



BERLINER BEITRÄGE ZUR SKANDINAVISTIK

Titel/
title: *Nietzsche's Ocean, Strindberg's Open Sea*

Autor(in)/
author: Michael J. Stern

Kapitel/
chapter: »The Landscape: ›As my father I am dead‹«

In: Stern, Michael J.: *Nietzsche's Ocean, Strindberg's Open Sea*. Berlin:
Nordeuropa-Institut, 2008

ISBN: 3-932406-28-1
978-3-932406-28-7

Reihe/
series: Berliner Beiträge zur Skandinavistik, Bd. 13

ISSN: 0933-4009

Seiten/
pages: 8–26

© Copyright: Nordeuropa-Institut Berlin und Autoren

© Copyright: Department for Northern European Studies Berlin and authors

Diesen Band gibt es weiterhin zu kaufen.

The Landscape: »As my father I am dead«

On the 27th of November 1888, August Strindberg received a letter post-marked: Torino, via Carlo Alberto 6. The writer of the letter was an itinerant philosopher, a pensioned professor of classical philology from the University of Basel. It opens:

Hochgeehrter Herr,
ich denke unsre Sendungen haben sich gekreuzt? – Ich las zwei Mal mit tiefer Bewegung Ihre Tragödie; es hat mich über alle Maaßen überrascht, ein Werk kennen zu lernen, in dem mein eigener Begriff von der Liebe – in ihren Mitteln der Krieg, in ihrem Grunde der Todhaß der Geschlechter – auf eine grandiose Weise zum Ausdruck gebracht ist.

(My esteemed sir,
I believe our postings have crossed? I have read your tragedy two times and was deeply moved; it has surprised me beyond all measure to discover a work that expresses my own conception of Love – as a medium of war, as the deadly hatred of the sexes – brought to expression in such a grandiose manner.)¹

The name of Strindberg's correspondent was Friedrich Nietzsche and the tragedy he was referring to was *Fadren* (*The Father*). Written in 1887, Strindberg's ironically entitled drama depicts the struggle between a cavalry officer with serious scientific ambition and his more strategically capable wife. The most immediate and concrete manifestation of the couple's troubles is the direction of their daughter's education. Laura employs a strategy against her husband that creates a sense of uncertainty in his mind about the paternity of their daughter and plants seeds of doubt in the minds of others about his sanity. Commonly held to be inspired by both the French sociologist Paul Lafargue's warning about the coming matriarchy² and a momentary infatuation with Prussian martial patriarchy, the collision between the Captain and Laura involves much more than a fearful reaction to the possibility of rule by women. Although

¹ Found as letter 1160 in NIETZSCHE: 2003, 493.

² Strindberg read Lafargue's *Le Matriacat* which was published in *La Nouvelle Revue*, 15,3 1886. For a different perspective than mine, see Margaretha Fahlgren's excellent discussion of *The Father* in her monograph *Kvinnans ekvation: Kön, makt, och rationalitet i Strindbergs författarskap* (FAHLGREN: 1994, 85). For a discussion about the implications of the Captain's doubts about paternity, see Ross Shideler's *Questioning the Father: From Darwin to Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Hardy* (SHIDELER: 1999, 99–135). Fahlgren analyzes the depictions of gender difference in the play and how the subsequent determinations relate to power. Shideler analyzes the role of biological understanding as refracted through Darwin in Strindberg's depiction of marriage.

it is often read in light of Strindberg's preoccupation with his own sanity and as the shadow of his own marital unrest, this tragedy resists a biographical reading. Giving voice to a wide range of discourses, *The Father* speaks the languages of science, law, religion, passion, madness, and mythology. Most importantly, the staging depicts the symbols of masculine power only to allow the discourse to drain them of their meaning. From the military jackets and weapons hanging on hooks, the Strindbergian tropes of masculinity abound. From the Captain's spectroscopy to his straight jacket, these tropes represent the collision of reason and its other.

While these props have most often been read as representing power, their signification refracts through a discourse that interrogates the possibility of knowing paternity, and of knowing scientifically; in other words, the relationship between the discourse and the staging weakens epistemological categories as it questions psychological certainty. In the discourse, maternity remains the only given. The staged symbols of male power are shown as ossified objects belonging to another moment in time. The nihilistic environment casts a shadow on what a symbol can bring to light, revealing the Captain as a figure who has seen his day.

Moreover, despite its pre-occupation with family roles and questions of paternity, the play entitled *The Father* gives the penultimate word to the *mother* and the *last* word to *the mother's brother* who happens to be a preacher. As the play concludes, the Captain finds himself wrapped in a straight jacket, exclaiming his likeness to Hercules when betrayed and enslaved by Omphale.³ Almost immediately thereafter he succumbs to a

