Introduction

With the exception of the concluding interview, 'August Strindberg on Himself', which serves as an afterword to this selection, the majority of the essays published here come from two phases of Strindberg's career as a writer. They are also directly related to the two periods during which he produced his major achievements as a dramatist. Thus, the *Vivisections* of 1887 explores many of the themes and issues on which he focuses in the masterpieces of psychological naturalism, *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888), *Creditors* (1888) and the series of short plays that he wrote between 1888 and 1892, while the later volume of *Vivisections* from 1894, the selection from *Jardin des Plantes* (1896) and the other pieces from the 1890s all testify to the spectacular intellectual and emotional process that Strindberg underwent during this period, which would in due course enable him to write several of the key works of modernist dramaturgy, beginning in 1898 with the first two parts of *To Damascus*.

None of these collections is translated here in its entirety. The 1887 *Vivisections* also contains a brief *causerie* entitled 'Hallucinations', two complementary *à clef* accounts of painters, 'The Small' and 'The Great', in which the fortunes of two of Strindberg's acquaintances, Carl Skånberg and Ernst Josephson, are imperfectly masked as representative destinies in the artistic world of the period, and the novella, 'Short Cuts', a study in hysteria which bears comparison with numerous other contemporary fictional anatomies of the female psyche by (among others) the Goncourt brothers and Ibsen or, perhaps more pertinently, given its original publication in Vienna, in 1887, with what is now recognised to have been Freud and Breuer's epoch-making *Studies on Hysteria* of the following decade. First published in German, the original Swedish manuscript of this female case study has been lost, although it may be reconstructed with some accuracy at least in part because, in an attempt to meet the fears of his publishers concerning its transparently autobiographical nature, Strindberg produced a revised version, entitled 'A Witch', in which his contemporary models

were superficially disguised in seventeenth-century attire and then brought before the public as one of the historical tales in his ongoing collection of stories *Swedish Destinies and Adventures* (1882–91).

Meanwhile, the 1894 volume also includes a number of pieces, sometimes fragmentary, on Maeterlinck and the creativity of children, the reputation of Zola, the 'zoology' of women, homosexuality, racial stereotypes, and the suggestive power of lying, while *Jardin des Plantes* complements the items translated here with four further speculations in natural history, 'The Sighing of the Stones', 'Where are the Nerves of Plants?', 'The Cyclamen, or the Great Disorder and the Infinite Coherence', and 'Holly', as well as a collection of jottings, 'Paralipomena and Repetitions'. In its French edition, with the Baconian title *Sylva Sylvarum,* this collection also includes a series of reflections on chemistry, 'Corps simples, Chimie simpliste', in which Strindberg gives an account of his experiments at the Sorbonne in 1895 to determine the composition of sulphur and seeks to refute the claim of the Professor of Chemistry there, Louis Joseph Troost (1825–1911), that it is an unstable element arising from impurities in test tube corks and the water in the neck of glass retorts. 'The day on which I betook myself to the Sorbonne was a holy day,' he subsequently claimed, in the autobiographical fiction *Inferno* (1897), and 'after about two weeks I had obtained incontrovertible evidence that sulphur is a ternary compound, composed of carbon, oxygen and hydrogen. I proffered my thanks to the director of the laboratory, who pretended to take no interest in what I had been doing.'[1]

Moreover, during the period from 1894 to 1896 Strindberg wrote numerous other essays in both Swedish and French on these and similar subjects, which he placed in the daily press as well as in a number of more or less fashionable literary Parisian journals such as *Gil Blas* or the symbolist *La Revue blanche*, or else with one of the numerous esoteric outlets that flourished in the occult subculture of *fin-de-siècle* Paris, such as *L'Hyperchimie, revue mensuelle d'Alchimie, d'Hérétisme et de Médecine Spagyrique*, which was edited by his young alchemist colleague, François Jollivet-Castelot, or *L'Initiation*, which Strindberg regarded as the foremost agent of scientific occultism. The latter was edited by an eccentric medical officer called Dr Papus, a self-styled 'Mysteriarch, and Unknown Superior', whose real name was Gérard Encausse (1865–1916). Papus headed the Groupe indépendant d'études ésotériques, and Strindberg had such confidence in him that on one occasion he claims to have proposed 'to Papus that I should "kill" myself with Cyanide and he recall me to life following my prescription; but he's reluctant to do this, because a medical commission

would only say: "All right, but as you see, he wasn't really dead then"' (*Brev* XI, p. 258).

