, hence, he likes cabbage only to distaste his wife The Daughter who is fond of the fish:

The Lawyer: Cabbage is cheap, nourishing, and good to eat.

The Daughter: For those who like cabbage – to me it is repulsive... What are we to eat, then? Fish? But you hate fish? (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 53).

Therefore, given their mounting tension in the domestic sphere The Daughter becomes nervous and her view about marriage all together changes and she develops a deep resentment for it. After her experience she feels, “it is very difficult to be married – it is more difficult than anything else. One has to be an angel, I think!” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 55).

This troubled married life is further detailed when The Lawyer reminds The Daughter about familial duties like towards their child. The Daughter tries to deny sensibly citing higher duties as god’s daughter more vital:

The Lawyer: [Enters and takes **The Daughter** by the arm] Have you forgotten your duties?

The Daughter: Oh, heavens, no! But I have higher duties.

The Lawyer: And your child?

The Daughter: My child what of it?

The Lawyer: Your child is crying for you.

The Daughter: My child! Woe, I am earth-bound! And this pain in my breast, this anguish what is it?

The Lawyer: Don't you know?

The Daughter: No (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 97).

Although she speaks sense while bringing forth the idea of higher duties, but, her negligence towards family is more significantly under focus. This lack of concern for family is tantamount to the lack of compromises in the unsettled married life of Strindberg himself. The Lawyer's worry and helplessness reflects on Strindberg's marital distress which had added to his misogyny. On the other hand The Daughter's feeling of entanglement in marriage signifies the marital discord the three subsequent wives of Strindberg might have experienced.

Another character representing the playwright is The Officer. His perpetual waiting of The Officer for his beloved, "Madame Victoria— to emerge from her dressing-room [represents the playwright's own wait for he] himself had waited eternities behind the scenes of theatres, first for Siri von Essen, then for Harriet Bosse." (Lucas 1962, 442) In *A Dream Play* The Officer waits perpetually for his beloved to come to renew their relation, but, she never turns up. Waiting is The Officer's suffering which the playwright depicts:

The Officer: No, I know one woman only, Victoria. Seven years I have come here to wait for her – at noon, when the sun touched the chimneys, and at night, when it was growing dark...Seven years I have been coming here. Seven times three hundred and sixty-five makes two thousand five hundred and fifty-five (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 36-37).

The third autobiographical element is The Poet's meditation on the absurdity of life which represents Strindberg's own "meditation on the vanity of human existence..." (Balzamo 58) The best instance comes handy when The Officer and The Master of Q are conversing and The Poet after entering seems to consider the creation of Man as ludicrous:

The Poet: [*Ecstatically*] Man was created by the god Phtah³ out of clay on a potter's wheel, or a hike [*sceptically*], or any damned old thing! [*Ecstatically*] Out of clay does the sculptor

³ Phtah in Egyptian mythology is the deity of creativity and patron of artisans.

create his more or less immortal masterpieces [*sceptically*], which mostly are pure rot. [*Ecstatically*] Out of clay they make those utensils which are so indispensable in the pantry and which generically are named pots and plates [*sceptically*], but what in thunder does it matter to me what they are called anyhow? [*Ecstatically*] Such is the clay! When clay becomes fluid, it is called mud... (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 61-62).

The Poet ridicules man's creation being out of clay. He is sceptical and seems to question the nature of human existence not being commendable given the ordinary substance it is sourced from. The same substance is the base for other objects necessarily used by man himself for different purposes like in sculpture, making utensils, pots and plates. He seems to comment on the vanity of human existence flawed due to its substandard base.

Furthermore, he philosophizes his past as fraught with glooms. The life from early stage has been pressing for him:

The Poet: I had a father who put his whole hope on me as his only son, destined to continue his enterprise. I ran away from the business college. My father grieved himself to death. My mother wanted me to be religious, and I could not do what she wanted and she disowned me. I had a friend who assisted me through trying days of need and that friend acted as a tyrant against those on whose behalf I was speaking and writing. And I had to strike down my friend and benefactor in order to save my soul. Since then I have had no peace. Men call me devoid of honour, infamous and it does not help that my conscience says, "you have done right," for in the next moment it is saying, "you have done wrong." Such is life (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 98-99).

