STRINDBERG AND MODERNIST THEATRE

Post-Inferno Drama on the Stage

FREDERICK J. MARKER
AND
LISE-LONE MARKER

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Baskerville Monotype 11/12.5 pt *System* LaTeX 2ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 62377 4 hardback

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

1

Before Inferno: Strindberg and nineteenth-century theatre

It could be said of August Strindberg, as it has often been said of Yeats, that he wrote himself out of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The great period of experimentation that produced the dream plays and the chamber plays began just before the turn of the century, in the aftermath of the massive psychic upheaval Strindberg described as his Inferno (1894–97). Of the plays written before that personal crisis, only a small handful – notably *Miss Julie, The Father*, and *Master Olof* – have sustained a subsequent history of major productions. All three of these, moreover, point forward and are linked in one way or another to the plays and poetics of his post-Inferno period. All this having been said, however, it would nevertheless be misleading to overlook altogether Strindberg's apprenticeship in the nineteenth-century theatre and its conventions. The earlier plays and their first productions laid an important groundwork of experience. It was from this basis that his dramaturgy and theatre poetics developed, at a time when the new influence of modern drama and theatre was becoming an increasingly dominant force.

"It is impossible to set up rules for theatrical art, but it ought to be contemporary." This statement, reiterated many times by Strindberg in varying contexts during the course of his career, points to a fundamental characteristic of his theatre practice. Almost from the outset, his art became a restless search for new forms capable of meeting the changing demands of the consciousness of the time, as seen from his uniquely personal point of view. Both as a playwright and as a theorist, Strindberg kept in touch with the newest directions and developments in theatre and drama, ready both to absorb and reshape them in his own way. As the arch rebel and social iconoclast, he was the ardent champion of a comprehensive revitalization of the theatre which, by the end of the nineties, he was convinced could only be accomplished through a redefinition of the nature of the theatrical experience itself. During the decades preceding that realization, his idea of theatre underwent radical change. This

process was not, however, one of continuous, linear, or even consistent development. Instead, its course was defined by an oscillating succession of experiments that led, gradually but surely, to a total rejection of the accepted conventions of stage illusion and dramatic construction, as inadequate means of expressing the mystical and visionary aspects of life that, to an increasing extent, he came to regard as the true fabric of reality.

During a brief, unhappy period as an aspiring actor in 1869, Strindberg had his first taste of the theatrical climate and repertory of the day. His "debut" at Dramaten came in a revival of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *Maria Stuart in Scotland*, in which he played a messenger with fewer than a dozen lines to speak. A grander scheme, to make his real stage debut as the stormy romantic hero Karl Moor in Schiller's *The Robbers*, predictably came to nought. He quickly found his footing as a playwright, however, and his first produced play appeared in 1870. This was a one-act verse drama called *In Rome* [*I Rom*], a Scribean vignette of anecdotal history depicting an incident in the life of the renowned sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, who as a young artist is saved from despair when an unexpected benefactor (Thomas Hope) commissions the famous Jason statue. Acted at Dramaten by an exceptional cast that included Axel Elmlund as an elegant, elegiac Thorvaldsen, this anonymous "Swedish original" enjoyed an auspicious run of eleven performances in the 1870–71 season. At the start of his career as a playwright, Strindberg was strongly influenced by the traditional romantic preoccupation with history, saga, and folklore that had also characterized the early work of both Ibsen and Bjørnson a generation earlier. The influence of his great Scandinavian predecessors is plainly evident in *The Outlaw* [*Den fredlöse*], a new one-acter Strindberg brought to the stage at Dramaten the next season. The theme of this saga drama is the conflict of Christianity and heathenism in twelfth-century Iceland. This time, however, the play met a chilly reception. Alfred Hanson, a decorative but rather wooden actor with a soporific delivery, was no match for the towering Viking hero Thorfinn ("a titan, a Prometheus who struggles against the gods"), and the 22-year-old dramatist learned a useful lesson about a play's dependence upon the exigencies of performance.

