

Strindberg across Borders

edited by Massimo Ciaravolo

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Between Literature and Politics. Strindberg and Scandinavian Radicalism as Seen through his Relationship with Edvard Brandes, Branting and Bjørnson

Massimo Ciaravolo

1. Introduction

During the Modern Breakthrough literature was conceived as a fundamental forum for proposing and debating ideas about social renewal and reform; as such it became strictly interwoven with ideology and politics. In the 1870s and 1880s it was generally believed that a writer's task was to observe, question and criticize in order to promote change, and through critic Georg Brandes' influential activism in Copenhagen this model conditioned literary practice all over Scandinavia.¹ August Strindberg too, especially in the period following the success of his political and satirical novel *Röda Rummet* (*The Red Room*, end of 1879) and into the mid 1880s, developed within the literary medium his own social and political vision in accordance with such ideas, but also in a spirit of rebellion against the Establishment that can justify the term anarchism.² The events connected with Strindberg's conservative views on women's emancipation and the trial for blasphemy against his short story collection *Giftas* (*Getting Married*) in 1884 charted new strategic directions from the second half of the 1880s, when he distanced himself from

¹ An admirable comparative analysis is still Gunnar Ahlström, *Det moderna genombrottet i Nordens litteratur*, KF, Stockholm 1947, in particular pp. 114-125, 365-390. More up-to-date perspectives are found in Jørgen Knudsen, *Georg Brandes og de intellektuelle i Norden og Europa*, in *Georg Brandes og Europa*, edited by Olav Harsløf, Det Kongelige Bibliotek-Museum Tusulanums Forlag, Copenhagen 2004, pp. 17-29; and in *Det stadig moderne gennembrud: Georg Brandes og hans tid, set fra det 21. århundrede*, edited by Hans Hertel, Gyldendal, Copenhagen 2004, here in particular Hans Hertel, *Nødtigt, men dog gerne – da Danmark blev moderne. Det nye samfund, det nye livssyn, det nye kulturliv 1870-1900*, pp. 19-48, and Hans Hertel, *Georg Brandes' kulturrevolution – og kulturkampen omkring Georg Brandes 1871-2004*, pp. 51-97.

² Sven-Gustaf Edqvist, *Samhällets fiende: en studie i Strindbergs anarkism till och med Tjänstekvinnans son*, Tiden, Stockholm 1961.

social stances and democratic ideas. Through new impulses, such as his friendship with the young writer Verner von Heidenstam and his readings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Strindberg's more anti-social and anarchistic tendencies went hand in hand with his individualistic aristocratism and his utter distrust of democracy and socialism.³ A yet new turn of events occurred with his religious interpretation of life following his so-called Inferno Crisis in the mid 1890s, implying a distance not only from the atheism he had professed in the period of his «aristocratic radicalism», but also from materialism and positivism, which he identified with the politically radical generation of the 1880s, and consequently also with his own former progressive standpoint. A comeback to the political arena, again on the radical front, occurred in the last years of Strindberg's life, between 1910 and 1912, when he attacked the cult of strong monarchs, nationalism and rearmament, and supported pacifism, republicanism and the implementation of democratic rule in Sweden. Strindberg was thus able to reconcile his own democratic and politically radical background with his Christian faith.⁴

The period of Strindberg's literary output, roughly from 1870 to 1912, corresponded to that in which the new literature promoted by the Modern Breakthrough, in spite of its social and political commitment, also needed to establish itself as a relatively autonomous social field, with its inner rules and institutions, as free as possible from the pressure of political or economic power. In this respect, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the genesis of the modern literary field – a sociological reading of the oeuvre of three nineteenth-century heroes of French literature, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire and Émile Zola, and of their fight for intellectual independence⁵ – has been usefully applied to the Swedish literature of the 1880s.⁶

The main purpose of this article is to take a closer look at Strindberg's interaction with three Scandinavian fellow writers and intellectuals –

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 359-360, 370-371. Strindberg's ideological facets in the 1880s are mapped in Elena Balzamo, *Mellan Bismarck och Tjernysjevskij. Strindbergs politiska pendlande under 1880-talet*, in «Strindbergiana», XXV (2010), pp. 13-26.

⁴ Björn Meidal, *Från profet till folktribun: Strindberg och Strindbergsfejden 1910-12*, Tiden, Stockholm 1982. Cfr. Andreas Nyblom, *Strindbergsfejden 1910-1912*, in *Litteraturbanken*, 2011, <<http://litteraturbanken.se/#!/presentationer/specialomraden/Strindbergsfejden.html>> (02-07-2015).

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Seuil, Paris 1992, pp. 73-164 and 180-200.

⁶ David Gedin, *Fältets herrar: framväxten av en modern författarroll: artonhundratalet*, Symposium, Stockholm-Stehag 2004. After Ahlström, Edqvist and Meidal, Gedin's book is the fourth fundamental contribution in this area of Strindberg studies.

Edvard Brandes, Hjalmar Branting and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson – during the first decisive years of the 1880s. These figures were all deeply concerned with both literature and politics, although to different degrees and with distinctions, in a time when there was no clear-cut boundary between the two fields, but when it became important to negotiate it, in order for literature to acquire a higher degree of autonomy. By listening to their voices, we can understand what Brandes, Branting and Bjørnson expected from Strindberg, and how Strindberg defended his artistic space from political claims.

The subject is complex, also because we are dealing with giants of Scandinavian culture at the turn of the century, endowed with strong temperaments and complex personalities. My focus is however not on biography or psychology, but on these figures' positions within the Modern Breakthrough, seen as a social space characterized by a great circulation of texts, discourses and ideas which cut across the borders of art, journalism, science and politics, and also, of course, across national borders, as the network that was created can indeed be called a Scandinavian republic of letters.⁷ The fact that Strindberg was not a "pure" writer of belles-lettres in the 1880s was not unique or simply a matter of personal temperament, but rather part of a common *habitus* among writers, determined by the features of the Scandinavian literature of that time.⁸

Another purpose of my article is to show how the patterns that took shape in the first half of the 1880s would influence Strindberg's development as a writer down to the last days of his activity, and therefore comprise an intellectual legacy for the future. By connecting Strindberg's earlier practice as a socially and politically committed writer with his later return to politics through the so-called Strindberg Feud in 1910-1912, we can consider his final standpoint, when he used pacifism versus rearmament on the verge of World War I to affirm the progressive function of the intellectual in society.

Strindberg's ideological constellation is however difficult to define, as it is contradictory, and complicated by the fact that only a few years before he had, whether voluntarily or not, allied himself with Europe's reactionary anti-Semitic Establishment in the Dreyfus case. This will finally lead us to some considerations on Strindberg's legacy as an intellectual in today's perspective.

⁷ John Landquist, *Inledning*, in Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling med nordiske Forfattere og Videnskabsmænd*, edited by Morten Borup, DSL-Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1939, vol. 6, pp. xi-xii.

⁸ David Gedin, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

2. The talented men's field is literature

During his breakthrough campaign against late Romantic, derivative literature (for example in his first collection of poems *Dikter på vers och prosa*, "Poems in Verse and Prose", from 1883) Strindberg attacked escapism, i.e. a literary practice that does not dare to question the Establishment, and in which so-called idealism and the cult of the beautiful act as alibis for the social and political status quo.⁹ Now, as Strindberg himself became a praised literary talent, capable of defying the established order through the written word, he saw the danger of aestheticism also in his own work: what if the literary quality of his writings became an excuse for ignoring the social and political stances for change they wanted to convey? This preoccupation did not play a marginal role in his intellectual profile, and was often expressed in his letters from 1880 to 1884.¹⁰

During the first half of the 1880s Strindberg oscillated between two stances which created frictions and tensions, although they were not necessarily contradictory in themselves: literature should be socially committed and work for political change, to the extent that it should also, if possible, renounce its prerogatives: imagination and fiction. Nevertheless, the writer should remain a writer and not become a politician.¹¹ A common trait in Strindberg's relationship with Brandes, Branting and Bjørnson reveals the ambivalence through which he sought a stronger connection with politics during the years following *Röda Rummet*, while avoiding too compelling a connection with this sphere.¹²

⁹ See the poem *Sångare!* ("Singers!"), in August Strindberg, *Dikter; Sömngångar-nätter på vakna dagar; och strödda tidiga dikter*, edited by James Spens, Norstedt, Stockholm 1995, *Samlade Verk*, vol. 15, pp. 23-24.

¹⁰ Evidence can be found in Strindberg's confession letters to Helena Nyblom on January 31, 1882, in August Strindberg, *Brev*, edited by Torsten Eklund, Bonnier, Stockholm 1950, vol. 2, pp. 362-364, and to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson on May 4, 1884, in August Strindberg, *Brev*, edited by Torsten Eklund, Bonnier, Stockholm 1954, vol. 4, pp. 144-146; see in particular *ibid.*, p. 145: «Och mina konstverk? De tagas ju därför att de äro sköna, men icke därför att de äro sanna!».

¹¹ See the essay *Om Det Allmänna Missnöjet, Dess Orsaker och Botemedel* ("On the General Discontent, Its Causes and Cures"), in August Strindberg, *Likt och olikt I-II: samt uppsatser och tidningsartiklar 1884-1890*, edited by Hans Lindström, Norstedt, Stockholm 2003, *Samlade Verk*, vol. 17, pp. 9-83. Cfr. Massimo Ciaravolo, *Between Vision and Doubt. Re-assessing the Radicalism of Strindberg's Italian Travel Writing and Likt och olikt (1884)*, in «Scandinavian Studies», LXXXIV (2012), 3, pp. 281-286; and Sven-Gustaf Edqvist, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-256.

¹² A rich documentation about this phase is given in Sven-Gustaf Edqvist, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-195.

