

My path through/with Strindberg

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Born in 1946, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac is a playwright and professor emeritus at the Institut d'Études Théâtrales (Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle). In 1995 he founded the Research Group on "Poetics of Modern and Contemporary Drama". He led this group until 2010 and promoted and directed many research projects and publications. Sarrazac's writings have been translated into around 15 languages. His *Poétique du drame moderne*, *L'avenir du drame* or *Lexique du drame moderne et contemporain* are key to understanding modern dramatic writing. Sarrazac has contributed some very useful original concepts to contemporary theatre such as the notions of *rhapsody* and *drama-of-life*, a new approach to the art of *deviation*, and a stimulating redefinition of the *parable*.

English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

This article reviews the stages of Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's relationship with August Strindberg from 1983 to 2018 through his work as a theatre director and dramaturge, essayist and playwright. This review outlines a path that enables us to understand the many contributions of the Swedish playwright and his capacity to influence contemporary drama.

Keywords: Strindberg, intimate theatre, Harriet Bosse, rhapsodic drive, supernaturalism

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With my gratitude to Christina Mirjol who, during my lecture, read – magnificently – excerpts of my theoretical texts and, above all, two of my plays: Harriet and La Fugitive.

I recall that in the late 1970s, while I was teaching playwriting at the School of the Théâtre National de Strasbourg (TNS), I already valued the kind of Ibsenian-Strindbergian path that Claude Petitpierre, its director, had undertaken there with his actor students. My taste for Strindberg's theatre probably crystallised at that time under Petitpierre's indirect influence. In any case, that exercise carried out by the students revived curiosity about the author of *A Dream Play* that the example of Arthur Adamov and the teachings of Bernard Dort had awakened in me since 1968-1969.

Thus, I opened the Training and Research Workshops of the Comédie de Caen – which I founded in 1983 and directed until 1991 – with a cycle on Strindberg or the Studio Strindberg, which for four seasons kept the internship actors, some workshop directors and myself busy.

Very quickly, my passion for Strindberg went beyond the educational framework of training actors – and also decorators, set designers and “dramaturges” in the German sense of the term – to dominate my professional life as a theatre director and playwright. In this way, with the participation of the Jeune Théâtre National, I directed *A Dream Play* at the Comédie de Caen (CDN) in 1988, a key artistic experience for me, and in 1993, at the CDN in Angers and at the Théâtre Paris-Villette, Claude Yersin directed my play *Harriet* on Strindberg's relationship with his third and young wife, the actress Harriet Bosse, and the theatre of love and love for theatre, published by Editions Théâtrales.

It is therefore clear that, although to a great extent teaching and university research helped me to keep the Strindbergian flame burning in me through many papers and publications – including the book *Théâtres intimes*, published in 1989 by Actes Sud, a chapter of which focuses on Strindberg, and is fully imbued with his thinking about playwriting –, this flame is mainly fuelled by artistic experience, a real multiform practice of Strindberg's theatre, from the plays of the 1880s such as *Creditors* considered naturalistic to the dream plays after *Inferno*.

Today I can only offer an outline of a retrospective path in seven stages through my work as an essayist, occasional theatre director, trainer of actors and, finally, playwright on — or based on — Strindberg's plays. This path (I hope you don't consider it an ordeal!) will be to some extent a reflection of this station drama (*Stationendrama*)¹ that German expressionist playwrights were so fond of and that Strindberg extolled in three of his plays: the trilogy of *The Road to Damascus*, *A Dream Play* and *Stora ländsvagen* (*The Great Highway*).

