

MYTH AS AN INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM OF REALITY:
STRINDBERG'S AND GÖRANSON'S *INFERNO*

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With his flowing lion's mane, thinker's forehead and that glaring look in his eyes, Strindberg was a favourite among caricaturists and lampooners in the satirical press of the nineteenth century, and continues to attract graphic artists and illustrators of today. In 2012, on the centenary of his death, various well-known Swedish cartoonists came together to pay homage to the author and his works in an itinerant exhibition entitled *Livet är inget för amatörer – svenska serieskapare tolkar Strindberg*. Perkins and Park's short animations *Strindberg & Helium*, which base their lines on Strindberg's texts, have spread worldwide through the web¹; in 2009, Anneli Furmark published her graphic novel *August & jag*, which tells of a student of literature and Strindberg and their bizarre encounter taking place more than a century after the death of the writer. Visual interpretations and revisitations of Strindberg's own novels have seen the light: in the late 1980s Per Demervall presented the graphic novel *Röda rummet*, followed by *Döda rummet* in 2012; that same year Katarina and Henrik Lange published *Strindberg för dig som har bråttom*. In the following we will take a look at *Inferno* as a graphic novel. Its creator, Fabian Göranson (born in 1978), testifies in an interview (LAQUIST 2009) to the allure that seems to lie in the portrayal of Strindberg, when he speaks of the writer's proverbial lion's mane as «den anatomiska manifestationen av hans mentala tillstånd. Tankarna fortsätter ut i frisyren och pekar åt alla håll» ('the anatomic manifestation of his mental state. The thoughts spread out into his hairstyle and point in all directions')².

¹ <http://www.strindbergandhelium.com/> (last access 28.3.2013).

² Translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

In the contemporary Nordic literary criticism, Strindberg's *Inferno* (1897) was spoken of, among other things, as a work containing «nya sensationer, kuriösa uppträden och rysande nervintryck» ('new sensations, curious scenes and thrilling neural impressions'); for «sitt mästerliga och vibrerande språk» ('its dazzling and vibrant language') and as «en genialisk hjärnas feberfantasier» ('the feverish hallucinations of an extraordinary brain'); for the portrayal of «en raglande titan» ('a staggering titan') and «ett stort snille på förfall» ('a great, decaying genius'); for its «brännande kraft och genialitet midt i all galenskapen» ('burning force and geniality in the midst of all its madness'); and as an «oroligt flammande» ('anguishly fluttering') book with a sense of «humor midt i afgrunden» ('humour right down in the abyss')³. Disconnected from their context as they are, these wonderfully articulate opinions should not be taken neither as positive nor negative assessments of the novel but they bear, nonetheless, witness to the expressiveness of Strindberg's prose and to the deep impression the reading made on the first reviewers. These somewhat 'explosive' characteristics of the text inspired Fabian Göranson to create a graphic version of Strindberg's novel in 2010⁴. Göranson specifically indicates «den spretiga berättarstilen, infallen, psykbrytet, det hetsiga tempot» ('the straggly narrative style, the whims, the psychological breakdown, the manic speed')⁵ and Strindberg's vivid figurative language as qualities that make *Inferno* exceptionally suitable for a visual adaptation⁶. He also specifies that he has chosen to read the novel as «en komedi» ('a comedy') or «en tragikomisk skildring» ('tragicomical account') (SEMB & SVENSKE 2010, pp. 21-22), a view in his opinion supported by the phrase that Strindberg, according to the novel, first contemplated to use as closing words to the text: «Vilket skämt, vilket dystert skämt är ändå icke livet!» ('What humbug! What wretched humbug life

³ All comments are but a small selection from Alf Lindvåg's survey of the early reception of the novel, see LINDVÅG 1986, pp. 60; 61; 65; 66; 68; 73.

⁴ GÖRANSON 2010.

⁵ See email exchange with the literary review «Ponton», *Mejlinteröju med Fabian Göranson* (26.10.2010) at <http://www.ponton.nu/page/19> (last access 28.3.2013).

⁶ Cfr. also Laquist's observation (LAQUIST 2009): «August Strindberg liknar en häftig olustkänsla vid att få ett slag i huvudet och i Fabian Göransons version är det just den smällen läsaren ser» ('August Strindberg compares a severe case of discomfort to receiving a blow in the head and in Fabian Göranson's version it is precisely this knock that the reader sees').

is!')⁷. At its best, Göranson's graphic novel *August Strindbergs Inferno* succeeds in transposing the throbbing beat and the visual dimensions of Strindberg's prose into the comic format, while boosting the humorous elements in the text.