The loss of father, rift with mother and later with the benefactor friend had lent a bitter taste to his life, which now he meditates on, is full of complexities, convolutions and contradictions. Thus, along with *The Lawyer* and *The Officer*, *The Poet* is also an incarnation of Strindberg.

Therefore, given the dreamlike structure of this play bracketed with "autobiographical data" one can infer Strindberg

himself the dreamer expressing his inner crisis in this artistic dream. He dramatizes his suffering and generalizes it to the phenomenal reality –meaninglessness of human life. Hence, a dream for him is fittingly instrumental.

Sigmund Freud's Concept of 'Dream' and Strindberg's 'Scripted Dream'

Sigmund Freud and August Strindberg published their respective path-breaking works in tandem with merely a difference of three years, the former publishing *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899 and the later publishing *A Dream Play* in 1902. The views in *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) are aptly applicable in *A Dream Play* (1902). Freud believed that “dreams are never concerned with trivia” (Freud 386) which Strindberg endorses to the effect of expressing his inner reality, generalized, in his artistic-dream-piece. Critics like Egil Tornqvist argue that *A Dream Play* is, “totally theme-centred drama.” (qtd. in Khan 2017, 168) It is contended that at the stroke of *A Dream Play* Strindberg articulated his dream owed to the play resulted from his “inferno crisis”. The ‘main motif’ as appraised in the above discussion is the playwright’s dramatization of the human suffering. The inference is that “dream” and “autobiographical data” in *A Dream Play* are juxtaposed hence Freudian view, “dream is thus the [disguised] fulfilment of a [suppressed, repressed] wish; its motive is a wish” (Freud 1899, 124) is yoked with Strindberg’s ‘repression’ and personal neurosis. “Wish” in terms of Freudian view can be Strindberg’s libidinal desire which had remained unfulfilled in his married life. The apropos appraisal here can be that Strindberg weaves together various features of expressionist theatre – autobiographical data, dream character, symbols etc. and gives vent to his emotions in this ‘scripted dream’ i.e. *A Dream Play*. The Lawyer’s marriage to The Daughter, its consummation and birth of their child fictionalizes Freudian idea of fulfilment of ‘repressed wish’ — the wish of Strindberg.

The above analysis with reference to ‘dream’ and expressionism is supported by J. L. Styan as, “in its early stages expressionist drama was a dramatization of the subconscious, a kind of scripted dream, with the consequent loss of character motivation and rational plot development of the well-made play” (Styan 1981, 4).

Expressionism in theatre, as a scripted dream is the foci of Styan's argument. His view of expressionist drama being "a dramatization of the subconscious" is quite similar to Sigmund Freud's idea that the origin of dream lies in the "depths of the unconscious". A dream according to Freud being the "fulfilment of wish" repressed and having remained hidden in these depths of the unconscious is very much in sync with the dramatization of subconscious in an expressionist drama, irrespective of the minor difference between 'unconscious' and 'subconscious'. Thus, expressionism, dream, Freudian idea and Strindberg's *A Dream Play* are interconnected.

Therefore, the mystery embroiling in 'dreamer', hence, gets resolved and Einhorn's view that it is, "a useless question to ask who the dreamer might be" (qtd. in Khan 2017, 169) seems an unjust assumption because to keep the dreamer unidentified means to hide the meaning of this drama and the significance of its complex title. Primarily, the playwright himself is the dreamer represented in a semi-autobiographical mode, thus a fit subject for Freudian view of dream. Meanwhile, there are many other dreamers in the form of different characters experiencing life as merely a dream.

UNCONVENTIONAL SETTING WITH ABUNDANCE OF PRIMARY COLOURS

The setting of the current play is unconventional, unrealistic and unnaturalistic, evident in the prologue itself. At the outset the celestial setting, much unreal escaping from the realistic is manifested by the presence of Leo, Virgo and Libra followed by the shining planet, Jupiter.

