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## Chapter 6: Strindberg's Open Sea: The Conflation of Science and Suffering

If it form the one landscape that we inconstant ones  
Are consistently homesick for, this is chiefly  
Because it dissolves in water.<sup>1</sup>

The skerries of Stockholm's archipelago have a harsh beauty and were a point of fascination for August Strindberg.<sup>2</sup> Like W. H. Auden's depiction of his limestone landscape, these sparsely populated islands served as a location where Strindberg explored the relationship between description and subjectivity. As Auden implies, these descriptions are born from the longing for a home and as such, are quintessentially modern. *In Praise of Limestone* suggests that we create the illusion of permanent formations while it is really the *ocean's* incessant ebb and flow that carves and shapes regions that are truly transient. And »... [t]he poet,/Admired for his earnest habit of calling/The sun the sun [...],« is made uneasy by the apparently solid shape assumed by the limestone. He rebels against this apparent conceit, which goes against the grain of his »antimythological myth«. <sup>3</sup> However, this poet who doubts the very substance of the illusion that he carves out of his incessant desire, his longing and his exile, realizes that when he tries »to imagine a faultless love/Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur/Of underground streams, what I see is the limestone landscape.«<sup>4</sup>

*In Praise of Limestone* reminds us that our aspirations and our dream-like projections inspire form, and that every description momentarily arrests the flow of a landscape's history. Perhaps the poet becomes aware of the streaming of time within him and shapes it as an impassioned recreation of desire through naming and through description. Perhaps he describes »things« by imposing the mark of being upon the landscape of becoming. And yet, Auden's »antimythological« mythmaker keeps alive the tension between the ocean, which dissolves the form, and the form

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1 AUDEN: 1989, 184, *In Praise of Limestone*.

2 Strindberg wrote short stories, poems, novels, and plays set in the Stockholm archipelago.

3 Ibid., 186.

4 Ibid., 187.

itself. It could be that this is what Nietzsche means when he tells us of the »hermit's'« secret imperative that:

... dieser würdige Wort-Prunk zu dem alten Lügen-Putz, -Plunder und -Goldstaub der unbewussten menschlichen Eitelkeit gehört, und das auch unter solcher schmeichlerischen Farbe und Übermalung der schreckliche Grundtext *homo natura* wieder heraus erkannt werden muss.

(... this dignified verbal pageantry belongs among the false old finery, debris, and gold dust of unconscious human vanity, and that the terrible basic text of *homo natura* must be recognized even underneath these fawning and painted surfaces.)<sup>5</sup>

Nietzsche's comment addresses what he calls a »Grundwillen des Geistes« (fundamental will of the spirit), which attempts to »in sich und um sich herum Herr sein« (dominate itself and its surroundings) by means of an appropriation of the unknown.<sup>6</sup> According to him, the spirit enjoys the use of masks and artifice in order to increase its own feeling of power, and accomplishes this sense of its own surfeit by indulging in the protean display of a rich vocabulary of appearance. Nietzsche claims that all this has served to furnish humans with the illusions of »höhere Cultur« (higher culture),<sup>7</sup> and with the feeling of being »mehr« (more), »höher« (higher) and of »anderer Herkunft« (a different origin).<sup>8</sup> This higher culture, however, despite its fear of the »wilden grausamen Thiere« (cruel and wild beast) creates and replicates its form through »*selbst gewendeten Grausamkeit*« (*self-directed cruelty*).<sup>9</sup> In this vein, Nietzsche goes so far as to describe the »Erkennende« (knower) as »Künstler und Verklärer der Grausamkeit« ([an] artist of cruelty and the agent of its transfiguration).<sup>10</sup> And so, if knowledge is a means of redirecting internalized cruelty (read *ressentiment*), this hermitic philosopher, who stands beyond »good and evil,« has a task. His charge is to:

Zurück-übersetzen in die Natur; über die vielen eitlen und schwärmerischen Deutungen und Nebensinne Herr werden, welche bisher über jenen ewigen

5 NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, 169 (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*), *Aphorism* 230. The English is from NORMAN: 2002, 124.

6 *Ibid.*, 167, (121 for the English)

7 NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, 166, *Aphorism* 229. NORMAN: 2002, 120 for the English.

8 NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, 169, *Aphorism* 230 (NORMAN: 2002, 123 for the English).

9 NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, 165–166, *Aphorism* 229 (NORMAN: 2002, 120–121, for the English).

10 NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, 167, *Aphorism* 229 (NORMAN: 2002, 121, for the English).

Grundtext *homo natura* gekritzelt und gemalt wurden; machen, dass der Mensch fürderhin vor dem Menschen steht, wie er heute schon, hart geworden in der Zucht der Wissenschaft, vor der *anderen* Natur steht ...

(Translate humanity back into nature; to gain control of the many vain and fanciful interpretations and incidental meanings that have been scribbled and drawn over the eternal basic text of *homo natura* so far; to make sure that, from now on, the human being will stand before the human being, just as he already stands before the *rest* of nature today, hardened by the discipline of science ...)<sup>11</sup>

To accomplish this undertaking, Nietzsche explains, one must ignore the calls of the metaphysicians and their siren song of unchanging form. One must become like Auden's »antimythological mythmaker« of a poet, and like Strindberg's grand naturalist; one should call things by their *proper* names.

Nietzsche insists that there is a relationship between knowledge and cruelty, and that the translation of the human back to nature does not mean a return to a »natural« man free from cultural mediation. There is an appropriative and an aesthetic reconfiguration to this process as naming allows the eternal oscillation between proximate and distant forms to settle temporarily into a »secret system of caves and conduits,«<sup>12</sup> for at least a moment. As Mark Warren reminds us: »If the Dionysian *pathos* of embodiment – what Nietzsche calls ›nature‹ – is a deep and multifaceted resource and ground of human life, it is intelligible only through our interpretative and material appropriations of it. Because ›nature‹ consists only in the flux and multiplicity of raw experience, it has no humanly intelligible qualities.«<sup>13</sup> Translation into nature implies an active sovereign, creating his or her perspective towards the world through description. These descriptions flow out of the larger pool, which is a conflation of science and suffering.

This conflation is where Nietzsche's commonality with Strindberg becomes apparent. Despite Knut Hamsun's characterization of him as a writer who depicted culture as a degenerated nature, Strindberg occupies a much more complex position than such a romantic view would allow. This position is not a binary opposition between nature and culture, a simple matter of Strindberg emerging from Rousseau's shadow and enter-

<sup>11</sup> NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, 169, Aphorism 230. NORMAN: 2002, 123 for the English.

<sup>12</sup> AUDEN: 1989, 184.

<sup>13</sup> WARREN: 1988, 48.

ing a Nietzschean phase.<sup>14</sup> Strindberg faces nature and forms a dynamic interpretative relationship with her. A few years before he encountered Nietzsche, Strindberg explicated his stance towards the cultural, stating that it »är alltså icke kulturen jag angriper utan överkulturen. Vi ha blivit för fina, därför är råheten ett symptom av den sunda återgången. Det är fint att ljuga och rätt att säga sin mening. Låtom oss uppfostra oss till mera råhet.« (is accordingly not culture that I attack but high culture. We have become too refined; consequently brutality is a symptom of the healthy retrogression. It is refined to lie and brutal to say one's piece. Let us educate ourselves to be more brutal).<sup>15</sup> It becomes apparent Strindberg's hostility was not directed towards culture per se; his critique was directed towards what he regarded to be a culture that had sublimated its *ressentiment* and created a nexus of lies. If we recall that we let Strindberg articulate his own understanding of naturalism in the excursus that follows the first chapter of this study and that he claimed that naturalists resist the artificial, »love to *name*« and thereby define their own cause, we can understand that Strindberg is arguing that the naturalist's belief in the primacy of a social contract honestly conceived is not simply a return to nature, and that he thereby assumes a position that lies somewhere in between Rousseau's notion of social contract and a Nietzschean translation back into nature. Once again the issue of naming something and determining its standing within a constellation of things that make up any collective sense of »reality« comes to the fore. With this in mind let us return to the skerries with Strindberg, where »Solrök« (Haze), a prose poem from »Högsommar« (High Summer) section of *Dikter på vers och prosa* (Poems in Verse and Prose) written in 1883 and »Solnedgång på havet« (Sundown at Sea) from the section entitled »Stormar« (Storms) from the same collection are set.<sup>16</sup>

### The Swimmer

»Haze,«<sup>17</sup> a prose poem, opens with a description of a family's objects being transported by ship. The passengers are leaving the city for the

<sup>14</sup> See Keith ANSELL-PEARSON's excellent book, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau* (1991).

<sup>15</sup> STRINDBERG: 1990, 12. *Utopia i verkligheten* was originally published in 1885. My translation.

<sup>16</sup> STRINDBERG: 1995, 9–156.

<sup>17</sup> »Solrök«. The poem appears in *ibid.*, 77–87.

Stockholm archipelago and the narration is in the third person. The protagonist notices a shift in his perspective. He catches sight of someone he knows and remarks: »Nej, man ser varann aldrig så här i stan, man har så mycket att göra.« (No, people never see each other like this in the city. One has so much to do.)<sup>18</sup> Not only does the journey change the angle of the narrator's vision, but the destination exerts an influence as well due to »naturens evigt förnygrande makt« (nature's eternal power of rejuvenation)!<sup>19</sup> However, as the narrative continues, this change in perception will prove to be misleading. The protagonist will find that a return to an unadulterated nature is not possible for him, and that nature herself does not transform things; his journey to the archipelago merely highlights the relationship between his own past and the desire to translate himself back into nature. In other words, he will see how the traces of an emergent subjectivity, whose perspective manifests in description, leaves an imprint on the very nature to which he longs to return. Man translated back into nature unfortunately transcribes the natural in human terms.

The protagonist has left the city, but traces of it remain. He has brought his things with him, and the city resides in his mind as a repressed element. Plagued by »mörka drömmar: han pressas mellan husen i trånga svarta gränder« (dark dreams: he is pressed between houses in narrow, black alleys).<sup>20</sup> He dreams that he is confined in a well, and is roused by some knocking on the windowpane. He awakes, looks out of the window and exclaims: »O natur! Verkligheten som övergår alla drömmar. Ser du, drömmare, sådant har din hjärna aldrig kunnat drömma ihop och du pratar om den kalla verkligheten.« (O' nature! Reality that surpasses every dream. See, you dreamer, your brain could never have dreamt up anything such as this, and you talk about cold reality.)<sup>21</sup> He creates an opposition between the magnificence of nature and the limitations of the mind, between »reality« and its mediation through thought.