The point of departure for what follows is an attempt to codify some of the myths that recur in *Inferno*. An earlier endeavour to read the text with this end in view has been made by the American psychiatrist Donald L. Burnham, in an article trying to demonstrate «how symbols and myths [...] provided forms with which he [Strindberg] could give shape to otherwise inchoate experiences. They afforded outer representations of his inner conflicts [...]» (BURNHAM 1973, p. 231). Myths and symbols in the text thus interest Burnham to the extent that they can be seen as having a compensatory function for the heavily strained author in the years of the *Inferno*-crisis. Burnham's thesis is postulated from a medical point of view: Strindberg's use of symbols and myths are seen as a stage in his recovery from the mental crisis. In my reading of *Inferno* the paramount ambition is not so much to gain an insight into the *function* of myths in the text, I rather wish to identify a couple of myths that seem to sustain the narrative at its core and subsequently ascertain the way in which these are given a visual dimension in Göranson's illustrated work.

The myths that will be used as interpretive paradigms for the narrated reality have been restricted to two: 1) the myth of the hero, one of the oldest and best-known myths, the pattern of which seems to follow the dynamic of the structural framework in the novel. On the subject of the hero, it could also be added that Strindberg is continuously drawing parallels to mythical figures and legendary characters such as Orpheus, Prometheus and Faust, or the biblical Jacob and Job, while building up his own self-portrait in *Inferno*; 2) the myth of the city, which will be used with the ambition to examine to what extent the city of Paris is interpreted with

⁷ The phrase is taken from the epilogue (STRINDBERG 1994, p. 203) starting with the words: «Jag hade först avslutat denna bok med ett utrop: 'Vilket skämt, vilket dystert skämt är ändå icke livet!'. Efter en smula reflexion fann jag uttrycket ovärdigt och strök ut det» («I had finished this book with the exclamation, 'What humbug! What wretched humbug life is!' But after some reflection I found the sentiment unworthy, and struck it out», STRINDBERG 2009, p. 103).

mythical correspondences in Strindberg's and Göranson's *Inferno*. The ultimate aim is thus to investigate the visual narrative technique of the comic format, an examination that to a certain degree falls back on the analytical tools offered by a selection of the theoretical studies that has emerged in the field of comics criticism: Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and Thierry Groensteen's *Système de la bande dessinée*⁸ as well as the Scandinavian contribution *Tegneseriens æstetik* by the Dane Hans Christiansen⁹.

Let us start by briefly outlining the itinerary of the hero as it comes across in the source text, in order to comprehend how this journey has been rendered in the corresponding panels of the graphic novel, before discussing the visual aesthetic of the comic book when it comes to transposing the myth of the city.

THE MYTH OF THE HERO

The coming-of-age motif, which Stockenström (STOCKENSTRÖM 1972)¹⁰, among others, sees as an underlying pattern in Strindberg's *Inferno*, corresponds roughly to the archetype of the hero and to the mythical model of his journey identified by scholars such as Jung (1964)¹¹ or Campbell (1949)¹², according to which the hero is expected to meet certain demands regarding origin, birth, departure, arrogance, fall, ascent, return and death. Karen Armstrong (ARMSTRONG 2008, p. 142) is moving in the same circles as she discusses the quest and initiation, and the hard way to (self)-discovery, connected with the universal myth of the hero:

⁸ Consulted in the English translation by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen, published in 2007.

⁹ Available on-line at <http://www.comicsresearch.org> (last access 14.3.2013) is also Gene Kannenberg Jr's annotated and regularly updated bibliography of literature dedicated to the (academic) study of comics and graphic novels.

¹⁰ Cfr. e.g. the summary of Chapter II, pp. 146-147.

¹¹ Jung's posthumously published work *Man and His Symbols* has been consulted in the Swedish translation by Karin Stolpe, see especially the chapter entitled *Gamla myter och moderna människor*, in JUNG / VON FRANZ / FREEMAN (eds.) 1995, pp. 104-57.

¹² Joseph Campbell sums up the question of the trip of the hero as follows: «The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth» (CAMPBELL 2004, p. 28).