Furthermore, in scene 1 the unconventional setting is patent when the castle being manured grows out of dirt in quite a bizarre manner. The Glazier wonders on this uncanny view which adds to this dramatic feature itself:

The Daughter: The Castle is growing higher and higher above the ground. Do you see how much it has grown since last year?

The Glazier: [To himself] I have never seen this castle before – have never heard of a castle that grew, but – [To The Daughter, with firm conviction] Yes, it has grown two yards, but that is because they have

manured it – and if you notice, it has put out a wing on the sunny side (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 29).

One can safely discern that this surprise is used as a tool to account the unconventionality of the setting in the prologue. The growing castle, the gilded roof the apex of which is formed by a bud resembling a crown, the forest of gigantic hollyhocks in bloom all are substantial for the unconventional setting of an expressionist drama.

Besides, the colourful setting as given in the stage direction of scene I, adds to the sensation of this drama. The colours like, “white, pink, crimson, sulphurous, violet” etc. generate this drama’s expressionist setting. The colour element remains constant throughout the play. In scene III there is again a mention of colour in the form of “a brown-coloured wardrobe” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 31).

In scene IV too, the colour element is shown in the form of “a small linden tree with coal-black trunk and a few pale-green leaves.” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 35) The setting of scene V shows “the verdure in the open space beyond the passageway...changed into autumnal brown.” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 40) The autumnal colour in the next scene again changes and turns into spring. “The monk’s-hood is blooming once more, and the sun is shining on the green space beyond the passage way” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 42).

When the daughter is about to marry The Lawyer the stage changes and “turns dark. The Daughter rises and draws close to the lawyer. By a change of light the organ becomes Fingal’s Cave⁴.” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 50) Interesting to infer is the setting for the marriage same as the previous scene. It endorses divine implication for The Daughter because the cave itself is connected with god Indra. Since, marriages are performed in sacred places; the Fingal’s Cave is the case in context.

⁴ Fingal’s Cave is actually a sea cave on an uninhabited island in Scotland famous for natural acoustics. But, in the play it has much to do with the setting. It is the cave which according to the daughter is named as Indira’s Ear, “The Daughter: Because it is the place where the king of the heavens is said to listen to the complaints of the mortals.” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 82)

The element of sensational colours also comes across when the hills are seen “stripped of their trees by fire, and red heather rowing between the blackened tree stumps. Red-painted pig-sties and outhouses [are visible]” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 58). This gives a clear insight of varieties of colours used to conform this unconventional theatrical element. The colour element can be further observed in scene XIV when the setting shifts to Mediterranean. The mention of white wall and blue sea supplements to the bizarre expressionist setting. (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 78) This unconventionality culminates when the setting of scene 1 is again brought in:

Outside the castle. The same scenery as in the first scene of the first act. But now the ground in front of the castle wall is covered with flowers—blue monk's-hood or aconite. On the roof of the castle, at the very top of its lantern, there is a chrysanthemum bud ready to open. The castle windows are illuminated with candles (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 99).

Grippingly, the drama ends again with the bizarre setting. The Daughter “*goes into the castle. Music is heard. The background is lit by the burning castle and reveals a wall of human faces. As the castle breaks into flames, the bud on the roof opens into gigantic chrysanthemum flower*” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 104).

DISJOINTED AND EPISODIC PLOT

The plot, disjointed and episodic is of much significance in an expressionist drama strikingly framed by Strindberg in *A Dream Play*. The scenes jumble so does the characters, thereby, wrest an unconventional sequence in terms of the plot. The daughter descends and comes across different situations and characters with their miserable stories to share. The series of characters like; The Lawyer, The officer, The Poet, The Blind Man, Alice, Edith, Lena etc. traverse each other in the unbalanced plotline of this “theatrical monster”. Thus, the plot is thoroughly disjointed.