3 The Captain's reference to Omphale has a few interesting implications. According to myth, Hercules had murdered his friend Iphitus and his punishment was to serve Queen Omphale for three years. During this time he dressed as a woman and spun wool with Omphale's hand-maidens while Omphale wore his lion skin. The punishment for inappropriate violence is cross dressing or perhaps gender reversal. In this case, masculine aggression taken to its extreme brings about the loss of masculine privilege and converts the symbols of masculine power to trans-gendered objects. See FULLER: 1957, 121–122. Another more speculative suggestion comes from an etymological cousin of the Queen's name. The omphalos or »navel-stone« is a common world-wide symbol. The *Dictionary of Symbols* tells us that: »The cosmic omphalos has been contrasted with the cosmic EGG as the male with the female principles of the universe. The world was born from their sacred marriage in the same way as the child is born from sexual intercourse.« (CHEVALIER and GHEERBRANT (eds.): 1982, 718–719.) In other words, perhaps Strindberg is using Omphale as both a symbol of gender inversion brought on by over-reaching aggression and as an agent of cosmic regeneration. And Omphale is a queen

heart attack. The last two lines of the drama seal the mother's possession of the child as the death of the father is punctuated by Laura's exclamation, »Mitt barn! Mitt eget barn!« (My child, my own child) immediately sanctioned by the pastors »Amen!«⁴ A mythological and cosmological allusion precedes taking possession with a word, which is followed by sanctification as the curtain falls. The patriarch has recourse to a classical myth of a fallen hero, but the matriarch has the power of both inevitability and institutional religion behind her. This turn of events, the rise of the mother at the father's expense is reinforced by the trans-gendered aspects of the Captain's re-naming of himself and Laura as Hercules and Omphale.

This denouement indicates that while *The Father* depicts the »deadly hatred of the sexes,« this motif is certainly a metaphor for a larger struggle, a collision between a discourse of alienated reason and a discourse of power operating under the signs of fate and Christian propriety. The Captain, the man of science finds no discursive justification for the exercise of his power. He is forced to assume a mythological mantle, which constricts his possibilities as the discourse of the mother derives its power from the engine of historical change and the offices of the church. So while on the surface, it seems that Nietzsche's admiration for *The Father* emerges out of his identification with Strindberg's depiction of *bitter struggle between man and woman* and the creation that emerges from this struggle, there is more to the story as we are presented with the colliding discourses of classical antiquity and Christian modernity. The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns re-emerges as a family affair. The first aspect of Nietzsche's appreciation of Strindberg, his admiration of the Swede's depiction of marriage, emerges as a common complaint about modernity and a critique that makes use of the metaphor of procreation as an after-image of the creation of a world.

Perhaps our point of entry opens to view when we realize that all of our colliding discourses are given form within a family drama that offers

named after a masculine principle. While the implications of this are not within the confines of my inquiry, it is rather interesting to note for this builds on Strindberg's oft mentioned fear of the »coming matriarchy,« as it is apparent that Strindberg considers this event to be a moment of the death of the father as such and the birth of a new cosmic order in which the symbols of the father become the reinforcing agents of the power of the mother.

4 STRINDBERG: 1984a, 98. The English translation is from JOHNSON: 1976, 63.

us a genealogy only to question its stability. Certainly, Nietzsche's first major contribution to aesthetic discourse, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (*The Birth of Tragedy*), opens with a discussion using the metaphor of procreation and the use of this substitution of sexual reproduction for poetic production will re-emerge in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (*Beyond Good and Evil*), and again in *Ecce Homo* in the form of Nietzsche's supposition that his profundity emerges from a certain riddle, to which my subtitle, »as my father I am dead,« alludes and to which we will return in a moment. Strindberg for his part entitles his four part »autobiography,« *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*The Son of a Servant*), and despite the titular prominence of his mother, the cycle ends with his depiction of his overcoming of his maternal inheritance, which he claims is the source of his divided self and his occasional slavishness. For both Nietzsche and Strindberg, one dies as his father only to be born again posthumously as recurrence regulates an economy of subjectivity that pauses before its ontological enshrinement as being.⁵

Rather than using genealogy to convey a sense of biological predestination, both Nietzsche and Strindberg use genealogical metaphors to disentangle notions of subjectivity from deterministic models.⁶ They do this while maintaining the tension between foundational and anti-foundational models, between, as Nietzsche would later articulate the problem, the need to love one's fate and the fact of endless becoming. These paradoxical genealogical pairs – for Nietzsche: Apollo and Dionysius, theoretical and instinctive man, the *decadent* and the *overman*, the Crucified and Dionysius (once again), and for Strindberg: the serving woman and the aristocrat, Hercules and Omphale, the star of Bethlehem

5 Kelly Oliver makes an interesting comment on the relationship between the death of the father, gender inversion and what I call pausing before being. She remarks: »Nietzsche's Dionysian *Übermensch*, on the other hand, is a strong new type who can bear the excesses of pregnancy without individuation. These are for the weak who cannot bear life's excess, for those who cannot affirm pain and difference. The *Übermensch* is truly eternally pregnant: the one who does not need to give birth; the creator without creations; the artist without works of art; life becomes creative; son becomes mother, both sublime and abject.« See OLIVER: 1994, 59.

6 Sarah Kofman comments: »In order to deny all connection and affinity with those closest to him, in favor of exclusively »elective affinities,« Nietzsche substitutes an economic hypothesis for biological or racial hypotheses of kinship. Birth is conceived as the result of an accumulation of energy necessitating the build up of capital that will burst forth or explode all the more strongly for the time it is kept in check.« This statement is found in BURGARD 1994, 48, »A Fantastical Genealogy: Nietzsche's Family Romance«.

and star of Hercules – all are masks for the twin parameters of subjectivity: *amor fati* and the need to place a name upon constant change.