In traditional mythology, the hero left the security of the social world behind. Often he had to descend into the depths of the earth, where he would meet an unsuspected aspect of himself. The experience of isolation and deprivation could result in psychological breakdown, which led to vital new insight.

She also points to the descent as a fundamental phase preceding the moment of intellectual illumination: «You cannot be a hero unless you are prepared to give up everything; there is no ascent to the heights without a prior descent into darkness, no new life without some form of death» (ARMSTRONG 2008, p. 37). Strindberg's and Göranson's *Inferno* both commence with a farewell from family life, indispensable for the protagonist's investigation into the unknown, and the descent to the underworld is made explicit already in the title of the work¹³. Furthermore, in the novel the narrator reads Viktor Rydberg's Germanic mythology and adapts the myth of Bhrigu, who was punished because of his arrogance and sent to the realm of the dead, as a diagnosis for his own case. Driven by superciliousness (against which, in addition, the three mottos of the Swedish edition of the book warns¹⁴) and the ambition to gain fame in the field of science, he decides to leave his everyday life behind. In search of the highest knowledge he thus crosses the threshold to a supernatural world where he is bound to face horrifying trials and tribulations that can only be tackled with the help of those protectors and guides who are at home in the classical myth of the hero: the Hand of the Invisible, «som styr mina fjät på den skrovliga stigen» (STRINDBERG 1994, p. 22) («which guides me over rough paths»,

¹³ Melberg makes an interesting point when indicating the theme of katabasis as «en återkommande fantasm» («a recurring ghost») in Strindberg's literary imagery, and observes its presence as a motive not only in the famous opening section to *Röda rummet* (1879) and in *Syndabocken* (1906), but also in the horizontal movement leading from the city to the archipelago in works such as *I havsbandet* (1890), see MELBERG 1999b, p. 85.

¹⁴ STRINDBERG 1994, p. 6: 1) Courbe la tête, fier Sicambre! / Adore ce que tu as brûlé, / Brûlé ce que tu as adoré!, 2) Och jag skall vända mitt anlete emot en sådan / man och slå honom med förfäran, så att han / skall bliva en varnagel och ett åtlöje bland / folket. Hesekiel XIV: 8, (And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people) 3) Och bland dessa äro Hymeneus och Alexander, / vilka jag har överlämnat åt Satan, på det att / de genom denna tuktan skulle lära sig att icke / mera försmäda. 1:sta Timot. I: 20 (Of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme). English translations from King James version, available at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/index.htm> (last access 28.3.2013).

STRINDBERG 2009, p. 14), who defeats his *hubris*, castigates and spurs him but who also performs as his servant, and St. Louis «min skyddspatron, min goda ängel» (STRINDBERG 1994, p. 25) («my patron, my guardian angel», STRINDBERG 2009, p. 15) but also Orfila, Kerstin (Strindberg's young daughter appearing as Beatrice), and Emanuel Swedenborg. The heroic victory over evil culminates with the arrest, in Berlin, of the narrator's mortal enemy, Popoffsky – an event to which the narrator himself actively has contributed through telepathy and «brinnande böner» (STRINDBERG 1994, p. 76) («earnest prayers», STRINDBERG 2009, p. 37). According to Arne Melberg (MELBERG, 1999a, p. 84), the turning point in the narration coincides with the «surrealistiska upplevelse» ('the surreal experience') in which the protagonist is sucked out of his bed by electric forces in Chapter VII, *Helvetet* (*Hell*), seen as a symbolic death by the narrator himself, although it is bound to be repeated more than once. Several critics (cf. e.g. LITTBERGER 2004, p. 64) have interpreted the episode in which the protagonist climbs the Austrian mountain where he finds the flag of the Sphinx, as the moment of the ascent. As the narrated Strindberg at last returns to his home country he is equipped with a new outlook on life after having completed an itinerary that has taken him «från lidandet, igenom vetenskapen, fram till botgöring» (STRINDBERG 1994, p. 16) («from suffering, through knowledge, to repentance», STRINDBERG 2009, p. 9).

Let us now take a look at Göranson's visual display of the same course of events by concentrating on the crucial moments of the descent, the ascent and the victory over evil in the conventional journey of the hero as exemplified above.

THE HERO IN COMIC FORMAT

In the graphic adaptation of the text, the cardinal motif of the downfall is conducted with skilful variation. *August Strindbergs Inferno* opens with a single panel covering the entire first page (*fig. 1*): in an otherwise static image dominated by the facade of the Gare du Nord, the positioning of the word balloons forms descending diagonals, on their own representing a downward movement, while the crowd of people jostling in front of the train station is forced down to the lower margin.