The Studio Strindberg (1983-1987)

The Training and Research Workshops of the CDN put Strindberg's theatre and all the techniques into practice: acting, set design, production, dramaturgy... In these workshops, research is closely linked to training, mainly through the holding of weekends of documentation and dramaturgical reflection: "Opening weekend", 28 and 29 January 1984, with presentations by Strindberg specialists Maurice Gravier, Carl-Gustaf Bjurström and Guy Vogelweith, as well as Bernard Dort and Michel Vinaver and the psychoanalyst Jacqueline Autrusseau-Adamov; "Dream weekend", 24 and 25 January 1987, with presentations by Terje Sinding on Strindberg's fantasy comedy; by Florence Delay and Jacques Roubaud, authors of *Graal theatre*; by Jean-Loup Rivière on *Le Jeu de l'oie*, a film by Raoul Ruiz; and the screening of *Mémoire des apparences*, a film by Raoul Ruiz followed by a presentation by the actor Alain Halle-Halle.

1st season (1983-1984): The work on acting and the dramaturgy of the scenic space leads to *Creditors* and the brief pieces *Första Varningen* (*The First Warning*), *Pariah* and *The Stronger*, workshops led by Michel Dubois, Claude Yersin and myself.

Main challenges: To achieve a performance style beyond naturalism (naturalism plus some abstraction typical of the symbolist current); put on stage what Strindberg calls "the walnut", a metaphor that refers to the core of interpersonal conflict: the war of the sexes, the battle of the brains, the whole device of cruelty...

The interpersonal relationship taken to paroxysm under the gaze of the playwright, invisible yet present, who appears on the stage with his characters.

2nd season (1984-1985): The "Damascus project".

In reality three projects in five weeks, three practical work teachers: Daniel Girard, Hubert Jappelle and myself. Public presentations on 13 and 14 June 1985.

Discovery, with *The Road to Damascus* trilogy, of a dramaturgy of *intersubjectivity*.

1. *Stationendrama* that I practised spontaneously, completely unaware of the notion, in two of my early plays, *Lazare lui aussi rêvait d'Eldorado* (1976) and *L'Enfant-roi* (1981). Bernard Dort recommended seeing the origin of modern drama in Strindberg's stations.

To announce the public presentations, I wrote (promotional material with no reference):

Common play with the contribution of all the workshops and all the internship students: actors, set designers and playwrights. Union of all the energies to reach, at the end of the path, the public presentation of all our works. Heterogeneous production, mosaic. Overall review according to the spirit of this theatre of the Middle Ages that continuously inspires *The Road to Damascus*.

The Road to Damascus and *A Dream Play*: In these plays, considered of symbolist inspiration or occultist, even “mystical” by some, we witness the advent of a theatre of *integral subjectivity*. This, through the practice of the *Stationendrama* well defined by Peter Szondi:

[...] the unity of action is replaced by the unity of the self. The technique of the seasons takes it into account fragmenting the continuity of the action into a succession of scenes. The different scenes are not linked by any casual relation, do not engender each other as in drama [...] This immobility and this lack of future in the scenes, which it transforms into epics (in the Goethian sense), is related to a structure characterised by the self and the world put into perspective (Szondi, 1988: 94).

My dramaturgical and scenic response to *The Road to Damascus* (promotional material with no reference):

Our *Road* will determinedly take place *in situ*. In this ambiguous place, a train station, where separations and reunions come together and are reversed. / In this station (more or less in disuse), the Stranger, shortly before the big farewell, will remember the hours of his existence – loves, paternity, work, successes and setbacks of fortune, unusual honours and frequent humiliations – like so many farewells, so many other moments in which he had to give up, to distance from himself. / Everything happens, in this theatre in the form of self-portrait, within a single mind, but visited by so many other discarding presences and voices... Here, the human “interiority” becomes a hall of lost steps, a “room for travellers”.

3rd season (1985-1986): Posterity of a theatre in the first person, of a dramaturgy of subjectivity and autobiography – or autofiction – begun by Strindberg: Hélène Vincent, Ibsen, Laurence Février, O’Neill; Jean BOLLERY, Pirandello; René LOYON, Arthur Adamov...

4th season (1986-1987): Real world/dream world.

