

Madam Flod in The People of Hemsö

In his novel *The People of Hemsö* Strindberg writes about Madam Flod in a less than effusive manner, concentrating on the sly and spirited Carlsson. This is a relationship that, on the screen, has been balanced by the fact that the role of Madam Flod has been undertaken by such forceful actors as Dagmar Ebbesen in Sigurd Wallén's 1944 production, Hjärdis Petterson in Arne Mattson's film from 1955 and Sif Ruud in Bengt Lagerkvist's popular TV-film in seven parts from 1966.

They all relate to Strindberg's characterisations, in turn inspired by his spending the summer on Kymmendö where he encountered the actual Madam Flod in the form of Susanna Elisabeth Berg.

My reading of this is that Madam Flod – also known as Moster [auntie], Anna Eva or Gumman [old lady] – that Strindberg characterises should be restituted. She has become a widow and she struggles to keep the homestead solvent.

Carlsson does not care about this. He has accepted the position unseen and he soon realizes, with Strindberg's Darwinist spectacles of 1887, that here I can climb upwards. The labourer can move forwards and upwards, can overtake the other labourers and Gusten marries (for gold?) and becomes the owner of a homestead on Hemsö.

But for Madam Flod, notably well-played by Sif Ruud, it is ultimately a matter of securing the homestead, of motivating the labourers and the insolent seal-hunter Gusten, and starting to rationalize the fields and meadows.

Strindberg lets Madam Flod endure a great deal, but in *The People of Hemsö* she takes command on a number of occasions; for example when the farmhands and the maids tease her by calling her and Carlsson as being engaged to marry, as well as at the end when, following

Carlsson's betrayal with Clara, and being mortally ill herself, she insists that Gusten should seal the bureau and see to it that Carlsson only has access to the "exceptional" cottage.

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