Another aspect also implied in the idea of *katabasis* is (as we have seen in Armstrong's discussion of the mythical hero) a personal and psycho-

logical degeneration, as in the case of the Strindberg-character in the novel. This dimension of the fall is converted into the graphic novel by focusing primarily on the rendering of the narrator-protagonist. The scene taking place at the St. Louis-hospital, designated as «skärselden» (STRINDBERG 1994, p. 17) («the purgatory», STRINDBERG 2009, p. 10) in the novel, is a central and significant event at this point. When conceiving one of the panels of this sequence (fig. 2), Göranson must undoubtedly have had Edvard Munch's litography *På kliniken* (*At the clinic*, 1896) (fig. 3), with a patient bearing Strindberg's features, in mind. This reference to the 'fine arts' is interesting since the motif of the medical examination finds no exact correspondence in the source text: the playful revisitation of the litography merely seems to underline the factual connection between the two Scandinavians¹⁵. The vertical shape of the first three-panel strip of the sequence then changes into a horizontal format accentuating the slanting panelling on the wall, which seems to send the protagonist gliding further and further down towards the lower right corner of the image (cfr. GÖRANSON 2010, pp. 19-20).

Even in the depiction of the psychological breakdown, Göranson makes no exception to the rule of recurring to a visual language that is universal and effortlessly intelligible, which he states to be at the core of the poetics of the adaptation. He confesses that he set out on the project with the idea of creating «en Kalle Anka serie» ('a Donald Duck cartoon') with «så mycket serieabstraktioner som möjligt» ('as many abstractions belonging to the language of comics as possible', SEMB & SVENSKE 2010, p. 23). As Göranson emphasizes, «i stället för att göra tankebobblor gestaltar jag i bild hur han [Strindberg] tänker och känner. Till exempel när han inser att han inte har några pengar på fickan så får han åsneöron och en liten svans» ('instead of resorting to thought balloons I illustrate his [Strindberg's] thoughts and

¹⁵ Strindberg and Munch both frequented the bohemian milieu in Berlin during the winter of 1892-1893 and met again in Paris in 1896. This litography is among the various portraits Munch made of Strindberg, who had reviewed his art positively and would turn him into a central character in the novel *Inferno*, where he anonymously appears as *den danske målaren* (the Danish painter). Göranson, instead, has chosen to give Munch and other biographical characters that figure in the novel their real names and immediately decodable characteristic traits, with the result that the source text's dominating protagonist has to vie for the reader's attention against his fellow characters in the graphic novel.

feelings. For instance, as he realises that he has no money in his pocket I give him donkey ears and a little tail', SEMB & SVENSKE 2010, p. 23).

In its most critical phase the breakdown is thus rendered with simple means and with the help of easily comprehensible visual codes common to the cartoonist and the readers of comics: one panel covering the entire page (*fig. 4*) combines the comic strip's conventional beads of perspiration with a background – a crumbling building – that mirrors the emotional state of the protagonist as in an expressionist painting; another full-page panel (GÖRANSON 2010, p. 88) again makes use of a visual transposition of the crack-up, which marks its distance from any obscure symbolic language, to show a petrified Strindberg literally going to pieces; one image (*fig. 5*) exemplifies the transition from the protagonist's colourful daytime tranquillity to black-and-white nightmarish angst through the change of hues and by resorting to a manic repetition of the subject within the same panel, as well as to unstable, expressionistic contour lines; two panels (*fig. 6*) reveal how a creative use of the interstitial frontier can have a function in the visual description of the fall. The space between the panel frames, which McCloud speaks of as the 'gutter' (McCLOUD 1994, p. 66), most often indicates an ellipsis in time or space that is bridged by the reader's capability and wish to create a coherent narration¹⁶. In this case, however, the 'limbo' is cleverly exploited as a means to translate the lack of inner unity peculiar to the subject's psychological despair.