An equivalency has been posited: to claim knowledge of »reality« is to dream. Yet there is a paradox built into this equation as well. Here, the limits of an individual's perspective are delimited by an intimation of that

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 78. My translation.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. My translation.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 78–79. My translation.

which exceeds the ability of the individual to formulate and conceive. The protagonist knows his perspective through the nocturnal whispering of that which lies outside of it, »reality, or nature«. In a play on the notion of the sublime, the »realist« who claims to be able to grasp »reality« is proven wrong by a realization that something essential exists and that it remains outside of his reach. Nature is postulated to be the text that lies beyond the realm of interpretation, yet it is asserted to be legible as a phenomenon beyond individual comprehension. An opposition is established between that which can be described and that which is beyond description. Nature is described absolutely as that which cannot be described at all. The protagonist walks to the ocean and this opposition emerges in sharper relief:

Av med kläderna och ner i djupet. Vad han såg där nere på en sekund? En annan värld, där träden voro röda som tång och luften smaragdgrön som havets vatten; och så är han uppe igen mitt bland de sorlande och kämpande vågorna; och han brottas med dem tills han blir trött och lägger sig att vila på deras ryggar; och de kastar honom upp, som de ville vräka honom ner i mörka dalgångar som om de ville suga honom ner i avgrunden; han upphör att vilja, han upphör att önska, han gör intet motstånd; hans kropp har förlorat sin tyngd, han står icke under inflytande av gravitationslagarne, han svävar mellan vatten och luft – det är den absoluta vilan utan förnimmelser

(Off with his clothing and down into the deep. What did he see down there in a second? Another world, where the trees were red as seaweed and the air emerald green like the ocean's water; and then he is forced to the surface again into the midst of the rippling and battling waves; and he wrestles with them until he becomes tired and lays himself to rest on their backs, and they toss him up, as if they wanted to cast him down into dark valleys, as if they wanted to suck him into the abyss; he ceases to will, he ceases to wish, he gives no resistance; his body has lost its weight, he is no longer under the influence of the laws of gravity, he hovers between the water and the sky – this is the absolute repose without perception.)<sup>22</sup>

There are several stages to this encounter between swimmer and ocean and these moments show that for Strindberg, the *beyond* of nature is not merely Kant's *Ding an sich*, a mere structure of the conditions of possibility for apperception. The encounter occurs at the site of collision between aspects of self; it constructs a paradigm of incommensurability. This is the moment where the comparison of the like and the unlike create metaphor.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 80–81. My translation.

The swimmer takes off his clothes and dives into the ocean naked. He experiences a glimpse of another world, which he describes ironically, using comparisons from the landscape, the world in which he enjoys familiarity. This description is ironic because it simultaneously feigns ignorance and yet it bears the conceit of knowledge. This irony serves as a deconstruction of the paradox of the sublime, claiming that nature can be experienced as an absolute beyond description and yet it can still be described. The rhetorical strategy of this deconstruction is played out in the citation above as the poet names the characteristics of the ocean as another world, and then he names the features of the oceanscape as land forms. He does this while simultaneously attributing these nouns with adjectives that are descriptions of the very same ocean he had claimed to misrecognize. This is performed in a comparison, a simile. It was as if the poet were saying: *naming is not reality, it is a comparison between the like and the unlike, an attribute of the perceptual misrecognition and the subsequent forgetting of this misrecognition through description, through renaming. It is as if he were saying that words obscure the perceiver's distance from »reality« through the ironic movement from distance to proximity in description.*

Furthermore, the experience of the swimmer is parallel to his dream, except this time he is not driven down into the valleys of streets and alleys, but into their marine equivalent. He is not restricted by the barriers of a well, but by the limits of his own ability to describe a force more powerful than he is. The confinement of the cityscape re-emerges as the borders of his conscious mind. The description of the ocean is followed by a cessation of struggle, as the swimmer surrenders his body to the power of the ocean. He hovers between the water and the air; standing in for the horizon, inhabiting a liminal space that defines difference. The fury of the ocean leads him to a state of absolute repose without perception. In other words, while he is caught by a force that dissolves the differentiation between subject and object, he inhabits the space that delimits. His very presence in nature, immersed in it at this moment, is rendered liminal by his desire to interpret. This passage explicates the irony of description and as such rejects any identification of the experience of nature as the experience of the sublime.

The swimmer's passage suggests that the shedding of the superficial aspect of civilization, clothing, does not result in the merger with nature. Human beings are incapable of this union. The ocean's landscape is de-



scribed in terms of a movement, as the narrator names the unfamiliar in the terms of what is familiar, and then he modifies the object through a comparison of the unfamiliar with »itself«. The mechanism works like this: The seaweed is called a tree that has the color of seaweed. The name of the unfamiliar is known, but it is described in a simile that plays on the act of familiarizing a perception through description, then defamiliarizing this description by calling a thing by its common name. In this way the struggle between new and familiar metaphors is highlighted. His description is neither objective nor is it subjective; it is adjective.<sup>23</sup>

The swimmer's passage can be read as a representation of the problem of description, as a dramatization of the dynamic of distance and proximity. He nakedly struggles with the natural force of the ocean; he tries to describe it, and his energy is sapped. He is enervated by the effort. After he loses his ability to resist, his experience runs parallel to a dream, as associations seem to come of their own accord. His body loses its weight; willing ceases as he seemingly merges with his environment. This is an illusion however; this species of merger is impossible. The natural force forces him into a liminal position; he acts as a border as even his weightless body assumes the position of a horizon. He senses an absolute will, but is unable to describe it, as there is no discernible object to perceive. Despite these Schopenhauerian overtones, the salient issue is not a matter of willing and representation; it is a matter of positioning and perspective. For the swimmer, **description ceases at a point of absolute proximity**; it is dependent on the relationship between distance and comparison. However, fidelity to experience depends on immersion, proximity. But a merger with nature is impossible and the narrator is washed up on shore where then he proceeds to describe a shipwreck in verse.

The shipwreck is not an incidental detail, but serves as a parallel phenomenon to the experience of the swimmer. The ocean as a representation of generalized will rejects the body of one who attempts to merge with it through the particularity of description.<sup>24</sup> Description particularizes the human as well, creating a sense of subjectivity and perspective.

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<sup>23</sup> The prefix »ad-« meaning either a moving towards or an adding to. I utilize this prefix in both of these senses.

<sup>24</sup> An interesting moment inflected perhaps by Strindberg's »favorite philosopher,« Schopenhauer.

Yet, the attempt to describe »reality« is enervating. Total immersion, absolute fidelity to experience is impossible. The discernible »reality« of the ocean for the swimmer is an ironic interpretation dependent on an appropriation through naming and the resistance of the text of experience to the name. Complete fidelity, total immersion obscures the position of the one who describes; the »will« as generalized force moves him back to his »proper« position as a particular and sentient being. He becomes the boundary marker, the personification of the delineation between identification through naming and difference. It is as if the poet were saying that human beings do not reside within the realm of the authentic, but exist as a delimitation of experience through interpretation. The will of the individual is a directed will, an interpreting will, a will that changes the object of its description through appropriation.<sup>25</sup>

After the description of the shipwreck in verse, the text returns to a prose narrative. Later, »the swimmer« wants to be alone with nature. He travels out to an islet that »ser mera ofördärvad ut än de andra holmarne« (appears less defiled than the other islands).<sup>26</sup> He sets sail for the islet and lands to find »sin dröm förverkligad« (his dream made real).<sup>27</sup> Again, there is a contradiction as the poet has already stated that reality was beyond the swimmer's ability to dream. He believes that he has found »ensamheten, naturen« (solitude, nature)!<sup>28</sup> He dreams of being alone with nature and he equates nature with solitude seemingly believing that he could lose himself and his relationships in its midst. He spies a house sparrow, »rännstenens och bakgårdens grannar« (the gutter and backyard's neighbor), and he asks, »Vad levde han då av härute där människan icke fanns« (What did he live on out here where people were not to be found)?<sup>29</sup> He walks on and finds the sole of a shoe. Suddenly his description of the landscape metamorphoses from a depiction of a paradisiacal idyll to a catalogue of the signs of waste and abandonment. He had found the remains of a quarry in the middle of paradise. Men had come and taken what they could use and then had left ruins as a trace. The swimmer is appalled:

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25 And here the moment becomes a bit more »Nietzschean«.

26 STRINDBERG: 1995, 83.

27 Ibid., 84.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 85.

Han flydde ifrån förödelser och styrde sina steg ner till båten. – Fotsår i sanden! Han bannade och ville fly, men då märkte han att han bannade sig själv och då förstod han varför måsarne flydde och huggormen och de andra, och han trampade igen i sina spår, ty han kunde icke fly sig själv

(He fled the scene of destruction and steered his steps towards the boat. Footprints in the sand! He cursed and wanted to flee, but then he noticed that he had only cursed himself, and then he understood why the gulls, and the snakes, and the others had fled; and he retraced his footprints for he couldn't escape himself.)<sup>30</sup>

The trace of the destroyer was a trace of himself. He who had criticized and described the transformation of nature from idyll to raw material now realized that he was the same as those who came to exploit what nature had to give. There is no direct escape from human exploitation to an Arcadian landscape as the swimmer had left his trace on the landscape as well by virtue of his presence, his description. In the end, he is incapable of experiencing that »reality« that resided beyond his dream state. The imprint of the interpreter has indelibly marked the landscape. The very notion of Arcadia itself destroys Arcadia.

The swimmer then »tog sin kikare och riktade den åter över fjärden varifrån han kommit« (took up his binoculars and directed them once again towards the bay over which he had come).<sup>31</sup> His gaze drifts across the water towards his vacation house and his family. His excursion into nature and his subsequent attempts to differentiate between that which is natural and that which results from human cultural activity had failed. He learned that his critique of the exploitation of nature was contingent upon the realization that his own footsteps were the cause of his despair. His description of nature was a text in which he forgot to account for his own intrusion upon that which is natural. It was as if he had realized that *to describe the natural is to change it through the infusion of the namer in the named*.<sup>32</sup> All he could describe was his own intrusion and his longing for a purity that is unattainable. It was as if he had learned that his mistake was the same as the misreading that Nietzsche attributed to »bad Philologists«. The text of nature was inaccessible; all that could be seen were the footsteps, the traces of an interpretation, and despite a desire to escape, the swimmer returns to his own past. »If it form the one

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>32</sup> Does the germ of Expressionism reside in this gesture?

landscape that we inconstant ones/Are consistently homesick for, this is chiefly/Because it dissolves in water ...«

### The Exile and his Metaphors

With this in mind, we turn to a poem written in 1883, »Solnedgång på havet« (Sundown at Sea). In »Haze,« a description of the ocean raised the issue of the possibility of the description of natural elements. I concluded that the depiction of the swimmer raised issues of liminality for the human, and an oscillation from that position of acting as a horizon highlighted the problem of depiction. The components of this problem are further illustrated in »Sundown at Sea«. The poem reads as follows:

Jag ligger på kabelgattet  
Rökande »Fem blå bröder«  
och tänker på intet.