Some indication of the complex intertextuality of Strindberg's writings at this time, as he shuttles back and forth between one language, subject, journal or volume and another, is given in the notes and commentary with which this selection concludes. Copious though it is, however, what the commentary does not indicate is the extent of his activity as an essayist at all stages of his career, from the early, and often anonymous, journalism on all manner of topics, from university reform to art criticism and the fashionable *causerie*, with which he sought to support himself as a young writer between 1872 and 1879, to his many polemical contributions on political, religious and literary issues during the so-called 'Strindberg Feud' which dominated the last two years of his life, before his death in 1912. During the early 1880s, when he was preoccupied with anarchist and socialist thinking, and in particular with the writings of Rousseau and the Russian critic and novelist Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828–89), whose novel *What is to Be Done?* he regarded as marking 'an epoch in my career as a writer' (*Letters* I, p. 150), he wrote a series of essays on social issues. These include the extended, if desultory, analysis of Swedish society 'On the General Discontent' (1884), the still pertinent 'August Strindberg's Little Catechism for the Underclass', and, of course, a number of increasingly dogmatic interventions in what was termed the Woman Question. Meanwhile, a never entirely assuaged desire for recognition as a scholar stimulated his always insatiable curiosity, and contributed to his numerous writings on cartography, sinology and painting, a number of which were subsequently collected under the general title *Studies in Cultural History*. In similar vein he wrote several essays on Sweden's political and cultural relationship with France, Spain, Portugal and Rome, which are freighted with scraps of idiosyncratic but pedantically presented learning, including numerous lengthy extracts in the original from Latin sources, which comprise an entire volume in the new edition of his *Samlade Verk*. Scholarly ambition and an admiration for the example of Linnaeus also helped promote a variety of works on natural history and the countryside, including *Among French Peasants* (1886), *Flower Paintings and Animal Pieces* (1888), and *Scanian Nature* (written 1891, published 1896), but with the exception of the Preface to *Miss Julie* and 'On Modern Drama and Modern Theatre', the other essay from the later 1880s included in this selection for the valuable gloss it provides on his attitude to the theatre during the same period, he wrote almost nothing about the theatre, and little literary criticism of significance, until the series of *Open Letters* that he addressed to members of the Intimate Theatre in 1908.[2]

However, from the point of view of his plays and the preoccupations of the mind that created them, it is the essays translated here that perhaps shed most light on the development of Strindberg's career as a dramatist. They testify both to the acuteness of the eye with which he regarded those aspects of human behaviour that inform his theatre, and which he directed with precise, if idiosyncratic, attention upon the natural world, and to the wide-ranging, if sometimes strikingly partial, scope of his reading. They also help to establish a number of underlying continuities in the remarkable development that his writing underwent from the naturalism of his major achievements in both narrative prose and the theatre during the 1880s to the fully achieved modernism of many of his later works; these continuities are otherwise easily overlooked in the apparent formal difference between *Miss Julie* or *Creditors,* on the one hand, and *A Dream Play* or *The Ghost Sonata,* on the other. Moreover, the development to which they bear witness is also frequently obscured by the often melodramatic events of Strindberg's colourfully staged private life during much of the 1890s.