In these terms we must also consider his first so-called exile from Sweden and Scandinavia. Strindberg left for France in 1883, to be sure in order to escape the hostile atmosphere at home, though persecution by the conservative establishment was not the only reason, since he was also fleeing from the very same progressive «party» and «programme» that he himself seemed bent on organizing.¹³ He was anxious from the start that this so-called party (not yet a political party, but a clique of intellectuals) might limit his freedom to make experiments and develop as a writer. Was Strindberg simply ambivalent, or was he in search for something as complex and essential as artistic autonomy – the same independent position advocated by Bourdieu, and which also according to Edward Said enables the intellectuals to «speak truth to power»?¹⁴

When Strindberg commenced an epistolary friendship with the playwright, theatre critic and journalist Edvard Brandes on July 29, 1880, he was encouraged by his Danish colleague's political passion, and welcomed his idea of a Scandinavian network of intellectuals.¹⁵ Strindberg complained that he was alone in his fight against the reactionary forces at home, and needed support. At the same time he did everything he could to appear politically unreliable, and also too radical, an anarchistic disturber of the social order rather than a democratic reformer of it.¹⁶ Furthermore, Strindberg represented himself, typically, as a writer torn between aesthetic pleasure and the duty of political commitment:

¹³ Strindberg wrote to the publisher Albert Bonnier on February 12, 1882 to convince him of the need for a party and a newspaper as its organ. Shortly before, on January 24, 1882, he had expressed his doubts to Helena and Carl Rupert Nyblom. See August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 2, p. 371 and pp. 357-358 (pp. 356-359) respectively.

¹⁴ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, Vintage Books, New York 1994.

¹⁵ The relevance of the relationship between Strindberg and Edvard Brandes is documented in John Landquist, *op. cit.*, pp. xii-xix, and Harry Jacobsen, *Strindberg i Firsernes København*, Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1948, pp. 23-25, 29-32, 34-40. Unfortunately, the existing biography of Edvard Brandes – Kristian Hvidt, *Portrætt af en radikal blæksprutte*, Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1987 – lingers on the cliché of Strindberg the fanatic, the madman and the bad influence for Brandes, which prevents us from understanding the seriousness of either Strindberg's or Brandes' positions; cfr. pp. 191-195, 268 and 270-275. More recently, Julie K. Allen, *Strindberg with Brandes in the Red Room*, in «Scandinavica», LII (2013), 2, pp. 33-51, has analyzed the early phase of the relationship between Strindberg and Edvard Brandes, after Strindberg's *Röda Rummet*. She considers the two writers' common agenda with reference to the ideas of the Modern Breakthrough, but also their different options, the artistic and the political one.

¹⁶ About this exchange cfr. Sven-Gustaf Edqvist, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-162. About Strindberg's hesitations cfr. Gunnar Brandell, *Strindberg – ett författarliv*, Alba, Stockholm 1987, vol. 1, p. 285.

Ni kan därför fatta att jag känner mig stolt och kraftig efter det erkännande Ni gifvit mig, icke som författare eller Talent (ty det aktar jag ringa, [se mina räsönemang i Röda Rummet om konsten]) utan som slagskämpe. Hvad gagn åter ett parti skulle kunna hafva af mig det törs jag icke förutsäga: Jag tror det blefve ringa, ty jag håller ännu på att plocka ihop bitarne af min spräckta kruka, är mig icke fullt klar, förefaller mig vara endast ett conglomerat af kasserade öfvertygelser, har slagits att jag blifvit trött, är tyvärr så mycket "Talent" att det etiska aldrig vill rent fram [...].¹⁷

You will therefore appreciate how proud and strong I feel following the recognition you have accorded me, not as a writer or a "Genius" (I've little respect for that [see my discussion of art in *The Red Room*]), but as a fighter. Though what use I'd be to any party, I daren't predict! Not very much, I fear, because I'm still piecing together the bits of my own shattered vessel and don't really yet know what they amount to, though they look like being a conglomeration of discarded convictions. I've fought until I'm exhausted, but am unfortunately endowed with so much "Genius" that the ethical never quite breaks through [...].¹⁸

Eight years before his own seminal theory of the multi-layered, characterless character in drama,¹⁹ Strindberg portrayed himself in a similar way as a political subject, proposing the self-image of a militant writer, but at the same time defending his inner divisions against the obligations of a party. This attitude would recur constantly.

One thing that the comparison between the standpoints of Strindberg and Brandes makes clear is that Strindberg wanted from the start to act as a writer and not as a politician. Brandes, caught in a similar dilemma (aesthetics as alibi for political status quo versus active political commitment for change), was eager to discuss it with Strindberg, and wrote from Denmark on 14 August 1880:

Hernede er vi jo nogle Stykker, som danne en Art Parti, men stort bevendt er det dog ikke. Jeg tror ogsaa at slutte efter nogle Ytringer, at De ikke ret véd, i hvilken rasende Reaktion vi lever, hvorledes enhver frisindet Ytring forkættes, hvorledes Pressen absolut er lukket, naar man ikke nøjes med «det Æsthetiske». [...]

¹⁷ August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 164-165. Also in Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling*, cit., vol. 6, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ August Strindberg, *Strindberg's Letters*, selected, edited and translated by Michael Robinson, The Athlone Press, London 1992, vol. 1, p. 76.

¹⁹ In the Preface to *Fröken Julie* (*Miss Julie*). August Strindberg, *Fadren; Fröken Julie; Fordringsägare*, edited by Gunnar Ollén, Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm 1985, *Samlade Verk*, vol. 27, pp. 101-113.

Jeg beder Dem derfor ikke tro os sysselsatte saa ivrigt med Literatur og Kunst uden fordi vi ikke kunne tage fat paa det Vigtigere.²⁰

Some of us are creating a kind of party down here, to little avail though. I also think, judging from some statements, that you can't really imagine the awful reactionary atmosphere we're living in, how every liberal utterance is condemned, how the press is absolutely out of reach for anyone who will not make do with "aesthetic matters". [...]

Therefore I beg you to consider us so eagerly engaged in literature and art only because we cannot tackle the more important issues.²¹

If Brandes admitted that literature was an escape – the only place where progressive values could be promoted, but with no political outcomes – his next move was then to cross the border and choose the political field in order to change the status quo. Entering the political arena as a member of the Danish Parliament in the 1880 elections became for him the right thing to do to solve his dilemma. He communicated to Strindberg on November 19, 1880: «Jeg er lige kommen ind i den praktiske Politik, De ønskede os danske Æstetikere»²² («I have just entered into the practical politics you wished on us Danish aestheticians»).

Later on, Strindberg felt that he had to clarify this misunderstanding. The fact that he had criticized aesthetic inclinations as a danger for the social impact of literature did not mean that he wanted to abandon literature, or wanted others to do so. On the contrary, Strindberg thought that professional, practical politics were the wrong field for a creative intellectual, who must be able to develop independent ideas. He answered Brandes on November 20, 1881:

Du sade en gång att du började misstänka politiken vara något underordnad! Ja, men är den så! Den fråga som kan afgöras med en votering är icke någon stor fråga och eger intet af evighet i sig; därför bör icke begåfvade män slita sönder sig på små tillfälliga frågor. Litteraturen är deras fält, ty der få de tala till punkt utan att bli afbrutna och slippa lösa sina idéer i gräl! Der är din plats! Utom det att den är behagligare! Gå på och skrif, Du! – Det är bättre!²³

²⁰ Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling*, cit., vol. 6, p. 9.

²¹ Translations are mine if not mentioned otherwise.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²³ August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 2, p. 313. Also in Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling*, cit., vol. 6, p. 22.

You once said that you had a growing feeling that politics was something of minor importance! And that's what it is! Any issue that can be decided by a vote is no great issue, and involves no eternal values; therefore, talented men must not tear themselves apart on trivial, transient issues. Literature is their field, because there they can finish talking without being interrupted and wasting their own ideas in quarrels! Your place is there! Besides it's much more pleasant! Go on writing! – It's better!

Some months later, on May 10, 1882, Strindberg reinforced this standpoint and, in his own expressive way, confirmed his skepticism towards professional politics in another letter to Brandes: «Du är väl midt oppe i politiken kan jag tro. När Du tröttnat på de der halfmesyreerna, så res ut, och glöm bort hela skräpet, och skrif sedan!»²⁴ («You're now absorbed in politics, I guess. When you have got tired of those half measures, set off on a journey and forget all that rubbish, and then write!»).

A recurring circumstance during the first half of the 1880s is that both Brandes, Branting and Bjørnson found it difficult to understand why Strindberg did not use his literary talent more, either for new socially critical novels, as he had done in *Röda Rummet* (Brandes and Branting's opinion), or for drama (Bjørnson's opinion). They did not really consider Strindberg's doubts seriously and tended to dismiss them, finding him too tormented and self-critical. Strindberg was however less whimsical than he seemed when he attacked aestheticism. In the early 1880s his self-criticism and reaction against the accommodating function of art in nineteenth-century bourgeois society anticipated later sociological analyses by Herbert Marcuse, which Peter Bürger, in accordance with that critical view, would use in his theory of the twentieth-century avant-gardes. Values such as humanity, truth and solidarity could find a home in art but not in everyday life. By being confined to the "ideal sphere" of art, those values became politically harmless; social criticism was allowed, but in fact neutralized.²⁵ Hence, according to Bürger, the

²⁴ August Strindberg, *Brev*, edited by Torsten Eklund, Bonnier, Stockholm 1952, vol. 3, p. 25. Also in Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling*, cit., vol. 6, p. 28. Incidentally, similar patterns can be observed in the famous exchange of letters between Georg Brandes and Henrik Ibsen in the early 1870s. Ibsen distinguished between longing for (higher) spiritual, individual «freedom» and the pursuit of (lower) civil, political «freedoms». See Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling med nordiske Forfattere og Videnskabsmænd*, edited by Morten Borup, DSL / Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1939, vol. 4:1, pp. 189-249, in particular p. 205.

²⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur*, in Id., *Kultur und Gesellschaft I*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1968 [1965], pp. 75-137. See p. 112: «Nur in der Kunst hat die bürgerliche Gesellschaft die Verwirklichung ihrer eigenen Ideale geduldet und sie als allgemeine Forderung ernst genommen. Was in der Tatsächlichkeit als Utopie, Phantasterei, Umsturz gilt, ist dort gestattet. [...] Das Medium der Schönheit

avant-garde's practice of rupture with art as an institution, and with its pursuit of autonomy from social life.²⁶ Hence also the peculiar self-criticism in Strindberg, a politically committed writer who, however, in the end preferred art to politics and pursued artistic autonomy.