More than nine years elapsed before another Strindberg play reached the Stockholm stage. Although he submitted the first prose version of *Master Olof* [*Mäster Olof*] to Dramaten as early as 1872, the theatre's readers were reluctant to recommend a work in which the historical characters seemed so altered from their traditional conceptions – though this

was obviously the author's whole point in this early masterpiece. At Nya teatern, where a bolder artistic policy came to prevail, the pioneering manager–director Ludvig Josephson eventually accepted the original prose version of the play, preferring it above the verse version published in 1878. The prominent naturalistic director August Lindberg staged the premiere of this sprawling historical chronicle at Josephson's theatre at the end of 1881. Strindberg's typically revisionist view of familiar figures of sixteenth-century Swedish history depicts Olaus Petri, biblical translator and influential champion of Luther's teachings, as an unheroic protagonist, a vacillating, hyperreflective religious revolutionary who, unlike the fiery and uncompromising rebel Gert Bookprinter, betrays himself and his beliefs. In terms of its style, the play's loose form, multiple changes of scene, and incisive use of realistic detail also challenged accepted conventions. The centre of energy in Lindberg's riveting six-hour production was the larger-than-life characterization of Gert created by the young Emil Hillberg, whose demonic fanaticism and black humour provided a striking contrast to the weak-willed Olof of William Engelbrecht. The play made Hillberg the new star of Swedish theatre, while its author at last found himself acclaimed as one of the foremost dramatists of the early 1880s.

Strindberg's interest in the history-play genre would reassert itself in his post-Inferno work, but in the early years he also experimented with the use of period setting in a different way, as a framing device for domestic dramas of married life that reflected his own initially contented but increasingly harrowing emotional life with his first wife, the strong-willed actress Siri von Essen. She played the staunchly loyal Margaretha in *The Secret of the Guild* [*Gillets hemlighet*] at Dramaten in 1880, in a production that marked a crucial step toward her husband's definitive breakthrough as a playwright the following year. Reminiscent of Ibsen's *The Pretenders*, this four-act play dramatizes the rival claims of two fifteenth-century master builders vying for the honour of completing the cathedral at Uppsala. One of them is a man who possesses the true strength of a great calling; the other, his own son, is the dishonest and inept pretender who is ultimately thwarted in his ambition when the tower he has constructed collapses. A closing scene in which Margaretha, wife of the humbled upstart, forgives and (in his own words) "redeems" her repentant husband provided a consoling outcome. The Strindbergian theme of marriage as an emotional battleground is more strongly stated in *Sir Bengt's Wife* [*Herr Bengts hustru*], a five-act medieval pastiche in which Siri von Essen again enjoyed great success as Margit in its production at Nya teatern

in 1883. She is Strindberg's alternative to Nora in a play that quite evidently presents an answer of sorts to *A Doll's House*. After the rebellious Margit has deserted husband and child and has attempted suicide, the marital combatants are at last reconciled in the end, as a love stronger than either rational logic or individual will prevails over the inevitable warfare of the sexes.

Lucky Per's Journey [*Lycko-Pers resa*], which proved to be one of Strindberg's most popular successes when produced at Nya teatern at the end of 1883, also employs a vaguely medieval setting, but this fairy-tale fantasy denotes a move in an entirely new and significant direction. In this work the playwright embarked, as it were, on a drama of pilgrimage that he continued years later in the much harsher, more phantasmagorical atmosphere of *The Keys to Heaven* [*Himmelrikets nycklar*, 1892], a fantasia in which a heartbroken smith searching for his dead children joins an aging and forgetful Saint Peter in a hopeless quest for the keys to heaven. The culmination of Strindberg's artistic pilgrimage would be the great journey plays of the post-Inferno period. Unlike these other works, however, *Lucky Per's Journey* retains a bitter-sweet fairy-tale quality that is resonant with echoes of the major works of Scandinavian romanticism – Adam Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, and not least the stories and fairy-tale plays of Hans Christian Andersen. After young Per leaves the belfry in which he has been raised, he wanders the world in search of happiness, discovering in the process that nothing is what he had imagined it to be. Instead, like many an Andersen figure with a wishing ring and a fairy godmother, he learns that the realization of his dreams of gold and honour and power brings with it only bitter disillusionment.

The fleeting, dreamlike transitions in this play, its replacement of the logic of reality with the imaginative logic of a fairy tale, and its invocation of a realism of the unreal are all signposts that point ahead to the dramaturgy of the mature dream plays. As it was originally conceived and performed, however, *Lucky Per* belongs squarely in spirit to the romantic theatre of pictorial illusion. In its use of transparencies, startling transformations, and a multiplicity of elaborately representational settings for its short, kaleidoscopic scenes, it took full advantage of the spectacular stage effects and mechanical wizardry of which the painted wing-and-border stage of the nineteenth century was capable. Consider, for example, the second-act *changement à vue* in which "a snow-covered forest" at dawn, with "an ice-covered brook" running across the stage in the foreground, is transformed "from winter to summer: the ice melts on the brook and it runs freely over the stones, while the sun shines over the entire scene."

