REMEMBERING THE DREYFUS AFFAIR

From *Klostret* to *Fagervik och Skamsund*

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IN A REMARKABLE paragraph that appears both in Strindberg's novel *Klostret* (*The Cloister*) and its reworked version, 'Karantänmästarens andra berättelse' ('The Quarantine Master's Second Story'), published in *Fagervik och Skamsund*, an unhappy husband dreams of escaping to a "konfessionslös[t] kloster för de intellektuella" (a non-confessional monastery for intellectuals).[1] This is probably one of the first—if not

1 The paragraphs are identical in both works: "Då längtade han ut, bort, men långt, till ljus och renhet, till frid, kärlek och försoning. Han drömde sin gamla dröm om klostret där inom murarne han vore skyddad för världens frestels"r och smuts, där han kunde glömma och glömmas. Men tron fattades, och lydnaden."

"Denna idé om klostret hade redan då spökat länge i litteraturen, och man hade talat i Berlin om grundandet av konfessionslösa kloster för de intellektuella, som i en tid, då industri och ekonomi trängt sig fram i första planet ej kunde finna sig i det atmosfär av materialism som de själva låtit förleda sig predika. Och nu skrev han till sin rike vän i Paris om grundandet av ett sådant kloster; kastade opp plan för byggnaden, författade regeln och gav detaljer om brödernas samliv och uppgifter. Detta skedde år 1894 i augusti. Målet var uppfostran till Übermensch genom askes, meditation, och övandet av vetenskap, litteratur och konst. Religion nämndes icke, emedan man icke visste vilken religion som skulle komma, eller om det skulle vara någon alls" (Strindberg, SV 50:105–106; SV 50:268).

("He longed to get out, to get away, but far away, to light and cleanliness, to peace and love, and reconciliation. He began to dream his old dream of a monastery, within whose walls he would find shelter from the temptations and filth of this world, a place where he would be able to forget and be forgotten. But faith was lacking, and the ability to obey.

This idea of a monastery had long haunted literature, and he and his friends in Berlin had talked of founding a non-confessional monastery for intellectuals who, at a time when industry and finance had pushed themselves so much to the fore, could not feel at home in the atmosphere of a materialism which they themselves had been misled into preaching. He now wrote to a friend in Paris about the founding of such a monastery. He sketched out plans for the building, drew up rules and went into details of the communal

the first—use of *intellektuell* as a noun in Swedish. The words, moreover, were first written in 1898, the year of the publication of Zola's 'J'Accuse . . .!' and the manifesto of the intellectuals in Paris, milestones in the Dreyfus Affair and in the emergence of the figure of the modern intellectual.

That Strindberg was aware of, even haunted by, the Dreyfus Affair is clear from the references to Dreyfus and the Affair in *Ockulta Dagboken* (*The Occult Diary*) and the novels *Götiska rummen* (*The Gothic Rooms*) and *Svarta fanor* (*Black Banners*). In contrast to these works, neither *Klostret* nor *Fagervik och Skamsund* refer explicitly to Dreyfus or the Affair. Instead, they register the impact of the Affair in a sustained meditation on the role of the writer as intellectual and the nature of justice, also central issues in the discussion in France of Alfred Dreyfus's innocence or guilt and the actions of Zola and other artists and writers to free him from what they saw as a profoundly unjust imprisonment.

Albert Dreyfus, as is well known, was a French army officer who was framed for treason and condemned to imprisonment on Devil's Island, a harsh sentence that almost certainly would lead to an early death.[2] The evidence was a piece of paper found in a wastepaper basket in 1894. On it were jottings concerning military secrets in a handwriting that bore only a very slight similarity to that of Dreyfus, but in reality belonged to another army officer, Ferdinand Esterhazy. With the wisdom of hindsight, it seems clear that the facts that Dreyfus was Jewish and from Alsace, since 1871 part of Germany, played key roles in his condemnation, and that many in the army knew that he wasn't guilty, but went to great lengths to make it seem that he was, even forging documents as false evidence. Discussion of his trial and condemnation divided educated French society in the 1890s, with conservatives arguing that tradition and patriotism outweighed uni-

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life and duties of the brothers. This was in August 1894! The aim of this monastery was to be the training of supermen, by means of asceticism, meditation and the practice of science, literature and art. Religion was not mentioned, since he did not know what religion there would be, or whether there would be any religion at all" (Strindberg 1966, p. 131).