3. Anti-Semitism

A three-year break in the correspondence between Strindberg and Edvard Brandes occurred in 1882, when Strindberg's anti-Jewish bias found expression in a letter (July 26). It was not the first time Strindberg gave vent to such views.²⁷ In the letter he warned his Danish colleague, a Jew, that his forthcoming collection of satirical stories *Det nya riket* (*The New Kingdom*) contained an attack against the Swedish Jews as a privileged and reactionary force of society. He wanted to reassure his friend that he had nothing against Jews as such and was not a racist. Yet, Strindberg's words confirmed the widespread and, for that time, ordinary prejudice.²⁸ Strindberg called the Jews strangers, and described the issue in terms of «we and they»:

Jag anses vara judhatare och har nu i min nya bok gjort satir på våra judar. Jag hatar icke judarne men *våra* servila, ordenshungriga, despotiska, förtryckande judar, hvilka med hela penningens magt, (det har varit dem en lätt sak att afnarra de dumma svenskarne deras pengar) arbeta, på sitt hänsynslösa sätt, med reaktionen mot oss! De äro dina fiender så väl som mina för denna orsaks skull.
[...] De äro fremlingar och hålla sig fiendtliga som fremlingar mot oss [...]. Du är ju icke jude då du offentligt afsvurit judendomen, under det att våra hålla på sin gamla vidskepelse [...].²⁹

I am regarded as an anti-Semite and have now satirized our Jews in my new book. I don't hate the Jews, only *our* servile, decoration-hungry, despotic, oppressive Jews who with all the power of wealth (they have found it easy enough to cheat the dumb Swedes of their money) work,

entgiftet die Wahrheit und rückt sie ab von der Gegenwart. Was in der Kunst geschieht, verpflichtet zu nichts». This essay was first published in 1937.

²⁶ Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1980 [1974].

²⁷ Nina Solomin, *Strindbergs judefiendlighet fram till 1882*, in «Strindbergiana», XI (1996), pp. 9-30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23. Cfr. Olof Lagercrantz, *August Strindberg*, Wahlström & Widstrand, Stockholm 1986 [1979], pp. 169-170; Björn Meidal's text in Björn Meidal - Bengt Wanselius, *Strindbergs världar*, Max Ström, Stockholm 2012, p. 114.

²⁹ August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 3, p. 54.

in their ruthless way, with the reaction against us! On that account they are your enemies as well as mine.

[...] They are foreigners and behave in a hostile, foreign manner towards us [...].

You're no Jew because you've publicly forsworn Jewry, while our Jews cling to their old superstitions [...].³⁰

Brandes was frightened by such words, and rightly so. His firm answer is significant as an intellectual legacy for the future: Strindberg's assumption was wrong when he thought that Brandes, being a freethinker, was not really a Jew. On the contrary, he was compelled to be a Jew, precisely because of the racial prejudice he and his brother Georg were exposed to as radical intellectuals. Brandes answered on September 13, 1882:

Saa nødig jeg vil saa maa jeg dog sige Dig, at jeg intet godt venter mig af Din nye Roman [*sic*], intet godt for vort Venskab, intet for vore fælles Ideer. Jeg frygter, at Du mod Din Vilje kommer til at tjene vore Fjender eller da i hvert Fald mine. Det Slag, Du vil føre de svenske Jøder, vil ramme mig og enhver Jøde, hvad enten han er troende eller ikke. Deri bestyrke Dine mærkelige Ord mig, disse nemlig, at «Jøderne ere Fremmede».

[...] Du mener, jeg ikke er Jøde. Du tager fejl. Jeg er simpelthen tvungen til at være det, enten jeg vill eller ej [...]. Der skrives aldrig nogensinde en Artikel mod min Broder eller mig, i hvilken ikke Jødehadet figurerer.³¹

Although reluctantly, I must tell you that I expect nothing good from your new novel [*sic*], nothing good for our friendship, nothing for our common ideas. I fear that you, against your will, will serve our enemies, or at least mine. The blow you want to give the Swedish Jews will hit me and every Jew, whether a believer or not. I am even more convinced of this by your peculiar words, according to which «Jews are strangers». [...] You think that I'm not a Jew. You are wrong. I'm simply obliged to be a Jew, whether I want to or not [...]. Not a single article against my brother or me is ever written without featuring hatred of Jews.

³⁰ August Strindberg, *Strindberg's Letters*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 99-100.

³¹ Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling*, cit., vol. 6, pp. 37-38. Cfr. Jan Myrdal, *Strindberg och antisemitismen*, in Id., *I de svartare fanors tid. Texter om litteratur, lögn och förbannad dikt*, Häggelund, Stockholm 1998, pp. 120-139. In analyzing Strindberg's «anti-Semitism from the left wing» during the 1880s, Myrdal connects the writer's standpoint to the Swedish tradition during the nineteenth century as well as to the development of a more modern form of European anti-Semitism in the second half of the 1880s. In another article, Myrdal observes how anti-Semitism weakened Strindberg's position among the liberals and the radicals in Sweden during the first half of the 1880s; Jan Myrdal 1985, *På tal om Gifias*, in «Strindbergiana», I (1985), pp. 31-34 (7-34).

Later, Strindberg made amends in his essay *Mitt Judehat* ("My Hatred of Jews", December 16, 1884), where he pointed out that the Jews had the specific mission of uniting Europe across the borders imposed by nationality and nationalism. He modelled his picture on the Brandes brothers' role and mission:

Samtidigt hade jag sett judarne i Danmark uppfylla sin stora mission såsom «världens adelsfolk». Där hade bröderna Brandes, med stor fara och med stort mod, kastat sin skeva ställning och introducerat europeisk kultur i ett stagnerande nationellt själv-avgudereri. Dessa män hade brutit med konvensansen, och i det främmande landet uppträtt under ren flagg som européer. Detta är enligt mitt förmenande judens stora kallelse i Västerlandet. Han har intet fädernesland, han har vandrat i alla länder, har hållit sig fri från alla nationella trånga fördomar, är obunden av dynasti-kristendomens försoffande dogmer, är bror med alla folk, talar alltid ett kulturspråk, har släktingar i alla Europas stater. Detta är en förmånlig ståndpunkt, och har verkligen gjort juden i genomsnitt till ett intelligent, kanske Europas intelligentaste folk.³²

At the same time I had seen the Jews of Denmark accomplish their great mission as «the world's noble people». There the Brandes brothers, at great risk and with great courage, had rejected their unfavourable position by introducing European culture into a stagnating national self-complacency. These men had committed a breach of etiquette, and in the foreign country they had acted as genuine Europeans. This is, in my opinion, the Jews' great vocation in the West. They have got no fatherland, have wandered in all countries, have kept themselves free from all narrow national prejudices; they are independent from the dogmas of dynastic Christianity that make you dull, are all peoples' brothers; they always speak a major language, they have got relatives in every state of Europe. This is a favourable standpoint, and it has really made the Jews an intelligent people on average, perhaps Europe's most intelligent one.

Strindberg's epistolary exchange and friendship with Brandes would resume in 1885, although his anti-Jewish bias, as we shall see, would reappear.

4. Is literature a vehicle for progress or an end in itself? And what is progress?

As I have mentioned, for Brandes, Branting and Bjørnson, Strindberg represented the hope that a superior literary talent would serve the cause

³² August Strindberg, *Likt och olikt I-II*, cit., p. 213 (pp. 212-214).

of social and political progress. This was their clear expectation; they all saw in his talent a vitally important weapon in their common fight, and were by and by disappointed at Strindberg's refusal to play such a role, in spite of his outspoken political profile in the first half of the 1880s.

Branting and Strindberg shared the same cultural background. Branting was younger than Strindberg, and came from the same cultivated and dynamic Stockholm bourgeoisie as Strindberg did. Since his youth Branting had seen in Strindberg a man of ideas, a fundamental point of reference in his *Bildung*, and a revolutionary energy.³³ Eventually Branting and Strindberg became friends, which, in addition, gives their correspondence a particularly informal and direct tone, in spite of the differences and contrasts between them that also emerged. It is something of a biographical exception that Strindberg never broke his friendship with Branting.³⁴

Before becoming one of the founders of the workers' movement and the social-democratic party in Sweden, and eventually the leading politician of modern Sweden, Branting was a journalist and a critic who was interested in cultural and literary matters. As such, he participated in the Modern Breakthrough of Scandinavian literature.³⁵ Branting dedicated particular attention to Strindberg's works from the 1880s to the end of Strindberg's career. In a laudatory review of *Sömngångarnätter på vakna dagar* (*Sleepwalking Nights on wide-awake Days*), his first review of a Strindberg work (February 22, 1884), Branting clearly expressed his vision of literature as a vehicle for a higher social and political purpose, not an end in itself; in the same review Branting consequently questioned the orthodoxy of Strindberg's ideas and political programme as they were outlined in the poetic sequence, a work that displayed, alongside a clear-cut progressive radicalism, a corrosive doubt about the value of the idea of linear, material progress, based on the advancement of science and technology.³⁶ Strindberg was showing, in *Sömngångarnätter*

³³ In a memoir article written in 1920, Branting refers to Strindberg's «ungdoms-revolutionära kraft». Quoted in Ture Nerman, *Hjalmar Branting kulturpublicisten*, Tiden, Stockholm 1958, p. 17.

³⁴ See Zeth Höglund, *August Strindberg och Hjalmar Branting i brev och skrifter*, in Id., *Lyrisk och lovtal*, Bonnier, Stockholm 1944, pp. 199-258. Other sources deal with the relationship between Strindberg and Branting, and Branting's progress from journalism to politics. Cfr. Ture Nerman, *op. cit.*, in particular pp. 17, 33-34, 37, 40-49, 63-69 and 74-80; Nils-Olof Franzén, *Hjalmar Branting och hans tid. En biografi*: Bonnier, Stockholm 1985, in particular pp. 22-32, 50-73, 79-83, 116-126 and 184-185; and Nils Beyer, *Den unge Hjalmar Branting*, Norstedt, Stockholm 1985, in particular pp. 80-108, 118-121, 150-156, 161-171 and 188-189. Cfr. also Gunnar Brandell, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 310-312.

³⁵ Cfr. David Gedin, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-43.

³⁶ Massimo Ciaravolo, *A Nineteenth-Century Long Poem Meets Modernity*: "Sleep-

as well as in other works, a form of environmental concern – something that Branting, as well as Edvard and Georg Brandes, simply dismissed as a reactionary, outdated legacy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.³⁷ In 1884, as a literary critic, Branting was already talking like a politician in the making and a spokesman of Sweden's modern project:

Han [Strindberg] har ett högre mål än blott att skänka «estetisk» njutning åt överförfinade, blaserade människor. Pennan är för honom ett vapen i striden, så gott som något, ingenting mer eller mindre. Han har valt detta emedan han vet med sig att han för det med kraft och skicklighet; men litteraturen står klart för hans starka pliktökänsla som medel, icke som mål.

[...]