Workshop with Christian COLIN on the issue of the Curse in Greek classical playwrights and Shakespeare. With René LOYON on “dream, nightmare and premonition” in the work of Strindberg and of Florence DELAY and Jacques ROUBAUD, authors of *Graal théâtre*. With Jean-Pierre SARRAZAC on enchantment and telepathic love relations based on Strindberg’s fantasy comedies: *A Dream Play*, *Inferno* and *Ockulta dagboken (The Occult Diary)*.

Le Songe at the Comédie de Caen (1988)

I directed this show with young actors, most of them members of the Jeune Théâtre National or former participants in our training and research workshops with the assistance of experienced actors such as Jean-Marie Frin and Stephan Koziak. Here is this production's presentation text that I wrote in 1988 (text of presentation or programme for the production of *A Dream Play* at the Comédie de Caen, 1998):

After a waking dream, August Strindberg, who sees himself as a “somnambulist” playwright – Deleuze would call him *vigilambule* – wrote *A Dream Play* (1901), which is the laconic, condensed and enigmatic transcription of his total vision of existence. In its two hours the condition of the whole of Humanity is portrayed in the theatre.

Agnes, the daughter of the god Indra, decides to go down among men to know them and, if possible, love them. But the sons of the gods (*cf.* Christ) are the least fortunate of men. What should be a privilege for Agnes, her capacity to be in and out, to live for a time the life of a woman and observe, will become a torture.

Each of the main acquaintances that the young woman makes on Earth will become a trap and will cause a cruel disappointment. The Officer, who claimed to be captive and prisoner in a stable and who she wanted to free from all his permanent failures, treats her with vanity and ignores her. The Lawyer, who she marries because he appears in front of her as the unhappiest of men, polluted by all those petty and serious crimes, which float in the corrupt air of his studio, this Lawyer, with whom Agnes has a son, seeks to lock her within the walls of family duties. The Poet, apparently freer than the previous two, just as desperate in reality, takes her towards a melancholic drift through a society in which all individuals, even those who from a distance seem happy, are reduced to the state of human debris. All three – the Officer, the Lawyer and the Poet – can be considered as projections of the playwright at different ages of his existence: sprightly youth, maturity, old age...

Agnes spends her reserves of understanding and compassion in vain. She will struggle to find the strength to return to heaven to intercede in favour of men, those inconsequent creatures.

But although our planet, as described by Strindberg, is a valley of tears, it also becomes, under the divine gaze of the Daughter of Indra, the setting of a sarcastic comedy in which a paralytic Don Juan and the Lady continue to believe they are irresistible, in which the deans of the faculties chat with ragmen, and the coal miners become orange thieves, in which the moans, the complaints and the recriminations eventually melt in a funny cacophony and in which, when we finally manage to open the door behind which all the secrets were supposedly hidden, we realise that there is nothing, absolutely nothing...

Thus, *A Dream Play* is a vigorous rhapsody that mixes what is pathetic and what is comic, realism and oneirism, lyricism and irony; rather than a play, there are fifteen, twenty, fifty plays sewn by Strindberg, as we ourselves do in the morning with our torn dreams.

The play has no other unity than the oneiric; it is fragmented into a large number of microdramas.

In the programme of the show I also included my “Notes for the mise-en-scène of *A Dream Play*”. Here is a fragment (the totality of these “Notes” is included in my book *Théâtres du moi, théâtres du monde*, a collection of articles and notes on my plays published by Editions Médiannes in 1995, p. 74):

Gauvin’s set will lead the play towards this same binary division of the space that we find in Strindberg’s “chamber plays” (*The Storm, Burnt House, The Ghost Sonata*): a street where people only walk, park their vehicles, where people stay in spite of themselves; and a building (here, a theatre) so big, so uncovered, so skinned.

It is not therefore a forced interpretation of the text to summarise the space of *A Dream Play* as the “Theatre Street” (with its furniture: a bench, a board for posters, a streetlamp, the artistes’ entrance) and the stage of a theatre – the Intima Teatern founded by Strindberg in Stockholm in 1907 – seen through the back wall as if we had removed it. Let us use the same delicacy with our audience. We will be outside, in Theatre Street, but we will also be inside, on the stage of the theatre where Victoria, the Officer’s fiancée, performs. We will be both inside and outside and will experience in a concrete way this familiar ubiquity of Strindberg and his characters.