2 My summary of the Affair follows the account in Bredin 1984.

versal standards of truth and justice, while those on the left held that the condemnation of an innocent man was an outrage. Zola's famous letter, 'J'Accuse . . .!', published in the newspaper, *L'Aurore*, on 13 January 1898, led to his own condemnation for treason. The publication of the manifesto of the intellectuals (*le manifeste des intellectuels*) in the same newspaper a day later marked the flamboyant emergence of the word intellectual as a noun that designated at first an individual devoted to reason and universal standards of truth and justice, and specifically, in 1898, a left-leaning Dreyfusard. In the writings of conservative anti-Dreyfusards the noun *intellectual* was originally an insult, but soon the word was used to designate individuals of all political persuasions, anyone who worked with his—or occasionally her—mind but also participated in the public debate over political and cultural matters. It should be noted, however, that this use of the noun *intellectual* represents the culmination of a development that had taken place over the course of the 19th century, when it designated any individual who worked with his or her mind—in newly expanded universities, laboratories, the professions, and even the schools founded to satisfy legal obligations to provide citizens with at least a rudimentary education.[3] Strindberg's use of the noun reflects all three uses of the term.

It is also interesting that he links *intellectuals* to monks and monasteries. The French writer Julien Benda also saw intellectuals in the broad sense of the term as inheritors of the monastic tradition, as the title of his famous *La Trahison des clercs* (*The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*), first published in 1927, makes clear. But there was a widespread fascination with monasteries and cloisters in the decades surrounding 1900. In 'La musique et les lettres' (Music and Letters), for example, the French writer Stéphane Mallarmé gave a wistful portrayal of the dons at Oxford as latter-day clerics, who enjoyed the leisure to devote themselves to literature and culture in a beautiful setting that suggested a new version of the monastery, like Strindberg's "konfessionslösa kloster", a place where writers and scholars could pursue their interests free from economic worries.

3 On this development, see especially Charle 1990 and 1996.

Strindberg wrote *Klostret* in 1898—he may have completed most of it in October—but in any case after the publication of Zola's letter and the manifesto of the intellectuals and also after the completion of *Inferno*.[4] *Klostret* turns to the period in his life immediately preceding the years evoked in *Inferno*, when Strindberg, newly divorced, moved to Berlin where he spent time together with other unattached men and a few women, many from Scandinavia, although some came from Eastern and Central Europe, and where he also met his second wife, the Austrian journalist Frida Uhl. During this period, he and his character Axel lived either in hotel rooms or as the guest of his wife's family in Austria and since he was not always able to write, suffered considerable financial hardship. In contrast to the solitude evoked in *Inferno*, the focus here is collective: the character's relationship to the other people in the bar bizarrely called *Klostret* and to the woman who becomes his second wife. With the exception of her family, almost everyone he encounters is a writer or would-be writer, which is to say a self-defined intellectual in the most general sense. But one character evokes a tradition of 19th-century intellectuals which goes back to Germaine de Staël and the generation of émigré writers who fled France during the decades following the French Revolution. This is the woman who would become his second wife. The narrator first sees her at an elegant dinner, sitting alone and gazing upwards with a look that reminds the narrator of a portrait of Germaine de Staël as her character Corinne, also sitting alone, but on Cape Miseno, holding a lyre, and looking upwards with eyes that may be full of tears.

> Där satt en ensam dam, tämligen ung, såg förgråten ut och hade munnen öppen som Madame Staël. Hon föreställde sig som varande correspondent till en stor tidning, sade en komplimang, och nu slogs språklådan upp. Damen, vars utseende han icke lade märke till, emedan hon endast ville verka intellektuell, tog själv samtalets ledning. Hon sade att Tyska Riket saknat konst, veten-

4 See Ståhle Sjönell 1994, pp. 287–290.

skap och litteratur sedan kriget 1870. Hon läste endast franska och skandinaviska böcker, och den nyuppblomstrade ungtyska litteraturen vore kommen från Norden.[5]

Axel does not call his future wife an intellectual, but uses the adjectival form of the word to describe her: he notes sceptically her intense desire to *seem* intellectual. Staël was a topical figure in late 19th-century Scandinavia, because Georg Brandes had devoted half of the first volume of his 1872 work, *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur* (*Main Currents of Nineteenth-Century Literature*), to her: she is an important model for what Brandes considered a good writer, one who, like Zola, wrote about social and political problems. The woman in question, called Maria in the novel, is a journalist, thanks to her father, and passionately interested in social and cultural issues, although Axel deprecates her views.