Vilket är då detta program? [...] [F]rihet och natur [...]. Mera uppmärksamhet förtjänar såsom en egendomlighet för Strindberg den dyrkan av det naturliga på alla områden, som gör honom till en så äkta lärjunge av Rousseau. [...] [E]n återgång alltså till något, liknande tillståndet här i landet för ett tusen år sedan. [...]

Här är en grundolikhet mellan honom och det revolutionära framstegsparti, vilket han synes så med hull och hår tillhöra.³⁸

Strindberg has a higher purpose than simply giving aesthetic pleasure to over-refined, blasé people. The pen is for him a weapon in the fight, as good as any other, no more and no less. He has chosen it, because he knows that he can handle it with power and ability, but for his strong sense of duty literature stands clearly as a means, not as an end.

[...]

What is this programme then? [...] Freedom and nature [...]. The worship of the natural in all respects, which makes him a veritable disciple of Rousseau's, is Strindberg's remarkable peculiarity. [...] Thus a return to something that resembles the condition this country was in a thousand years ago. [...]

walking Nights”, in *The International Strindberg. New Critical Essays*, edited by Anna Westerståhl Stenport, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2012, pp. 167-193.

³⁷ Cfr. Edvard Brandes, *Folkets Skæbner*, in «Politikens Prøvenummer», September 1884, and Georg Brandes, *Strøtanke angående August Strindbergs Gifas*, in «Politikeren», 20-10-1884. As a literary and theatre critic Edvard Brandes followed Strindberg's authorship carefully and supported it until the end of the 1880s. Georg Brandes wrote the essay *August Strindberg*, in *Samlede Skrifter*, Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1900, vol. 3, pp. 633-661 (originally in 1894).

³⁸ Hjalmar Branting, *Strindbergs Sömngångarnätter*, in Id., *Tal och skrifter*, Tiden, Stockholm 1930, vol. 11, pp. 17 and 19 (pp. 17-21). Cfr. Massimo Ciaravolo, *A Nineteenth-Century Long Poem Meets Modernity*, cit., pp. 185ff. Cfr. Zeth Höglund, *op. cit.*, p. 228: «men ändå förefaller det mig, som om Branting icke nog uppskattat den även rent estetiskt säregna skönheten i denna kosmiska dikt». Cfr. also Nils Beyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.

Here is a fundamental difference between him and the revolutionary progressive party he seems wholly to belong to.

The same standpoint made Branting comment positively, in a letter to Strindberg on June 14, 1884, on Strindberg's short story *Samvetskval* (*Pangs of Conscience*), to be published in Branting's newly launched newspaper «Tiden». According to Branting, fiction and imagination were the best ways to convey political values, in this case pacifism, so that people could grasp them. Branting clearly put emphasis on the social function of literature; art and culture were seen as instruments of a greater political change: «Samvetskval är mycket styf i mitt tycke, naturligtvis. Den pågår nu som bäst i Tiden. Men ge oss mer sådant. Skönlitteraturen är allt bra att ha ändå, och frågorna behandlar du så, att de gå lättare i folk än med afhandlingar»³⁹ («*Pangs of Conscience* is very strong in my opinion, of course. It's currently being published in "Tiden". But give us more of the sort. Literature is always good to have, and you can treat the issues in a way that's more accessible to people than through dissertations»). Strindberg's answer from Switzerland on June 17 was positive, but also detached and blasé, typically underscoring the necessity of one day abandoning fiction: «Du har rätt (delvis) om Skön Litt! Vi äro dömda till den sortens förfalskning än en tid! Bon!»⁴⁰ («You're right – in part – about literature! We are doomed to that kind of falsification for some more time to come! Bon!»).

The request that Strindberg's literary talent should be a vehicle for social and political struggle was also repeatedly underscored by Brandes, both in his private letters and in his reviews as a literary critic. He wrote to Strindberg on, respectively, October 3 and November 19, 1885:

Foragt dog ikke saadan hvad du kalder Skrivebordslitteraturen! Den er to Ting: Propaganda og Penge, to nyttige Ting. Skriv en stor Roman, et modent Røda Rummet [...].

[...]

Skriv dog en stor Roman; du gør Synd imod Naturen om du kastrerer dit Talent. Literaturen gaar ad Helvede til. [...]

Vi maa lave et radikalt-literært og politisk nordisk Parti [...]. Hvordan skal vi ellers udholde at leve i disse Landsbyer?⁴¹

³⁹ Hjalmar Branting, *Brev till August Strindberg*, Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm [Ep. S 53 b]. See also Branting's comment on the same topic on July 7, 1884, *ibid.*: «Samvetskval är fan så bra i mitt tycke! Ge oss mera sådant! Tro mig, det tar bättre än logisk bevisföring [...].»

⁴⁰ August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 4, p. 218.

⁴¹ Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling*, cit., vol. 6, pp. 58, 64.

But don't despise what you call desk literature! It's two things: propaganda and money, two useful things. Write a great novel, a mature Red Room [...].

[...]

Do write a great novel; you commit a sin against nature if you castrate your talent. Literature goes to hell. [...]

We must create a radical literary and political Nordic party [...]. Otherwise how are we supposed to hold up in these small villages?

In his praiseful review of the short story collection *Utopier i verkligheten* (*Utopias in Reality*), one of Strindberg's most politically committed works, Brandes wonders about Strindberg's tormented spirit, with his contradictory hatred of belles lettres, and his inclination to a sort of utilitarian literature for the sake of progress («hans Had til Skønlitteraturen, hans Hang til Nyttelitteraturen»).⁴² Brandes' standpoint corresponds to Branting's when he concludes that imagination and fiction are in themselves unquestionably useful to the cause:

Hvorfor da diskutere om Skønlitteraturens Nytte? Videnskabelige Afhandlinger kan være fortræffelige og politiske Taler højst oplysende, men en Roman kan undertiden stifte ligesaa megen Nytte og agitere ligesaa vidt som baade Videnskab og Politik. Hvor ingen af disse kommer indenfor Døren, bliver maaske Skønlitteraturen en velset Gæst.⁴³

Why, then, discuss the advantage of literature? Scientific dissertations can be excellent and political speeches highly rewarding, but a novel can sometimes provide as great an advantage and carry on a task of propaganda that is as comprehensive as both science and politics. Where these two do not gain access, literature might be a welcome guest.

However, things were not so clear-cut for Strindberg as they might have seemed to Branting and Brandes. Even the genesis and publication of the story *Samvetskval* in «Tiden», eventually included in *Utopier i verkligheten*, illustrate Strindberg's collaboration from afar with the new radical front in Sweden, as much as Strindberg's early letters to Brandes did. From Switzerland Strindberg wrote cautious and even suspicious letters to Branting about the enterprise concerning the newspaper – in Branting's intentions a highly needed organ of the new political-intellectual left-wing front in Sweden. Strindberg was even-

⁴² Edvard Brandes, *Literatur. August Strindberg: Isbrud*, in «Politiken», 12-10-1885.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

tually satisfied to show Branting that he could serve the progressive cause through his creative skills.⁴⁴

Like his anti-Semitic prejudice, Strindberg's anti-materialism and pacifism too would crop up again as part of a complex intellectual baggage during his last years.⁴⁵

5. Women's emancipation as a watershed

Opposition to women's emancipation became a permanent standpoint in Strindberg's intellectual and artistic profile, from its decisive appearance with the short story collection *Giftas* (1884) up to the end of his life.⁴⁶ This point of view eventually made his participation in the radical front impossible, besides provoking, at least indirectly, the end of his friendship and correspondence with Bjørnson, as well as tensions with Branting. The issue became a turning point also for Branting, who entered the political arena more definitively in 1885, at the age of twenty-four, with a mature essay in which his analysis and vision were set against the background of the ideas Strindberg had expressed in *Giftas*, a literary work, and in some essays.⁴⁷

I would like to pinpoint some of the cultural and ideological implications in Strindberg's rupture with Bjørnson, more than the personal ones. The friendship with Bjørnson in Paris at the end of 1883, and the correspondence that followed in the first half of 1884, had in fact nourished Strindberg's strongest democratic belief ever.⁴⁸ He was then

⁴⁴ See Strindberg's letters to Branting from April to June 1884 in August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 4, pp. 100-102, 134, 155-156, 174, 202-203, 218; Branting's letters to Strindberg in the same period, in Hjalmar Branting, *Brev till August Strindberg*, cit. (see note 39); and Zeth Höglund, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-227.

⁴⁵ *Samvetskval* was actualized and reprinted during Strindberg's pacifistic campaign in 1912. See Björn Meidal, *Från profet till folktribun*, cit., pp. 270-271.

⁴⁶ Ulf Boëthius has explored the genesis of Strindberg's attitude towards women's emancipation before *Giftas*, and how it led to *Giftas*. By «decisive appearance» I mean the impact of this stance in the public debate and in the reception of Strindberg. Cfr. Ulf Boëthius, *Strindberg och kvinnofrågan: till och med Giftas I*, Prisma, Stockholm 1969.

⁴⁷ Hjalmar Branting, *Strindberg och kvinnofrågan*, in Id., *Tal och skrifter*, Tiden, Stockholm 1927, vol. 2, pp. 256-285.