If we passed a magnifying glass over Strindberg’s text, we would find that Beckett appears here and there. Beckett *in the intimate space* of Strindberg.

The characters of *A Dream Play* (and those in many of his plays) are divided. There is a character performing, and the same character watching himself or herself performing. In Agnes this splitting takes on the extreme form (angelism?) of a divine/human scission, which does not prevent her, on her earthly journey, from having the body united to the soul.

“A naturalistic dream,” says Strindberg. And even if it were a chimera, of the type of the knife without a handle and a blade, we strive to give it a shape.

***Théâtres intimes* (1989)**

An essay on the dramaturgies of what is intimate and on subjective realism from Strindberg to O’Neill, Beckett, Achternbusch, Duras and Thomas Bernhard. Here is a fragment of the prologue (pp. 10-11):

Théâtres intimes reveals a displacement: the dramatic conflict that in the past developed in an interpersonal space now takes on as its main setting the inner life of each character. From Strindberg to Beckett and from Ibsen to Thomas Bernhard, we witness not only a displacement of the drama towards more subjectivity but also an insularity of the drama in the psyche of the character. How does the playwright, from this moment, manage to portray this conflict, plotted with day and night dreams, with fantasies and unconscious drives, that is only expressed when concealed? How to portray on the stage this invisible continent?

These are the questions that irrigate the book. The aim was to identify a common dramatic challenge — a theatre of the intimate — for playwrights of very different styles, who share this challenge while each developing a different, personal, aesthetic gesture.

Harriet at the Nouveau Théâtre d'Angers (1993)

The play was created at the Nouveau Théâtre d'Angers, directed by Claude Yersin, on 19 January 1993, and was published by Editions Théâtrales (1992). It was adapted for radio by France-Culture with Alain Cuny and Francine Bergé in the main roles of the Writer and Harriet, and broadcast on 7 December 1991:

In May 1901, August Strindberg married Harriet Bosse. Some weeks of happiness followed that soon gave way to seven years of suffering, a suffering punctuated with frequent and dazzling resurrections, and that reached its climax in 1907-1908, that is, when the Intima Teatern was founded.

In his hallucinated solitude, Strindberg had a telepathic love affair with Harriet and records in his *Ockulta dagboken* his night hugs with the “astral body”, the “double”, the “phantom” of Harriet [...].

A ceremony of the farewells will induce drama... The Writer interrupts a rehearsal of one of his plays on the stage of the Intima Teatern to announce that he is leaving for America. Later, preceded by their daughter Anne-Marie, Harriet intervenes, who has come to return to her ex-husband the play that he had dedicated to her. And all of them will be dragged, around the Writer, Harriet and their daughter, by this dance of death and life: the old councillor Merlin, director of the Intima Teatern; the debuting actress who has to play the role of Page and the Writer's rival he paradoxically calls “Jealous actor”... But the time of the ceremony shifts and what had to be an epilogue transforms into a (re)start...

François Regnault in his prologue: “The play takes place in a time loop comprised between 6 May 1908 and 6 May 1901.”

Every day is an anniversary. Cf. *The Dance of Death* (25 years of marriage of the Alice-the Captain couple). Every day-anniversary enables us to *retrospectively* seize the life of a human being, of a couple in its entirety.

Fragment from François Regnault's prologue (Sarrazac, 1992):

At that time. I deliberately use the eternal formula *in illo tempore*, because Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's play, according to the first lines, starts on 6 May 1908 to end, according to the final lines, on 6 May 1901, but lasts, in reality, it seems, *an instant*. The instant of the retrospective — *retroactive* — gaze aimed at an artist for his great love and his great work. But the beauty of the play does not lie in the fact that it goes back in time, although a few playwrights would risk it, but rather in the fact of condensing, in the chemical sense of the term, through a kind of absorption of energy, action, time and place in a hard compact core to then diffuse them in some scenes that are emanations or deflagrations and that

make us perceive, like lightning in a forest at night, the luminous paths and dark bushes.