Eventually, Strindberg would come to look upon a realistic representation of such an effect on the stage as "wasted effort," simply because the careful, detailed setting required to bring it off convincingly only detracted from the dreamlike mood it endeavoured to convey. Before his crucial reorientation toward simplification, however, he had to pass through a phase coloured, as he later writes, by a "naturalistic taste, adapted to the materialistic objectives of the age, [that] strove for realistic accuracy."[1] During this earlier stage in his development, his primary concern thus became the intensification of an illusion of objective, credible reality in the theatre.

Always closely attuned to new theatrical directions – and always ready to acknowledge debts of literary or theatrical influence – Strindberg was preoccupied from the early 1880s with the emergence of naturalism and its quest for a "new formula" for art. With *The Father* [*Fadren*, 1887] his writing underwent a radical change that he was certain represented the formula for which "the young Frenchmen" were still searching. For this playwright, the term "naturalism" was synonymous from the outset with what he comes to describe, in "On Modern Theatre and Modern Drama" (1889), as "the great style, the deep probing of the human soul." He was never convinced by the merely photographic aspects of the movement or by its sometimes exaggerated insistence on the reproduction of the details of surface reality. "If a woman is seduced in a hothouse," he writes dryly, "it isn't necessary to relate the seduction to all the potted plants you can find there and list them all by name."[2] Instead, what he calls greater naturalism is that "which seeks out the points where the great battles are fought, which loves to see what you do not see every day, which delights in the struggle between natural forces, whether these forces are called love and hate, rebellious or social instinct, which finds the beautiful or ugly unimportant if only it is great."[3] In this interpretation, the elements of external verisimilitude in the naturalistic style serve only as a means of achieving an intensification of dramatic mood and conflict.

In this way, the unrelenting struggle for dominance and survival that rages between Laura and the Captain, the titanic contestants in *The Father*, acquired added horror for its first audiences by being so concretely anchored in a contemporary bourgeois milieu they found familiar. Yet the conflict in the play quickly takes on an added dimension, bursting the bounds of mere realism and confronting us with a harrowing dramatic image of hell as mutual psychic torment. The suggestion that the Captain is not the real father of his only child festers and grows to an

obsession that severs his ties with objective reality, undermines the basis of his very existence, and ends by bringing on the fatal stroke he suffers when his female persecutors lure him onto a straitjacket. But here, as in the subsequent plays of gender warfare, the primary emphasis is not on the customary naturalistic interaction of character and a convincingly lifelike environment. In *The Father*, as in such one-acters as *Creditors* [*Fordringsägare*, 1888] and *The Bond* [*Bandet*, 1892] as well as in both parts of *The Dance of Death* [*Dödsdansen*, 1900], the sex wars take place in a context of detailed verisimilitude. However, their full theatrical impact derives from the evocation of a wrenching, nightmarish atmosphere that transcends this reality, yet nevertheless remains familiar by virtue of a tightly controlled realistic technique. What one might call an almost Ibsenian blend of naturalism and symbolism ("super-naturalism," O'Neill later chose to call it) becomes even more evident in *The Dance of Death*, an anomalous work that, although written after the Inferno, still retains the style and features of the earlier marriage plays to which it is generically linked.

Zola, the principal spokesman for naturalism in the theatre of the late nineteenth century, appears not to have been wholly convinced by Strindberg's idea of a "greater" naturalism. In a letter (December 14, 1887) occasioned by the publication of the French translation of *The Father*, he objected that "the Captain without a name [and] the others who are almost entirely abstract figures do not give me as powerful a sense of reality as I demand."[4] The inaccuracy of Zola's statement about the namelessness of the Captain (whose name is Adolf) has often been noticed. Equally misleading is his broader judgment that the play lacks a strong "sense of reality." It was precisely the shock of its realistic immediacy that almost completely overshadowed the reception of its first performance, which opened at Casino Theatre in Copenhagen in November 1887 amidst a storm of controversy. Directed by Hans Riber Hunderup, the production became, above all, an ideological battleground of opposing tastes. To demonstrate his solidarity, Georg Brandes even took the unusual step of attending rehearsals. "From the very outset one could see how numerous the Strindbergians, or those whose natures were more or less in sympathy with the Strindbergian tendency, were in attendance: the applause which was heard from beginning to end was truly enthusiastic," the critic for *Nationaltidende* (November 14, 1887) observed. "Whether this success will last more than a very few evenings remains quite another matter. So far as we are concerned, we think not." Despite their praise of the play's technique, most of its first reviewers took strong exception to