TYPIIFICATION OF CHARACTERS IDENTIFIED WITH NAMELESS DESIGNATIONS

In *A Dream Play* the characters lose their individuality and are identified with nameless designations or types. The Daughter, The Lawyer, The Officer, The Poet etc. are the types sans individual recognition. Even, god Indira is referred to as 'The Voice' in the prologue.

The motive of typification is to bestow the representative merit to the characters so that each character would signify a cult, a section of society or a sphere of human life. Through each character the writer conveys a message or reflects on any particular issue concerning human life. However, in *A Dream Play* only a few minor characters are named, like, Christine, Lena, Edith, Alice, Victoria. Besides, the Officer is also mentioned at once with name 'Alfred' by his mother while speaking to him:

The Mother: [*Aloud*] My Alfred, I must soon part from you and from the other children—But let me first speak a word to you that bears on all the rest of your life.

The Officer: [*Sadly*] Speak, mother (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 32-33).

Thus, The Mother is The Officer's actual mother calling him with his real name, Alfred. However, this single mention reflects on the maternal affection otherwise he is referred to as The Officer all through the drama.

RHAPSODIC AND POETICAL LANGUAGE/ DIALOGUE

The language/dialogue *A Dream Play* is highly rhapsodic and poetic. The prologue itself bears emotional intensity and poetic tone. The Daughter's interaction with various characters being engulfed with agony unravels the emotional intensity of the dialogue. Before the descent Indra overtly informs her that the mother tongue of the men is named, complaint, "**The Voice:** I fear me not—for even their mother-tongue is named complaint. A race most hard to please, and thankless, are the dwellers on the earth." (Strindberg and Bjorkman

1913, 27) This generates the emotional tenor. Indira's assertion turns absolute as the characters do complain for being caught in perpetual suffering which makes the dialogue emotionally intense. Furthermore, The Daughter keeps on moaning, "Men are to be pitied" which adds to the rhapsodic tone.

Besides the rhapsody, language is also strikingly poetic. This argument is substantiated as Strindberg features the winds whispering and wailing in a poetic tone and waves which sing. What is singing if not poetic? In a conversation with The Daughter, The Poet avows that he hears the whispering of the wind:

The Poet. [Listening] I hear nothing but the whispering of the wind
The Daughter: Then I shall interpret it for you. Listen. The wail of the winds.

[Recites to subdued music:

Down to the sand-covered earth.
Straw from the harvested fields soiled our feet;
Dust from the high-roads,
Smoke from the cities,
Foul-smelling breaths,
Fumes from cellars and kitchens,
All we endured.
[...]
Indra, Lord of the Heavens,
Hear us!
Hear our sighing!
Unclean is the earth;
Evil is life;
Neither good nor bad
Can men be deemed (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 82-83).

This shows how Strindberg frames environmental issues by making the winds wail due to the overwhelming pollution. The above account vividly highlights the nuisance of air pollution with its different means and forms. This alarming situation does require a rhapsodic tone which the playwright aptly bestows. After hearing the wails of the winds The Daughter then claims the singing of the waves also:

The Daughter: Hush! Now the waves are singing.

[Recites to subdued music:

We, we waves,
That are rocking the winds
To rest-Green cradles, we waves!

Wet are we, and salty;
Leap like flames of fire
Wet flames are we:
Burning, extinguishing;
Cleansing, replenishing;
Bearing, engendering (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 84-85).

The above account details the nature of the waves hazardous like fire. But their harm is juxtaposed with their utility for 'cleansing and replenishing' the water bodies by throwing away wastes to shores. This sense of force aligned with waves also requires specific language employed in the form of songs of the waves replete with dejection.

In terms of using poetic language there cannot be more notable achievement than the incorporation of The Poet as one of the main characters in this drama. With his thorough poetical supplication towards the end, he adds to the poetic tenor of this play. The prayer is to be taken by the daughter to Indra on behalf of the humanity:

The Poet: Do you mean to ascend soon? ...