The encounter with the forces of evil, which ends up with the protagonist's victory over his enemy, is similarly depicted under the guidance of a principle of stylistics that Hans Christiansen through McCloud (CHRISTIANSEN 2001, p. 28) defines as «forstærkning gennem forenkling» ('emphasis through simplification'). Göranson here chooses to interpret Strindberg's text quite literally, thus awarding the plotting Popoffsky-character,

¹⁶ In McCloud's theoretical work the topic of the collaboration between the creator of the cartoon and his reader is spoken of as «a contract between creator and audience», a phrasing that reminds us of how close comics criticism can stand to literary criticism and how codes and categories in a genre not always regarded as a legitimate form of literature can be those of narratology (cfr. McCLOUD 1994, p. 66ff). On the subject of applying narratology to the art of comics, Groensteen (GROENSTEEN 2007, p. 160) comments: «[...] narratology suffers from having developed in reference only to literature, when its field of natural investigation is in reality the *narrative genre*, and should no longer exclude the art of visual stories».

who (in the Swedish original) «spann intriger» (STRINDBERG 1994, p. 64; «wove intrigues», STRINDBERG 2009, p. 32) the likes of a spiderman (fig. 7) ensnaring his victim in a web that is both spiderweb and later the musical notes to Schumann's *Aufschwung*. The triumphant Strindberg, who thinks he may have won the battle thanks to his knowledge of black magic, turns in Göranson's drawings into the devil's own *döppelgänger* (fig. 8 and 9). As a horned devil, Strindberg makes an interesting parallel to himself as he comes across at the end of the narrative after the suffering and the scientific gains have helped him to a vital insight into Catholicism: in Göranson's visual commentary Strindberg is here depicted, in the rigid frontal perspective of early Christian art, as the holy mother of God – an interpretation that undoubtedly connects with the graphic artist's personal reading of *Inferno* as a tragicomic novel (fig. 10)¹⁷.

Although one of Göranson's last panels (GÖRANSON 2010, p. 156) suggests the protagonist's lack of conviction when embracing the Catholic faith, the graphic novel's adaptation of the road to Christian belief is nevertheless worth commenting. The ascent, which in *Inferno* just like in many myths of *anabasis*, expresses a desire for transcendence and involves climbing a mountain, represents both thematically and graphically a counter-movement to the previously discussed descent. In the visualisation of the climbing of the mountain, horizontal panels are abandoned to favour the vertical format and the word balloons have been positioned to indicate an upward movement (GÖRANSON 2010, pp. 135-136). As Strindberg through his reading of Swedenborg finally comes to understand the significance of his long and winding road through *Inferno*, Göranson's poetics of the page places the decisive panel in the lower right corner of the opening of pages 148 and 149 to serve as a 'cliffhanger' and an invitation to the reader to turn the page: on the following page appears no less than God himself¹⁸.

The narrative pulse slows down in the ensuing sequence as Göranson zooms in on the protagonist, who remains seated without changing his

¹⁷ This motif possibly echoes the coal statue of a Madonna and Child «i bysantisk stil» (STRINDBERG 1994, p. 46) («in the Byzantine style», STRINDBERG 2009, p. 24) that the protagonist finds in his fireplace in his room at hotel Orfila.

¹⁸ Groensteen (GROENSTEEN 2007, pp. 35-39) discusses the importance of the double page as a unit in the comics system and the ways in which the artist can utilize the position of the panel to obtain a desired effect.

pose: the only detail bearing witness to the passing of time is the raising and lowering of his eyebrows as he slowly gains insight. The story is then momentarily interrupted and eye contact between the reader and the main character is established: Strindberg fixes his stare on the readers to inform them of his heavenly illumination through a flash of genius that mimicks the light behind Nietzsche's *Übermensch* on page 150.

THE MYTH OF THE CITY IN *INFERNO*

According to Karen Armstrong (ARMSTRONG 2008, p. 58), the mythology celebrating life in the city emerged around 4000 B.C., as the first cities were being built in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and later in China, India and the island of Crete. Myth, as the scholar observes (ARMSTRONG 2008, p. 72), was no longer merely a question of the deeds of gods and archetypal ancestors: the idea arose that man could act autonomously and that his own inventiveness was worth honouring. Arne Melberg, as well as the previously mentioned Donald L. Burnham, have both stressed the mythic dimension that Strindberg's Paris takes on in *Inferno*, a city, which at the end of the nineteenth century «var en lika mytisk och litterär som geografisk, politisk och social storhet» ('was as much a mythic and literary as a geographic, political and social greatness'), in Melberg's words (MELBERG 1999b, p. 88).