the unrelenting despair of Strindberg's vision. *Berlingske Tidende* summed up the reaction of a large conservative majority impervious to a fervent campaign by the Brandes brothers on behalf of Strindberg and modernism: "Despite the talent revealed in the technical construction of the play, it nevertheless remains a bitter, unpoetic fruit on the arid tree of realism."

At the eye of the critical hurricane was the unnerving straitjacket scene. "How far have we actually drifted, when that grim instrument of the insane asylum, the straitjacket, has managed to become a means of gaining effect on the stage?" demanded the angry critic for *Dagbladet* (November 16). "An uglier, more revolting scene has probably never been presented in a Danish theatre. Those who only read the play have no conception of how incredibly nerve-racking this sight is. . . . The mood of the real audience – those who had not attended a demonstration – was oppressed and indignant." This particular observer's logic is interesting: precisely because a play like *The Father* speaks to everyone in a theatre, modern drama "has no right to use such unrefined and brutal means to achieve effect," he insists. Although *Aftonbladet* (November 16) might argue that "in its scenic effectiveness it ranks on a level with the very best in modern dramatic literature," the harrowing straitjacket scene remained the focus of conservative umbrage. "The drama is bleak enough as it is, so crushing and depressing that this scene is the drop that makes the cup run over," the reviewer for *Nationaltidende* declared, while his like-minded colleague at *Dags-Telegrafen* added: "We can well understand why individual spectators stood up this evening during the third act and left the auditorium."

Although Hunderup's actors, accustomed to the light Casino repertory, lacked the requisite strength and technique for this demanding task, their performances, with Hunderup and his future wife Johanne Krum in the leading roles, won high praise. "When one must daily hold an audience through the aid of exaggerated outward action with many gestures and grimaces, it is no small problem when, for once, one must return to the evenness and naturalness that are the devices of all good plays," Edvard Brandes observed in *Politiken*. He was especially impressed, however, by the able portrayal of Laura, "acted with a natural and heavy tone of voice that has an extremely intense effect." Strindberg's own conception of the proper performance style for his play was, at this time, characterized by a similar emphasis on a subdued naturalistic approach. "Act the play as Lindberg acted Ibsen; that is, not tragedy, not comedy, but something in between," he wrote in a letter (December 23, 1887)

addressed to the management of Nya teatern, which was preparing to stage the Swedish premiere. "Don't take too fast a tempo as we did to begin with here at the Casino. Rather, let it creep forward quietly, evenly, until it gathers momentum of its own accord towards the last act. Exception: the Captain's speeches when his *idée fixe* has broken out. They should be spoken rapidly, abruptly, spat out, repeatedly breaking the atmosphere."[5] The role must be played with "the superior, self-mocking, slightly cynical air of a man of the world," Strindberg wrote to the young novelist Axel Lundegård a month before the Hunderup premiere (October 17, 1887): "This is what is modern in my tragedy, and woe betide me and the clown if he goes overboard and acts *The Robbers* in 1887. No shrieks, no sermons. Subtly, calmly, with resignation – as an otherwise healthy spirit accepts his modern fate in the form of erotic passion."

Two decades later, Strindberg's ideas about both acting and the nature of the theatrical experience in general had changed drastically. By the time *The Father* was revived at his own Intimate Theatre in Stockholm in 1908, he was essentially finished with naturalism. Instead, he urged August Falck, who directed the production and also acted the Captain, to stage the play in an abstract, simplified setting of dark drapes so that, in his words, it would "be lifted out of its everyday atmosphere and become tragedy in the grand style; the characters will be sublimated, ennobled, and appear as from another world." He also intended the acting to develop this idea further: "*The Father* should be played as tragedy. Grand, broad gestures, loud voices . . . let loose the passions."[6] Falck was having none of this, however, and both photos of the Intima production and the 1911 film based on it confirm a style of staging and performance firmly anchored in the naturalistic tradition. When the play finally reached the stage at Dramaten in 1915, the "appealingly quiet sadness" of Emil Hillberg's meditative interpretation of the Captain likewise harked back to the playwright's earlier vision of a rigorously subdued, unhistrionic tone and atmosphere.