The reference to Staël is hostile: Strindberg's narrator calls her Madame Staël, instead of Madame de Staël, omitting the nobiliary particle. Yet it also evokes Brandes' history of European writers, which argues that the French Revolution marked a turning point in the history of writers, as well as politics. The best writers are concerned with politics and culture, often from a distance, as exiles, like Maria, Axel, and the community of the little bar. Brandes situates Staël as the foremost among a group of writers who, forced to go into exile, registered the effects and potential of the French Revolution from a distance. His pages on her suggest that she is one of his most important forerunners and that exile or at least the status as an outsider is one of the most important hallmarks of the modern intellectual. Further, as Strindberg suggests—albeit in a back-handed way—Staël became an

5 Strindberg, SV 50:13 ("In it sat a solitary lady, fairly young, who looked as if she had been weeping, and kept her lips apart like Madame Staël. She introduced herself as the correspondent of an important newspaper, paid him a compliment, and conversation flowed freely. The lady, to whose appearance he paid no attention, as she only wanted to impress him as an intellect, herself took the initiative. She told him that the German State had had no art, science or literature since the war of 1870. She herself only read French or Scandinavian books, and the young German writers, who were just beginning to flourish, had got their inspiration from the North": Strindberg, 1966, p.14).

important model for women in late 19th-century Europe who also aspired to become writers and intellectuals.

Despite the narrator's scorn, the reference to Staël suggests that he is aware that there are women, as well as men, who aspire to be intellectuals. Thus, the reference to the cloister of male intellectuals at the end of *Klostret* and 'Karantänmästarens andra berättelse' marks in part an attempt to erase women's claims, as well as the narrators' desire to flee their wives.

In *Klostret*, Maria disapproves of Klostret, the bar, and the central parts of the novel focus on Axel's attempts to live together with a woman with intellectual ambitions and a desire to collaborate with him on writing projects and their publication. Not surprisingly, he finds it an impossible task, fleeing first from her in London, where they have travelled to discuss his plays with the owner of the Independent Theatre, J.T. Grein, and then after their child is born, when penniless and exasperated he dreams of joining an all-male colony of intellectuals, clearly an alternative to life with Maria.

What is the relationship between the cloister Axel dreams of at the end of *Klostret* and the bar by that name? There were women at the bar and he had had an affair with one of them. None of the customers seem to have foresworn sexuality. Axel admits to an affair with a woman the narrator calls Lais, almost certainly based on the Norwegian Dagny Juel. The name Klostret evokes what the bar is not and what it could be: a place where men alone gather to discuss cultural and political matters, to take their place among what Brandes had called in his 1883 book *Det modern Gennembruds Mænd* (*Men of the Modern Breakthrough*).

The bar also recalls the setting of *Röda rummet* (*The Red Room*), a bar where men gather to do the same, linking the bohemia of Henry Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (Scenes of Bohemian Life) to Brandes' history of European writers of the early 19th century.

Clearly, Zola's open letter and the manifesto of intellectuals provoked Strindberg to think about his own writing and its place in a larger European, rather than French or Swedish, context. The one possible allusion to the context of the Dreyfus Affair in *Klostret* is a

short discussion of the antisemitism of the protagonist's wife's Austrian family, curious because the family itself has Jewish ancestry:

> Det fanns nämligen hos henne och hennes släkt en underbar dyrkan av de blonda; om därför att de liknade ljuset, under det de dunkelhyade erinrade om mörkret, vore svårt att säga. De trodde alla blonda om gott, talade illa om judarne oaktat lilla fruns farmor varit judinna; och på mödernesidan som var av böhmisk bondsläkt begagnades ordet jude som ett förklenande tillmåle. Svärfadren var till och med antisemite, men när Axel B. skämtade över det bisarra häri, svarade frun:
> -- Du får inte skämta med det; ty det vilja vi göra själva.[6]

What the jokes do not say directly is that the family probably distinguishes between assimilated Jews who have been in Austria for decades and the large number of newcomers who entered the Empire in the last decades of the 19th century. The passage also suggests that it was above all people in the countryside who found the influx of new migrants disturbing.