Havet är grönt  
så dunkelt absintgrönt;  
Det är bittert som klormagnesium  
Och saltare än klornatrium;  
Det är kyskt som jodkalium;

Och glömska, glömska  
Av stora synder och stora sorger  
Det ger endast havet,  
Och absint!

O du gröna absinthav,  
O du stilla absintglömska,  
Döva mina sinnen  
Och låt mig somna i ro  
Som förr jag sömnade  
Över en artikel i  
Revue des deux Mondes!

Sverige ligger som en rök  
Som röken av en Maduro-Havanna,  
Och solen sitter däröver  
Som en halvsläckt cigarr.  
Men runt kring horisonten  
Stå brotten så röda  
Som bengaliska eldar  
Och lysa på eländet

(I stand by the Hawser hole  
smoking five »blue brothers«  
and think about nothing.

The sea is green  
so dark absinth-green;  
it is bitter like magnesium-chloride  
and saltier than sodium-chloride  
it is chaste like potassium-iodide;  
and forgetfulness, forgetfulness  
of great sins and sorrows  
is granted only by the sea  
and absinth!

Oh you green absinth-sea,  
oh you tranquil absinth-oblivion,  
dull my senses  
and let me sleep in peace,  
as before I had slept  
over an article in  
Revue des deux Mondes!

Sweden lies like smoke,  
like the smoke of a Maduro-Havanna  
and the sun sits over there  
like a half-extinguished cigar,  
but around by the horizon  
sit the cliffs as red/as Bengali fire  
and shines down on the misery.)<sup>33</sup>

»Sundown at Sea« builds a metaphorical complex around the figure of the ocean in order to illustrate a philosophical problem. The descriptive aspects of this poem are in collision as a tension between the will to name and the desire to forget prevails. The metaphorical core of this poem builds up through a process in which simile is transformed into metaphor. In other words, the resemblance or likeness between two things commutes to substitution of one thing for another. This movement depicts the very same phenomena faced by the narrator of »Haze« as he realized that he inhabited a liminal position from which he could never merge with the ocean, but from which he could only oscillate between positions of proximity and positions of distance. For the poet, nature herself could never be more than an interpretation, a valuation in the form of description.

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33 STRINDBERG: 1995, 125–126. Translation mine.

»Sundown at Sea« opens with the poetic »I« standing on the deck of a ship and thinking about nothing. He has no object which he could describe until he turns his attention to the ocean. Unlike the swimmer, he does not immerse himself in the water, but stands at a distance. He is not subject to the ocean's power and his will is not suspended. His first description of the ocean stutters as he directly describes the ocean's greenness and then modifies and intensifies his description by calling it the dark green of absinthe, the color of intoxication. He continues his description and the poem takes a strange turn, as an almost exaggeratedly programmatic naturalist rendering comes to the fore. The ocean is now »bitter as magnesium chloride/and saltier than sodium-chloride«. The natural object of description is broken down into its component parts and the use of scientific language, a manifestation of cultural mastery through naming, connotes an attempt to subjugate the natural to the cultural. However, in the very next line another, subtle change manifests. The sea becomes »chaste like potassium-iodide,« and scientific naming is infused with a human quality: *kyskhet* or chastity. This simile fuses scientific naming and human behavior. The trace of the describer's footsteps is again discernible. Scientific nomenclature is used to create similes. The scientific name and the natural object it describes are separated and compared, they hold likeness in common but this commonality shows itself to be unstable, held together by the fabric of the observer's distance. He stands on the deck of a conveyance that allows him the illusion of *being* in a sea of becoming. The ocean, which has the color of intoxication is confronted by an attempt to master it through scientific naming and thereby an attempt to enculturate nature. This attempt is complicated as a personification is juxtaposed to a scientific term infusing it with a human quality. This is the beginning of a merger of poet's interpretation and the text of nature in the act of description. However, the attempt to objectify the ocean cannot withstand the intrusion of the poet's own encroaching subjectivity.

The next four lines further efface the text of the ocean and a salient dynamic of description itself comes to the fore: »And forgetfulness, forgetfulness/of great sins and great sorrows/is granted only by the ocean/and absinth.« Suddenly the desire to forget is juxtaposed to the will to name. The poetic voice wishes to forget guilt feelings and suffering. The ocean is established as a locus for the juxtaposition of the will to intoxication, the will to name scientifically, and the slippage of the ability to mas-

ter nature through scientific naming when this attempt to objectify is infused with a human quality (*kyskhet*). After that, the ocean is personified, and it becomes a source of forgetfulness and is compared to absinth, intoxication.

In the next line the personification introduced in the attempt to enculturate nature is further radicalized as the poetic »I« addresses the ocean directly. »O you green **absinth-ocean**« (*absinthav*).<sup>34</sup> Absinth or intoxication now merges with the ocean, which is now not merely the color of absinth, but becomes the drink. This is the first time that substitution emerges out of a series of comparisons. The ocean merges with the forgetfulness of intoxication. The deck, the solid platform gliding across a raging sea and the site of an attempt to still the force of ever moving water by naming scientifically, has become the site of oblivion as forgetting obscures a rationalized system of naming in the movement from comparison to substitution. The Dionysian aspect of this particular metaphorical series takes over. The metaphorical complex around the figure of the ocean in »Sundown at Sea« is the locus of two seemingly opposing impulses: the desire to master through naming and the will to forget through intoxication. It becomes rather obvious here that my contention is that this opposition can be read as an aestheticized formulation of a philosophical problematic with Nietzschean implications.

The obvious association is the Apollonian/Dionysian opposition in *Der Geburt der Tragödie (The Birth of Tragedy)*. While one could certainly squeeze this poem into that rather tight shoe, this possibility is ruled out in favor of a development in Nietzsche's thought that more explicitly treats the problematic of naming and forgetting. I am referring to the Nietzschean genealogies. As discussed in the fourth and fifth chapter of this monograph, Nietzsche, in his genealogies, associated the right to name with the sovereign act of appropriation. He also posited that a willful forgetfulness was an essential aspect of a creative perspective. The inability to forget was conversely attributed to a perspective marked by a dyspeptic *ressentiment* and a sense of obedience to what he regarded as a dominant and unhealthy social order. As Sarah Kofman remarks in *Nietzsche and Metaphor*:

To make up for the forgetting of origins which it conceals, memory struggles against forgetting as an active life-force – against self-forgetting the other and

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34 My emphasis.

the past. It gives us the opportunity to take on the future and make promises; it gives us conscience, responsibility, personal identity. But these gratifications are merely a deception, for this violent process culminates in the triumph of the collective over the individual ... The fundamental objective of memory is to make one forget difference and genesis at all costs: for to society each presents the risk of change, instability and insecurity ... The objective of memory is to make us forget life.<sup>35</sup>

Kofman is arguing that, for Nietzsche, memory is the means by which the deception of individual identity is defined within the confines of a social structure. In other words, it is the means by which the collective assumes control over the individual by defining the concept of the self. Seen in this light, Nietzsche's argument that an active forgetting is a vital component of health is also a bid for release from the legacy of domination by the collective morality over the individual.

If we understand »Sundown at Sea« in light of »Haze« with its depiction of the human suspended on the horizon as a liminal being who both changes the object of his description and is changed himself by performing this act adjectively, then the problematic aspects of description bear a close resemblance to the dynamic of the Nietzschean understanding of interpretation. Interpretation, in turn, is accompanied by the creation of a perspective, a species of self-interpretation through the delimitation of one's angle of vision and the subsequent establishment of one's horizon. Seen in the light of Nietzsche's articulation of the problem, the desire to name scientifically is tantamount to an attempt to objectify and master a natural force from a distinctive perspective. For if the ocean is described as being like chemical compounds; it is broken down by naming and effaced as a natural force through the distance created by objectification. However, the tension between naming and forgetting in this poem leads to the construction of a metaphor. The metaphor emerges as the »gröna absinthav (green absinthsea),« a merger of intoxication and a natural force. As intoxication implies oblivion (»glömska, det ger endast havet och absint« [forgetfulness, is granted only by the ocean and absinth]), there is a merger between the will to forget and the intoxicating compound of nature and the Dionysian.

What the poetic voice wishes to forget are »stora synder och stora sorger« (great sins and great sorrows). Sins and sorrows are connected: sin the moralized conception of transgressive behavior and sorrows, the

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<sup>35</sup> KOFMAN: 1993, 47–48.



internalization of pain. This is the hallmark of the Nietzschean conception of the *ressentiment* of the *herd animal*. The overcoming of this painful condition in which memory enslaves the individual is the creation of a metaphorical complex, which is an amalgam of exact naming and active forgetfulness. This is the Nietzschean formula for *Selbstüberwindung*.

Nietzsche also treated this issue of naming and forgetfulness in the unpublished essay, *Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne*, collected in his *Nachgelassene Schriften* and written in 1872.<sup>36</sup> This essay informs us about the implications of metaphor production.

Wir wissen immer noch nicht, woher der Trieb zur Wahrheit stammt, denn bis jetzt haben wir nur von der Verpflichtung gehört, die die Gesellschaft, um zu existiren stellt, wahrhaft zu sein, d. h. die usuellen Metaphern zu brauchen, also moralisch ausgedrückt, von der Verpflichtung nach einer festen Convention zu lügen, schaaarenweise in einem für alle verbindlichen Stile zu lügen.