⁴⁸ About the exchange of letters between Strindberg and Bjørnson cfr. Algot Werin, *Strindberg, Bjørnson och Giftas-processen*, in «Svensk litteraturtidskrift», XXI (1958), pp. 86-90; about the relationship between them and Bjørnson's role as a politically engaged writer cfr. Edvard Hoem, *Vennskap i storm. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson 1875-1889*, Oktober, Oslo 2010, in particular pp. 378-392, 396-407 and 409-428; Liv Bliksrud *et al.*, *Inledning. Kunstner og kosmopolitt*, in *Den engasjerte kosmopolitt. Nye Bjørnson-studier*, edited by Liv Bliksrud *et al.*, Novus, Oslo 2013, pp. 11-16.

far less inclined to anarchism, and more willing to believe in reform and parliamentary rule. The active role played by Bjørnson in turning public opinion in favour of Norway's right to self-determination against Sweden, and the Norwegian victory with the breakthrough of parliamentary rule in 1884, made Bjørnson the champion of democratic rights and, for Strindberg, a veritable model of the politically committed writer. Such a vision is displayed in the essays Strindberg wrote in this phase, among which a portrait of Bjørnson.⁴⁹

The short but intense epistolary exchange between Strindberg and Bjørnson – from February to June 1884, and again in October 1884, after the summer break during which Strindberg composed *Giftas* – is an interesting document for the history of these two intellectuals.⁵⁰ Parallel and at times connected issues are at stake in Bjørnson's texts: the question of democracy and parliamentary rule (not yet a battle won, and for Norway intertwined with the need for independence from the Swedish monarchy); consequently, a strong idea of the writers' role as leading intellectuals and awakening conscience of their nations, in which the Norwegian *nasjonalskald* legacy is perceivable. At the same time Bjørnson is concerned with Strindberg's literary and dramatic output; he admires Strindberg's genius and manifold talent, but fears that it might lead him away from the core of his mission, i.e. that of producing a new, modern, great literary art in Sweden:

Og «kunsten», – den og alene den gir dine bøker kraft; vore tanker er ikke ny; formen gjør dem ny og intrængende. Tankerne er alle tænkte

⁴⁹ I agree with Gunnar Brandell's analysis of Strindberg's ideological roots in Scandinavian bourgeois radical liberalism, and with his more balanced evaluation of Strindberg's anarchistic trait; cfr. Gunnar Brandell, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, in particular pp. 30, 53-54, 119-124, 175, 276-277 and 295-296. Even Edqvist, who otherwise puts forward the thesis of Strindberg's anarchism, admits however the circumstance that Strindberg wrote more as a democratic reformer in this phase; cfr. Sven-Gustaf Edqvist, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-248. See Massimo Ciaravolo, *Between Vision and Doubt*, cit., in particular pp. 279, 286-287 and 291. On Strindberg and parliamentarism cfr. Björn Meidal, *Från profet till folktribun*, cit., pp. 121-122. Edvard Hoem, *op. cit.*, p. 382, defines Strindberg's homage to Bjørnson «den mest skarpsindige oppsummering som nokon gong er gitt av Bjørnsons poetiske innsats og betydning i samtida», as Strindberg did not object to Bjørnson's commitment as a journalist and understood his political mission: «å forandre samfunnet for dei som akkurat no vakna og kjende lengten etter fridom».

⁵⁰ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, *Bjørnstjerne Bjørnsons brevveksling med svenske 1858-1909*, edited by Øyvind Anker, Francis Bull and Örjan Lindberger, Gyldedal-Bonnier, Oslo-Stockholm 1961, vol. 2. Apart from two letters in October and in November 1882 (pp. 124 and 133), and a short postcard in December 1883, which testifies to Bjørnson's personal intercourse with Strindberg in Paris (p. 158), the bulk of Bjørnson's letters and postcards to Strindberg, from February to October 1884, is between p. 163 and p. 218.

før vi tænkte dem; bruket, sættet for bruket er det ny, og er dette kunstens, så har det en betingelse mer for virkning. Husk det, du, som er en stor kunstner!⁵¹

And «art» is the only thing that gives your books energy; our thoughts are not new; form makes them new and penetrating. All thoughts have been thought before; the use, the way in which we use them is new, and if this use is artistic it has a greater chance to exert influence. Remember it, you who are a great artist!

Only art – good form – gives thoughts effect, the power to exert influence. Bjørnson, who also works as both a literary writer and a political journalist, suggests therefore that Strindberg keep the two activities separated.⁵² In this respect Bjørnson plays down the originality of the ideas promoted by the writers of the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough. Their progressive ideas are, to be sure, important, but it is the artistic force with which they are conveyed that finally counts in terms of a country's spiritual and social progress. Art as an instrument for spreading progressive ideas is a standpoint reminiscent of Brandes' and Branting's.

The exchange between Strindberg and Bjørnson is best-known for its dramatic shift from mutual love and appreciation (February-June 1884) to incommensurable hatred and bitterness (October 1884). Bjørnson is almost touching in the way he admires, encourages and tries to guide his younger friend and colleague. Strindberg answers in his turn with two long letters of confession, the second of which is a relevant self-analysis of his contradictory relationship to «art», loathed and adored at the same time.⁵³ By and by, Bjørnson's suggestions sound more like teachings and orders, especially when Strindberg takes his own paths and seems out of control.⁵⁴ Bjørnson's overprotective attitude may also explain the pause in the letter exchange, when Strindberg was composing *Giftas* and began to be annoyed by Bjørnson's opinions. Beyond the clash of temperaments, the confrontation deals again with different views on the relation-

⁵¹ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, *op. cit.*, p. 163 (1 February 1884).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 171 (20 February 1884) and pp. 188-189 (3 June 1884).

⁵³ August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 4, pp. 45-47 (21 February 1884) and 144-146 (4 May 1884).

⁵⁴ Bjørnson's approach to other people could often be too forward and obtrusive. Cfr. Edvard Hoem, *op. cit.*, p. 37: «Bjørnson akta ikkje orda sine. Han kunne krenke andre menneske utan å ville det eller meine det, gjennom altfor fri tale, for nærgående kommentarar, for personlege utspel». Even his relationship with Georg and Edvard Brandes was problematic and ended with a rupture. Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 119-125 and 477-485.

ship between literature and politics, and on the intellectual's public commitment in society, besides dealing with diverging opinions on the representation of marital life in literature.⁵⁵

In the autumn of 1884 Strindberg had been accused of blasphemy owing to a definition of Holy Communion given in *Giftas*, and had to stand trial in Stockholm. Strindberg broke with Bjørnson when the latter interfered, suddenly insisting that Strindberg should come back to Stockholm and openly stand trial, whereas Strindberg was rejecting that idea and wanted to stay in Switzerland. Strindberg found Bjørnson's patronizing attitude intolerable, while Bjørnson objected to Strindberg's aloofness as useless for the common cause and for the principle of freedom of expression. A politically engaged writer, Bjørnson maintained, had the duty to remain in contact with the collectivity, and not work in isolation from abroad; besides, the conservative establishment's persecutory act against Strindberg was, according to Bjørnson, playing in favour of Strindberg's position as a leading intellectual of his country. Strindberg felt, at this point, that he was being used, and answered expressing contempt for the empty rhetoric of all public speakers like Bjørnson, defending his right to take part in the public debate through the written, and not the spoken word, as well as his will to follow solitary paths of artistic experimentation, without political obligations to any parties. This confrontation took place by letter, since Bjørnson was in Paris and Strindberg in Switzerland. At a certain point the letters followed hard upon each other. Bjørnson wrote on October 10, 1884: «Men du trænger omgang, Strindberg; meget af det, du skriver, giver indtryk af en ene-taler, en "tør-tænder", som ikke har sul til».⁵⁶ Strindberg answered on October 13:

Mina vänner i Sverige hafva telegraferat efter mig och erbjudit mig kandidatur på martyrskapet. Det är för stor ära för mig och jag tackar. Anser alla perrongtal och tablåer på landgångar vara romantik. o.s.v. Du misstar dig om verkningarna af min isolering. Jag har endast kunnat tänka så sundt och så långt i ensamheten. Pratet och umgänget gör en feg och att man tar personliga hänsyn. I Paris under din och [Jonas] Lies uppsigt skulle jag ha tvekat innan jag angrep Ibsens aristokratiska estetiska kurtis!⁵⁷

⁵⁵ In his strongly positive reevaluation of Bjørnson, Erik Bjerck Hagen underscores the ethical moment in the Norwegian writer's literary oeuvre, and also how lucid his arguments were in his exchange of letters with Strindberg. Cf. Erik Bjerck Hagen, *Livets overskudd. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnsons glemte kvaliteter*. Gyldendal, Oslo 2013, in particular pp. 39 and 148-151.

⁵⁶ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁵⁷ August Strindberg, *Brev, cit.*, vol. 4, p. 354.

My friends in Sweden have wired for me, offering a candidacy for martyrdom. It's too great an honour for me and I say thanks. I consider all train platform speeches and gangway tableaux to be romanticism etc. You are mistaken about the effects of my isolation. Such sound and profound thoughts are possible only in solitude. Chitchat and social intercourse make you cowardly and considerate towards other persons. In Paris, under your and [Jonas] Lie's control, I would have hesitated to attack Ibsen's chivalrous and aesthetic flirtation.

Bjørnson replied immediately, underscoring how compelling the public role of the intellectual might be, if one chose to interpret it:

Men du må rejse hjem, Strindberg! Den «komedie» som følger med «perrongtaler» og «mottagninger» og «fæster» må enhver man ta med for sakens skyll. Du kan ikke mælde dig ut af værden. Du kan ikke hindre, at i dig, i din person gagnes ordets frihet, uten at du begår forræderi! – Vågt dig for din egen spidsfindighed! Den er bare nervøsitet på en annen måte. [...] Til dommen må du hjem, den må du underkaste dig, hvis du vil utrette mere i Sverige. – På dette blir du Sveriges store man; det har sin gæne, sin «komedie», ja, sin væmmelighed; men på det fører du ti år fræm alt det, du kæmper for!⁵⁸

But you must go home, Strindberg! Everyone must accept the «comedy» implied in «train platform speeches», «at-homes» and «feasts» for the cause. You cannot claim to be outside of the world. You cannot prevent freedom of speech from using you, your person, without your committing an act of treachery! – Watch out for your own sophistry! It's just nervousness in a different fashion. [...] You must go home and stand trial; you must submit yourself to it, if you want to get ahead in Sweden. – This way you will become Sweden's great man; it does imply annoyance, «comedy», and even repulsion, but through it you will push all the things you're fighting for ten years forward.

Strindberg broke off the friendship with a well-known reply on October 14, in which he rejected precisely the role of public speaker that Bjørnson was advocating, and that Bjørnson had accepted for himself as a socially and politically committed writer. Strindberg, on the contrary, imagined that his role was to be played in a different, higher sphere, far from the baseness of practical politics:

Kära bror!

Din oförskämndhet gör dig liten. Behöfver du mig för någon politisk humbug, så har jag andra och större uppgifter i lifvet. Min spetsfundighet,

⁵⁸ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-208.

det är mitt skarpare förstånd. Det ska du lära dig ha aktning för! [...] Var sann! Björnson! Du är falsk som en festtalare.⁵⁹

Dear Friend,

Your impudence demeans you! If you need me for some piece of political humbug, I've other and greater tasks in life. What you call my sophistry is my more acute intelligence. That's something you must learn to respect! [...]