The Daughter: As soon as I have consigned this mortal shape to the flames—for even the waters of the ocean cannot cleanse me. Why do you question me this?

The Poet: Because I have a prayer—

The Daughter: What kind of prayer?

The Poet: A written supplication from humanity to the ruler of the universe, formulated by a dreamer.

The Daughter: To be presented by whom?

The Poet: By Indra's daughter.

[...]

The Daughter: [Receives the roll, but reads without looking at it]

Well, by me it shall be spoken then:

“Why must you be born in anguish?

Why, O man-child, must you always

Wring your mother's heart with torture

When you bring her joy maternal,

Highest happiness yet known?

Why to life must you awaken,

Why to light give natal greeting,

With a cry of anger and of pain? (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 86-87).

The prayer initially, is in the form of a series of questions about human misery dramatized by the contraries of maternal joy aligned with the birth of a human child, and the “natal cry” of a newly born which itself can be symbolic of the forthcoming distress in life. Thus, juxtaposition is at work with the birth of a child. The ‘paternal joy’ and the ‘natal cry’ concomitantly delineate the aspiration with, and the reality of human life. This issue is followed by the direct supplication in which change is craved in an explicit manner:

Better garment craves the spirit/
Than one made of filth and blood!
Need a god his teeth be changing—”
—Silence, rash one! Is it seemly
For the work to blame its maker?
No one yet has solved life’s riddle (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 87).

This prayer, quite significantly, substantiates the feature of rhapsodic and poetic language in an expressionistic drama. The pathos in human life is framed with the appropriate language used by Strindberg, thus bestowing this artistic masterpiece the merit of being a representative expressionist drama.

“NOT VERY SUBTLE USE OF SYMBOLS” IN *A DREAM PLAY*

In addition to the characteristics discussed above another significant element the theatrical expressionism “featured” which Robert Cohen in his seminal book *Theatre* (2003) mentions is “not very subtle use of symbols.” (Cohen 2003, 253) Expressionism does involve a variety of symbols. A symbol signifies an idea or a quality lent symbolically by a word, object, event or an action. Symbolic meaning differs from the literal and is much deeper and more significant. Symbols can shift their meaning depending on the context they are used in. An instance can be of a ‘chain’ which may stand for ‘union’ as well as ‘imprisonment’. Thus, symbolic meaning of an object, a character or an action is understood by when, where, and how it is used.

A Dream Play being a theatrical or “scripted dream” in which Strindberg frames his central ideas is in sync with Freudian perspective about ‘dream’ given in *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899).

Freud states that, “dreams employ... symbolism to give a disguised representation to their latent thoughts. Among the symbols thus employed there are, of course, many which constantly, or all but constantly, mean the same thing. But we must bear in mind the curious plasticity of psychic material.” (Freud 1899, 342) According to Elena Balzamo, “Consequently, in order to understand [*A Dream Play*] it is necessary to decode the hidden meaning presented through a series of symbols.” (Balzamo 62) To decode, interpret or study dream symbols Sigmund Freud views:

Critical circumspection in the solution of the symbols must coincide with careful study of the symbols in especially transparent examples of dreams in order to silence the reproach of arbitrariness in dream-interpretation. The uncertainties which still adhere to our function as dream-interpreters are due partly to our imperfect knowledge (which, however, can be progressively increased) and partly to certain peculiarities of the dream-symbols themselves (Freud 1899, 343).

In *A Dream Play*, thus a “scripted dream” Strindberg uses a series of symbols right from the character of Agnes to the opening of a bud on the roof of the castle into a gigantic chrysanthemum flower. These, “symbols point to the flux of human predicament, the perpetual existential angst man is subjected to and hopes and challenges that keep mankind alive and going. The play is a kind of stoic acceptance of the pitfalls of existence that holds a huge share of what one calls life.” (Kunhi 2014, 7869) A comprehensive view of the symbols incorporated in *A Dream Play* with their significances is given below:

Agnes, The Daughter

Agnes, the daughter of Indra (king of gods in Vedic mythology) has her name rooted in Christianity. The name alludes to one of the 4th century Christian saints, St. Agnes⁵ meaning the Lamb of God.