The legendary nineteenth-century Parisian scene is also at the root of Göranson's interest in *Inferno*. When asked whether he will continue to transpose Strindberg, the cartoonist answers by paying homage to the atmosphere of the French capital at the time: «för mig var det boken *Inferno* och miljön, sekelskiftes-Paris, som triggade igång mig, min passion. *La belle époque* och sekelskiftet är nog mera det jag kommer att komma tillbaka till» (SEMB & SVENSKE 2010, p. 29), ('it was the novel *Inferno* and the milieu, Paris at the turn of the century, that triggered me, my passion. *La belle époque* and the *fin de siècle* are probably what I am going to return to'). The attempt to capture details distinguishing the period is certainly visible in Göranson's representation of the urban scene with its architectural landmarks, but also through the attention given to interiors and character portrayal.

In what way is the city perceived and approached in Strindberg's *In-*

fermo? The postulate in this paper is, as we will see, that the city parks, often taken to represent the urban scene in the narrative, are encoded as spaces suggesting the possibility of a return to Eden – in contrast with the nineteenth-century myth of Paris as a reference of gravity for progress and modernity. Nevertheless, the myth of the bustling city, which in the collective consciousness is believed to foster intellectual creativity and innovation, also filters through in an episode such as the promenade that takes the protagonist from the St. Louis hospital to Canal Saint-Martin.

Melberg (MELBERG 1999b) has briefly commented on the biblical and mythological parallels that the novel establishes in its descriptions of Paris and of the Garden of Luxembourg, a park that on its own caters for a considerable part of the cityscape in *Inferno*¹⁹. Burnham, again, clarifies as follows the function of *le Luxembourg* in Strindberg's autobiographical account:

To him this green island in the city symbolized the Garden of Paradise, the Golden Age, and the City of God, from all of which he felt estranged. The Garden touched deeply on his sense of banishment and exile. He felt unable to enter by the main gate with its gilded fasces, but did permit himself to enter the side gates (BURNHAM 1973, p. 235).

Jardin des Plantes, with its botanical garden and the zoo, is similarly used to symbolise the Creation, as Burnham emphasizes: «He [Strindberg] called the park a Noah's Ark and Paradise Regained» (BURNHAM 1973, p. 239).

Both Burnham and Melberg read the description of the urban scenery as a stage in a transformational process encapsulating death and rebirth. Burnham, once more, makes an attempt to answer for Strindberg's need to 'return to square one', according to the scholar evident in the years of the crisis and fomented, one easily imagines, by the sense of failure experienced in the personal relationships and the lack of progress in the scientific field

¹⁹ Cfr. MELBERG 1999b, p. 91: «Mestadels ligger Strindbergs Paris kring Luxembourg trädgården och det beror nog inte bara på att han själv ofta bodde i parkens närhet, men också på latinerkvarterens stadgade litterära, närmast mytologiska status bland de många tillresande skandinaverna, t. ex. Sophus Claussen» ('Most of Strindberg's Paris is situated around the Garden of Luxembourg, something which is not likely to depend only on the fact that he often lived close to the park, but also on the literary, almost mythological status of the Latin Quarters among the many Scandinavians sojourning in the city, e.g. Sophus Claussen').

that haunted the writer. Burnham therefore describes the author of *Inferno* as a man immensely fascinated by

any symbol or myth which gave expression to the wish to begin again, to be reborn or to return to a state of blissful harmony, grace and unity. We can see why he would be ready to abandon myths of superhuman competence and to turn toward myths of childlike innocence and purity. No wonder that gardens and ideas of a lost golden age held such appeal for him (BURNHAM 1973, p. 240).

Melberg (MELBERG 1999b, p. 96), instead, underscores the fruitlessness of the protagonist's haphazard city walks, as a part of the mythicising process present in the novel: «Slutligen, och främst, mytologiseras vandringen av den cirkulära rörelsen: den går till sin egen utgångspunkt och vägen dit präglas dessutom av vanans upprepningar» ('In the end, and above all, the circular movement mythologises the itinerary: it ends where it began and reaches its goal through habitual repetition').

Let us then turn to the articulation of the mythical Parisian cityscape in *August Strindberg's Inferno* by concentrating on Göranson's interpretation of the Luxembourg garden and the Jardin des Plantes, as well as on his representation of the meanderings of the protagonist in the labyrinth of the city.