Fragments from “Théâtre intime ou la folie de Merlin” dedicated to Harriet:

On 26 November 1907, Strindberg, with the assistance of the young director August Falk, opens his Intima Teatern in a popular neighbourhood, behind Stockholm’s main train station. Despite the discreet and ephemeral existence (the experience ended in December 1910) of this tiny theatre of 160 seats “almost underground”, a theatre myth emerges, the story of a Beginning: the story of the real beginning of modern drama. Twenty years earlier, another myth of modern theatre experienced its apogee: the myth of the theatre director to whom the name of André Antoine will remain linked. Strindberg was able, moreover, to closely follow the epic of the Théâtre Libre and even relate to it, because *Miss Julie* was created in French by Antoine. It is also worth noting the Berlin experience of Max Reinhardt’s Kammerspieltheater in performing Strindberg’s dramas and being a model for the Intima Teatern.

“Chamber theatre” and “intimate theatre” are, if not brothers, at least first cousins.

To better understand this myth of the Intima Teatern, I would like to superimpose it – or slip it – over another older myth, the myth of Merlin, or rather of Merlin the magician and the fairy Viviane. Several small events enable this approach.

As shown, for instance, by the inclusion of *Merlin: Eine Mythe (Merlin: a Myth)*, by Karl Immermann (1832), in the foreign repertoire of the Intima Teatern. Or the fact that *The Road to Damascus* was first called *Merlin*. It is also worth noting *Merlin l’enchanteur (Merlin the Magician)*, an epic by Edgar Quinet (1960), and *Merlin* by E. Schuré (1898). More generally, the trend of the period, as Strindberg himself admits, towards a return to the Middle Ages, its legends, its myths.

[..]

The myth of Merlin is, in the first place, *a myth of knowledge*. Merlin, through the demons, knows the whole past and, by God’s will, the whole future. Strindberg, in his turn, in many aspects herald of modernity, will perhaps be the last writer who wants to achieve, in a kind of parody of Goethe, the sum of knowledge. To his real talents (writing, painting, photography), he wants to add that of alchemist and, at the end of his life [...], he recorded in his *En blå bok (A Blue Book)* his research in such diverse fields as, according to the table of contents, philosophy, psychology, the problem of love (*sic*), religion, art and aesthetics, history, philology, mathematics, botany, zoology, astronomy, meteorology, chemistry, physics, medicine, geology, mineralogy, occult science...

[..]

The myth of Merlin, like that of the intimate theatre is *a myth of love* [...]. In the version of the loves between Merlin and Viviane that I prefer – the least misogynistic, probably –, Merlin (who, moreover, is aware of the trap he will fall victim to but who, to some extent, kills himself for love), reveals to Viviane a spell thanks to which she can preserve her body from any attack and penetration by a man. The other effect of this spell is to make this man believe that he

has possessed her sexually (*cf.* the telepathic love relationship between Strindberg and Harriet).

But the myth of Merlin is also a *myth of theatre*. Not only because Merlin excels when he transforms himself and moves from one character to another, or because he is the genial director and set designer of the Round Table. Nor because he makes emerge, for Viviane's beautiful eyes, in a clearing in Brocéliande forest, a castle that grows like a mushroom similar to the "growing castle" opposite which Agnes of *A Dream Play* and her performer Harriet Bosse stop. If the myth of Merlin is a myth of theatre it is so because it gives a faithful image of this intimate theatre, an image that is also the most evocative of the names... "Prison of air", "prison of indivisibility", this is the name of the place in the myth where the fairy Viviane keeps a finally consenting Merlin prisoner. "Prison of air", "prison of indivisibility" should be the name of the intimate theatre that is the only true home, in life and beyond — because the prison here is also a tomb of immortality — of the playwright Strindberg.