In any case, it is genealogy as figure and as symbol that regulates both men's understanding of the emergence of themselves as individuals and subjectivity as a performance whose contours are brought into relief by the act of *self-overcoming*. This helps to explain Strindberg's letter to the Danish playwright and parliamentarian, Edvard Brandes on September 4, 1888, where he writes: »Emellertid mitt aandsliv har i sitt uterus mottagit en förfärlig sädesuttömning af Friedrich Nietzsche, så att jag känner mig full som en hynda i buken.« (Meanwhile, my intellectual life has received a terrible stream of seed from Friedrich Nietzsche in its uterus, so that I feel intoxicated like a bitch in the belly.)⁷ For both Nietzsche and Strindberg, intellectual encounters were productive collisions and these collisions were genealogically regulated, tragic in nature, and metaphorical in valence. For both of these men, epistemological considerations lead to descriptions impregnated with subjectivity's very possibility, and what is born from the encounter is never identical to either one of its parents. Creation is not a form of cloning, but rather the inflection of random recombination.

Nietzsche addresses this issue himself in Aphorism 248 from *Beyond Good and Evil*. It is here that he states that there are two types of genius, »eins, welches vor allem zeugt und zeugen will, und ein Andres, welches gern befruchten lässt und gebiert« (the kind which above all begets and wants to beget, and the kind which likes to be fructified and to give birth).⁸ He expands his analogy to a classification of national cultures, but my concern is with the *individual subject*. Nietzsche concludes by stating: »Diese zwei Arten des Genie's suchen sich, wie Mann und Weib; aber sie missverstanden auch einander – wie Mann und Weib.« (These two kinds of genius seek one another, as man and women do; but they misunderstand each other as man and woman do.)⁹ If we extend the metaphor here to Strindberg, we can understand that his encounter with Nietzsche involved a period of »Gestaltens, Ausreifens, Vollendens« (forming, maturing, perfecting).¹⁰ Strindberg's pregnancy, his gestation

7 STRINDBERG: 1961, letter 1632 to Edvard Brandes, September 4, 1888. Translation by Stefanie von Schnurbein.

8 NIETZSCHE: KSA 5, 1993, 191. The English translation is from HOLLINGDALE: 1990, 180.

9 Ibid. for both the original and the translation.

10 Ibid. for both the original and the translation.

involves a fictional enactment of the possibilities of Nietzsche's philosophy as it relates to tragic subjectivity. This monograph concerns itself with Nietzsche and Strindberg's conceptions of the possibility of the emergence of the individual under the sign of nihilism; that is as an affect of the death of God the father, as the loss of the guarantee, as what Nietzsche would call the *dangerous perhaps*.

It was Edvard's brother, Georg Brandes, the Danish literary maverick, who had arranged the encounter between Nietzsche and Strindberg. Brandes, Nietzsche's first champion, had written him about Strindberg on the 3rd of April 1888 stressing that the philosopher shared a commonality with the person whom he considered to be Sweden's only genius: »Wenn Sie über die Frauen schreiben, sind Sie ihm sehr ähnlich.« (When you write about women, you are very similar.)¹¹ Nietzsche had initially responded to Strindberg's writing in a letter to Brandes dated November 20 (a week before his letter to Strindberg) where he remarked: »Vorgestern las ich, entzückt und wie bei mir zu Hause, *les mariés* von Herrn August Strindberg. Meine aufrichtige bewunderung, der nichts Eintrag thut, als das Gefühl, mich dabei ein wenig mitzubewunderen.« (The day before yesterday I read, with rapture and feeling altogether at home, *Les Mariés* by Herr August Strindberg. My most unreserved admiration, which is marred only by the feeling that in admiring him I also admire myself a little.)¹² On the surface, this reads again as if the commonality between the two thinkers begins and ends with their rather unfortunate understanding of gender relations; however as I have suggested, the register of male and female is de-centered and commutes across gender lines and we must remember that Nietzsche repeatedly debunks the concept of identification.¹³ It is also clear that Nietzsche thematizes his appropriation of Strindberg's text, as he takes possession of its attributes (he describes them, then names them as his own).

¹¹ NIETZSCHE: 1984b, 183. Collected as letter 533. My translation.

¹² Ibid., 483. See also NIETZSCHE: 1996b, 327, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, for the English translation.

¹³ Janet Lungstrum comments on what she calls the »metonymic, antagonistic desire between the sexes«: »It is a desire that Nietzsche internalizes or bisexualizes within his own text ...« (LUNGSTRUM: 1994, 137.) Lungstrum argues that because of this, Nietzsche provides a model of a woman's empowerment despite his utterances about woman. My point is that Nietzsche unmoors essentialist positions from the dock, setting them adrift.

Yet, despite Nietzsche's appreciation of Strindberg's depictions of gender politics, there is something much more esoteric about Nietzsche's understanding of Strindberg's tragedy. He seems to admire both the idea and its tragic expression. What is curious about this is that the gender conflict, the collision between Laura and the Captain happens *onstage*. You may well ask why this would create a curiosity. Allow me a slight, explanatory digression.