(We still do not yet know where the drive for truth comes from. For so far we have heard only of the duty which society imposes in order to exist: to be truthful means to employ the usual metaphors. Thus, to express it morally, this is to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie with the herd and in a manner binding upon everyone.)<sup>37</sup>

In this essay, Nietzsche argued that every concept is a comparison between that which a thing is and that which it is not (*Gleichsetzen des Nicht-Gleichen*).<sup>38</sup> Therefore, he continues, a concept is created through a forgetting of the difference between individual things of the same »class« »durch ein Vergessen des Unterscheidenden« (through the forgetting of the distinctions).<sup>39</sup> This process leads to another type of forgetting whereby: »den Menschen als Maass an alle Dinge zu halten, wobei er aber von dem Irrthume ausgeht, zu glauben, er habe diese Dinge unmittelbar als reine Objekte vor sich. Er vergisst also die originalen Anschauungsmetaphern als Metaphern und nimmt sie als die Dinge selbst.« (His method is to treat man as the measure of all things, but in doing so he again proceeds from the error of believing he has these things [which he intends to measure] immediately before him as mere objects. He forgets that the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors and takes them to

36 NIETZSCHE: 1988a, KSA I, 874–890.

37 Ibid., 881. The English translation comes from BREAZEALE: 1999, 84.

38 NIETZSCHE: 1988a, KSA I, 880.

39 Ibid. Translation: BREAZEALE: 1999, 84.

be things themselves.)<sup>40</sup> According to Nietzsche, scientific »truth« can be seen in the same light, as an order of naming that obscures its origins. For him, science creates categories from out of the observable world through the anthropomorphizing act of conceptualization that is ultimately based on metaphor.<sup>41</sup> The problem, as Nietzsche saw it, is that the metaphors utilized by science are distinguished by an accompanying form of amnesia, a passive forgetting of the possibility of creating new metaphors. This is of course a one-sided critique, as science does have the ability to renew its representations of the world. This ability is exemplified by valorization of the notion of fallibility in scientific research. However, Nietzsche is forwarding a polemic here whose target is all absolute truth claims, and his main point remains of interest: *acts of description arise through metaphor and description is a form of valuation; therefore all our values are not essential, they merely stand in for something else.*

However, even if absolute truth claims have obscured the origin of the concept as a species of metaphor, there are still aspects of human endeavor where one can find freedom from the rule of the ossified metaphor, »im Mythus und überhaupt in der Kunst« (in myth and in art generally).<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche compares these activities to dreaming, which he claims frees the dreamer from the fixed order of conceptual metaphors and unleashes an associative stream of new metaphors that he compares to the celebration of a Saturnalia.<sup>43</sup> The creation of new metaphors liberates:

Mit schöpferischem Behagen wirft er die Metaphern durcheinander und verrückt die Gränzsteine der Abstraktion, so dass er z. B. den Strom als den beweglichen Weg bezeichnet, der den Menschen trägt, dorthin, wohin er sonst geht. Jetzt hat er das Zeichen der Dienstbarkeit von sich geworfen; sonst mit trübsinniger Geschäftigkeit bemüht, einen armen Individuum, dem es nach Dasein gelüstet, den Weg und die Werkzeuge zu zeigen und wie ein Diener für seinen Herrn auf Raub und Beute ausziehend ist er jetzt zum Herrn geworden und darf den Ausdruck der Bedürftigkeit aus seinen Mienen wegwischen.

(With creative pleasure it throws metaphors into confusion and displaces the boundary stones of abstractions, so that, for example it designates the stream as »the moving path which carries man where he would otherwise walk.« The intellect has now thrown the token of bondage from itself. At other times it

40 Ibid., 883. The English translation is found in BREAZEALE: 1999, 86.

41 See NIETZSCHE: 1988a, 886.

42 Ibid., 887. The English translation is in BREAZEALE: 1999, 89.

43 NIETZSCHE: 1988a, 886–887.

endeavors, with gloomy officiousness, to show the way and to demonstrate the tools to a poor individual who covets existence; it is like a servant who goes in search of booty and prey for his master. But now it has become the master and it dares wipe from its face the expression of indigence).<sup>44</sup>

Nietzsche ended this essay by creating an opposition between »der vernünftige Mensch« (the man of reason) who lives by the ossified metaphor and »der intuitive Mensch« (the intuitive man) who creates with the metaphorical freedom described above. These two types were common elements in the oppositions that appear in Nietzsche's work having appeared earlier as the tragic and Socratic Greek and they would later appear in *Zur Genealogie der Moral (On the Genealogy of Morals)* as representatives of the *ascetic ideal* and the *nobility of prehistory* respectively. It is apparent that the poetic »I« in »Sundown at Sea« has internalized both positions and that the construction of metaphor in this poem, the tension between naming as a »Gleichsetzen des Nicht-Gleichen« (comparison of the unlike), as a means of mastering the ocean through the concepts of science is in a tense relationship with the desire to forget. It is here that we can understand that Strindberg, even in his most radical, almost absurd application of his understanding of naturalism bares the device of a collision between rational and irrational elements in the creation of his art.<sup>45</sup> The metaphorical complex of the ocean is created from a perspective that has internalized this conflict. What I wish to take forward from Nietzsche's early thoughts on the equation of the creation of new and transgressive metaphors with the overcoming of a position of servitude to the already created metaphors of the collective is that the creation of a new metaphor is the performative linguistic vehicle for the active forgetting of the sovereign individual. For Nietzsche, it is by means of an active forgetting that the artist creates and resists the moralized judgment of the collective.

The last stanza of »Sundown at Sea« acts a condensation of the descriptive movement in the poem and alerts us to the commonality between Nietzschean thought and Strindberg's early poetic production. Here there is once again a movement from simile (*Gleichnis*) to metaphor. The poem ends: »Sweden lies like smoke/Like the smoke of a Ma-

44 Ibid., 888. The English translation is from BREAZEALE: 1999, 90.

45 In this sense, Strindberg is much less polemical and one-sided than Nietzsche in this moment. This also alerts us that the formal components of the commonality are much more pronounced than any commonality in content.

duro-Havanna,/And the sun sits over there/Like a half-extinguished cigar./But around the horizon/the cliffs stand so red/like Bengali-fire/and shine on the misery.«<sup>46</sup> After the creation of the initial metaphorical complex where the collision of rational and irrational elements amalgamates into a sea of intoxication, the poetic voice depicts its collective origins. Sweden becomes evanescent, illuminated by the sun, but perceivable only in this natural source of light's reflection, which in a simile, is compared to an artificial source of light – fireworks, the light of the carnival. This light shines on the misery, »eländet« in the original Swedish. »Eländet,« »Elend« in German, according to one of Nietzsche's numerous etymologies in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, has its origin in the word for exile, and is, according to Nietzsche, connected to the transgression of what binds a member to his community, the pledge to refrain from harmful and hostile acts.<sup>47</sup>

We can now discern the complex that connects naming, forgetting, and origins in the poem and point out its Nietzschean commonality. For Nietzsche, mastery was dependent upon appropriation through naming. Naming, in turn, is dependent on the forgetting of the agonistic elements of origination. The Nietzschean genealogies are attempts to reactivate this conflict in order to linguistically re-appropriate the name for a thing in the present through a system of ranking. Metaphor can either be in an ossified state that masks its aspect, or through the activity of the sovereign individual, a means of separating oneself (through pathos, through suffering) from the moral valuation of the collective.

For both Nietzsche and Strindberg, metaphor was a means of overcoming the constraints of their environment and a means of self-overcoming. In »Sundown at Sea,« a metaphorical complex is created which performs the tension between naming and forgetting. In the last lines of the poem, the origin of collective values, Sweden, is connected to the notion of being a source of misery from which the poet is exiled for the crime of his metaphorical originality. The poem performs the movement from likeness to substitution and highlights the tension between disparate elements in the formation of a description. This description in turn, is a form of overcoming the opposition of rational and irrational

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<sup>46</sup> Please notice the movement here: There are four similes and an ending metaphor, the substitution of misery for Sweden.

<sup>47</sup> See NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, 307, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*.

elements through struggle while retaining both elements. This is the way that Strindbergian naturalism is compatible with Nietzschean philosophy. For in Strindberg's naturalistic production, the text is a site of collision of rational and irrational elements. The struggle between these elements was then projected upon his society, as the origin of moral valuation, in the form of critique.

### Self-overcoming and the Pathos of Dual Origination

This leads us to a discussion of what I claimed was the underdeveloped concept in the environment of reception, origination. In the discussion of Nietzsche's genealogical method, I claimed that the notion of dual origination was a springboard for the activity of *Selbstüberwindung* (self-overcoming). This process depended on the internalization of an opposition between creative and reactive forces. I also posited that this opposition, between the *ascetic ideal* and the self-creating *Herrschaft*, was forwarded as a metaphorical explanation for the passage from a *prehistorical* to a historical state, and served as the contradictory raw material for self-construction in the text. This conflict between what Nietzsche calls the forces of the *Vorzeit*, that which comes before time and the forces whose internalization of their conditions have created historical consciousness is essential to our understanding of the notion of *Selbstüberwindung* in its relation to the conflation of autobiography and history in the texts under consideration.

*Selbstüberwindung* is a process that utilizes the internal conflict between forces that have two distinctly different temporal qualities. Nietzsche believed that these forces are simultaneously present in the individual. The textual form of this temporal duality is genealogical polemic. As early as his 1874 meditation, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life), Nietzsche both criticized the domination of the historical sense in cultural life and understood its ineffable presence in human culture.<sup>48</sup> Yet while Nietzsche was concerned with what he considered to be the enervating effect of an overabundance of concentration on the past, he never denied the validity of historical thinking in itself.

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<sup>48</sup> See NIETZSCHE: 1988a, KSA I, 243–324, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*. This essay is the second of the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*.

Nietzsche's genealogical project, and in this I include *Jenseits von Gut und Böse (Beyond Good and Evil)* as the main text that the genealogies explicate, was a response to the problem to what he saw as an *overabundance* of history. In *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche claimed that the social conditions of the *Vorzeit* were the result of a problem that *nature* set before man: the breeding of an animal that could make and keep promises.<sup>49</sup> As this *breeding* was the cause of much suffering or pathos, this suffering was turned inward by the animal that was bred. Thus, another way to understand Nietzsche's re-construction of the origins of morality is that with the victory of the *ascetic ideal* and the advent of moral thinking, this originary pathos was obscured by a now prevailing ethos. In Nietzsche's performative antidote to the insomnia that he attributes to an overabundance of historical thinking, *der Wille zur Macht* (the will to power), as an interpreting pathos struggles with the prevailing ethos. For in Nietzsche's conception of a *healthy* historical sense, the ethos of shared moral valuation is subordinated to the pathos of interpretation. This helps to explain Nietzsche's philosophy of history; *der Wille zur Macht* as the interpretive force of both self and world uses a genealogy as a vehicle for a reversal of the repression of pathos by ethos. This was his notion of an active nihilism, Nietzsche's dangerous perhaps.

Regarding temporal matters, Nietzsche's attempted reversal of values does not point to the past. Instead it highlights the conflict between two orders, each of which has its own construction of temporality, each which has an anticipation of return. From this we can posit the following about Nietzsche's conception of time and memory. First, Nietzsche did not see time as simply moving in a circle; instead, he posited two species of time in collision: the first is a linear historical time that is based on the inability to actively forget; this time is marked by *ressentiment* and the repression of pathos. Here, the past dominates and its anticipated return marks an eschatological moment with the possibility of salvation and resurrection. The second species of time is the circular time of the eternal return. This is not a metaphysical time, for Nietzsche had abandoned the notion of divine logos with his declaration of the *death of God*; it is a psychological time marked by differentiated repetition and *Selbstüber-*

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49 See NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. The discussion of this problem starts at the beginning of the »Zweite Abteilung« and can be found on pg. 291.