PARIS IN GRAPHIC TRANSLATION

Considerations, like the ones made above, on the significance and function of the city parks in Strindberg's text inevitably lead to the observation that the graphic novel heavily reduces the episodes taking place in the gardens. Reduction, in this case, is not only a question of the number of frames, but also signify reducing the *importance* of the scenes set in the parks. When wandering through the gardens, the novel's narrator-protagonist feels blissfully in command, as if this luscious territory and its budding flowers belonged to him only. Moreover, if the Jardin des Plantes is «the epitome of creation» (STRINDBERG 2009, p. 45), the description of the work of the Creator is not unlike the scientific experiments that the protagonist himself has shared with his readers in the novel. Göranson has chosen to tell the Jardin des Plants only as Noah's Ark, and dedicates a whole page (GÖRANSON 2010, p. 93) to some of the animals mentioned in the text as

the narrator walks through the zoo bidding farewell to this earthly paradise.

The mythicising transformation that *le Luxembourg* undergoes in the novel corresponds in Göranson's adaptation merely to a supernatural light that floods through the park (although the architectural elements maintain the documentary traits) (*fig. 11*), and also in this case the interpretation of the garden as a blooming, paradisiacal Eden is undoubtedly lost. As a consequence, very little of the *contrast* between the harmony prevailing within the Garden of Eden and the turmoil, which, according to the biblical myth, rules outside, can be seen. Göranson's talent is on the other hand evident as he focusses on the chaos in the disharmonic labyrinth of the city streets. Here, the narrative rhythm of the feverish city walk leading from the St. Louis hospital to Canal Saint-Martin, heavily condensed and fragmented in Strindberg's prose, finds a correspondence in the elliptical style of the graphic novel: the page (*fig. 12*) has been broken down into a myriad of small panels and the fast changes in the urban setting, as well as the great variation of visual angles, are all strategies of composition that join forces up until the moment when the wanderings of the protagonist debouch into one of the great boulevards and order is restored with an end panel re-establishing the frontal perspective (*fig. 13*).

Yet another visual strategy that is used to do justice to Strindberg's hectic promenades and feverish trains of thought, in which association is chained to association, is encapsulated in the condensed dynamics of the action: when illustrating the city walk in Meudon, one frame only contains and creates an almost theatrical course of events (*fig. 14*).

CONCLUSIONS

An attempt to investigate what happens to the form and the representation of urban mythology and the myth of the hero, as *Inferno* is transposed from Strindberg's prose to the vocabulary of Göranson's graphic novel, cannot ignore the fact that the latter inevitably compresses the original and looks at its humoristic details through a magnifying glass. If the pictures are often allowed a rather free interpretation of the text, word bubbles and captions remain instead closely knitted to Strindberg's wording. These two aspects of *August Strindbergs Inferno* allow us to appreciate Göranson's exquisite work both as a variation on Strindberg's novel and as an au-

tonomous piece of art. With reference to the latter quality, this paper asserts that when transposed into the comic format, the content of *Inferno* assumes a unique creative expression and starts evolving on additional, multiple levels.

Though restricted to charting the myth of the hero and the myth of the city in the graphic adaptation, this essay has tried to show how the images and the visual rhetoric create layers of meaning. When communicated through images, the narrative at times locates contents embedded in the source material (as in the example of the gridding of the narrative material present in the city walk). At other times (for example when doing justice to the complex character of the protagonist), new meanings spring out of Göranson's imagery and independent creative vein, not the least through the use of heterogeneous visual references. In Göranson's visual glossary, elements at home in the archetypal comic book universe of Walt Disney and occasional references to highbrow art (Edvard Munch) blend in with attempts at a photo-realistic documentation (especially in the panels representing the cityscape and the historical characters that appear anonymously in Strindberg's original). On this level, too, however, the visual rhetoric of the graphic narrative manages to connect with Strindberg's style in the novel: a combination of detailed, realistic description and free, illogical associations through which reality undergoes a mythicisation.