Just a few months before writing his first letter to Strindberg, Nietzsche had published *Der Fall Wagner (The Case of Wagner)*. In section 9 of this book, Nietzsche appends a footnote, which reads:

Es ist ein wahres Unglück für die Aesthetik gewesen, dass man das Wort Drama immer mit »Handlung« übersetzt hat. Nicht Wagner allein irrt hierin; alle Welt ist noch im Irrthum; die Philologen sogar, die es besser wissen sollten. Das antike Drama hatte grosse *Pathosscenen* im Auge – es schloss gerade die Handlung aus (verlegte sie vor den Anfang oder hinter die Scene).

(It has been a real misfortune for aesthetics that people always translate the word ›drama‹ as ›plot.‹ Wagner is not the only one to make this mistake; everyone does it; even philologists who should know better. Classical drama had *scenes of great pathos* in mind – it specifically excluded the plot (which it placed *before* the beginning or *behind* the scenes).)¹⁴

The footnote goes on to explicate the Doric etymology of the word drama, explain its religious origins, and to claim that drama means a happening and not a doing. The doing, so to speak, occurs *offstage*.

Nietzsche's comments on Strindberg's *The Father* clearly indicate that he understood the essential tragic collision in the drama to have happened offstage. Nietzsche's reading must have been right on the mark as Strindberg would later make good use of this Nietzschean perspective on drama and in an article published in the journal, *Nya Jord*, in 1889. In *Om modernt drama och modern teater* he would claim:

Drama lär i äldre grekiskan ha betytt tilldragelse, icke handling, eller vad vi kalla medvetna intrig. Livet passerar nämligen icke alls så regelmässigt, som ett konstruerat drama, och medvetna intrigörer få så ytterst sällan tillfälle att i detalj utföra sina planer, så att vi ha förlorat tron på dessa lömska ränksmidare, som få obehindrat styra och ställa med människors öden, att teaterboven redan i sin medvetna falskhet endast väcker vårt löje såsom osann.

(Drama seems to have meant event in older Greek, not plot, or what we call conscious intrigue. Life does not actually pass so predictably, like a constructed drama, and conscious schemers so seldom have the opportunity to set

¹⁴ NIETZSCHE: 1988d, KSA 6, 32. English translation from NORMAN: 2005, 249.

their plans into motion in detail, so we have lost our belief in these underhanded plotters who can play with human destiny unhindered. We have lost our belief in the theatrical villain who already with his conscious deception only awakens our scorn for being untrue.)¹⁵

This claim has a history as well. On October 2nd of 1888, Strindberg had written Georg Brandes thanking him for having sent a copy of *The Case of Wagner*. While Strindberg wrote *The Father* a good year and a half before he read this text and his correspondence with the philosopher began, he must have felt that Nietzsche's theoretical principles applied to his own production. For less than a year after reading *The Case of Wagner*, Strindberg had re-articulated Nietzsche's position on drama and even reproduces his etymological explanation of drama's origination. He began to understand his own production retrospectively and Nietzsche became his theorist. As he explained to Brandes: »Eget att jag genom Nietzsche finner systemet i min galenskap att ›opponera mot allt.‹ Jag omtaxerar och sätter nya värden på gamla saker! Det har man ej förstått. Knappt jag sjelf.« (Strange, through Nietzsche I find the system for my madness in opposing everything. I re-evaluate and place new values on old things. No one has understood this; I have hardly understood this myself.)¹⁶ Furthermore, in a letter to Ola Hansson on the 10th of March 1889, he comments:

Qvinnohat är därför och blir aldrig poesi, utan måste bli filosofi. *Fadren* faller ännu under poesin därför att den innehåller qvinnodyrkan (= öfverskattning av qvinnans egenskaper) moderkult. Förhållandet mellan poesi och filosofi kan jag ej för tillfället utreda.

(*Misogyny* therefore is not and will never be poetry, but must be philosophy. *The Father* falls under the category of poetry still in that it contains a worship of women (= an overestimation of a woman's qualities), a mother cult. I cannot for the moment untangle the relationship between poetry and philosophy.)¹⁷

Strindberg's comment to Hansson despite its rather banal misogynist inflection carries some import; for it is just the relationship between poetry and philosophy, between lyrical and form-giving impulses that is at issue.¹⁸ The letter to Brandes and the re-articulation of Nietzsche's position on drama indicates that the commonality between the two thinkers

¹⁵ STRINDBERG: 1912, 298. My translation.

¹⁶ STRINDBERG: 1961, letter 1715 to Georg Brandes, Dec. 4, 1888. Translation mine.

¹⁷ STRINDBERG: 1938. My translation.

¹⁸ These impulses are represented in a gendered fashion as well.