La Fugitive at the Théâtre 13 (1996)

Play written on a theme by Thomas Hardy — the "errant Jew of love" in *The Well-Beloved* — and directed by Jean-Yves Lazenec at the Théâtre 13 in 1996. A sculptor in his sixties returns to the island where he was born and from where the material of his sculptures is extracted, the white oolite. At night, he will meet a girl who will turn out to be the daughter and granddaughter of the women the sculptor felt in love respectively — but not to the extent of marrying them — when he was twenty and forty.

Finally, he will renounce this impossible love and live the rest of his life with Marcia, the young woman with whom he had fled the island forty years ago.

This play is a sister of *Harriet*. Through the end of Pierston's life, it is the drama-of-life. Merlin-Pierston or Merlin-The Writer prisoner of a phantom, of the return of his Love, of this eternal youth that imprisons him. He has performed all his spells to conquer his Love, but she, like the fairy Viviane, keeps him prisoner in her prison of air.

In fact, the love myth of Merlin and the fairy Viviane acts as a bridge between this play and *Harriet*: "There is almost no one day or night / when I have not her company / and I am more insane than ever, / because I love her more than my freedom" (Merlin to Gauvain in *Histoire de Merlin, Lancelot-Graal* by Florence Delay and Jacques Roubaud).

Harriet and *La Fugitive* form part of a personal constellation — a theatre of the inanimate/animate relationship, the paradigm of life/paradigm of death — in which *La Vénus d'Ille* by Mérimée (1837) and *Gradiva* by Wilhelm Jensen (1904) hold an important place. The statue of the *Vénus d'Ille* asphyxiates the cynical newly married with a deadly strangle against its chest of bronze (the inanimate kills the living): *Gradiva*, who walks in front, pursues the archaeologist on his pilgrimages and even in his dreams. As in the case of Marcia in *La Fugitive*, the love of Zoe — the real woman — frees

the archaeologist Robert Harnold from this influence. The Writer in *Harriet* also works, while forging the myth of the Actress of the new century, on the relation between the animate and the inanimate, the permanent incursion of one into the other (it is said that Harriet is dead at the start of the play).

Poétique du drame moderne: De Henrik Ibsen à Bernard-Marie Koltès (2012)

The study of Strindberg's theatre has greatly contributed to deepening the notion of the rhapsodic *drive* (*The Ghost Sonata* with a first epic act, a second dramatic, and a third lyrical), in my definition of the paradigm of modern drama and in my analysis of the rupture with the old Aristotelian-Hegelian paradigm. The drama-of-life in *Creditors* and in *A Dream Play*, two plays that seem to be at the antipodes of each other: the briefness of a crisis with a deadly end and a long path. On the one hand, the part for the whole (synecdoche), on the other the metaphor but, in fact, a metaphorical-metonymic play, an oscillation between these two poles: the endless stage and the human landscape.

The study of Strindberg's theatre and his treatment of the character have also enabled me to update the notion of *impersonnage*. One that is more than one. The *transpersonnage*.

Fragment from *Poétique du drame moderne* on the Strindbergian *impersonnage*, p. 232 in my *Poétique* (Sarrazac. 2012):

Contrary to the depersonalisation involved in the complete abstraction and vacuity of the character, the impersonalisation creates a character open to all roles, to all those possible of the human condition. The *impersonnage* is mainly *transpersonal*. A mask pursues the other, before exclaiming "I suffer as if I alone were the whole human species," the Stranger in *The Road to Damascus* specifically experiences this play of roles and asks himself: "Am I a child or an old man? Am I god or demon? Who are you? Are you you or are you me? What I see around me, are they my entrails or are they stars or nervous networks at the bottom of an eye?"

Strindberg, L'Impersonnel (2018)

One of the main challenges of this recent book is to examine the relationship between dramatic writing and autobiographical writing in Strindberg's work. An autobiographical process that leads to a dramaturgy of subjectivity.