*windung*. This is the time of Zarathustra's »Vom Gesicht und Räthsel« where the two pathways that stretch on for eternity come together under a gateway over which is written »Augenblick«.<sup>50</sup> These two species of time coexist and are in constant opposition in Nietzsche's genealogical work. Linear time is the time of *nihilism* or *decadence*. Circular time is valorized as the time of health. It is also the time of *Selbstüberwindung*, the time when elements of the past are addressed in the moment in order to create the metaphor of subjectivity.

This formula also informs the Nietzschean conception of memory. For Nietzsche there are two kinds of memory as well. The first type of memory is distinguished by an inability to digest experience. Nietzsche considered this to be an unhealthy state of affairs. This type of memory posits »I was therefore I am«. The second type of memory is a function of *active forgetting*. This entails a discrete relationship between the *lordly right to name* and the recreation of a past that is dominated by the imperative of the moment. For Nietzsche, this dominant perspective that produces this type of interpretation is *der Wille zur Gesundheit* (the will to health). This type of memory says, »It was because ›I‹ will it to be such«. This also helps to explain why Nietzsche's historical genealogy is a polemic against moral valuation as memory becomes a site of conflict between pathos and ethos, between individual re-construction through internal conflict and a collective understanding of the past where conflicts in valuation are resolved externally through an ossified metaphorical system: either the coming salvation as an absolute truth, or science or history as absolute *telo*.

It is my contention that Strindberg's »autobiographical« project makes the same use of origins. Here, as in Nietzsche's genealogical work, dual and agonistic origins are posited. The struggle between them is a war between two types of memory. This is the very struggle that Strindberg was later to call his *befrielsekriget*, his war of liberation. For it is in *Tjänstekvinnans son (Son of A Servant)* that the struggle between two orders of understanding experience, the naturalist order of environmental determination and the hyper-present order of momentary affirmation, come into conflict.

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50 NIETZSCHE: 2002, KSA 4, *Also sprach Zarathustra* 3. »Vom Gesicht und Räthsel« can be found on pp. 197–202, the parable about the »Augenblick« on pg. 200.

*Tjänstekvinnans son* was written between 1885 and 1886. It was divided into four volumes, each depicting a period of time in »en själs utvecklingshistoria« (the history of the development of a soul). The first volume covers the period from 1849–1867; the second, entitled *Jäsningstiden* (*Time of Fermentation*), tells the story of the years 1867–1872; the third volume, *I Röda rummet* (*In the Red Room*) narrates the »events« between 1872–1875; and the final volume, entitled *Författaren* (*The Author*), which was not published until 1909, is an account of the years between 1877 and 1887.<sup>51</sup> The two missing years, 1875 and 1876, were the subject of *Han och hon* (*He and She*), a collection of letters between Strindberg and his first wife Siri von Essen that was refused by several publishers and did not reach the public until 1919, after Strindberg's death.<sup>52</sup> *Han och hon* shared the subtitle »en själs utvecklingshistoria« with *Tjänstekvinnans son* and Strindberg had planned it to be included in the work.

In an excursus that follows the first chapter of this study, I discussed the relationship between Strindberg's conception of a *naturalist* autobiography and utilized the »interview« that he intended to preface the first volume of *Tjänstekvinnans son*. The fictional *interviewee*, *the author*, stated in this *interview* that *Tjänstekvinnans son* »är ingen roman; det skall sålunda vara något nytt« (is not a novel, it would be, in that case, something new).<sup>53</sup> He went on to explain the principle of a project that was to continue beside his literary production for the rest of his life. This project was a series of cross-referential »autobiographical« works of which *Tjänstekvinnans son* was the first installment. At the core of Strindberg's conception of this project was the claim that one could only *know* one's own life. The form of these naturalist autobiographies keeps this claim from degenerating into mere solipsism. This form, *the genealogy of self*, employs the oscillation between distance and proximity, revealing itself as a self-referential hermeneutic with a weakened truth claim that is dependent upon the agonistic relationship between internalized elements of necessity and contingency. I define necessity here as the linear time of history with its collective memory, and contingency as being the process of *Selbstüberwindung* through description.

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51 STRINDBERG: 1996a.

52 STRINDBERG: 1996b.

53 STRINDBERG: 1989, 372.



In *Mitt förhållande till Nietzsche* (My Relationship to Nietzsche), Strindberg claims with the writing of the fourth section of this text to have »arbetat mig ur äldre vantrö, invuxen från ungdomen« (worked myself out of older false beliefs inherited from my youth).<sup>54</sup> The first chapter of the first volume of the work alerts us to the source of this »false belief«. It is my contention that the way this self-overcoming is performed is the heart of Strindberg's commonality with Nietzsche. In order to illustrate this point, I will compare the description of origins in the first volume of the text with the meta-narrative commentary that closes the book in the fourth volume. I will now turn to the first volume, entitled simply, *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*Son of a Servant*).

*Tjänstekvinnans son* is narrated in the third person. It opens, in exemplary naturalist fashion, by depicting the historical environment into which the protagonist, Johan, is born:

Fyrtioalet hade gått ut. Tredje ståndet som genom 1792 års revolution tillkämpat sig en del av människans rättigheter hade nu blivit påminnat om att det fanns ett fjärde och femte som ville fram. Svenska Bourgeoisien som hjälpt Gustav III att göra den kungliga revolten hade längesedan recipierat i överklassen under förre jakobinen Bernadottes stormästarskap, och hjälpt till att motväga adels- och ämbetsmannaståndet, vilka Karl Johan med sina underklass-instinkter hatade och vördade. Efter 48 års konvulsioner togs rörelsen om händer av den upplyste despoten, Oskar I, vilken insett evolutionens omotståndlighet och därför ville passa tillfället att få äran av reformernas genomförande. Han binder vid sig borgarskapet genom näringsfrihet och frihandel, med vissa inskränkningar naturligtvis, upptäcker kvinnans makt och beviljar systrar lika arvsrätt med bröder, utan att samtidigt lätta brödernas bördor såsom blivande familjeförsörjare. I borgarståndet finner hans regering stöd gentemot adeln med Hartmansdorff och emot prästerskapet vilka utgöra oppositionen

(The forties had run their course. The third estate, which had won a share of human rights in the revolution of 1792, had now been reminded that there was a fourth and a fifth estate that also wanted to advance. The Swedish Bourgeoisie, who had helped Gustav III in his royal revolt and had long since been initiated into the over-class during the former Jacobean, Bernadotte's reign, now helped to balance the scales against the nobility and the bureaucracy, who Karl Johan with his underclass instincts both hated and admired. After the convulsions of '48, this movement was appropriated by the enlightened despot, Oskar I, who realized that the evolution was irresistible, and as a result, wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to receive the credit for the enactment of the reforms. He binds the bourgeoisie to him through freedom of trade, with certain restrictions of course, discovers the power of women, and grants sisters equal rights of inheritance without simultaneously relieving the burden of their

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54 STRINDBERG: 1918, 323. My translation.

brother's load as eventual breadwinners. His government finds its support in the bourgeoisie, and used them against the aristocracy with Hartmansdorff and against the clergy who makes up the opposition.)<sup>55</sup>

It is interesting, that Strindberg, the writer of his own history of Sweden, *Svenska folket* (1882), the man who attacked Gustav Geijer's notion that »att det svenska folkets historia är dess konungars« (the history of the Swedish people is her kings),<sup>56</sup> would open his own story with a catalogue of the political positions of three of Sweden's more powerful kings. The narration continues with a description of the class structure, a description that extends architectonically, as the house into which Johan is born is divided along the very same class lines as society, the apartments being located along the lines of rank and distinction. These class divisions of the social environment are even mirrored in Johan's own biological origins.

Johan's father is described: »Han var en aristokrat av börd och av uppfostran.« (He was an aristocrat by virtue of lineage and upbringing.)<sup>57</sup> His mother's description, juxtaposed in the same paragraph to the father's, reads, »mor var fattig skräddardotter av en styvfar utsatt i livet som piga sedan som värdshusflicka« (mother was the daughter of a poor tailor who was sent out by her step father to be a maid and then a waitress).<sup>58</sup> This dichotomy of being the son of an aristocrat and a servant is further developed as the father's aristocratic bearing is set in relief against the mother's »democratic instinct«. This opening sets a narrative in motion that is informed by the internalization of historical conditions and hereditary factors. This certainly seems like a naturalist memoir. The protagonist's historical environment and heredity are established as a starting point for an analysis of his development. His environment shapes him and his experience seems to be circumscribed by necessity. It also seems to be an internalization and anticipation of the anti-naturalist debates that accompanied the Nietzsche reception in the late 1880s. However, there is more to the story.

There is a split in the textual fabric. The protagonist Johan is an unveiled pseudonym narrated in the third person. August Johan Strindberg,

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55 STRINDBERG: 1989. My translation.

56. My translation.

57 Ibid., II.

58 Ibid.

the well-known public figure was designated as the author of the text. The name August Strindberg is inscribed upon the title page as the legal authority to which the text belongs. The narrator attributes the qualities and events that have marked »Strindberg's« life to Johan. The proper name Johan is connected to a series of predicates that have already been publicly attributed to the proper name Strindberg. This protocol is observed so strictly that the texts that have been legally attributed to Strindberg, published under his name and copyright, are attributed by the narrator to Johan in the third person within the confines of the text. This act gives *Tjänstekvinnans son* a dual characteristic. On the one hand, distance is taken through the use of a protagonist who stands in metaphorically for the name »Strindberg,« who speaks of his »I« as »he«. On the other hand, the text is so radically self-referential that the books, which Strindberg had written, are utilized to illustrate the development of the »fictional« protagonist. This strategy, at once a distancing through fictionalization and a making proximate through reference to the public utterances and legal status of the author, creates an oscillation between the very notions of the fictionality and the facticity of the past. This points to the relationship between the contingency of artistic creation and the necessity of environmental conditions that are forwarded in the text, and between the fixed aspects of the proper legal name and the variability of self-description. One can say that Strindberg assumes the right to name through the use of a pseudonymous stand-in for himself, and thereby claims the right for self-definition. He reappropriates aspects of his past through a reinscription of his name, as the stand-in, Johan, and thereby as metaphor.

