MEMORY SPEAKS

Introduction

August Strindberg used his life as a source for his creativity over and over. In a famous letter to his colleague Verner von Heidenstam he declared:

> There is no occupation so brutal, so lacking in all sensitivity! If you knew what life is like when you, as an author, must stand naked in a public square, when you, as a vampire, suck the blood of your friends, of those nearest to you, of yourself! (Strindberg to Heidenstam 30 March 1885.)

> Det finns intet så rått yrke, så beröfvadt all finkänslighet som detta! Om du visste huru lifvet ter sig när man såsom författaren måste göra, klädt af sig naken på ett torg, huru man som vampyr får suga sina vänners, sina närmastes, sitt eget blod! (Strindberg till Heidenstam 30 mars 1885.)

It is well-nigh impossible to separate Strindberg's life from his fiction, and his contemporaries liked to read his works as scandalous testimonies about his private life. His writings are saturated with memories; those of his childhood (*Tjänstekvinnans son/The Son of a Servant*, etc.), of his marriages (*En dåres försvarstal/A Madman's Defence*, etc.), of former friends (*Svarta fanor/Black Banners*, etc.), of real or imagined abuses (*En blå bok/A Blue Book*, etc.). In a similar way, our relationship to Strindberg and his texts is shaped by how they are connected to our own lives—recollections of when we first heard his name, read one of his books, saw a play—and these connections have in turn shaped our lives.

Memories are testimonies from the past and thus the foundation of the present. In Walter Benjamin's famous description of Paul Klee's

painting *Angelus Novus* (in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* from 1940)[1] the angel is facing a past that keeps piling up wreckage with an irrepressible force that in turn pushes him blindly toward the future; wreckage of the past that also forms the building blocks of our present.

In early summer 2023 the 22nd International Strindberg Conference, on the theme Strindberg och minne/Strindberg and Memory, took place in the splendid surroundings of Kungl. Vitterhetsakademien in Stockholm, a venue that is itself a mixture of memorial to the past and site of contemporary activities. More than forty participants from eleven European countries, as well as from the USA, gathered for two days to present and analyse different aspects of Strindberg's works; to explore our reception of them today as well as personal memories of Strindberg's importance in the participants' lives.

Yet again, Strindberg's work and life proved to be a near-inexhaustible source for analyses of stage interpretations, new perspectives on his authorship and explorations of various themes in his writing. Other contributions focused on the experience and impact of reading Strindberg. The result was an inspiring two-day meeting full of reflections and discussions.

Jan Balbierz traces themes from Strindberg's dramas back to medieval ideas, while Massimo Ciaravolo claims the past as a central presence in the plays. Tobias Dahlkvist shows how memories turn Axel Borg into a melancholic in *I havsbandet* (*By the Open Sea*). Moa Marken analyses the way Strindberg considers fatherhood in his late drama, while Astrid Regnell shows how Strindberg creates meaning through recapitulations in *En blå bok*.

Lynn R. Wilkinson, in turn, shows how Strindberg uses the Dreyfus Affair to examine the notion of "intellectual" in a European context, while Hélène Ohlsson discusses Strindberg's complicated relation to the art of acting. Strindberg's importance outside Sweden is the focus of Ann-Charlotte Gavel Adams' presentation of the recent

1 Published posthumously in Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis*, ed. Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Frankfurt am Main: Sozialforschung 1942.

English translation of *Ockulta Dagboken* (*The Occult Diary*) and its importance for future English readers, followed by Vicente R. Sanchis Caparrós, who describes Strindberg's shifting reputation in Spain over time.

Gytis Padegimas follows Strindberg through his last years and later works. His more seldom considered dramas written in his youth, e.g. *Den fredlöse* (*The Outlaw*), are examined by Roland Lysell, while Björn Sundberg analyses Strindberg's use of the historic drama to "improve" his reputation. Mindaugas Naudžiūnas describes the work of undertaking a "postdramatic" performance of *Miss Julie*. Elvyra Markevičiūtė discusses different interpretations and stagings of *Fordringsegare* (*Creditors*), and Martin Hellström compares Strindberg's *Engelbrekt* with other interpretations and dramatizations of the 15th-century Swede.

Andreas Tranvik writes about Strindberg's critical stance towards the academic world and the concept of knowledge, and compares those with that of Ludvig Holberg. "Why does Miss Julie have to die?" is the question Maria Hansson tries to answer both from a historical aesthetic and an ideological point of view. Interpretations or adaptions of Strindberg as a person in Henning Mankell's nine one-act plays about Strindberg is the subject of Annie Bourguignon's paper, while Eszter Szalczer reconstructs an imaginary play by Karin Smirnoff in order to examine Strindberg's role as a father. Finally, Richard Bark tells the tale of his long theatrical life in the company of the author.

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In memory of Björn Sundberg (1951–2023).

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