Be truthful, Bjørnson! You are as false as an after-dinner speaker!⁶⁰

Being attacked at the same time by both the conservative and progressive fronts turned out to be a shock for the «high-strung» Strindberg, who fiercely attacked in his turn. Thus, this issue marked the start of Strindberg's far-reaching detachment from his idea of an engaged literature that worked for social and political change, and from his own possible role as a spiritual, if not strictly political, leader of Sweden's radical generation of the 1880s, an idea that was strongly promoted by Bjørnson, and that had also inspired Strindberg, if only for a short time.⁶¹

6. Interdependence and search for autonomy

The patterns outlined are examples of the interdependence between literary and political discourses in Scandinavia during the first half of the 1880s, as well as of Strindberg's problematic position, which vacillated between loyalty to the causes of social justice and democratic reform, and his strenuous search for detachment from politics, in order to create

⁵⁹ August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 4, p. 355.

⁶⁰ August Strindberg, *Strindberg's Letters*, cit., vol. 1, p. 159.

⁶¹ Contemporary evidence of the crisis is to be found in Strindberg's autobiographical essay *Kvarstadsresan* ("Journey into Detention"), written at the end of 1884 and published in 1885, whereas a retrospective focus is applied in a chapter of the fourth part of Strindberg's autobiography *Tjänstekvinnans son*, written in 1886-1887, but published for the first time in 1909. See August Strindberg, *Kvarstadsresan*, *Fabler och Societeten i Stockholm samt andra prosatexter 1880-1889*, edited by Conny Svensson, Norstedt, Stockholm 2009, *Samlade Verk*, vol. 18, pp. 119-171; August Strindberg, *Tjänstekvinnans son III-IV*, edited by Hans Lindström, Norstedt, Stockholm 1996, *Samlade Verk*, vol. 21, pp. 170-183. Cfr. Massimo Ciaravolo, *Kvarstadsresan by August Strindberg: Letters as Autobiographical Space, Self-defence and Reassessment of Views*, in *Forme di narrazione autobiografica nelle letterature scandinave. Forms of Autobiographical Narration in Scandinavian Literature*, edited by Massimo Ciaravolo et al., Firenze University Press, Firenze 2015, pp. 143-157; <<http://www.fupress.com/catalogo/forme-di-narrazione-autobiografica-nelle-letterature-scandinave--iforms-of-autobiographical-narration-in-scandinavian-literature-i/2914>> (27-08-2015).

a position as independent as possible from the rules of power, whether political or economic.

To summarize the positions of our actors, the poles of literature and politics were relevant to them all, but Branting and Edvard Brandes finally gave priority to their practical political commitment, in whose service they employed their humanist concerns with literature and theatre. As a matter of fact Brandes continued, even during his political career, to work as a critic and a journalist, as well as a playwright and a promoter of modern theatre in Denmark, where these manifold activities were facets of the same intellectual-political agenda.⁶² On the other hand, Bjørnson and Strindberg, although engaged in political issues, chose writing as an artistic end in itself. Branting's and Strindberg's options for their respective fields were clearer. The former became the leader of the Swedish social-democratic party, eventually Prime Minister, and lastly worked in favour of the pacifist ideals of the League of Nations after World War I. The latter was ready to sacrifice anything in order to follow the peculiar paths of his talent and inspiration, thus becoming the major Swedish writer.

When Bourdieu represents Flaubert's and Baudelaire's heroic will to ignore money, honour and power in order to affirm the legitimacy of their art as an independent ground – a sphere ruled by a reverse economy, where the symbolic and not the immediate monetary capital is important, thereby creating the literary field⁶³ – this can also be read with reference to Strindberg's experience as a writer, for example in his choice of experimental drama against all odds. Brandes' bitter letter on June 7, 1889, one of his last to Strindberg, also marks the end of a friendship. To be sure, Brandes is irritated by Strindberg's suspicions, but his main accusation deals with what for him is Strindberg's incomprehensible refusal to pursue honour, power and money in spite of his talent:

Du kunde underkastet dig disse tre smaa Lande, hvis du havde anvendt dit Talent med Klogskab. Du kunde endnu blive en mægtig Mand, en Potentat – men du foretrækker at følge dine Kapricer og da Farvel Magt

⁶² Several sources focus on Brandes' intellectual-political agenda as a literary and a theatre critic: Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen, *Litteraturkritikeren Edvard Brandes*, in Edvard Brandes, *Litterære Tendenser*, edited by Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen, Gyldendals Uglebøger, Copenhagen 1968, pp. 7-30; Harald Engberg, *Forord*, in Edvard Brandes, *Om Teater*, edited by Harald Engberg, Politikens Forlag, Copenhagen 1947, pp. 3-6; Helge Scheuer Nielsen, *Edvard Brandes och Politiken. En bibliografi*, Helge Scheuer Nielsen, Copenhagen 2008; and Edvard Brandes, *Kritik og Politik. Artikler fra Politiken*, edited by Helge Scheuer Nielsen, Helge Scheuer Nielsen, Copenhagen 2008. All of them give evidence of the attention Brandes paid to Strindberg's authorship.

⁶³ Pierre Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-45, 49-50 and 75-164 .

og Penge. At man gider være bohémien i disse Lande, hvor Stillingen ingen Fordel frembyder.⁶⁴

You could have conquered all these three small countries, if you had used your talent with intelligence. You could still become a mighty man, a potentate – but you'd rather follow your whims, so farewell to power and money. Why bother being a Bohemian in these countries, where the position offers no advantages?

Brandes and Bjørnson operated in a borderline area; both did political work through journalism and their roles as progressive opinion makers, but Brandes acted from within Parliament, and eventually became a government minister after the breakthrough of parliamentary rule in Denmark, while Bjørnson resisted the temptation of that kind of commitment in Norway, although it seems that he hesitated more than Strindberg did in the choice of his main activity.⁶⁵

Both options, the artistic and the political, had their advantages and their shortcomings. The free, creative spirit of the writers tended to ignore the fact that the practical political work for the progressive cause was often slow, boring and frustrating (Brandes often mentions this aspect in his letters to Strindberg), yet necessary, while the pragmatic politicians risked disregarding the autonomy of art, seeing it merely as a means to a political end.

While Strindberg broke with Bjørnson for good in 1884, and while even his personal contacts with Edvard and Georg Brandes became sporadic after the intense intercourse during Strindberg's stay in Denmark and Copenhagen from 1887 to 1889 (when he launched his play *Fadren, The Father*, and his Scandinavian Experimental Theatre, *Skandinaviska Försöksteatern*),⁶⁶ his friendly relationship with Branting continued. This happened in spite of relevant ideological differences on several issues: women's emancipation; the conception of linear progress in Branting's «industrial» socialism; Strindberg's aristocratic

⁶⁴ Georg Brandes - Edvard Brandes, *Brevveksling*, op. cit., vol. 6, pp. 144-145. Landquist's comment grasps the core of this confrontation and dilemma. Cfr. John Landquist, *op. cit.*, pp. xviii-xix.

⁶⁵ In a letter to Strindberg, Bjørnson, who was dissatisfied with the spirit of compromise in the policy of the Norwegian liberal party (*Venstre*), stated that things would have been different, had he chosen to become a member of Parliament. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, *op. cit.*, p. 190 (10 June 1884): «Mine bøker, de er dyre bøker; for havde jeg ladet mig vælge til stortingsman, var der ingen kompromis blét af; men derimot noget mere bygget på fræmtids-opgaven: et norsk folk». About Bjørnson's borderline position between literature and politics cfr. Edvard Hoem, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-190, 355, 384-392 and 396-407.

⁶⁶ Harry Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-65 and 79-164.

and anti-democratic standpoint during the late 1880s and early 1890s; Strindberg's anti-materialism and return to religion as a consequence of the Inferno Crisis during the 1890s.⁶⁷

This long-lasting personal contact gave Strindberg the benefit of hindsight and a clear awareness when considering his own experience of the relationship between literature and politics. A couple of episodes, mentioned in the letters, give evidence of it.

As a newly elected member of parliament, Branting tried to work in favour of a state wage for Strindberg between 1897 and 1899.⁶⁸ Strindberg motivated his refusal to accept such a wage in an often quoted letter to Branting from Lund on January 23, 1899, the day after his fiftieth birthday:

Jag har aldrig varit annat än diktare, och att vi diktare under nyss utgångna perioden ville vara profeter och politici tror jag var ett gå utom befogenheten. «Intet program» var min gamla lösen och är än. Samma frihet att växa som jag unnade andra förbehöll jag mig själv. Det är sålunda en ren tillfällighet att jag strävar i sällskap med Dig såsom freds- och rösträttsvän, och du får icke betrakta mig som politisk person. Somliga människor ha religiöst behov, andra icke. Jag måste ha kontakt med 'Jenseits' för att få perspektiv och lointain i mina målningar och jag kan icke andas i Ert fysiska vacuum.

Alltså: där skiljas vi, och följaktligen i synpunkterna på liv och ting. Vad nu beträffar den rent praktiska åtgärden Du föreslår, utgående på att förmå riksdagens majoritet ge mig diktargage, så vill jag icke bli majoritets- eller bondepoet,⁶⁹ lika litet som jag vill bli hovpoet.

⁶⁷ Zeth Höglund, *op. cit.*. An analysis of Strindberg's ideological development is given in Björn Meidal, *Från profet till folktribun*, cit., pp. 19-23 (rupture with Branting's socialism and his idea of linear and industrial progress; critique of Branting's dogmatism as a professional politician; aristocratic disdain for «the small ones» in society), pp. 24-36 (Christian interpretation of Socialism as materialism after the Inferno-Crisis) and pp. 40-57 (new turn: Strindberg's Christian faith and anti-materialism coexist with his support of the growing social-democratic movement in Sweden; spirituality and social pathos meet). About Strindberg's opposition against industrial socialism cfr. Sven-Gustaf Edqvist, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-298. About the ideological differences between Strindberg and Branting cfr. Gunnar Brandell, *Strindberg – ett författarliv*, Alba, Stockholm 1985, vol. 2, pp. 21, 37-38 and 52.

⁶⁸ Zeth Höglund, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-254.

⁶⁹ When Strindberg mentions the «farmers», he refers to *Lantmannapartiet*, the conservative party in the lower chamber of the Swedish parliament, i.e. the political opponents of the liberal radicals and the socialists. On the other hand, Strindberg's «agrarian» Socialism is ideologically different, a part of his «pastoral» utopia, and in contrast with Branting's «industrial» Socialism. Cfr. Zeth Höglund, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-244 and 247-248. About Strindberg's ideology as a form of pastoral vision cfr. Martin Kylhammar, *Maskin och idyll. Teknik och pastorala ideal hos Strindberg och Heidenstam*, Liber, Malmö 1985, pp. 27-129; see in particular pp. 48-50.