This relationship is radicalized even further. In the fourth volume, in the last chapter entitled *Tjänstekvinnans son* (1886), the narrative is brought into the present tense and a metanarrative commentary is brought into play. The chapter itself describes aspects of the writing of the book of which it is a part. This chapter can be divided into two sections. The first section comments on the writing of *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*Son of a Servant*) and the writing begins by conjugating verbs in the past tense only to break into a discussion of subjectivity that shifts tenses, the verbs conjugated in the present. This second part of the chapter consists of a dialogue between Johan and a character designated only as X. It is here that the radical hermeneutic structure of the text is brought home and internalized within the text itself, as it comments upon itself. This

chapter that bears the name of the text is a commentary upon the writing of itself. It takes the same distance that Strindberg takes to Johan and it enjoys the same proximity as well. It is even more interesting that the narrator states that the book was written because of a decision to

göra upp bokslut med det gamla, genomgå sitt livs händelser från början till dato, undersöka sin själs uppkomst – och utvecklingshistoria, sådan densamma uppstått under alla framverkande orsaker av ärftlighet, uppfostran, naturell, temperament, under tryck och inverkan av den givna historiska epokens yttre händelser och andliga rörelser.

(close the books on the old, go through his life's events from beginning to the date, examine his soul's origination – and developmental history, such as it arose under all the pre-existing conditions of inheritance, nature, temperament, under the pressure and influence of the given historical epoch's external events and spiritual movements.)<sup>59</sup>

On the surface this appears to be a laundry list of a naturalist's understanding of the relationship between a historical environment and the possibilities for the development of the individual under those circumstances. Considering that Strindberg radicalized his own conception of naturalism to the point where only self-understanding was deemed possible, it is certainly no surprise that there would be a conflation of autobiography and history in this text. It could be argued that Strindberg's innovation was to give the naturalist protagonist a self-conscious understanding of the effect of environment on the individual by turning the vivisection scalpel on himself, no more and no less. If this is so, then there is at best a weak commonality with Nietzsche, who despite his own predilection for positing environmental factors as determinant was certainly not a naturalist.<sup>60</sup>

However, despite its »naturalistic« surface, there are two orders of time and two orders of memory present in *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*Son of a Servant*). The first order of time is the linear time of naturalist depiction. This is particularly manifested in the first three volumes. It is here

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<sup>59</sup> STRINDBERG: 1996a, 214. My translation.

<sup>60</sup> Or perhaps he was a »naturalist« in the same sense as Strindberg. In other words, a type of dialectical naturalist, one who recognized that self-interpretation was subject to historical factors, but introduced a radical element of contingency into the mix. In any case, Strindberg's »naturalism« is certainly eccentric and Nietzsche's anti-naturalistic position does not deny the effect of hereditary, social, historical, or even geographical conditions on the development of the subject. Certainly, both men's positions on naturalism are more polemical than substantial. As illustrated throughout this study, this is most often the case in late nineteenth century letters.

that environmental conditions dominate the individual. The second order of time is the circular time of differentiated repetition. This is the time of the last chapter of the fourth volume. It is here that the dual origins of Johan's conception are overcome and a hierarchy is established. It is here that autobiographical excavation is transformed into a performative act in the moment. This performative act is initiated in the metanarrative commentary.

The metanarrative commentary goes on to state that the text is neither a confession nor is it a memoir.<sup>61</sup> This leads us to a question: what is *Tjänstekvinnans son*? My answer is that it is a *genealogy of self*, a *Selbstüberwindung*, a performative work that overcomes the dual origins of its author and establishes an internal hierarchy. Strindberg performs his *Selbstüberwindung* in the following manner. The title, *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*Son of a Servant*), is misleading for it implies that the subject of the book is defined by his relationship to his mother's position («als meine Mutter lebe ich noch und werde alt» (as my mother I still live and grow old)).<sup>62</sup> Almost immediately, dual origins are posited. The title has three textual valences: it is an expression of one of the temporal orders in the text, the representation of a movement away from a point of origin, and at the same time a symbol of the retention of a contradictory internal life («als mein Vater bereits gestorben» (as my father I am already dead)).<sup>63</sup> The protagonist is the son of two discrete and incompatible positions, as his father's aristocratic nature is sharply contrasted with his mother's »lower-class« origins.

These dual origins are not in a stable relationship to each other, but rather like Nietzsche's competing perspectives, their relationship collides internally. They are the raw material with which Johan (»Strindberg«) constructs a complex metaphor to stand in for the self. The process of self-construction that is dependent on contradiction is brought home in the metanarrative commentary in the last chapter. The title of the chapter, *Tjänstekvinnans son* (1886), represents the circular order of time and is a

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61 STRINDBERG: 1996a, 214: »Detta var huvudsyftet med boken om Tjänstekvinnans son, och alls icke att skriva några bekännelser, för att ursäkta sig, eller några memoarer för att roa.« My translation: »This was the main goal of the book about the son of a servant, and the goal was not at all to write some confessions to ask for pardon, nor to write a memoir to entertain.«

62 NIETZSCHE: 1988d, KSA 6, 264.

63 Ibid.

differentiated repetition. For it is here that the narrative enters the present, becomes a polemic, the right to name is asserted, and the genealogical exploration of origins ends with a truth claim that is contingent upon an *organizing idea* and opposed to a telos. The issue of the shifting metaphors of self and their temporality has been addressed. I will treat each of the remaining claims in turn, starting with a discussion of the relationship between the act of presenting (making contemporary) and the polemical voice.

Fick han då fatt på sitt jag under denna långa och trista vandring i minnenas skuggrike? Att svara nej, skulle förr ha gjort honom bryderi, ty en personlig gud fordrar en ansvarig personlighet, men nu bryr det honom mindre, då han vet att jaget är en mycket bräcklig form av en liten rörelse varande kvantitet kraft, eller materia om man hellre vill, som under de givna förhållandena utvecklar sig så och så.

(Did he get a grasp on his I during that long, gloomy meander in memory's shadowy realm? Before, an answer of no would have embarrassed him, for a personal God demands an accountable personality; but now he cares less for he knows that 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.)<sup>64</sup>

The narrative changes its verb tenses at the moment of a discussion of the construction of the »I«. It is in this moment that the narrative takes on a polemical voice as it both addresses Johan's own past as a contemporary and implicitly attacks the internalization of his mother's religious position through a denial of the existence of a *personal God* who would demand responsibility in the form of a stable character. It is in this moment, directly after the denial of God's existence, that the tenses change. It is in this moment as well, that the »I« is dismissed as a construction, as it said to be a quantity of force or material if »if one prefers«.

The metadiscourse then turns to the subject of the book's conclusion. The narrator addresses an imaginary interlocutor who demands a »sammanfattning,« a recapitulation or summary conclusion. The narrator responds to his own question by stating:

Men resultatet, sammanfattningen? frågar man. Var ligger sanningen han sökte? Den ligger här och där i de tusen tryckta sidorna; sök upp dem, samla dem och se efter om de kunna sammanfattas; se efter om de äro giltiga längre än ett år, fem år, tänk efter om de ens ha utsikt att bli giltiga, då därtill fordras ett flertals erkännande. Och glöm inte att sanningen icke kan finnas emedan den befinner sig som allt i beständig utveckling.

64 STRINDBERG: 1996a, 214. My translation.

(But the conclusion, the summary, one asks? Where does the truth he sought reside? It resides here and there in the thousand printed pages; look them up, collect them and see if they could be summarized or concluded; see if they are valid longer than a year, five years, think about if they even have the intention to be valid, for that would have demanded many admissions. And don't forget that the truth does not exist since it finds itself, like everything else, in constant development.)<sup>65</sup>

There is no recapitulation. There is no summary. There is only a continuous becoming with a dynamically unstable truth claim. The imaginary interlocutor is told to look at the text itself, and to the texts that the text discusses; all attributed to one August Strindberg and also to his double, Johan the protagonist. Any conclusion is of the moment, which is the time of the recurrence of the past, continually the same and continually new, always in a state of becoming (i beständig utveckling). There is no truth to *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*Son of a Servant*), there is only a self-referential narrative that demands an immanent interpretation of the texts of August Strindberg. The narrator names his »truth« and it is the »truth« of the fluidity of the past as it is organized and re-organized under the imperative of the moment. The narrator implicitly claims the right to name his own truth and the name of his truth is Johan, the character who has textually relived August Strindberg's life. There is no telos, only a metaphorical »I« that stands in for the constant change. The »I« is the deck of a ship on the open sea, from which the narrator describes his perspective. But the »I« is also a »he« for Strindberg. He/I is Johan.

Thereby, Johan is a split metaphor. He is the Johan who represents the trajectory of the linear order of time and memory, subjected to the historical conditions that have shaped his environment and the inheritance of his parents, who, in turn, represent conflicting aspects that have been internalized. This is the Johan determined by an interpretation called necessity. There is also the Johan who is merely the proper name that stands in for the performance of a genealogy of self, the fictional »doer« of the deed of *Selbstüberwindung*. This moment is also present in the last chapter, the chapter of the present tense. This is the Johan of contingency.

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65 Ibid., 215.

The last section of *Tjänstekvinnans son* is a dialog between Johan and X.<sup>66</sup> They are discussing politics. X is a young Swedish aristocrat. The dialog begins:

– Det förefaller mig, började X, som din monomani att vilja vara demokrat strede emot något att du ej rår på.

– Jag vet inte, svarar Johan, men det synes mig, när jag själv läser boken, såsom om ett samvete förföljde mig.

X. – Vad är samvete?

Johan. – Frukten för följderna, säger man numera; känslan av att man ha gjort orätt, sa man förr.

X. – Orätt, rätt? Du har genom uppfostran och naturliga anlag stigit över den klass, där du var född; du är icke mer underklass du kallar, utan överklass. Varför generar du dig? Känner du kanske motsägelsen i dina angrepp på överklassen, och känner du att du angripa dig själv i dina skrifter? Du är gammaldags i det stycket, och det är bara kristendom med försakelselära som du ej kan frigjöra dig ifrån.

Johan. – Ja, men det kan också vara mina medfödda klasskänslor som ej kunnat följa med i utvecklingen ...«

(– It occurs to me, X began, that your monomania about wanting to be a democrat conflicts with something that you are not able to overcome.

– I don't know, answers Johan, but it is evident to me when I read the book myself that it is as if a conscience persecuted me.

X. – What is conscience?

Johan. – Fear of consequences, people say nowadays. People used to say that it is the feeling of having done something wrong.

X. – Wrong, right? You have risen above the class that you were born into by virtue of your upbringing and natural proclivities. You are not underclass, rather you are overclass. Why bother yourself? Do you even see the contradiction in your attack on the overclass, and do you not know that you attack yourself in your writings? You are old-fashioned in that way, and it is only that you cannot free yourself from Christianity with its ascetic teachings.

