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World premiere for Pär Lagerkvist at Black Box theatre via an unusually charming performance.

"There once were some dead people, they sat together somewhere in the darkness, they knew not where, perhaps nowhere, they sat and conversed to pass the time"

With these words, *The Eternal Smile* opens, a story in which Pär Lagerkvist plays with the notion of life after death, limbo or purgatory. But perhaps firstly and fore-mostly life's own sense of (un)reality. The dead shake their heads over the arrogance and complacency of the living: "they imagine that everything depends upon them." Indeed, its almost like hearing the old complaining over the youth of today, as the elders have done for generations.

Articulate.

At Black Box theatre, Verk productions have rigged up a classic picture-frame stage with an undulating red velvet curtain and gold tassled ropes.

Swedish-speaking Anders Mossling provides the starting signal for the three other actors, who illude the dead, look back and tell the stories of their lives. Amongst others, the story of a man who spent his entire life underground, as the custodian of one of the city's public toilets. When he took the job it was what he considered to be a transitional phase, before he discovered his true calling. Men that is not how it turned out.

The tale provides an articulate expression of Pär Lagerkvists humorous, multi-leveled style, which, to say the least, is brilliantly captured by Anders Mossling.

Translation.

This marks the first time *The Eternal Smile* has been dramatised for the theatre. And perhaps that was the greatest surprise of the evening - because during the performance the associations rush on, to Strindberg, Dylan Thomas, Beckett and Fosse. Even so, Verk's staging makes it most tempting to think of the tempered style of Pirandello's theatre. Something which naturally is on account of the striking parallel between Lagerkvist's dead souls, and Pirandello's six characters in search of an author.

Verk Productions have perfected their own style, but all the theatre references also provide a sense of repetition. It has, none the less, become a remarkably charming performance.

Theres Bjørneboe