By the time Strindberg revised *Klostret* four years later, for inclusion in *Fagervik och Skamsund* as a novella called 'Karantänmästarens andra berättelse', the European cosmopolitanism of Berlin and the little bar have disappeared; instead the new version evokes the Scandinavian cosmopolitanism of the last decades of the 19th century, when Copenhagen assumed the role of the cultural capital of the North. The second protagonist is a Swede, who marries a Danish woman. In this version, too, Maria's family harbours antisemitic opinions, although

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6 Strindberg, SV 50:101 ("Both she and her family had a strange passion for fair-haired people, but whether it was because they resembled the light, whilst dark people reminded them of darkness, it was difficult to say. They thought well of all fair people, and spoke ill of Jews, regardless of the fact that his little wife's paternal grandmother had been a Jewess. On her mother's side of the family, which stemmed from a race of Bohemian farmers, the word 'Jew' was used as a term of abuse. His father-in-law too was anti-semitic, but when Axel B suggested jokingly that this seemed to be rather bizarre, his wife answered: 'You mustn't joke about it. Only we are allowed to do that'": Strindberg, 1966, p. 125).

they have Jewish ancestors.[7] Further, the novella omits the first chapter of *Klostret*, which includes the references to Staël, as well as the bar in Berlin. Thus, not only does the European cosmopolitanism of the little bar in Berlin disappear, but this version also erases the presence of women intellectuals. Nevertheless, like the protagonist of the earlier version, his counterpart in the Quarantine Master's second tale marries an independent woman—a Dane, rather than an Austrian—who accompanies him to London and the continent in a marriage he finds intolerable, leading him to abandon her and their child and to dream of a cloister as a refuge at the end of the narrative.

There are, however, five tales in the collection. Four are stories the Quarantine Master reads to a little group of solitary men, who meet in the harsh and barren setting of the island of Skamsund, located in close proximity to the attractive tourist destination called Fagervik. The first recounts an episode in the life of an ambitious woman who abandons her husband, a grocer, for a baron, and travels southwards with him, but ultimately their relationship ends when they are quarantined on the Island of Ven in Denmark; afterwards, she takes one lover after another, even after she retreats to Skamsund. His third and fourth tales evoke a successful writer who is shunned by the other guests after he dances with the dishwasher at a charity ball, and a man with an upper-class background who refuses bourgeois society, the world of Fagervik, to eke out a modest living as a translator on Skamsund.

The novella most directly related to the Dreyfus Affair occurs at the beginning of the collection and is not attributed to the Quarantine Master. It is called 'En barnsaga' (A Child's Tale) and evokes the coming of age of Thorkel Öhman, the son of a sailor who was accused, perhaps unjustly, of causing the sinking of a ship and who, having lost respectability, as well as his livelihood, disappears, apparently turning to a life of crime. Young Thorkel becomes a ward of the state, and is assigned to work for the Quarantine Master, doing the dirty work of

7 The paragraphs are nearly identical in both works, the only difference being that the later version refers to "holsteinsk bondsläkt" instead of "böhmisk bondsläkt": Strindberg, SV 50:101; SV 50:263.

sorting through animal hides, looking for evidence of a disease that is said to devastate livestock in the East. After several years, he is able to make his way from Skamsund to Fagervik, where he at first flourishes, before he, like his father, is accused of neglecting his job, but in this case, clearly unjustly. Unlike his father, however, he does not complain. Instead, his stoicism impresses a navy officer, who employs him and promises to recommend him for a place in the navy, if he continues to please.

Like Dreyfus, Thorkel Öhman and his father inhabit a hellish island setting and are accused—perhaps unjustly—of crimes. Thorkel is rewarded, however, for his acceptance of his situation: unlike French Dreyfusards, he does not complain, but accepts injustice as part of society, especially the pleasant-seeming society of Fagervik. Thorkel moves from Skamsund to Fagervik, whereas the protagonists of the Quarantine Master's four tales do the opposite.

What to make of the contrast? The title of 'En barnsaga' suggests that the tale is both a coming-of-age narrative and a fairy tale. Perhaps Thorkel is naïve to think that it is desirable to move up in a social world characterized by hypocrisy and injustice. The narrator of the final tale, 'Den kvarlåtne' (Left Behind), asks why anyone should struggle to become part of something in itself unjust and even contemptible. His words are among the final lines of *Fagervik och Skamsund*, serving as a kind of conclusion to the collection as a whole. The quest of individuals such as Thorkel Öhman and Alfred Dreyfus to become part of mainstream society may be not only naïve but also self-destructive. For both, it might have been better to remain outsiders in unattractive island settings, perhaps not such a bad fate for young Thorkel, but surely a deadly one for Dreyfus on Devil's Island.