Johan. – Yes, but that can also be my inherited class feelings that could not keep pace with the development ...)<sup>67</sup>

There are several things to note about this exchange. First is the form, that of a dialogue between an aristocrat and the *son of a servant*. Second is the relationship of form and content. The two are discussing the split in Johan, his internalized guilt, his rise above his class, the contradictions of self-critique in his production, and the elements of his birth that he can-

66 Biographical readings of *Tjänstekvinnans son* have identified X as Verner von Heidenstam and all evidence points in his direction. However, for my purposes, X is a textual location, a participant in a split in the narration, an indication of the struggle of Johan's emergence from being the son of a servant, and a trope in Strindberg's »befrielsekrig«.

67 STRINDBERG: 1996a, 218–219.



not escape. There is a struggle between the two orders in this dialogue; the necessity of inheritance is confronted by the contradictions created by Johan's overcoming of his origins. The dialogue is in the form of a debate, X as an element of the text is the manifestation of the struggle between the son of a servant and an aristocrat. He plays the role of the *organizing idea*.

The text ends with a performative moment. X urges Johan to write down their conversation if he dares. Johan replies: »Ja det ska jag göra [...] och det ska bli slutet på fjärde delen av *Tjänstekvinnans son*.« (I will do that [...] and that will be the end of the fourth part of *Son of a Servant*.)<sup>68</sup> Considering that Strindberg was later to call the writing of this volume his *war of liberation* and in many ways began to assume X's convictions,<sup>69</sup> there is a doubleness to this statement. On the one hand, it draws the text into the moment in a radical temporal shift that equates the close of the book with the ending of the act of writing. The performativity of this act resides in the confluence of memory and the moment of writing, thereby highlighting the differentiated repetition that governs the form of the *genealogy of self*. It reflects the subordination of content to formal considerations. Second, in this volume this act marks the emergence of the Johan that is no longer *tjänstekvinnans son*, no longer only the son of a servant, but rather an *aristocrat* by virtue of self-overcoming, which subordinates the son of a servant through the tyranny of the *organizing idea*. It is as if he were saying what Nietzsche was to say later in *Ecce Homo*: »Wohlan, ich bin das *Gegenstück* eines *décadent*: denn ich beschrieb eben *mich*.« (Well then, I am the *opposite* of a *decadent*, because I have just described *myself*.)<sup>70</sup> In an act of performative irony, *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*Son of a Servant*) is no longer a fitting title and Strindberg has written himself out of his »false belief«. The problem of overcoming dual origins was for both Nietzsche and Strindberg an aesthetic process in which an internalized social structure and hereditary disposition are overcome by a selection process that creates a fictional »doer« for the »deed« of a polemical genealogy. In both cases, the act of de-description enables a re-inscription of a momentary metaphor that

68 Ibid., 229.

69 By early 1887, Strindberg had renounced many of his former political views. He would return to socialism, democracy, and Christianity after his Inferno crisis in the late 1890s.

70 NIETZSCHE: 1988d, 267. See NORMAN: 2005, 77 for the English translation.

stands in the place of the subject. This is the commonality in the two men's authorial projects, what Strindberg called the systemless system.

### By the Open Sea: Strindberg's Nietzschean Experiment

Let us return for a moment to Strindberg's open sea. The novel *I havsbandet* (*By the Open Sea*) (1890) was said by Strindberg to be a fictional experiment with Nietzsche's philosophy. Commentators have often pointed to this novel in order to underscore their point that Strindberg misread Nietzsche. They designate the protagonist, Axel Borg, as Strindberg's version of *der Übermensch* (the overman). The Norwegian, Harald Beyer, comments that Borg is hardly a Nietzschean figure due to his refined and sensitive nature. Beyer uses the term *intelligensaristokrat* to describe the Strindbergian version of this Nietzschean figure.<sup>71</sup> I would like to conclude this chapter by pointing out that perhaps Beyer read Strindberg's novel in too programmatic a fashion and that *By the Open Sea* comments upon Nietzsche in a way that remains unexplored.

Strindberg included a map of his production in the preface to the fourth volume of *The Son of a Servant*. Written by Strindberg retrospectively in 1909, the preface includes a chart that schematically lists his writings and places them into categories. On the second page of this chart one can read:

*I havsbandet*. Nietzsches Filosofi influerar; men Individiden går under i strävan till den absoluta Individualismen. Inleder 90-talet: Übermensch.

(*By the Open Sea*. Nietzsche's philosophy influences; but the individual succumbs (goes under) in the striving for absolute individuality. Introduces the 90's: Übermensch.)<sup>72</sup>

This lone paragraph has greatly inflected scholars' understanding of two aspects of Strindberg's encounter with Nietzsche. First, it has contributed to a concentration on the question of influence and has delimited the texts that have been brought under scrutiny. Second, it has led to a reading of *By the Open Sea* that concludes that Axel Borg's final act is suicide. I offer an alternative reading.

<sup>71</sup> See BEYER: 1958, 50–63. See also Eklund: 1948: 414.

<sup>72</sup> STRINDBERG: 1996a. This preface can be found in the appendix on pp. 263–267. Our citation can be found on pg. 265. My translation.

First, Strindberg's retrospective self-analysis claims that the individual perishes in the attempt for an absolute individuality. At the time of this novel's composition, a form of self-construction that was dependent upon contradiction governed Strindberg's conception of individuality. He understood these contradictions as arising from description (self or otherwise), which he understood as creating a locus where the collision between irrational and rational forces becomes apparent. This is quite apparent in the novel, where the demise of the individual indicates a possibility for a beginning as well as an end.

If Johan, in *Tjänstekvinnans son* had overcome the doubleness of his heredity, Axel Borg is a motherless child. The protagonist does not carry the burden of a dual inheritance. Instead he carries the expectations of a father who represents the idea of generational progression that is passed on to his son. This idea is carried by Borg, and his understanding of it in vulgar Darwinian terms, as the survival of the fittest, is severely tested as the novel progresses. There are two other arenas of contention, one external and the other internal. The prominent external struggle in this novel plays out through Borg's relationship to the inhabitants of the skerry. The internal struggle is between science and desire, or knowledge and love.

On the surface, Borg wears the aspect of the *Übermensch* as an *intelligensaristokrat*. He has a clearly »superior« understanding, and even attempts to establish religion on the island as a means of organizing what he considers to be the *herd*. Strindberg certainly conducts an experiment with his understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy in that the text implicitly asks the question: is it possible for such a figure as Borg to thrive in the company of other humans? His answer is seemingly in the negative as Borg eventually becomes so isolated that he breaks down and despite his desire to do so, he cannot reproduce himself as he loses his chance at love due to his need to conquer. In the end he even tries unsuccessfully to reproduce life in his laboratory. His drive to reproduce comes to a head in a pathetic scene where Borg collects some dolls that have washed up on the shore and tries to raise them as his children. On the level of content, seen through the optic of influence, Beyer appears to be correct; if Strindberg did depict Borg as an *Übermensch*, then his experiment came to the conclusion that Nietzsche's philosophy is untenable in the *real* world. However, if Borg's last act is read through a different optic, another possible conclusion emerges.

The scholarship that sees the encounter from the perspective of influence has been dependent on a direct mapping of a reading of Nietzsche's philosophy onto Strindberg's work. Limited by an insistence on assessing Strindberg's fidelity to the more underdeveloped and polemical aspects of the Nietzschean corpus, such as the notions of *origination* and the *Übermensch*, it has attempted to understand Borg as a type of miscreant *Übermensch*, and as a result, neglected to pay heed to the development of the ocean as metaphor in the novel. This has caused a negative reading of Nietzsche's influence, and the conclusion that there is a misreading and a rejection of the philosopher on Strindberg's part.

I approach this novel from a different perspective. First, if the description of the ocean is taken into account, Borg is not an *Übermensch*, but more likely an example of *der höheren Menschen* in *Also sprach Zarathustra* or the scientific nihilist of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. If this is the case, then even on the level of content, the ending of the novel takes on quite a different valence and the description of the novel in the 1909 preface to the fourth volume of *Tjänstekvinnans son* can be read to mean that the decade of the 1890s was the start of an experiment with the *Übermensch*. Seen on the level of both form and content, *By the Open Sea* does not demarcate the end of a period of commonality in the authorships, but serves as a signpost that points to a further investigation of the implications of Strindberg and Nietzsche's understanding of the dilemma of subject formation in a world *abandoned by God*.

There are three issues to be addressed regarding the description of the ocean in the novel: Borg's perspective in relation to the object of description, the components of the description, and the relation of the description to the end of the novel. It is certainly meaningful that the narration is in the third person and that Borg is depicted from this distance. However, my treatment of Borg's perspective is justified by the focalization of nature descriptions through his eyes. The components of the description inform us about the dynamics of this perspective. The first two points of analysis bring new light to the meaning of the book's conclusion.

Borg's perspective is established from the outset. The text opens with Borg traveling as a passenger in a rowboat to the skerry where he is to serve as fishing Inspector. One of the inhabitants of the island, »Tullkarlen« (The Customs Man), is rowing the boat. Borg's is described in detail and three aspects of his appearance are of note. He dresses in the manner of a decadent, he is regarded as an exotic outsider by »Tullkarlen,« and

he is wearing »ett tjockt guldarmband i form av en orm som bet sig i stjärten« (a thick bracelet in the form of a snake that bit itself in the tail).<sup>73</sup> Borg is dressed inappropriately for his rather rough surroundings, his companion regards him with disdain, and he bears the symbol of the Uroboros. There is split in Borg's appearance that signifies his perspective: this highly cultivated individual is also a figure of the realm of the circular self-referential cycle represented by his bracelet, a self-enclosed cycle of birth and death. Borg is described as a confluence of culture and irrational cyclical repetition.

A violent storm arises and events confirm the description of Borg as an amalgam of scientific and irrational elements. The purely instinctive »Tullkarlen« is unable to navigate through the violence of the storm, so Borg takes the helm and his performance delineates his perspective on nature. Borg is both the man of instinct and the man of science:

det var såsom om han improviserat nautiska och meteorologiska instrument av sina känsliga sinnen till vilka ledningar stodo öppna från hans stora hjärnbatteri som doldes av den lilla löjligen hatten och den svarta hundluggen.