⁵ At the tender age of fourteen, St. Agnes died for her Christian faith. Her name comes from the Latin word —agnus given for —lamb which means —chaste, pure. St. Agnes offered her life as sacrifice like —Abrahamic lamb. As mentioned in Christian history the Emperor Diocletian wreaked havoc by ordering to wipe out the churches and burn the Christian literature. Subsequent orders led to the imprisonment and torture of clergy and laity compelled to worship the emperor instead of the Christ. St. Agnes, the beautiful

Strindberg bases this central character on this historical Christian figure. In the context of Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, Agnes also means the Lamb of God symbolizing a female Christ (Agnes, The Daughter) descended to redeem mankind from suffering.

The Growing Castle

Next symbol employed is the castle growing on dung. This denotes the “parasitic tendencies of a capitalist society” (Kunhi 2014, 7868). Such a society is based on class structure. The capitalist or the upper class generates wealth by exploiting the rights of the proletariat or the working class. Capitalism thus, widens the gulf between the rich and the poor.

The growing castle also “symbolizes the upward striving of man towards the ideal and the ‘beautiful’, an oft-repeated idea in the play.” (Kunhi 2014, 7863) This strive pertains to desire and struggle of different characters to improve their lives. This, however, turns futile, The Lawyer asserts, “all the improvers end in prison or in the madhouse” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 80).

Suffocation

On Agnes's very descent into the human world, she experiences suffocation in the room she occupies with The Lawyer, though, it literary means The Lawyer's economic instability, but symbolically has symbolic connotation:

Christine: I paste, I paste.

The Daughter: [*Pale and emaciated, sits by the stove*] You shut out all the air. I choke!

Christine: Now there is only one little crack left.

The Daughter: Air, air—I cannot breathe!

Christine: I paste, I paste.

The Lawyer: That's right, Christine! Heat is expensive.

The Daughter: Oh, it feels as if my lips were glued together (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 52).

young lady was the believer in Christ and had decided to lead herself to the service of the Christ and live a life in celibacy. She executed her —will to die and accepted persecution in a dignifying manner for her faith.

This asphyxiation is symbolic of or 'premonition' to the miseries that she is going to encounter during her earthly experience. It suggests the pressing and choking human existence. The suffocation is involved in her incompatible marriage which in turn has to be situated with the author's own strained marital relationship.

Shawl

Another significant symbol used in the play is a shawl which The Portress (doorkeeper) initially has in her hand and is later taken by The Daughter. The Daughter's putting on the shawl is symbolic again of the human existence she becomes a part. She speaks to The Portress about the same as:

The Daughter: [To The Portress] Let me have the shawl now, and I shall sit here and watch the human children. But you must stand behind me and tell me about everything.

[She takes the shawl and sits down at the gate]

(Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 35).

The symbolic significance of the shawl becomes more vivid when The Portress tells the daughter, "in that shawl, dear, lie hidden thirty years of my own and other people's agonies." (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 40) The implication is that the shawl symbolically does signify the wretched human existence.

Foulstrand and Fairhaven

Experiencing the miserable human life in general and her own married life in particular The Daughter is fed up and wants to find solace far away from the vexations having caught her up. She leaves her husband and the child after The Officer proposes to go to Fairhaven but to the worst of her experience they arrive at Foulstrand:

The Officer: Will you come with me now?

The Daughter: At once! But where?

The Officer: To Fairhaven. There it is summer; there the sun is shining and dancing, feasting and frolicking.

The Daughter: Then I will go there (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 57).

The idea to reach to the Fairhaven is not materialised as both The Officer and The Daughter arrive at Foulstrand a place full of miserably sick people being treated in a quarantine station:

The Officer: [Meets (The Master of Quarantine) and they shake hands] Why, Ordstrom⁶. Have you landed here?

Master of Q: Yes, here I am.