revolves around a notion of the tragic, of tragedy as the retrospective emergence of the doer after the deed. The issue at stake is, as Peter Szondi would write in his essay on tragedy, the difference between a poetics of tragedy and the idea of tragedy. For if Nietzsche regarded the tragic collision in *The Father* to have happened offstage, and the onstage event to be an expression of the pathos generated by this doing, then perhaps this suggests that it is Laura and the Captain's daughter Bertha's conception that is the tragic happening, and the pathos, the interpretation that is depicted onstage involves a struggle for power, an interrogation of paternity and the rights to determine her education. Again, the question of significance arises, for while we certainly can read this power struggle symbolically as the collision between impulses, we need to ask: what is tragic about birth and what should it matter that Bertha's conception is not depicted? I believe that an answer emerges when we follow Szondi's suggestion and shift our attention to the idea of tragedy rather than its poetics, the idea, which for Nietzsche involves the emergence of the individual and falls under the sign of the ideology of return. Szondi reminds us that there is an ironic collision inherent in the idea of tragic drama and again I quote: **»At every point in the hero's fate, he is met with the unity of salvation and annihilation, a fundamental trait of everything tragic«.**¹⁹ So for Szondi and for Nietzsche, the idea of tragedy is fundamentally linked to an ironic notion of subjectivity, for in its emergence are the seeds of its destruction, and in its destruction is the promise of salvation. This conception of the tragic provides a portal through which we can discern the significance of the encounter between Nietzsche and Strindberg. It is my contention that this commonality supercedes any notion of influence as the issue at hand involves a process and not a recapitulation of ideas. Furthermore, I contend that it is the development of an idea of tragedy, and not just a poetics, that informs us of the movement in both Strindberg's understanding of subjectivity and his dramatic production from the naturalism in *The Father* to the more abstract expressionist dramas around the turn of the century. These dramas with their ideology of return retain the ironic subjective position expressed by Szondi's formulation, and in a sense they subvert ontology by pausing before being. Strindberg's prose production rides along the

19 SZONDI: 2002, 59 (my boldface).

same rails in this period. Let us turn back to Nietzsche in order to explicate this common notion of the tragic.

Nietzsche first addressed tragedy in 1870. He gave a series of lectures on the origin of what he called Greek music drama, published a few essays, and then in 1872 he published *Die Geburt der Tragödie (The Birth of Tragedy)*, the book many readers associate with Nietzsche's views on the subject. Suffice it to say for the moment that while Nietzsche expressed reservations about his conclusions, most notably in his 1886 preface to the second edition, his concern for the notion of tragedy would remain constant throughout his career, and a few concepts raised in the *Birth of Tragedy* (if one can call them concepts) remain crucial for his thinking. His opinion »dass die Fortentwicklung der Kunst an die Duplizität des *Appollinischen* und des *Dionysischen* gebunden ist: in ähnlicher Weise, wie die Generation von der Zweiheit der Geschlechter, bei fortwährendem Kampfe und nur periodisch eintretender Versöhnung, abhängt« (that the continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac* in much the same way that reproduction depends on there being two sexes which co-exist in a state of perpetual conflict interrupted only occasionally by periods of reconciliation)²⁰ will develop into a series of genealogical collisions as his work progresses. Nietzsche will continue to make use of metaphors of procreation referring to art. These metaphors will often as not make reference to gendered conflict or misrecognition. It is also important to note that for Nietzsche, aesthetics was *aisthētikē epistēmē* or knowledge of bodily sensations, not merely a theory of artistic production and form.²¹ Therefore it should come as no surprise that in *Ecce Homo*, his »autobiography,« he states that the riddle of his existence comes when one considers that as **his mother he is still living and as his father he is already dead**. We can see here how the biological becomes the genealogical metaphor, where origin is posited only to be effaced and where subjectivity falls under the sign of aesthetic knowledge.

The second enduring issue raised in the *Birth of Tragedy* is that tragedy originates as a masked actor representing Dionysus who steps out of

20 NIETZSCHE: KSA I, 1988a, 2. The English translation is in SPEIRS: 2006, 14.

21 Martin Heidegger defines *aisthētikē epistēmē* as »knowledge of human behavior with regard to sense, sensation, and feeling, and knowledge of how these are determined.« See HEIDEGGER: 1991, 78.

the chorus. For Nietzsche, tragedy's content is emerging individuation and the subsequent demise of that individual. This view takes its most radical form in Nietzsche's retelling of the story of King Midas and the Satyr Silenus, and his citing of Silenus's response to Midas's question about what is best of all for humans:

»Elendes Eintagesgeschlecht, des Zufalls Kinder und der Mühsal, was zwingst du mich zu sagen, was nicht zu hören für dich das Erspreßlichste ist? Das Allerbeste ist für dich gänzlich unerreichbar: nicht geboren zu sein, nicht zu sein, nichts zu sein. Das Zweitbeste aber ist für dich – bald zu sterben.«

(Wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon.)²²

The birth of tragedy is equated with the emergence of the dream of individuated subjectivity. While Nietzsche will abandon such a radical pessimism, he will later depict his philosophy as a tragic philosophy and himself as a follower of Dionysus. Even Zarathustra will be depicted (in the 1886 preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*) as a Dionysian monster, thereby being marked as a tragic figure whose *Untergang*, going down or demise, will be depicted as the beginning of the tragedy. In any case, the notion of a strictly individuated subjectivity will remain an apollonian fiction even for the mature Nietzsche, and a critique of subjectivity will remain in the indices of his critique of morality and religion throughout his corpus.

The third enduring aspect of the Nietzschean version of tragedy's inception comes in the depiction of the two myths: the Judeo-Christian myth of the fall, and the Promethean myth of culture creation through transgression. This will later emerge as the non-gendered aspect of Nietzsche's historical genealogies, returning as the rational and instinctive man in *Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne* (*On Truth and Lies in an Extramoral Sense*), the two species of tragedy in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*), the noble and the man of *ressentiment* in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (*On the Genealogy of Morals*) and as the last line of *Ecce Homo* as *Dionysus versus the crucified*.

²² NIETZSCHE: KSA I, 1988a, 35. Translation by SPEIRS: 2006, 23.