(it was as if he were improvising nautical and meteorological instruments from his delicate senses, to which the cords passed freely from his large brain-battery, concealed behind the little hat and the black dog's bangs).<sup>74</sup>

Borg's thinking is compared to the functioning of scientific instruments. There is a conflation of his instincts and his knowledge. He brings the boat safely to shore and collapses. He is both the instinctive man who understands the ocean's »harmonilära,«<sup>75</sup> and he is the scientific man who takes his distance from the fury of the storm to guide the boat to safety. When his task is completed, he collapses. Like the swimmer in »Haze,« Borg had pitted his own will against that of the ocean and the end result was a loss of consciousness. However, there is a significant difference between the two depictions. Borg did not immerse himself in the ocean in search of a merger with a natural force, instead he oscillated between the proximity of an instinctive reading of the text of the ocean and the distancing engendered by the internalization of science. This conflation delineates Borg's initial perspective.

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<sup>73</sup> STRINDBERG: 1982b, 7.

<sup>74</sup> STRINDBERG: 1982b, 12. Translation taken from SANDBACH: 1987, 6.

<sup>75</sup> STRINDBERG: 1982b, 12. Translation: »harmony-teaching«.

However, the descriptions of the ocean in the novel, as focalized through Borg, play on the notion of science as hubris and are not necessarily a valorization of Borg as an *intelligens aristocrat*. The narrative develops a complex of descriptive events to illustrate this point. Borg sees himself as the crown of creation. »Intendent Borg var ingen naturdyrkare, lika litet som indiern dyrkade naveln, tvärtom hyste han såsom självmedveten och stående högst i den telluriska skapelsekedjan, en viss ringaktning för lägre existensformer.« (Inspector Borg did not worship nature any more than the Indian worshipped his navel. On the contrary, as a being conscious of himself, and of standing highest in the chain of terrestrial creations, he entertained a certain contempt for lower forms of existence.)<sup>76</sup> This attitude emerges from the descriptions of the ocean focalized through Borg's perspective by means of indirect discourse.

Det var icke med poetens drömfantasi med de dunkla och därför oroande känslorna och orediga förnimmelserna betraktaren njöt av det stora skådespelet utan det var med forskarens, den vakne tänkarens lugna blickar han överskådade sammanhanget i denna skenbara oreda, och det var endast genom sitt hopade väldiga material av minnen han kunde sätta alla dessa åskådade föremål i förbindelse med varandra.

(It was not with the dream-like imagination of the poet, or with vague and consequently disturbing emotions and confused perceptions that the beholder enjoyed this great spectacle. No, it was with the calm eyes of the scholar and conscious thinker that he detected order behind this apparent disorder. He was able [only] with the great store of accumulated memories to arrange all his observations in relation to each other.)<sup>77</sup>

This description of natural life that follows obeys a progressive line of development, and things are described by virtue of their age: »avsvalningsperiodens alger« (algae of the cooling-off period), »den äldsta avkomlingen sillen« (their oldest descendent, the herring), »stenkolstidens ormbunkar« (club-mosses of the Carboniferous era), »sekundärtidens barrträd« (coniferous trees [...] of the secondary era), and »tertiärtidens lovträd« (deciduous trees [...] of the Tertiary era) and so on.<sup>78</sup> All living things are described by their position in a chain of development in a schema that despite its attention to rank and order is more Darwinian than Nietzschean. Borg goes on to classify human beings in the same manner.

76 Ibid., 25. Translation: SANDBACH: 1987, 20.

77 STRINDBERG: 1982b, 34. Translation in SANDBACH: 1987, 29.

78 STRINDBERG: 1982b, 35. Translation SANDBACH: 1987, 30.

Borg is depicted not as an *Übermensch*, but as *der höhere Mensch* (the higher man) in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, or the scientist of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (*On the Genealogy of Morals*).

As the novel progresses the duality in Borg's perspective becomes more apparent. He continues to seek nature through a scientific optic, but wears his bracelet as a talisman whenever he needs to rely upon his instincts. This represents a confluence of rational and irrational elements in Borg's person, and the descriptions illustrate a repression of instinctive elements that accompanies Borg's conscious attempt to subordinate nature to a scientific order of naming. This is especially apparent in two moments. The first moment is the creation of an optical illusion designed to show the inhabitants of the island the power of science. Borg loses control over his creation as two suns appear in the sky and the superstitious islanders understand the scene to portend the coming of the apocalypse.<sup>79</sup> His control is incomplete, and he learns that nature cannot be controlled by calculation. His attempt to master nature parallels his attempt to master the population of the island through science alone. Both end in a dismal failure as »[h]an hade lekt med naturandarne, frambesvurit en fiende till hjälpa sig som han trodde och då hade alla gått över till fienden så att han nu stod ensam« ([h]e had played with the spirits of nature, he had conjured up an enemy to help him, as he thought, and now everything had gone the enemy's way and he walked alone).<sup>80</sup> This passage is crucial to an understanding of the novel for as Borg, forgetting the ocean's »harmonilära,« masters neither the natural environment nor human relations. He becomes more and more isolated and eventually his reason in the extreme crosses over to madness. His relationship with Maria follows along similar lines. He eventually »masters« her, but winds up alone.

The depiction of Borg's degeneration has its parallel in the progression of the dominance of scientific thinking in his descriptions. The story of Borg's visit to the island is not a representation of the failure of an *Übermensch* to establish control over his environment. Rather, it is a narrative that leads to a »genealogical« moment at the novel's conclusion. At the end of the novel, Borg once again sets out to sea. This time he is alone and he is leaving the island. It is Christmas Eve, and he sees a

79 STRINDBERG: 1982b, 117

80 Ibid., 118. Translation, SANDBACH: 1987, 117.

star in the sky. At first, he thinks that it is »ledstjärnan till Betlehem« (the lodestar to Bethlehem) and a criticism of Christianity as occasioning »fallna storheter« (fallen heroes) for the benefit of »alla smås förklarade gud« (the avowed God of all the small).<sup>81</sup> He then realizes that he is mistaken. The star is »Beta i Herkules«. Borg sets his course:

Ut mot den åtminstone på himmelen upptagne, som aldrig lät piska sig eller spotta sig i ansiktet utan att som en man slå och spotta tillbaka, ut mot självförbrännaren som endast kunde falla för sin egen starka hand utan att tigga om nåd från kalken, mot Herakles, som befriade Prometheus, ljusbringaren, själv son av en gud, och en kvinnomoder, som sedan vildarne förfalskat till en jungfrupilt, vars födelse hälsades av mjölkdrickande herdar och skriande åsnor. Ut mot den nya julstjärna gick färden, ut över havet, allmodern, ur vars sköte livets första gnista tändes, fruktsamhetens, kärlekens outtömliga brunn, livets ursprung och livets fiender.

(Out towards the one whom at least the heavens had received. The one who had never allowed himself to be whipped or spat in the face without, like a man, hitting and spitting back. Out towards the one who had burnt himself, who could only die from his own strong hand, without begging for grace from the chalice. Out to Heracles who had [freed] Prometheus, the bringer of light, himself the son of a god and a human mother, though the barbarians later misrepresented him as a virgin boy, whose birth was celebrated by milk-drinking shepherds and braying asses. He had steered his course out towards the new Christmas star, out over the sea, the mother of all, in whose womb the first spark of life was lit, the inexhaustible well of fertility and love, life's source and life's enemy.)<sup>82</sup>

Borg sets his course for the star of Hercules and the ocean takes on a new aspect. The description is now poetic, and the ocean becomes a source of love, life, and suffering. There is an opposition created in the tension between the description of the star and the description of the ocean. The star, »den nya julstjärnan« (the new Christmas star) becomes a symbol of Borg's decision to replace the light of Christianity with Hercules, who enabled Prometheus to bring light to the human race. If Prometheus can be seen as a bringer of culture, he is also a symbol of suffering as he was forced to endure torture throughout eternity. The ocean becomes a vitalistic symbol, dark, uncertain, fruitful, a source of love and death. Borg is traveling towards the beacon of culture creation on a sea of

81 STRINDBERG: 1982b, 182. Translation: The first and third translations are from SANDBACH: 1987, 184. The second translation is mine.

82 STRINDBERG: 1982b, 183. Translation: SANDBACH: 1987, 184–185. I made one amendment that is indicated by brackets. Sandbach translated the Swedish »befriade« as »bred«. This is incorrect; it translates to »freed«.



incalculable and cyclical repetition. Rather than committing suicide, Borg is sailing on a body of water that is a union of the necessity of recurrence and the contingency of possibility. He has given up his rational evolutionary thinking and now valorizes a source as opposed to the crown in a chain of progression. His previous mode of description, exemplary in its inability to forget that which has been learned and exemplary in its forgetting of the metaphorical nature of its scientific postulations, has now turned to the creation of a metaphor that transgresses against Christian belief. Borg has set sail for the open sea. He has paused before the decision. In a state of endless becoming, in the guise of the »good European« to come, he has paused before being.<sup>85</sup>

Borg's final journey does not mark a final capitulation nor is it a suicide in the sense of finality. It is genealogical moment where the twin lodestars of European culture are set against the horizon as Borg sails out to the open sea. On the surface, he understands his possibilities to be between Christ and Hercules, but as we shall see, there is no choice at all, for both are present within. This moment of decision does not mark the end of Strindberg's fictional enactment of Nietzschean possibilities; it marks the beginning of a Promethean stage in Strindberg's understanding that culminated in his *Inferno* crisis. It is during that time period that the repressed elements, the path not chosen re-emerges. However, before we turn to our concluding chapter, it would be wise to remember that Strindberg, who ends his Nietzschean novel with Borg on the open sea, wrote to Nietzsche on December 31<sup>st</sup> of 1888. In this letter, he cites Horace and the English translation reads as follows:

You would lead a better life, Licinius, if you neither shaped your life constantly towards the open sea, nor, shivering tremulously in the face of the storm, held too closely to the treacherous coast.

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85 Recall that Strindberg owned a copy of Nietzsche's *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (*Beyond Good and Evil*), and in the margin next to Aphorism 243 he wrote the word »framåt« or »forward«. The aphorism reads: »Ich höre mit Vergnügen, dass unsre Sonne in rascher Bewegung gegen das Sternbild des Herkules hin begriffen ist: und ich hoffe, dass der Mensch auf dieser Erde es darin der Sonne gleich thut. Und wir voran, wir guten Europäer!« (I'm glad to hear that our sun is moving rapidly towards the constellation of Hercules: and I hope that the people of this earth will act like the sun. With us in front, we good Europeans!) See NIETZSCHE: 1993, KSA 5, 183. The translation comes from NORMAN: 2005, 134.

Apparently Strindberg, unable to conceive of a harbor for being on the shores of the ocean's incessant becoming, could not follow this advice himself. Neither was Nietzsche able to affect such moderation. With this in mind, I will conclude with an examination of what these two thinkers have to say to us today.