The Officer: Is this Fairhaven?

Master of Q: No, that is on the other side. This is Foulstrand (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 59).

Fairhaven actually refers to some coastal places in Canada, Australia, UK, USA and Norway. In *A Dream Play* it symbolically represents a far-off blissful place, a summer resort.

Foulstrand is a foul place where sick people are treated in the quarantine station which “itself stands for the never-ending misery that man is subjected to irrespective of his class, race or gender and seems to echo that suffering is democratic.” (Kunhi 2014, 7867) It is symbolic of a dystopian place full of miseries. Thus, both of “these places highlight the theme of reality versus illusion or, to put it more precisely, reality versus idealism” (Kunhi 2014, 7866).

Sea/Water

After the setting shifts to the shores of Mediterranean The Daughter, now highly experienced about the human strife, is again seen with her earthly husband The Lawyer, may be hoping to improve their vexed relation. But, this visit disillusions her when the coal heavers reveal their plight and desolation even at this place. Everything there is governed by the capitalist class preventing these poor workmen even to take a bath (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 79). Thus, this “vast expanse of the beach initially comes across as a source of consolation and peace but the idea of everlasting happiness is soon subverted as the sea itself stands for the ebb and flow of life” (Kunhi 2014, 7868).

Furthermore, the next scene too is set around the sea, but The Daughter is seen now with The Poet trying to witness some bliss in human life. Together they visit Fingal's Cave which according to The Daughter is named as Indira's Ear, the place “where the king of the

⁶ Ordstrom literally means “word spout” i.e. words spoken in an abrupt and louder tone while in a surprise.

heavens is said to listen to the complaints of the mortals” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 82). Around Fingal's Cave Agnes gets to experience the dualistic side of sea/water. A sea is good when it provides livelihood to the poor fisherman who enjoys his occupation as clued implicitly, The Fisherman pulls, “the hook is torn out of a fish and brings up the heart with it through the neck –” i.e. the fish's heart comes out through its throat” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 73). A sea is dreadful as well. A sea can be a source of death for numerous people after getting a ship sunken. The ships; *Friendship*, *Golden Peace*, *Hope*, especially the ship named *Justice* which The Blind Man's only son had also boarded all get sunken and destroyed. The Blind Man though being the most envied owing to his enormous wealth and property is woefully distressed as his only son departs from him by the sea (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 73). The reader comes to know about the sinking of the ship *Justice*, having been boarded by The Blind Man's son also, through the perspective of The Poet before The Daughter clues towards the sinking of the other ships. The Daughter says, “Nothing but the figure-heads remain of the sunken ships – and the names: *Justice*, *Friendship*, *Golden Peace*, *Hope*... The Poet: [Searching in the pile] Here is the name-board of the ship *Justice*. That was the one which left Fairhaven with The Blind Man's son on board” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 1913, 85). Experiencing the devastative side of the water The Daughter out rightly calls the waves as, “false and faithless”. Her perspective sums up the varied ramifications linked with the sea.

Therefore, “water too serves as a multi-forked symbol. Water is shown to be a sign of redemption as well as destruction” (Kunhi 2014, 7869).

The Orange Tree

On the shores of Mediterranean the orange tree in the setting “next to the coalmine is another Christian symbol... The fruit, be it orange or apple, which the coal heavers are prohibited to taste, symbolizes a similar prohibition that merges with the sign of private possession.” (Bhattacharyya 2014, 86)

First Heaver. Couldn't we pick some fruit off that tree?

Second Heaver. Then the police would get after us” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 78).

These “lines present a criticism of private ownership of land and sea. It also shows power relations which have nothing in common with religion, but which is commonly disguised as religion. Underneath all religions preaching lies the discrimination between the rich and the poor” (Bhattacharyya 2014, 86).

The Door

One of the most important symbols in *A Dream Play* is the closed door which appears very early with a lot of mystery associated with it. It becomes a subject of curiosity for many people around:

The Officer: And I have been looking two thousand five hundred and fifty-five times at that door without discovering where it leads. And that clover leaf which is to let in light – for whom is the light meant? Is there anybody within? Does anybody live there?