The first collection of vivisections, as Strindberg called the various incisive texts in which he sought to emulate the scientist and dissect his contemporaries and their ideas,[3] was written between January and April 1887, following Strindberg's move from Gersau in Switzerland to Lindau in Bavaria. Such changes of place, which were frequent during what became for many years a largely itinerant life in both Sweden and abroad,[4] were often accompanied by a change of direction in his writing, and this was again the case here. Having just completed the four-volume autobiographical fiction *The Son of a Servant,* in which he claimed 'simply to have taken the corpse of the person I know best and read anatomy, physiology, psychology and history on the cadaver' (*Brev* V, p. 344), he now temporarily abandoned the social concerns and polemics that had characterised much of his writing during the first years of the decade, in such books as *Among French Peasants*, and planned to concentrate on psychological analysis and literature. (His last play of any substance had been *Sir Bengt's Wife* in 1882.) Thus, he pointed out in a letter to his publisher Albert Bonnier (23 February 1887) that he was 'ready to embark upon a new stage in my writing and, leaving the Peasantry and social questions behind, return to the poet's and thinker's neutral ground' (*Brev* VI, p. 171), and told another correspondent (the eminent Swedish writer Verner von Heidenstam) that he had 'discovered a new genre' with which he hoped 'to make my appearance . . . in the *Neue Freie* in a couple of months time' (*Brev* VI, p. 144). The latter was the eminent Viennese daily, the *Neue Freie Presse*, which had previously published two of the stories from his 1885 collection *Utopias in*

Reality, and which now appears to have approached him with the intention of commissioning an original *feuilleton* in German. Consequently, he shifted his sights briefly from Paris, where he had for some years been seeking to establish a European reputation, and redirected them upon a German-reading public, on whom his immediate hopes were currently pinned.

The essays and discursive narratives of the vivisections in which he sought to realise these hopes were also European in design, and led almost immediately to the first of his dramas with an international appeal, *The Father*, which he interrupted work on the essays to write in late January and early February 1887. Their frame of reference is eclectic and up to date. In the foreground are the contemporary experimental psychology of Henry Maudsley (notably his *Pathology of Mind* of 1879, which Strindberg read in French) and the psychological theories of Théodule Ribot, whose concept of the *multiplicité du moi* he adopted as one of the organising principles of his own self-portrait in *The Son of a Servant* and for the dramaturgy which he used to depict the central character in *Miss Julie*. But he also responds to Jean-Martin Charcot's accounts of hysteria, including the spectacular public demonstration of his female patients at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, the experimental application of hypnosis to medicine by Hippolyte Bernheim and the Nancy school, Cesare Lombroso's typology of the criminal, the evolutionary theories of Darwin and the rigorous monism of the German philosopher and scientist, Ernst Haeckel. He also had recourse to popularisers like the once widely read Hungarian Jewish author and physician, Max Nordau, whose *Conventional Lies of Our Civilisation* (1883) Strindberg briefly considered 'Holy Writ!' (*Letters* 1, p. 119) or the speculations of several less well-known and respected thinkers such as the nineteenth-century German philosopher and mystic Carl du Prel, whose *Die Philosophie der Mystik* (1885) would become one of his most favoured texts. Meanwhile, in literature their affinity is with the psychological realism of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, which he was to praise in the Preface to *Miss Julie* as attracting him 'more than anything else in contemporary fiction' (*SV* 27, p. 109), the late naturalism of Guy de Maupassant and Paul Bourget and the scientific tropes of Edgar Allan Poe, who was to generate such enthusiasm in Strindberg when the latter encountered his short stories for the first time the following year that he even entertained the notion that he might be Poe's reincarnation (see *Letters* 1, p. 300, where he observes that 'On the night between Christmas Day and Boxing Day I read Edgar Poe for the first time! And noted it in my diary! I'm astounded!', and then asks, 'Is it possible that he † in '49, the year I was born, and could

have smouldered down through hosts of spirits to me!'). Of the eight extant vivisections, four are psychological studies of living models in narrative form while three of the others are essays on aspects of psychology, similar in kind to those treated in the narratives. Poised generically and stylistically between the essay and fiction, they approach Edmond de Goncourt's conception of the 'livre de pure analyse' which he believed might embody 'la dernière évolution du roman',[5] and anticipate the intriguing combination of novel and essay that Huysmans would achieve with *A Rebours* in 1889.