"Perhaps you know that I have no sympathy with the abstract," Zola had written in the letter to Strindberg about *The Father*. "I demand to know everything about the characters' positions in life so that one can touch and perceive them, sense them in their own atmosphere." Possibly as a consequence of this letter, adherence to the Zolaist principles of dramatic character became more pronounced in *Miss Julie* (*Fröken Julie*) than in any other Strindberg play. He himself considered this work "the first naturalistic tragedy in Swedish drama" – "'*Ceci datera!*' = this play will

go down in the annals," he added, with characteristic directness, in his submission letter of August 10, 1888 to the publisher Karl Otto Bonnier. In the long Preface, added for distribution to the patrons of the Théâtre Libre in Paris in 1893, he seems consciously to have set out to promulgate the ideas of theatrical reform advocated by Zola and Antoine, director of the French production. In so doing, he formulated what has since come to be regarded as perhaps the clearest summary of the aims and methods of the naturalistic style of theatre. In performance, Strindberg wanted the spectator to experience the drama of the Midsummer Eve seduction and suicide of the aristocratic protagonist as an unbroken slice of living reality. In order for an audience to respond in this way, the developing confrontation between Julie and her father's valet Jean must remain undisturbed by an intermission that would disrupt "the suggestive influence of the dramatist–hypnotist." To intensify the illusion of reality further, the large kitchen in which the action takes place must be fully three-dimensional, thereby eliminating "the effort of believing in painted saucepans." Yet at the same time, Strindberg describes a setting that should be impressionistically conceived, with a use of asymmetry that stimulates our imagination so that "we complete the picture ourselves." By advocating the elimination of footlights and heavy make-up and by introducing strong side-lighting to accentuate eye and facial (i.e., psychological) expressiveness, he sought to create a close-up drama of subtler reactions "mirrored more in the face than in gestures and sound." Following Antoine's lead and often using his vocabulary, he called for the actor to disregard the audience seated beyond the invisible fourth wall and to perform within, rather than in front of, the setting/environment. In this way each scene would be played in "that part of the stage the action dictates." I do not "dream of seeing the full back of an actor throughout an important scene," he writes, "but I do fervently wish that vital scenes should not be performed next to the prompter's box, as duets designed to elicit applause."[7]

Although its views on theatrical production are largely restatements of existing naturalistic theory, the dramaturgical arguments advanced in the Preface to *Miss Julie* often combine aspects of the naturalistic aesthetic with observations that point in a new, distinctly postnaturalistic direction. A complexity of motives – psychological, biological, environmental, hereditary – customarily underlies the behaviour of a naturalistically conceived character; yet the "split and vacillating" characters envisioned by Strindberg – "conglomerations of past and present stages of culture, bits out of books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, torn shreds of once

fine clothing now turned to rags" – are potentially Pirandellian in their characterlessness. His advocacy of a meandering, non-sequential pattern of dialogue, mirroring the randomness and casualness of everyday conversation, anticipates the dialogue of free association in Chekhov's work. Not least, the allusions in the Preface to musical composition and thematics become fully meaningful in Strindberg's own dream plays and chamber plays.

Strindberg conceived *Miss Julie* to be performed by a small experimental theatre. The founding of Antoine's Théâtre Libre in 1887 had sparked widespread interest in the concept of a free, independent theatre as a venue for trying out new plays and production methods. Strindberg, who had entertained the notion of a theatre of his own as far back as 1876, was immediately attracted by Antoine's model and approached the energetic Ibsen champion August Lindberg with a proposal that they collaborate to form an independent touring company. His sales pitch was as dynamic as always: "You can't go on for long with Ibsen; for he probably won't write much more, and his particular genre is on the way out . . . He can do his thing, and we ours!" Strindberg's proposal, contained in his long letter of June 3, 1887, was to start a small touring theatre devoted to a repertory made up exclusively of his own works: "We'd never be short of plays, for I can write a one-acter in two days," he reassured Lindberg, to whom all the leading male parts were to be tailored. Siri von Essen was to have all the female leads – but, he adds, "if you want your wife along, I'll write one role for her and one for my wife, alternately, but always with one for you!" His suggestions were meant to be as practical as possible: "I shall write the plays so that it won't be necessary to lug along any costumes, sets, or props." A revolution of the kind envisioned by Antoine and his followers was not the ostensible objective of Strindberg's undertaking: "I have no dreams of transforming or reforming the theatre, for that's impossible. It can only be modernized a little!"