[...]

Alltså: Tack än en gång, men jag måste avstå!⁷⁰

I have never been anything but a writer, and the fact that in recent times we writers wanted to be prophets and politicians was, I think, to exceed our competence. «No programme» was my old motto and still is. I reserved for myself the same freedom to develop that I granted to others. It is thus quite by chance that I am fighting alongside you as a friend of peace and universal suffrage, and you must not regard me as a political person.

Some people have a need for religion, others don't. I must have contact with *Jenseits* in order to gain perspective and *lointain* in my canvases, and I cannot breathe in your physical vacuum.

So: that is where we part company, and consequently we must see life and other things differently.

As regards the purely practical measure you propose, namely to persuade a majority in the Riksdag to award me a writer's stipendium: I don't want to be the poet of the majority, or the farmers, any more than I want to be a court poet. [...]

So! Thank you once again, but I must decline!⁷¹

In this passage Strindberg is, on the one hand, coherent with what he has professed since the early 1880s: no affiliation to a party or a programme; a metaphysical need which distinguishes him from the progressive and positivist mainstream of the radicals.⁷² On the other hand he will not be able to keep himself outside the political arena. Even his religious perspective, which appears here as a distinctive trait, will play a political role in the last years of Strindberg's life, when he will act both as a reactionary intellectual, in the case of the Dreyfus affair, and as a progressive one, in the case of his support for democratic rule and his opposition to nationalism and militarism.

Through the «Strindberg Feud» Strindberg reaffirms democracy and socialism, and after his sixty-third birthday, in 1912, he greets the workers' movement of Stockholm with a message sent to Branting and Gerhard Magnusson, another social-democratic journalist: «Då jag nu slutligen återfunnit mig sjelf och min ställning, hvilken på grund af min verksamhet som diktare icke kunnat vara resolut, så vet Ni hvar Ni

⁷⁰ Quoted in Zeth Höglund, *op. cit.*, pp. 254-255.

⁷¹ August Strindberg, *Strindberg's Letters*, selected, edited and trans. by Michael Robinson, The Athlone Press, London 1992, vol. 2, pp. 646-647.

⁷² Besides the aforementioned letters, an important document is *Invokation*, Strindberg's unpublished preface to the poems in *Sömnängarnätter*. See the text and the editor James Spens' comments in August Strindberg, *Dikter; Sömnängarnätter på vakna dagar; och strödda tidiga dikter*, cit., pp. 440-443.

har mig; och dermed skall all misstro fara»⁷³ («Now, as I have finally found myself and my position again – a position that could not be resolute owing to my activity as a writer – you know what I stand for, and any distrust will vanish»). Besides a final profession of political faith, this is further evidence of Strindberg's awareness of his role as a writer and a poet (*diktare*), necessarily independent of ideological obligations for the sake of personal experimentation and growth.

7. Political comeback in his late days

If Bourdieu's theory of the creation of an autonomous literary field can be applied to map Strindberg's strategies from the 1880s and on, Strindberg's behaviour elicits, on a significant point, a different reading of that theory. In Bourdieu's historical construction, Émile Zola's defence of the unjustly accused Alfred Dreyfus became a decisive step towards the "invention" of the modern intellectual. It was thanks to the prestige and the capital (both symbolic and monetary) gained as an independent writer within the autonomous literary field that Zola could play such a decisive political role in the public debate.⁷⁴ It is however a fact that Strindberg was on the other side of the political fence during this affair. Like Europe's reactionary forces, he thought that Dreyfus was guilty.⁷⁵ His explanations were Christian and metaphysical; they defied logic and referred ultimately to a form of theodicy, a faith in God's inscrutable will and intervention in earthly matters: you never suffer without being guilty; and since the imprisoned Dreyfus was suffering, he must have been guilty of something.⁷⁶ Behind this

⁷³ Quoted in Björn Meidal, *Från profet till folktribun*, cit., p. 264. Cfr. Zeth Höglund, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

⁷⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-189. In this respect Bourdieu's conclusions are different from Marcuse's and Bürger's. For them the problem, and the historical tragedy, was that art had become too detached and independent from social life, and that the values of humanity expressed in the self-contained art could do nothing to prevent inhuman, totalitarian forces from coming to power. On the other hand, Bürger concedes also that art's relative freedom and independence from «life praxis» is a precondition for a critical knowledge of reality through it. Cfr. Peter Bürger, *op. cit.*, pp. 68 and 73.

⁷⁵ Cfr. Maurice Gravier, *Strindberg antidreyfusard*, in *Influences. Relations culturelles entre la France et la Suède* edited by Gunnar von Proschwitz, Société Royale des Sciences et des Belles-Lettres, Göteborg 1988, pp. 269-277.

⁷⁶ Cfr. Björn Meidal, *Från profet till folktribun*, cit., pp. 232-233, and Björn Meidal's text in Björn Meidal - Bengt Wanselius, *op. cit.*, pp. 364-365. Meidal does not see a connection between Strindberg's old anti-Semitism and his thoughts about Dreyfus.

construction, Strindberg's old anti-Semitic bias, I argue, was free to re-emerge.⁷⁷ In *Ockulta Dagboken* (The Occult Diary) Strindberg kept careful record of the ongoing trial. Here are two excerpts from April 14 and June 4, 1899 respectively:

Antikrist (=Juden) kan väl ej vara Krist! Hans Petrusar heta Reinach!
Zola, Clemenceau, Jaurès.

[...]

Jag har ändå sedan 1894 trott Dreyfus vara skyldig och tror det än på dessa grunder: Ingen människa lider oskyldigt och D. måste ha skuld för att lida så gränslöst. När jag såg huru Henry och de andra straffades trodde jag på guddomlig rättvisa och slöt därav att även D. måste vara brottslig då han straffas.⁷⁸

Antichrist (=the Jew) cannot be Christ! His Peters' names are Reinach!
Zola, Clemenceau, Jaurès. [...]

Since 1894 I have believed that Dreyfus is guilty, and I still believe it on this basis: No one suffers without guilt and D. must be guilty in order to suffer so immensely. When I saw how Henry and the others were punished I believed in a divine justice, and drew the conclusion that even D. had to be culpable as he was punished.

To be sure, Strindberg's standpoint was more private – «occult» – than public. He wrote about it in *Ockulta Dagboken*, which was not meant to be published, and in some letters written after 1898.⁷⁹ Public opinion could however read considerations and comments about the Dreyfus affair in some passages of Strindberg's novels *Götiska Rummen* (*Gothic Rooms*, 1904) and *Svarta Fanor* (*Black Banners*, 1907).⁸⁰

Gunnar Brandell sees Strindberg's passivity towards social and political issues, and his interpretation of the Dreyfus-affair, within the ideological frame created by the Inferno Crisis; cfr. Gunnar Brandell, *Strindberg – ett författarliv*, Alba, Stockholm 1983, vol. 3, pp. 171-172 and 270-272; and Gunnar Brandell, *Strindberg – ett författarliv*, Alba, Stockholm 1989, vol. 4, pp. 29-32 and 251.

⁷⁷ Cfr. Nina Solomin, *op. cit.*, p. 10: «Kanske är i detta sammanhang också hans ståndpunkt i Dreyfusaffären på nittioalet intressant – något som ännu inte blivit undersökt ur detta perspektiv».

⁷⁸ August Strindberg, *Ockulta Dagboken*, edited by Karin Petherick and Göran Stockenström, Norstedt, Stockholm 2011, *Samlade Verk*, vol. 59:1, pp. 86 and 89.

⁷⁹ See in particular August Strindberg, *Brev*, edited by Torsten Eklund, Bonnier, Stockholm 1970, vol. 12, pp. 259 and 261; August Strindberg, *Brev*, edited by Torsten Eklund, Bonnier, Stockholm 1972, vol. 13, pp. 5-6 and 215; August Strindberg, *Brev*, edited by Torsten Eklund, Bonnier, Stockholm 1976, vol. 15, pp. 45-46.

⁸⁰ See August Strindberg, *Götiska Rummen*, edited by Conny Svensson, Norstedt, Stockholm 2001, *Samlade Verk*, vol. 53, pp. 189ff., 209ff., 279ff.; and August Strindberg, *Svarta Fanor*, edited by Rune Helleday, Norstedt, Stockholm 1995, *Samlade Verk*, vol. 57, pp. 107f., 213f. Even Jan Myrdal's interesting article about Strindberg's

His ideas also went against Georg Brandes' and Bjørnson's positions, although this difference was not expressed publicly.⁸¹

Some years later Strindberg's stance for democratic rule and against monarchy, chauvinism, armament and war marked, on the other hand, his surprising political comeback as a progressive, democratic, socialist intellectual. Björn Meidal's analysis of the literary, ideological and political implications of this conflict is so thorough that it is difficult to add anything. What I would like to point out is that the so-called Strindberg Feud in Sweden may be compared with what, according to Bourdieu, Zola and the Dreyfus affair meant for France and the rest of Europe, in the sense that Strindberg could reinvest his prestige and symbolic capital – which he had gained over the years outside politics, as a writer – in an intellectual-political campaign.

8. Conclusions

The figure of the modern, independent intellectual as Bourdieu conceives it in his postscript of *Les règles de l'art*,⁸² the necessary outsider who also Said advocates in *Representations of the Intellectual*,⁸³ appears in Sweden with Strindberg through a long process that spans the period from his first literary masterpiece, the play *Mäster Olof* (*Master Olof*, 1872), to the verge of World War I. In spite of his fluctuations and contradictions, Strindberg embodied the figure of the intellectual who dares to defy power and speak truth to it, taking on a position of disturber and even «amateur» vis-à-vis professional politics. Not by chance he referred to *Mäster Olof*, in his first letter to Edvard Brandes, as «my biography»,⁸⁴ since the play clearly focuses on the

anti-Semitism – Jan Myrdal, *Strindberg och antisemitismen*, cit. – does not consider its development during the Dreyfus-affair at the turn of the century, an affair which in modern times was the most important struggle concerning anti-Semitism, opposing reactionary forces against liberal and radical intellectuals. Myrdal comes to the obvious conclusion that Strindberg's anti-Semitism during the 1880s was a fact, but cannot be considered in the terms of the Nazis' anti-Semitism. The most pertinent analysis remains, in my opinion, Nina Solomin, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ August Strindberg, *Ockulta Dagboken*, cit., p. 98 (9 September 1899). Bjørnson's stance as a *dreyfusard*, but also his ambivalent opinions about the Jews, not completely free from prejudice, are analyzed in Ragnhild Henden, *Ambivalens og alvor: Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson i møte med europeisk antisemitisme*, in *Den engasjerte kosmopolitt*, cit., pp. 291-308.