The last aspect that reappears in the Nietzschean corpus is his complaint about Aristotle, whom Nietzsche claims got it wrong when he advanced the theoretical notion that the intended affect of tragedy was catharsis and its vehicle was mimesis. Nietzsche advances the counter claim that tragedy was not conceived to discharge us of discomfort, but rather as a creation of strength, which celebrates the abundance of its vitality by staring unflinchingly into a terrific world of infinite chance and becoming.

Nietzsche's mature idea of tragic philosophy has the following elements. It made use of genealogical metaphor for the creation of both individuals and worldviews. It depicts the emergence and demise of the individual, though please note that the pessimistic notion of the tragic as expressed by the anecdote about Silenus transforms with the writing of Zarathustra. As you may recall, the figure of Zarathustra is introduced in the last aphorism in the 1881 edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Gay Science)*.²³ This pivotal text in the Nietzschean corpus opens by linking poets to morality and declares that we still live in a tragic age where these teachers of morality will arise time and time again. This is also the text that announces the death of God and depicts the environment of his shadow. This is the context in which the last two aphorisms are enunciated. Aphorism 341 posits the eternal return of the same as an experimental position. The last aphorism in the original text, number 342, is entitled *Incipit Tragoedia*, the beginning of the tragedy and it is here that the narrative of Zarathustra's *Untergang* begins. Suffice it to say here, that when Nietzsche wrote a preface to the second edition in 1886, he claims: »*Incipit tragoedia* – heisst es am Schlusse dieses bedenklich-unbedenklichen Buchs: man sei auf seiner Hut! Irgend etwas ausbündig Schlimmes und Boshafes kündigt sich an: *incipit parodia*, es ist kein Zweifel.« (*Incipit Tragoedia*, we read at the end of this suspiciously innocent book. Beware! Something utterly wicked and mischievous is being announced here: *incipit Parodia*, no doubt.)²⁴ As Nietzsche announces his own form of tragedy, he announces the beginning of parody, the poem besides the poem – as he introduces the bearer of the ide-

23 The 1881 edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Gay Science)* ends in Book 4 with Aphorism 342.

24 NIETZSCHE: KSA 3, 1988c, 346. The English translation is by NAUCKHOFF/DEL CARO: 2001, 4.

ology of return, for Zarathustra, the *dionysian monster*, is the teacher of the *eternal return*, he lets us know that another discourse will run along side, another discourse of return, and the opposition of two gods that return, Christ and Dionysus are the genealogical companions in this parodic tragedy. This tragic parody, this collision of poems carries great weight, for Nietzsche declares that poets are the handmaiden's of some morality or other and the Nietzschean conception of morality suggests that an internal organization of drives for morality is the domination of one drive over the others.

In any case, Nietzsche's hostility towards notions of catharsis and mimesis will remain, as he never resolves this conflict ending *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where it begins, with his down going, and his authorship with a colonization of the narrative of the crucifixion, *Ecce Homo*, which ends with the opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified, a genealogical moment that began with his mother and father and ended with two metaphorical stand-ins for an internalized agon that happens off-stage, the tragic collision between internalized and competing perspectives on death and re-emergence. In the Nietzschean genealogy of self, there is a colonization of religious texts, and *the ideology of return is the bearer of hostility towards notions of stable subjectivity, as it pauses before decision by the oppositions whose collision provides the raw material for the emergence of the individual as an affect of repetition.*

So it is no wonder that Nietzsche did not understand the tragic aspects of *The Father* in its mimetic fidelity to recognizable experience. He understood the death of the father as the pathos required by individuation and he recognized the need *to be born posthumously*. If the idea of tragedy for Nietzsche is closely connected to the masked emergence of the individual and the parodic conflation of the possibility of his demise and his salvation, then he could only possibly read the intrigue that leads to the Captain's heart attack as merely an element of pathos, not as tragic action. Therefore I would like to introduce a postulation – that the movement in Strindberg's understanding of his dramatic production, and his notion of subjectivity have a distinct commonality with the mature Nietzsche's understanding of a parodic and tragic philosophy that pauses before its genealogical moment, before its birth, before its emergence into determinant being. This commonality is not restricted to the dramatic production as it commutes to the prose works as well, being especially prominent in Strindberg's *autobiographical* works. I call the commonal-

ity in Nietzsche's philosophy and Strindberg's literary production a genealogy of self, which is a form of tragic autobiography. This genealogy of self is an agonistic conflation of autobiography and history, of family drama and religious narrative, of necessity and contingency.

Earlier, I claimed that Strindberg's notion of subjectivity ran parallel to his conception of tragic drama. I have organized my findings around the categories explicated as comprising Nietzsche's idea of the tragic. These categories are the personal and impersonal genealogical construction, the emergence of an individual whose subjectivity is ironic, carrying within the seeds of both his annihilation and his salvation, a hostility towards mimesis and the cathartic discharge resulting in the use of a parodic colonization of a pre-existing narrative and a pausing before ontological determination.