As their title suggests, however, it is Zola, with his conception of the writer as a surgeon dissecting corpses, an anatomist in a blood-stained apron who cuts open the human beast laid out naked on a marble slab in a medical amphitheatre, who continues to offer what is perhaps the most fundamental example of the artist as vivisector. 'Le talent de l'auteur est un talent froid et sobre, emportant le morceau', Zola wrote, in an article on 'Livres d'aujourd'hui et de demain', in *L'Evénement* (29 July 1866). 'L'écrivain est un chirurgien qui, pour aller jusqu'au cœur, coupe dans la chair d'une main paisible et ferme, sans fièvre aucune. Il garde son sang-froid tant que dure l'opération. Il scie et taille avec un plaisir tranquille. Il n'a d'ailleurs ni dégoût ni enthousiasme, et il semble remuer toute cette pourriture humaine avec le calme du médecin qui connaît la toute-puissance de la mort.' Like Zola, the narrator or essayist of this collection readily presents himself as a doctor, analysing and commenting upon the maladies of the age, although unlike Zola his concern is more with the extreme individual case than with the socially representative example; in anticipation, too, of another of Strindberg's later enthusiasms, Nietzsche, whom he first read at Georg Brandes' instigation in 1888, the dispassionate, forensic intellect at play in these works is contrasted with the emotional imprecision and sentimentality of 'the small', who are generally defined here as women, Christians, socialists and romantics. Thus, writing in January 1888 to the publisher Claës Looström, whom he wished to reassure about what the latter considered to be the disturbingly frank autobiographical nature of these texts, Strindberg observed: 'These vivisections are literature in the modern style, you'll see. That they deal with me and persons still living is precisely what is so fine, and the title provides a justification or explanation; but I've thought up a subtitle which justifies some of the roles I assume! See how this looks: *Vivisections* – A Retired Doctor's Observations (Notes, Dossiers, Stories, Memoirs) Reported by Aug Sg' (*Letters* 1, p. 262).

For where Strindberg is concerned, an autobiographical, and hence by

association necessarily biographical element was a crucial aspect of this volume, as of so many of his writings. In a foreword to *The Son of a Servant* which remained unpublished until 1913, he had recently argued that the truthful writer inevitably writes about himself, since that is the only life he really knows anything about: 'How is one to know what goes on in someone else's mind, how is one to know the complicated motives behind someone else's acts, how can one know what he or she said in an intimate moment? One makes it up. But up to now homology, the scientific study of man, has not been much cultivated by writers, who with their deficient knowledge of psychology have embarked upon the portrayal of the well-concealed life of the soul. One knows only a single life, one's own' (*SV* 20, p. 373). In *Vivisections*, however, he was now concerned to extend this analysis to other people, beginning in his private life with his first wife, Siri von Essen, whom, according to a letter to his old friend Pehr Staaff, he was currently vivisecting in advance of writing a detailed account of their relationship in the autobiographical novel *A Madman's Defence* (1887–8).[6] Just as he tells Staaff how 'interesting [it is] to study the very intestines of a woman's soul' (*Letters* 1, p. 242), and recommends that he follow suit, so, in a letter from Vienna, where he had gone in April 1887 to supervise the publication of these pieces in the *Neue Freie Presse*, Strindberg justifies his supposedly impersonal, scientific standpoint in these case studies by maintaining that it is of no great moment that 'my investigation focuses upon living persons. That some of them [should] perish is quite normal with vivisections, when fistular canals are inserted all the way into their intestines. It's the spirit of the age to write about the living rather than the dead: I have myself been the subject of a whole literature' (*Letters* 1, p. 229).