⁸² Pierre Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 461-472.

⁸³ Edward Said, *op. cit.*, in particular pp. ix-xix, 3-23 and 65-102.

⁸⁴ August Strindberg, *Brev*, cit., vol. 2, p. 165; also in Georg Brandes - Edvard

dilemma of the intellectual confronted with the possibilities and the risks of his participation in the political sphere. In the construction of Scandinavian modernity this interdependence of art and politics, the role of progressive ideas and ideological discussion in literature (what in the Danish tradition is known as *kulturradikalisme*), as well as the artists' necessary search for autonomy, are central patterns, for which Strindberg's relationship with Brandes, Branting and Björnson can offer a model.

Drawing on Bourdieu's French model and adapting it to Swedish literature, David Gedin shows how the conflicts between the generation of the 1880s and that of the 1890s in themselves started an autonomous literary field with inner rules and positions.⁸⁵ However, we observe with the Strindberg Feud in 1910-12 how literature and politics were still strictly intertwined. Strindberg's political attack against antidemocratic positions coincided with a literary attack against the generation of the 1890s and their most outstanding spokesman, the writer and former friend Verner von Heidenstam.⁸⁶

With Branting, a generation of Swedish radical liberals was formed by Strindberg's early production, and by the *ideas* it expressed. With the Strindberg Feud, Strindberg was even canonized by the workers' movement. Opinions diverge, however, about the value of Strindberg's ideas, given his astonishing intellectual mobility. Is he worth anything as a thinker, or should his ideas be considered as temporary poetic tools, what he himself called experiments with viewpoints?⁸⁷ While Branting distinguished between ideas and ideas in Strindberg's authorship, and thereby saved Strindberg's political legacy from the early years,⁸⁸ the writer Hjalmar Söderberg, with his bittersweet, melancholic attitude, read his own enthusiasm for those same ideas in the light of his disappointment in Strindberg's religious turn with the *Inferno Crisis*. As ideas could change so thoroughly for Strindberg, they became, in Söderberg's view, indifferent in the end. Strindberg was *just* a poet.⁸⁹

Brandes, *Brevveksling*, cit., vol. 6, p. 5: «min biografi».

⁸⁵ David Gedin, *op. cit.*, pp. 337-354.

⁸⁶ Cfr. Andreas Nyblom, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Cfr. Björn Meidal, *Den politiske Strindberg – post festum*, in «Strindbergiana», XXV (2010), pp. 89-102, who underscores the complications of reading Strindberg politically, with reference to the reception of his oeuvre from his death to the present day. In his latest biography, Göran Söderström underscores the importance of Strindberg's ideological-political legacy; cfr. Göran Söderström, *Strindberg: ett liv*, Lind & Co, Stockholm 2013, pp. 114-119, 135-136, 538, 547-548, 556 and 590-591.

⁸⁸ Cfr. Björn Meidal, *Från profet till folktribun*, cit., pp. 52-53.

⁸⁹ See Hjalmar Söderberg, *Strindberg. Sömnängarnätter*, in Id., *Skrifter*, Bonnier, Stockholm 1921, vol. 10, pp. 124-128 (originally published in «Svenska Dagbladet».

Still, the political and ideological questions that were raised by Strindberg were fundamental in the construction of twentieth-century modernity, and are still relevant as a political and intellectual legacy: struggle for social justice and democracy (hence the potentialities but also the limits of parliamentary rule); national self-determination; the idea of a democratic community of nations; anti-nationalism and pacifism; critique of civilization, of our blind faith in rationality, science and technology, of the idea of linear, uninterrupted material progress; consequently, a concern for the natural environment; the idea of sustainable development through small rural communities. But also marriage and feminism; patriarchal order; Jews and anti-Semitism. Uniting all these subjects, the intellectual's need for autonomy from power. This is not so irrelevant a legacy; on the contrary, it is compelling for us today. And even Strindberg's opposition to women's emancipation and his anti-Semitism are important as a negative legacy, evidence of erroneous though pervasive ideas. Strindberg was a man of his time who wrote without inhibitions, and could express all too typical and ordinary views.

A line goes from Strindberg's critique of instrumental rationality and the positivist conception of progress, as well as from his hatred of war, to German thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno⁹⁰ and Herbert Marcuse, who experienced twentieth-century totalitarianism and the most destructive sides of progress. Benjamin refers in fact to Strindberg when he reflects on the progress of modernity as a nightmare, an inferno and a catastrophe.⁹¹

Strindberg's historical experience and authorship express the ambivalence that Marshall Berman has summarized in the idea that to be modern is also, necessarily, to be anti-modern. Only the most sensitive modern spirits can sense the dangers of a disquieting process by which

09-01-1901); Hjalmar Söderberg, *Teaterkrönika*, in «Ord och Bild», X (1901), pp. 51-53 (49-56); Hjalmar Söderberg, *Till Damaskus. Svar till Ninguno*, in Id., *Skrifter*, cit., vol. 10, pp. 128-135, originally published in «Ord och Bild», X (1901), pp. 186-187. Cfr. Massimo Ciaravolo, *Hur Söderberg läste Strindbergs Sömnängarnätter*, in «Parnass» (2006), 3, pp. 5-8.

⁹⁰ Max Horkheimer - Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1981, vol. 3.

⁹¹ Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1982, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5:1, p. 592 [paper N 9 a, I]: «Der Begriff des Fortschritts ist in der Idee der Katastrophe zu fundieren. Daß es "so weiter geht", ist die Katastrophe. Sie ist nicht das jeweils Bevorstehende sondern das jeweils Gegebene. So Strindberg – in "Nach Damaskus"? –: die Hölle ist nichts, was uns bevorstünde – sondern dieses Leben hier».

the world constantly changes and «all that is solid melts into air».⁹² Hence, also, Strindberg's atavism and nostalgia for an old order.⁹³ Knut Hamsun reflected in this direction when he defined his admired Swedish colleague as a reactionary radical.⁹⁴ Therefore it is difficult, but also necessary in today's perspective, to try to distinguish between a worthy intellectual legacy produced by Strindberg's nostalgia (critique of civilization; hatred of war) from a puzzling legacy produced by the same view (opposition to women's emancipation, anti-homosexual opinions, defence of the patriarchal order, racial bias), i.e. to try to discern the divide between radicalism and reactionary ideas.⁹⁵ The same thing applies to Strindberg's religion, which was of course a private matter, but also an important public ground of ideological confrontation. Söderberg's enlightened spirit reacted against Strindberg's post-Inferno theodicy, whereby God is the ultimate authority that cannot be questioned by humans; Söderberg understood that this was the opposite of Strindberg's early anti-authoritarian intellectual legacy. On the other hand, the metaphysical perspective has always given Strindberg, before his Inferno Crisis and after it, the force to develop an independent, critical stance against contemporary materialism, lack of spirituality, blind faith in the material world and its so-called progress. Even here, I argue, we must make an effort to distinguish.

Finally, such questions become even more complex because Strindberg was a great writer. No matter how wrong some of his views may seem to us, they were, especially anti-feminism, necessary for him in his struggle to gain autonomy from the political field and develop

⁹² Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Penguin, New York 1988 [1982], pp. 13-15.

⁹³ Anna Jörngården has focused on a central problem, exploring the double movement – at the same time progressive and regressive, regenerating and nostalgic – in the works of three major Scandinavian writers on the threshold of modernity: Ola Hansson, August Strindberg and Knut Hamsun. Anna Jörngården, *Tidens tröskel. Uppbrott och nostalgi i skandinavisk litteratur kring sekelskiftet 1900*, Symposium, Höör 2012.

⁹⁴ Knut Hamsun, *Lidt om Strindberg*, in Id., *Artikler 1889-1928*, edited by Francis Bull, Gyldendal, Oslo 1965, p. 18 (pp. 14-32): «Han er en Radikaler, men en reaktionær Radikaler; han vil komme ud af Uføret ved at vende om». This important essay was originally published in the newspaper «Dagbladet», 10-12-1889 and 11-12-1889; it was reprinted as *Et Overblik. Skrevet for mange Aar siden*, in Holger Drachmann *et al.*, *En Bok om Strindberg*, Forssells boktryckeri, Karlstad 1894, pp. 5-33. Cfr. Harry Järv, *Den reaktionære radikalen*, in *Strindberg*, edited by Folke Olsson *et al.*, LiberFörlag, Stockholm 1981, pp. 78-86.

⁹⁵ Cfr. Olof Lagercrantz, *op. cit.*, p. 136: «Ideologiskt var Strindberg femtio år på efterkälken eller hundra år före vilket man önskar. Att förneka framsteget, att i de triumferande industriutställningarnas tidsålder ifrågasätta den moderna tekniken var en hädelse som inte kunde förbli ostraffad».

his own authorial voice. One can even consider the fact in terms of what Harold Bloom has called a text's «strong», creative misreading, and its anxiety of influence as a result.⁹⁶ How could Strindberg have created, without his idea of fight between the sexes, a dramatic style that, while inheriting the new naturalistic fashion, distinguished itself from Ibsen and Ibsenism? How could he have written modernistic prose masterpieces such as *Le plaidoyer d'un fou* (*A Madman's Defence*) or *I havsbandet* (*By the Open Sea*) without the same views?

While Strindberg's fixations can be disturbing, he is also capable of contradicting his own ideological stances in the process of literary creation. One example, by way of conclusion, is the Father's monologue in the play with the same name, *Fadren*, where the protagonist, in defending the male's right to cry and be sensitive, fully contradicts his attempt to restore a collapsing patriarchal order.⁹⁷ Furthermore, as this monologue is a rewriting of the Jew Shylock's monologue in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, one can perceive the complexity of the ideological stance, as Shylock cries his accusation against all those who think that Jews are different from other human beings.⁹⁸

As always with Strindberg, any attempt at conclusion is, at best, an open conclusion.

⁹⁶ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford 1997 [1973] and, more recently, Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence. Literature as Way of Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 2011.

⁹⁷ August Strindberg, *Fadren; Fröken Julie; Fordringsägare*, cit., p. 69.

⁹⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, in Id. *The Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988, Act 3, Scene 1, p. 438.