Fragments from the essay published by L'Arche (Sarrazac, 2018):

In this essay devoted to Strindberg's theatre, the author seeks to assess the role of *hypotext*, the basis of the dramatic work, in the autobiographical stories. Contrary to George Steiner, who denounced, in *The Death of Tragedy*, the "scandalously personal" use by Strindberg of this public space that the theatre is, the author of the present essay seeks to reconstitute the approach by an immense artist that places the *intimate* at the core of creation and whose work

results from revealing, on the stage, his own existence and the existence of others.

[...]

Today, as in his time, Strindberg's reputation does not cease to mirror his work. There are many witnesses for the prosecution on his supposed mental disease, his deliriums of persecution and his furious misogyny, to begin with the hundreds of self-accusing pages that his readers can find in *Inferno* and in the other autobiographical writings, like the excessively well named *En dåres försvarstal* (*A Madman's Defence*).

The premises of my essay were that Strindberg was not mad, as Jaspers argued, or decadent, as Lukács believed. Behind the apparent solipsism of the great man of Swedish drama, my intention has been to outline the permanent invention of a *dramaturgy of subjectivity* – attached, through autobiographical writings, to the playwright's existential torments. Of a dramaturgy in the first person leading to a new realism, which is to a great extent oneiric. Of a dramaturgy of the “self” that never stops opening to the “them”, to the polyphony. In fact, Strindberg could have subscribed to what Adamov writes in *L'Aveu*, the first part of the beautiful volume *je...ils...* published by Gallimard in the collection “L'Imaginaire”: “I am distanced. I can't name what I am distanced from. But I am distanced [...]. Everything that in man is worth living tends towards a unique unavoidable and monotonous objective: to go beyond the personal borders, to break down the opacity of their skin that distanced him from the world.”

Always in motion, Strindberg's theatre slips from the personal to the impersonal and *transpersonal*. Strindberg's dramaturgy of subjectivity is built on the lines of vanishing points of the autobiographical story.

[...]

At the forefront of its time, Strindberg's theatre embodies the confrontation of the naturalistic current and the symbolist movement. It will place itself, over different decades, at the very crossroads of these two trends. Rather than making of it a dialectical summary, it will make its distance, its permanent tension, play. Always, in his plays, the part of what I've called “couple scene”, renders a complete account of existence, and the metaphor of the whole – life like a “penitentiary colony for the crimes committed before birth” – seizes the most “realistic” fragments. The author of *The Road to Damascus* gives a name in the form of oxymoron to this artistic process: “supernaturalism”.

We could summarise all this by saying that Strindberg carries out in theatre what Kafka did in the novel and novella. And Strindberg is as much a model for playwrights since the 1900s – such as O'Neill, Adamov, Duras, Thomas Bernhard, Sarah Kane... – as Kafka is for novelists.

At the starting point of *Strindberg, L'Impersonnel* lies the fact that, on two or three occasions, in his *Versuche über Brecht* (*Essays on Brecht*) and in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin, also a great commentator on Kafka, mentions a little enigmatically Strindberg, whose work he presents as a goal in this “important yet badly signalled road” through which “the legacy of medieval and Baroque drama has reached us [...], and not by

some obscure smugglers.” Through this “goat trail”, Benjamin considers that Strindberg is linked, downwards, to Brecht and, upwards, to Lenz and Grabbe, to Goethe, to Calderón, to the miracle plays and the mystery plays of the Middle Ages.

To the Aristotelian genealogy of tragic theatre, Benjamin opposes another genealogy, in the end not tragic, founded on the “mourning play” (*Trauerspiel*), which goes back to Plato’s *Dialogues* and of which Strindberg’s theatre marks a stage.

Yet another stage...?

Still today, if I started writing a new play, it could be as a response to Strindberg’s chamber theatre. Plays such as *The Tempest*, *The Ghost Sonata* or the fragment *Toten-Insel (Island of Dead)* fascinate me because they put on stage, in a totally oneiric way, the daily life of the most common people, because they seem to realise in the closest way possible this “superrealism” that Strindberg pursued. If I had any strength, I would dream of writing a play that was a contemporary equivalent, an *analogon*, of *Burnt House*.



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