The Portress: I don't know. I have never seen it opened.

The Officer: It looks like a pantry door which I saw once when I was only four years old... (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 37).

This door is one of the potent symbols pertaining to the belief that something significant lies behind it. The Daughter argues that, “there is a suspicion that the solution of the world-riddle may be hidden behind it” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 92). Later, The Daughter later tells The Portress to call the Lord Chancellor and all the Deans of Faculties, as she says the door is to be opened, “call them at once, then, for the door is to be opened” (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 92). Ultimately, when the door gets opened as All Right-Minded announce, to surprise all, there lies nothing behind:

All Right Minded: Hooray! The door is open.

Lord Chancellor: What was behind the door?

The Glazier: I can see nothing.

Lord Chancellor: He cannot see anything – of course, he cannot!

Deans of the Faculties: what was behind that door?

Theology: Nothing! That is the solution of the world riddle. In the beginning God created heaven and the earth out of nothing –

Philosophy: Out of nothing comes nothing (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 96).

The opening of the door towards the end results in the “mass disappointment in finding nothing there.” (Kunhi 2014, 7871) The essence of existence amounts to nothing. Thus, the door signifies meaninglessness of human life. It reflects on man's strive for some purpose but his whole struggle consequently turns futile. Hence, this mysterious door does not solve the riddle and unravel the mystery of life.

Fire of the Burning Castle

Agnes, after experiencing the tormenting human condition, finally, sheds her mortal life in the blazes of the palace. She goes into the castle the burning of which lits the background:

The Daughter: The parting hours has come, the end draws near... Farewell! To all thy fellow-men make known that where I go I shall forget them not; and in thy name their grievance shall be placed before the throne. Farewell!

She goes into the castle. Music is heard. The background is lit up by the burning castle and reveals a wall of human faces, questioning, grieving, despairing. As the castle breaks into flames, the bud on the roof opens into a gigantic chrysanthemum flower (Strindberg and Bjorkman 2013, 104).

Her entry into the burning castle symbolizes her shedding off the mortal life. Moreover, this fire of the burning castle “through which the Daughter ascends back to heaven is symbolically the same fire which burns the miseries [duties] of all the characters whom the Daughter has met. This signifies that the Daughter of Indira is the second Saviour.” (Bhattacharyya 2014, 88)

Growing Bud

In the end of this play Strindberg succinctly brings “the wall of human faces questioning, grieving and despairing” against the background of the castle, now burning, which represents the human existence as perpetually miserable. However, in the extreme end Strindberg leaves the issue of human strife to god. The Daughter gives hope to humans.

She assures by saying that she will put their case before god. Moreover, “the bud on the roof opening into a gigantic chrysanthemum flower signifies the cyclic nature of life itself and accompanying hope—the spirit that keeps man going...” (Kunhi 2014, 7872).

Therefore, the series of symbols incorporated in *A Dream Play* enhances its merit of being an expressionist drama. Each symbol significantly helps to delineate the coalescence of both the form and content of this drama. Symbols, therefore, add to it as a superb attempt in the expressionist theatre.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to examine August Strindberg's *A Dream Play* in view of the essentials of theatrical Expressionism. A thorough analytical approach was used to examine August Strindberg's marvellous incorporation of such essentials. The study also found out how Strindberg has succeeded to juxtapose dreamlike form and dream as content in this drama. A theoretical model was applied to accentuate Sigmund Freud's view of a dream being in sync with Strindberg's manner of expression in this scripted or artistic dream. Thus, *A Dream Play* is rich and substantial to be considered as an archetypal expressionistic drama. Furthermore, there is much scope to apply multiple theoretical apparatuses on this excellent aesthetic piece. It can be read with reference to surrealism or within the perspective of symbolist theatre, or partially, in view of the poetic drama due to the incorporation of rhapsodic and poetic language.

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