Seeing that both Nietzsche and Strindberg considered themselves to be living under the sign of the death of the father, the death of God the father, and the end of the ontological guarantee, it is no wonder that they regarded the subject as a species of fiction. For following Aristotle, if only in this moment, fiction, like philosophy is the seat of possibility. If Nietzsche saw the subject as being retrospectively poeticized into the deed (*hinzugedichtet*),²⁵ it is because the subject is a metaphorical substitution for experience under the guise of the proper name. The subject organizes itself like a society (*Gesellschaftsbau*),²⁶ and is a nexus of relations, and social relations at that; however Nietzsche and Strindberg seeing themselves in a nihilistic age never got past the idea of recurrence as the re-appropriation of experience through the enunciation of the proper name. Both writers inform us about how description organizes possibilities in their relationship to subjectivity and perspective.

The genealogical oppositions in Strindberg's work appear as both biological and cultural oppositions. In the last chapter of volume 4 of *Tjänstekvinnans son*, in what he would later call his *befrielsekrig* (war of liberation), Strindberg writes himself into the position of being a *spiri-*

25 Translation: KAUFMANN and HOLLINGDALE: 1967, 45. The translators use the term »fiction added to the deed,« Nietzsche writes that »... »der Thäter« ist zum Thun bloss hinzugedichtet ...« in the original, implying that the subjectivity is a retrospective poetization and thereby tied to both aesthetic and moral action. For the original see NIETZSCHE: 1993, 279.

26 See NIETZSCHE: 1993, 33, for the original and HOLLINGDALE (tr.): 1990, 49 for the English. The German reads: »... unser Leib ist ja nur ein Gesellschaftsbau vieler Seelen.«

tual aristocrat through the dialog between the unveiled pseudonym *Johan* and a character designated simply as *X*. Just prior to this dialog the narrator (the autobiography is written in the third person) declares that »jaget är en mycket bräcklig form av en liten i rörelse varande kvantitet kraft, eller materia om man hellre vill, som under de och de givna förhållandena utvecklar sig så och så« (the I (ego) is a very fragile form of a small quantity of existing force or material in motion, if one prefers, that under such and such given relationships develops one way or the other).²⁷ The conditions for this state of »constant development« are »contradictions« for »the author is an experimenter«.²⁸ While *Tjänstekvinnans son* was written prior to the encounter, this notion of a subjectivity in constant development and experimental contradiction crept into Strindberg's theory of tragic drama in the Preface to *Fröken Julie* (*Miss Julie*, 1889),²⁹ where the understanding of the emerging tragic individual as *karak-tärslösa* (characterless), as »konglomerater av förgångna kulturgrader och pågående, bitar ur böcker och tidningar, stycken av människor, avrivna lappar av helgdagskläder, som blivit lumpor, alldeles som själen är hopflickad« (conglomerations of past and present cultures, bits out of books and of newspapers, pieces of human beings, torn-off shreds of holiday clothes that have become rags, exactly as the human soul is put together).³⁰ Though it is important to mention, at this point in Strindberg's development, these patchwork subjectivities are explicated in an environment of determinant notions of rising and falling, of class and gender conflict. The preface to *Miss Julie* is supposedly one of those texts written under the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy, but it is rather plain to see that Strindberg's understanding of the subject predates the encounter and the crux of the matter is not the reception, but the perspective on the relationship between the individual and the historical moment that the two men share. However, by the time we get to *By the Open Sea* (*I havs-bandet*) (1890), Strindberg openly places Nietzsche's philosophy under experiment. This experiment comes in the form of a novel. The protagonist of *By the Open Sea*, Axel Borg is faced with another genealogical decision at the book's close, for he must choose which star to follow, the

27 STRINDBERG: 1996, 214. My translation.

28 Ibid., 215. I have translated the Swedish.

29 The play was written in 1888, the preface in 1889.

30 STRINDBERG: 1984a, 105. The translation is found in JOHNSON 1976, 77.

star of Bethlehem or the star of Hercules. He chooses Hercules, but the novel ends with him pausing before tragedy; as unlike Julie, his demise is either left to reader's imagination, takes place outside the text, or is a circular regeneration as the book begins and ends with Borg on the open sea. The scholarship on the encounter has generally seen this novel as the apex of Nietzsche's presence in Strindberg's work; but if one eschews speculations about influence and favors commonality as a methodological category, it becomes apparent that a study of Strindberg's work at the close of the nineteenth century allows a glimpse into an extended interplay between the idea of tragedy theoretically articulated by Nietzsche and its possible permutations.

It is with *Inferno* (1897) that the parodic aspects of a Nietzschean idea of tragedy emerge with an ironic conception of subjectivity that carries both the means of its annihilation and salvation, knowledge and love. This type of parodic individual is exemplified by the character of *Den okände* (The stranger) in *To Damascus 1* (*Till Damaskus 1*) (1898). It is here that a divine narrative is parodied, as *Den okände* in a sense inhabits the story of Saul's transformation into Paul, although he pauses before the decision. Again, the protagonist's awareness of his own transgressions is refracted through the prism of a family drama, and it is that awareness of transgression that moves the subject through a circuit of repeating stations until he ends up in the same place he began, on the street corner, outside of a gothic church. At the drama's end he is unable to decide between Christ and the madhouse as Arne Garborg's decadent protagonist from *Trætte mænd* (*Weary Men*) (1891)³¹, Gabriel Gram had put it. It is here that the ideology of tragic repetition does not allow for a cathartic resolution. It is here that Nietzsche's two species of tragic regimes, the Judeo-Christian and the Dionysian converge and diverge in moments in a manner that »härma drömmens osammanhängande men skenbart logiska form« (imitate[s] the incoherent but ostensibly logical form of our dreams) as Strindberg will later describe *To Damascus 1* in his author's note (*Erinran*) to *Ett drömspel* (*A Dream Play*).³² For it is in *To Damascus 1*, perhaps Strindberg's most Nietzschean play that the idea of tragedy merges with the idea of parody, as the poem doubles and is mirrored in that »[p]ersonerna klyvas, fördubblas, dunsta av, förtätas, flyta ut, sam-

