“The Stronger:” Silence is Golden.

“Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence” (da Vinci). In August Strindberg’s play “The Stronger,” the reader is shown the strength and command that can be found in silence, even when the silent person is at fault. Strindberg also demonstrates how much a person will reveal about their feelings and thoughts when allowed to speak uninterrupted. By using a character that says nothing, Strindberg reveals how powerful a person can be when capable of holding their tongue. Strindberg also shows how easy it is to reveal personal flaws when a person continues to speak.

When a character is allowed to monologue, which is similar to what MME X does throughout the play, they will often reveal much more about themselves than they realize. Quite often, characters will feel as though they have made a great realization about their foil or counterpart, when, in reality, they have shown much more of their own colors. MME X shows herself to be a narcissistic, insecure and volatile person. MME X praises herself in many of her speeches, “I was the first to say, ‘Forgive him’” (Strindberg 2014). She makes herself look like the better person by not only asking for the forgiveness of the former fiancé of MLLE Y, but also by bringing it up in conversation. MLLE Y is insecure in both her career and in her marriage, “the first time I was afraid of you, so afraid that I didn’t dare let you out of my sight” (Strindberg 2014). MME X is drawn to MLLE Y, just as many people are drawn to leaders. MME X is afraid of the talent and strength that is seen in MLLE Y at their first meeting, which is why she
befriends her so quickly. MME X also reveals her volatile nature, “I’d have torn her eyes out” (Strindberg 2014). MME X allows many of her flaws to be shown, simply by continuing to speak while MLLE Y is unspoken.

While we see a great deal about the character of MME X, MLLE Y is guilty of the claims against her. When a person is facing charges, it is often the wisest choice to remain silent, “You have the right to remain silent; anything you say can and will be used against you,” especially when the charges are factual (Miranda v. Arizona). MME X makes the realization that MLLE Y has been sleeping with her husband. This claim is justified with the evidence MME X has become conscious of, “You both dared to show your real feelings only when you were secure... You are fond of tulips... that’s why we go to Lake Malarn in the summer, because you don’t like salt water... my boy is named Eskil – because it is your father’s name” (Strindberg 2014). MME X has enough information to hold a valiant case against MLLE Y. MLLE Y’s silence neither confirms nor denies the accusations against her; she shows no reaction in either direction and therefore does not give MME X any power over her. It was the wisest choice for MLLE Y to stay silent. MLLE Y remains the more powerful of the two by allowing MME X no hints or clues about what is true, nor does she give MME X any further ammunition against her. While MLLE Y is at fault for her affair, she is the stronger of the two women for keeping the upper hand.

The power of information is the most dangerous weapon a person can wield. When a person is allowed the opportunity to speak, they will often give more information that would ever be expected in normal situations. Some people are more prone to over speaking, much like MME X. These people often give off the air that they are powerful and clever, when in reality they are giving away the most perilous weapon that could be used against them. The more that is
communicated to another person, the more ammunition is given away. Silence, when the other person is willing to speak, is power, “Your eyes have reeled out of me all these thoughts which lay like raw silk in its cocoon” (Strindberg 2014). The amount of information that can be collected is unlimited. The person remaining silent has the power to steer the conversation, or the speaker’s thoughts, in any direction with only looks or body language. Command rises when very little has to be said; often the most intelligent people are the most silent.
Works Cited