Thus, in 'The Battle of the Brains', for example, he gives a fairly detailed, if grossly subjective and imperfectly masked account of the field trip that he had recently made through the French provinces, in September 1886, to gather information for his study *Among French Peasants*. He was accompanied on this journey by the young Swedish sociologist Gustaf Steffen (1864–1929), a future Professor of Economics and Sociology in Gothenburg, who was currently studying mineralogy in Berlin. Like Schilf, the narrator's antagonist in 'The Battle of the Brains', Steffen was indeed engaged in socialist politics and an enthusiastic admirer of the German socialist leader August Bebel. He was, also like Schilf, the son of a cloakroom attendant, though at the Royal Library in Stockholm, where Strindberg had been employed between 1874 and 1882, rather than at a German museum of natural history, as in the story. Rumour had it, too, that Steffen was (again like Schilf) the illegitimate son of someone at the

top of the hierarchy of the institution at which his mother worked, in his instance the Royal Librarian, Gustaf Edvard Klemming (1823–93). This was in fact not the case however, although, like Strindberg, Steffen enjoyed Klemming's patriarchal protection.

Steffen had originally approached Strindberg when the latter was attacked in an article in the *Preussiche Jahrbücher* by the journalist Otto Rüdiger. He offered to write a rejoinder, and a lively correspondence ensued as a result of which Strindberg invited Steffen to become his travelling companion, even though he soon grew irritated with the younger man's self-assurance and orthodox Marxism, which encouraged him to question Strindberg's current faith in the rural rather than the industrial proletariat. Their relationship came to a sudden and disastrous end when Strindberg accused Steffen of withholding two of the photographic plates that he had made to document the expedition in order to conceal what was in all likelihood his own incompetent handling of their valuable equipment, and also of stealing 100 francs from his wallet. According to Steffen's account, which was addressed to Klemming on his return to Berlin: 'In Toulouse Strindberg began to reproach me for having squandered our money . . . and when he found out that some days had cost getting on for 100 francs and others not more than 50, he started to speak of treachery and theft! . . . I had destroyed the hotel bills so as not to have a mass of (as I supposed) unnecessary papers. Strindberg now maintained that it was *impossible* for any day to have cost us 100 francs! . . . Finally, at the station in Nîmes, Herr Strindberg flung 100 francs at me for my ticket back to Berlin, saying we should part, and overwhelming me with the crudest insults: I had "exploited" him or, "even worse", I was a Jew and had a hereditary tendency to betray him, an Aryan.' Although they do not tally precisely with one another, both this account and Strindberg's initial response, which is to be found in the angry letter that he addressed to Steffen from Clermont-Ferrand on 16 September 1886,[7] clearly frame the version of events that Strindberg gives in 'The Battle of the Brains', where they are marginally but transparently removed from France to Italy.

Characteristically transgressing conventional genre boundaries, these texts are frequently an uneasy but provocative fusion of the essay and short story, as Strindberg explores in prose the kind of conflict which he presents on stage in the mental battles between the Captain and Laura in *The Father* or Gustav and Tekla in *Creditors*. And while in many respects their range of literary and scientific reference provides a gloss upon the preoccupations of the great naturalist dramas, the generic ambiguity of these pieces is characteristic of his general practice as a writer of discursive prose where,