31 The modern Norwegian *bokmål* spelling of this title is *Trette menn*.

32 STRINDBERG: 1988, 7. The translation can be found in SPRINCHORN: 1986, 646.

las« ([t]he characters split, double, multiply, dissolve, condense, float apart, coalesce).³³ It is here that the possibility of the individual's salvation and annihilation stand before him, and a decision awaits him on another stage, as the ideology of return pauses before determination in a genealogical moment.

So this is our landscape where tragic and sacred narratives collide with family drama, where the modern individual emerges only to claim a fictional status, where lyrical impulse is given philosophical form, where biological determination is undermined as it is posited, and where the belief that there lacks a foundation unites atheistic and religious perspectives. Up until recently, Strindberg's production and especially his use of repetition is often seen as an anticipation of Freud. I hope that my reading at least raises the question whether the Freudian notion of repetition compulsion as being determined by the desire to return to an inorganic state, as a symptom, is not inadequate for describing what is happening in Strindberg's work. Perhaps a Nietzschean notion of return, repetition as the possibility of subjective affirmation and possibility serves the texts as well or better.

That said; this book is an attempt to rescue this encounter from the marginalia. As a literary historical problem or in an influence driven model of interpretation, the encounter is a collection of letters, a few texts by Strindberg, and a *received* interpretation of Nietzsche, which guides the ensuing analysis.³⁴ It is my contention that the importance of the encounter resides in a process that is common to both men's work, *the genealogy of self*. I take distance from the previous scholarship in that I argue that it is not a matter of influence, but an articulation of commonality that matters here. I leave each writer to his own strength – Nietzsche provides our theory and Strindberg dramatizes the theory's possibilities in verse, in prose, and on stage. This dramatization of the theory opens a window to the existential dimensions of Nietzsche's philosophy and its relationship to human suffering and subject formation. If one eschews influence theory, it is no longer an issue of whether Strindberg gets Nietzsche »right«: the issue commutes illuminating the ramifications of

³³ Ibid. for both the translation and the original.

³⁴ The extant literature on the encounter performs very little explication of the Nietzschean corpus. Nietzsche's work is reduced to three basic concepts: *Der Wille zur Macht* (*the will to power*), *der Übermensch* (*the overman*), and *Individuality*. I will review the scholarship in the fourth chapter.

the philosophy's possibilities as seen by a contemporary without the burden or the benefit of a body of scholarship.

Consequently, this study is divided into two sections. The first section is an archeological survey of the environment of the Nietzsche reception in Scandinavia. This section will include an analysis of the discursive environment immediately before and contemporary to the philosopher's reception in the North. This is intended to accomplish the following tasks: Chapter one will establish the vitalist and perspectival elements of the discourse on *realism* in the Scandinavian *modern breakthrough*. An excursus at the end of this chapter situates Strindberg's conception of *naturalism* within the debates. Chapter two will explicate the notions of primacy and authenticity in the Nietzsche reception itself. Chapter three will elaborate upon the polemical elements of the anti-realist discourse of 1889 and discuss the use of Strindberg and Nietzsche as tropes within this discourse. The first section is designed to illustrate the superficial aspects of the commonality between the two men by showing their similar positions within the discursive environment. This is not an attempt to lay claim to a definitive reading of the *actual* position each man inhabited in the intellectual environment of the time. Instead, this section explains how the environment defines and redefines »realism,« »naturalism,« »origination,« and »authenticity« in relationship to both »Strindberg« and »Nietzsche« The citation marks are provided by the discourse itself as neither man is cited directly, but each becomes a trope grafted upon pre-existing ideological positions.

The second section of the study removes the inverted commas of citation and turns its attention to the encounter between Strindberg and Nietzsche. Chapter four examines the relationship between the primary source materials and the scholarship of the encounter. This analysis is designed for the purpose of illustrating how the notions of primacy and authenticity that permeated the discourse of the reception are carried over into the commentary on the subject of Strindberg's relationship to Nietzsche. I will retell the story of the encounter with the intention of showing the limitations of this approach. Chapter four includes an embedded excursus that critiques the use of a negative model of influence in the scholarship and offers an alternative methodological optic, *commonality*. Chapters five and six are devoted to an extended elaboration of the commonality in Strindberg and Nietzsche's authorial projects, *the genealogy of self*. Chapter five is an analysis of Nietzsche's genealogical method,

and it is here that I connect the discrete elements of genealogy and polemic in order to discern how description appears as a manifestation of *Selbstüberwindung* (self-overcoming). Chapter six applies these findings to Strindberg's descriptions of nature and self. A discussion of the contemporaneity of Strindberg and Nietzsche's genealogies of self, and their relevance to our own notions of subject formation conclude my investigation of their encounter. Here, I pay close attention to the significance of recurrence in the authorships of both men.