Strindberg continued to ruminate on the role of writers and intellectuals in his novels *Götiska rummen* and *Svarta fanor*. Both include characters, especially Count Max, who believe Dreyfus was guilty, as well as multiple narratives of failed marriages. Count Max eventually founds a cloister just south of Stockholm, where male characters gather to discuss political and cultural matters, although it is unclear who exactly lives there. *Götiska rummen* even ends with a scene showing a

group of male characters gathering to sign some kind of manifesto in favour of Dreyfus, but several decline to do so. Clearly, for Strindberg, intellectuals could be for or against Dreyfus, but the best among them believed that he was guilty. After all, in the world of *Fagervik och Skamsund*, we all are.

Even the later novels, *Götiska rummen* and *Svarta fanor*, are ambiguous on the subject of Dreyfus's guilt or the role of Jews in European or Scandinavian culture. Nevertheless, they are polemical works that seem to present a stark contrast to Strindberg's late masterpieces, poetic dramas such as *Ett drömspel* (*A Dream Play*) and his five *Kammarspel* (*Chamber Plays*), although these works also refer to social and political issues largely outside their dream-like worlds. If the two late novels hark back to *Klostret* and 'Karantänmästarens andra berättelse', the plays, often included among Strindberg's "post-*Inferno*" works, recall Strindberg's autobiographical novel by that name. Indeed, *Inferno* and *Klostret* present two very different notions of authorship: one, solitary and allied with the idea of the genius who, like Dante, has survived a descent into Hell; the other, collective and closely related, as I have argued, to the emergence of the intellectual in France and in Europe.

Written in 1898 and rewritten in 1902, *Klostret* and 'Karantänmästarens andra berättelse' situate the emergence of the word *intellektuell* and its corresponding concept in the context of the Dreyfus Affair. Remarkably, the second version suggests sympathy for Dreyfus's plight, although it does not affirm his innocence. In the narratives, moreover, imaginary cloisters and isolated Baltic islands are refuges from industrialization and mass movements on the continent and probably also from the immigration into Europe of new groups of people, above all Jews. Like the hides that Thorkel Öhman tries to keep out of Sweden, they come from the East.

This is a disturbing association, but remarkably enough, *Klostret* and 'Karantänmästarens andra berättelse' do not mention Dreyfus by name and the only reference to Jews and antisemitism concerns the Austrian and Danish families of the wives in both narratives. Here, as we have seen, the narrators express surprise and bewilderment at

the families' deprecation of Jews, since some of their own members are Jewish. At first glance, this reference seems to stand in sharp contrast to the account in *Inferno* of the narrator's experiences in Austria, where it is above all the Catholicism of some members of the family that turns him towards religion and also, perhaps, redemption.

The two, however, are probably not as far apart as they initially seem. In his classic account of Viennese culture in the years surrounding 1900, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, Carl E. Schorske links the psychologically oriented works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Sigmund Freud and Gustav Klimt to the rise of mass politics and antisemitism at that time. As he shows in chapter 3, 'Politics in a new key: An Austrian trio', the failure of Liberalism to gain widespread support in Austria and anxieties provoked by the migration into the Empire of large numbers of people, above all Jews, from the East, infused the politics of Georg von Schönerer and Karl Lueger, as well as Theodor Herzl.[8] The references in *Klostret* to the wife's family's antisemitism, as well as to diseased hides from the East in *Fagervik och Skamsund*, suggest that Strindberg was not unaware of such anxieties and that they may also inform his so-called post-*Inferno* works. Both the intense Catholicism of some members of the wives' families, as well as their hostility to some Jews, can be seen as two aspects of the reaction to the arrival of large numbers of newcomers in Europe, suggesting the limits to European cosmopolitanism at the turn of the century from the 1800s to the 1900s. Schorske's account invites us to consider Strindberg's late poetical dramas and his polemical novels also as closely related to immigration and the rise of hostility to outsiders, above all Jews, in the years surrounding 1900. Unfortunately, perhaps, this perspective also makes Strindberg's work especially relevant in 2026.

8 Schorske 1981, pp. 116–180.

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