within the boundaries of a single work, objective comment or personal polemic is juxtaposed with acknowledged or lightly masked ruminations upon his own life as he switches rapidly back and forth between expository or critical discussion, on the one hand, and dramatic narrative, on the other. Strindberg called them sketches and stories as well as vivisections, studies and essays and they are thus subject to the kind of generic slippage and revaluation that characterises so much of his work,[8] particularly where the identity of the reflecting or narrating figure at the heart of the text is concerned. There is often a great deal of circumstantial evidence to link this figure with Strindberg's situation at the time of writing and yet in other, frequently minor respects, this identity has been subject to various slight displacements. For example, the writing subject of the 1887 *Vivisections* is identified by one of his interlocutors as a doctor rather than a writer and in 'Mysticism – For Now', he would appear to have only two children rather than the three which Strindberg and Siri von Essen had at the time; and yet it is easy enough to associate his relationship to his wife and more particularly the list of his enemies struck down by Nemesis or his account in the same text of the places where he has lived with people and events in Strindberg's life. Thus, while some texts collected here approximate closely to the form of a critical *causerie* or of the meditative or informative essay ('Césarine', 'The Death's Head Moth' or 'On the Action of Light in Photography', for example), others transgress or compound generic boundaries, to pose awkward questions about the identity of the narrator and the relationship between fact and fiction. While the traditional conception of the essay as a try-out in discursive prose of an idea, judgement or experience is doubtless the most adequate description of these more or less fugitive pieces, they thus share with Strindberg's work in other genres an ability to disturb received assumptions about the writer as an autobiographical subject and the figure that she or he projects in a text. On the one hand, his writing in any genre not only demands imaginative freedom but also recognises an essential rupture between the writing and the experiencing self (as one of Strindberg's early mentors, Søren Kierkegaard, observed, 'all poetic production would *eo ipso* be rendered impossible and unendurable, if the lines must be the very words of the producer, literally understood');[9] on the other, even the most achieved works of Strindbergian fiction solicit attention as accounts of his own experience both as texts in which he has 'multiplied himself' (polymeriserat sig – *SV* 20, p. 377) in a more or less discernible role and by way of apertures in the fictional text through which his life may suddenly become visible, initially to the eyes of his contemporaries whom he supposes are following his

career with close attention, and subsequently to the critical gaze of his ideal reader who will, he hopes, be reconstituting his life from 'the thousands of printed pages' (*SS* 19, p. 287) among which it has been dispersed, and where he claims it is to be found among what Michel Foucault terms '[the] relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentification, or . . . common utilization'[10] which exist between his various texts.

This remains very much the case with the miscellaneous items that form the second collection of vivisections, which were written in Austria during July and August 1894. 'I have a collection of new Vivisections ready', he told his old friend, the radical journalist Erik Thyselius. 'More brutal than ever, but full of new ideas and discoveries. They are written directly in French' (*Brev* x, p. 285). This was neither the first time, nor would it be the last, that Strindberg wrote one of his works directly in French, although he generally asked a competent friend or French-speaker to look over his text before publication. Both the second collection of stories in the volume *Getting Married* and *A Madman's Defence* were written in French; so, too, were *Inferno* and a collection of *Fables*. Moreover, when it came to publishing these works in Swedish, Strindberg rarely translated them himself but relied on the skill of an old student friend from Uppsala, Eugène Fahlstedt, who could reproduce his style with rare accuracy. His reasons for avoiding Swedish in these and other works were various, but had to do mainly with the fact that the material in question was either hard to place in Sweden (after his trial for blasphemy over the first volume of *Getting Married*, for example, no Swedish publisher was prepared to look at a second) or too personal even for Strindberg to confront in Swedish, as was the case with *A Madman's Defence*. The work in question might also be aimed specifically at an international rather than a Swedish audience: *Inferno*, for instance, was designed at least in part for readers familiar with the discourses of alchemy, black magic and occultism at large in Paris during the 1890s. Where the 1894 *Vivisections* were concerned, however, his intention was also quite practical. While living with his second wife, Frida Uhl, and their young child on her family estate at Dornach, on the banks of the Danube, between Mauthausen and Grein, he was planning a further descent upon Paris, where he did not wish to arrive empty-handed, and hoped to make an immediate impression. Thus, in one of two cards that he addressed to his current confidant, Leopold Littmansson, on 15 August 1894, the day on which he was to leave what seemed for the moment a claustrophobic rural Austrian backwater for the greater stage of Paris, the capital of the