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Illustrations

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Fig. 1

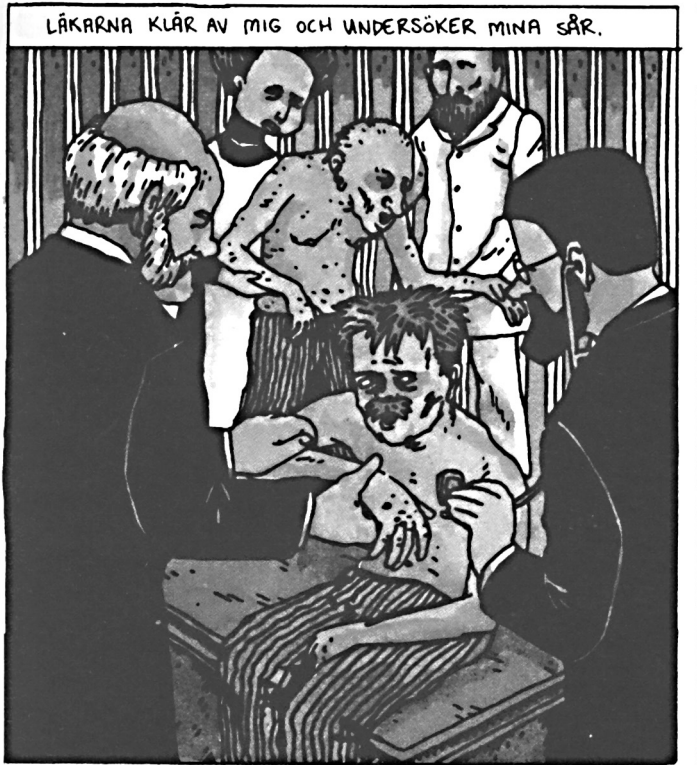


Fig. 2

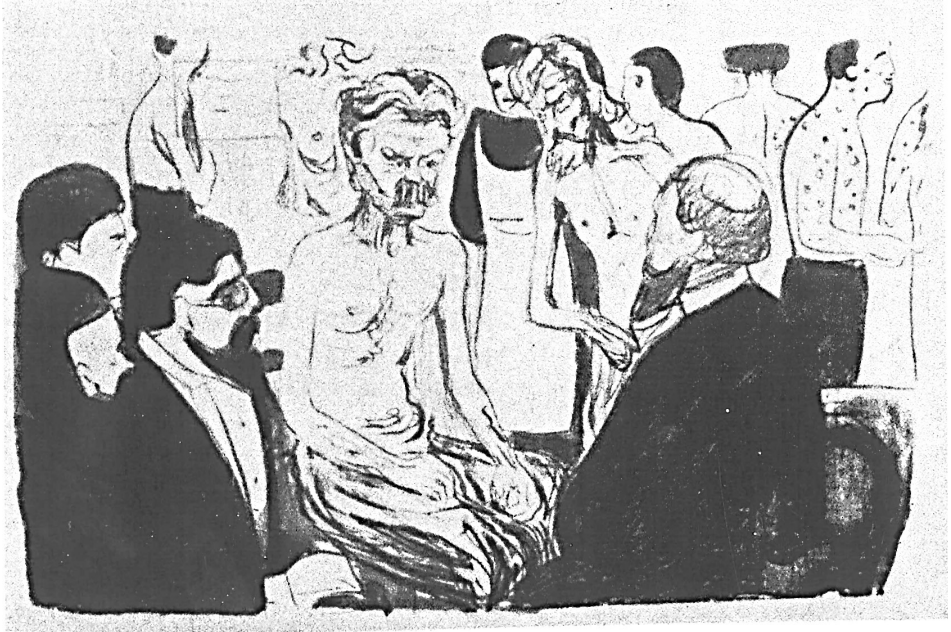


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

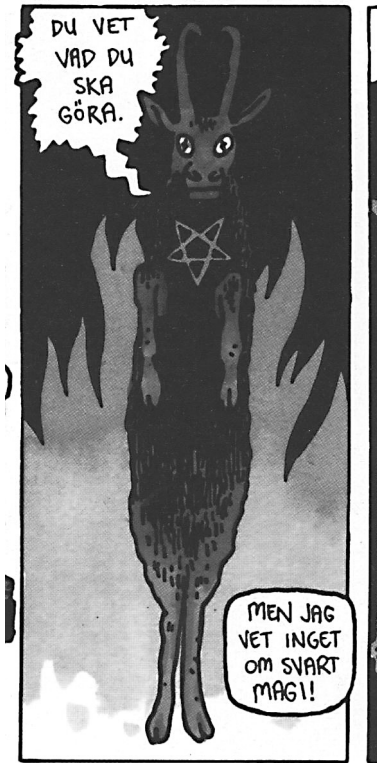


Fig. 8



Fig. 10



Fig. 9



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14