Nearly two years later, when Strindberg finally did succeed in establishing his own Scandinavian Experimental Theatre in Denmark (where he resided from late 1887 to 1889), his venture survived only a week. The small troupe of amateurs and professionals (notably Siri von Essen and Hans Riber Hunderup) set up quarters in Dagmar Theatre, one of Copenhagen's leading private theatres. However, only a day before the scheduled premiere of *Miss Julie*, the event that was to have launched the enterprise, the public censor banned the play on account of its "daring" subject matter. Undaunted, Strindberg's experimental theatre quickly changed plans, opening on the Dagmar stage one week later (March 9,

1889) with a triple bill that included *Creditors* and two short pieces written for the occasion, *The Stronger* (*Den starkare*) and *Pariah* (*Paria*). For practical as well as artistic reasons, Strindberg created all three of these works as performance texts for a small company with a minimum of technical and financial resources. *Creditors* he described as "a naturalistic tragedy, better than *Miss Julie*, with three characters, a table and two chairs, and no sunrise." This popular but perilously contrived three-hander was, however, no success when first attempted. Hunderup was a suitably cynical and worldly Gustav, the vengeful ex-husband who exposes his former wife's inner ruthlessness and perfidy. But Adolf, the adoring spouse who is felled by a stroke when he overhears their vicious confrontation, was too much for the popular Danish writer Gustav Wied, who made his shaky debut as an amateur actor in the role. "People laughed till they had tears in their eyes as the small, slightly built author wriggled about like a worm in a monstrosity of an armchair," a reviewer for *Vort Land* declared.[8] But not all was lost for Strindberg's little ensemble. His wife was very effective as the talky Mrs. X in *The Stronger*, while Hunderup's rendering of X, the inadvertent murderer who outwits his would-be blackmailer in *Pariah*, was a masterpiece that took its place in the regular Dagmar repertory.

As for *Miss Julie* itself, the ban on public performances compelled its world premiere (March 14, 1889) to take place as a private showing for 150 spectators, presented on a makeshift stage in the student union at the University of Copenhagen. Siri Strindberg played a subdued Julie opposite the polite Jean of Viggo Schiwe. "She is too cold, much too cold, and one gets no impression at all of the kind of woman who would seduce a man like Jean," complained a correspondent for the Stockholm daily *Dagens Nyheter* (March 18, 1889). This observer also found that Schiwe "hardly suggested a servant; his manner was much more that of a gentleman or a *viveur*."[9] Despite the primitive production conditions, however, Strindberg's demands for a credibly three-dimensional stage environment appear to have been met. The setting "looked surprisingly like a real kitchen," admitted the critic for *Dagens Nyheter*. "A plate rack, a kitchen table, a speaking tube to the floor above, a big stove with rows of copper pots above it – in short, everything is there, presenting the living image of an actual kitchen." While much else in this play's interpretation would change during the course of its long performance history, its solidly representational setting – icon of the naturalistic belief in environment as a silent character in the drama – has usually remained an indispensable feature of any revival. Not least in the 1951 film of *Miss Julie* made by Alf Sjöberg, one of the foremost directors of this play

in the theatre, Kristin's kitchen stands as a vivid reminder of the power of a naturalistically conceived environment as a symbolic force that is at the same time a reality as tangible and practical as the stove on which she fries Jean's supper.

Although *Miss Julie* is probably still the play most commonly associated with Strindberg's name, the naturalistic revolution it helped to ferment soon ceased to hold the playwright's interest. Even by the time his work had reached Paris and the Théâtre Libre in 1893, Strindberg himself had stopped writing plays altogether. Indeed, as Inga-Stina Ewbank observes in an essay on his avid receptiveness to the influence of Shakespeare, his career at that point "looked like that of a naturalist who, after *The Father*, *Miss Julie* and *Creditors*, had written himself into a minimalist corner with plays like *The Stronger* and then fallen silent. . . ." Yet, as Ewbank goes on to point out, "possibly the outstanding Strindbergian characteristic is a continuous growing and renewing, so that it is quite useless to speak of his 'formative' years, since he was forever forming and re-forming his art."[10] And so when he resumed his theatre work at the end of the century, following the darkest time in his life, it was with a very different style of performance and an entirely new kind of revolution in mind.