

8. 'Spela den så att Pontoppidan och Fru Nansen få blåskatarrh': Strindberg's Correspondence with Actors and Directors

In October 1902 Max Reinhardt staged Strindberg's *Crimes and Crimes* at the Kleines Theater in Berlin, with Emanuel Reicher as Maurice and Gertrud Eysoldt as Henriette. It was Reinhardt's third major Strindberg production in twelve months and both these performers were also experienced at acting in Strindberg's plays. Anticipating a success, his German translator, Emil Schering, therefore encouraged him to travel down and see the production for himself. However, Strindberg's response was characteristically discouraging: '([I'm] grateful for the high hopes you send me every day,' he told Schering,

and look to see them realized in due course. My going to Berlin would be to study and to get some new ideas, for here we're sunk in a winter sleep all year round, and I have now lived up the entire supply I brought home from abroad last time. But you surely never believed I would go to Berlin to be lionized or 'perform' (like Bjørnson!). I certainly believe I owe it to the actors to see a performance, from a concealed seat, one evening when no one in the public is aware I am there, and even though it is a torture to see my shadows and hear my words, I shall do my duty... I am opposed to everything of a public nature, quite pathologically so! [XIV, 220]

To anyone familiar with Strindberg's correspondence this response will come as no surprise. For while he was always pleased to travel the world in pursuit of the capital of experience that he exploited in his writings, he was unwilling to expose himself to the paying public in person. Shy and frequently tongue-tied in public gatherings, he left his writing to speak for him, and a director or impresario (Schering at this time enjoyed playing the latter role alongside that of translator) had to be prepared for Strindberg to cry off an opening night. At best he might attend a dress rehearsal and follow up his visit with a formal note of thanks to those involved in mounting the production.

Such notes form only a small proportion of the some 9,000 items in Strindberg's extant correspondence. The sheer volume of his letter writing, which in this respect represents his principal genre, is to be accounted for only in part by the fact that for many years he lived abroad during the 1880s and 1890s. In fact, the volume of his correspondence in no way diminished when he returned to Sweden, either in 1889 or again in 1898, and it is clear that from an early stage in his career letter writing fulfilled a vital need for self-expression, one which could only be adequately satisfied in this immediate fashion. Moreover, for Strindberg, the private letter was not only the most honest and individual form of communication, which implied spontaneity, naturalness, and originality; it was also the basis for other kinds of writing, whose affinity with the personal letter seemingly masked for him the element of artifice and stereotype present in all written compositions.

At first sight Strindberg's epistolary aesthetic may recall Stendhal's approach to autobiographical prose, which he sometimes regards as a form of letter: 'Je me suis imposé d'écrire ces souvenirs à vingt pages par séance, comme une lettre', he writes, in *Les Souvenirs d'egotisme*, and again, 'J'écris ceci, sans mentir j'espère, avec plaisir comme une lettre à un ami', in Chapter One of *La Vie de Henry Brulard*.¹ But Strindberg's practice is very much more far-reaching. Just how far-reaching is most clearly articulated in the lengthy epistle on writing with which he initiates his correspondence with his first wife, Siri von Essen, in 1875. 'For you, writing is simply a matter of remembering' [I, 193; 1, 41], he tells her, and goes on to demonstrate how she may arrive at a work of literature by taking and dating a sheet of stationary, and addressing on it all she cannot say aloud to a dear friend. Then, by the simple expedient of removing the date, the superscription and the signature the text of this and other such 'letters' to which she has confided herself may be published as a book. Again, in 1882, he tells his sister, Elisabeth, 'If your heart is full and you cannot speak, then write! Every educated person can write, that is, commit their thoughts to paper. You can write letters; a good and true book is a letter. Writing is not inventing, making up something that has never happened; to write is to relate what one has lived' [III, 41; 1, 97]. And in 1907 letter writing remains the touchstone for that immediate and truthful form of writing to which he aspires when he seeks to console Schering for the break up of his (Schering's) marriage by advising him to 'Write yourself, write out your pain! You write such masterly letters! and are thus a writer' [XVI, 30; 2, 748]. Or, as he writes in *A Blue Book*, of his own published work and with the outrage it so frequently occasions uppermost in his mind: 'I confided (anfortrodde) it to the silent, printed word on the white paper. It was a confidential communication; and he who betrayed it was a traitor. Our books are produced in order to be read silently, to be whispered in [the reader's] ear' [SS 48, 941–2].²

Nevertheless, Strindberg's response in this otherwise practical letter to Schering about Reinhardt's production of *Crimes and Crimes* touches upon a notion that lies behind much of his writing in general, and his letter writing in particular, namely that where he is concerned social intercourse is 'a web of hypocrisy and lies' [SS 17, 68] which people deploy 'only with the object of deceiving each other' [SS 48, 1061], and that in spoken discourse one therefore runs the risk of losing one's identity. Through shyness or social convention one is unable to represent oneself accurately when speaking; this can only be done in writing. Moreover, 'our tongues and the words they speak are so sullied by everyday use that they cannot say aloud what the pen says silently' [SS 47, 731]. Strindberg is in fact deeply suspicious of the notion of a full and present speech, embodied in the person of the speaker, and likewise of a presence that is immediately recoverable from language as spoken, a language that is denied transparency and truth by the need always to accommodate oneself to one's interlocutor. For Strindberg, the self is dissolved or frittered away in speech; the speaker does not commit himself to his utterance but dissipates himself in the impermanence of the spoken word; hence he prefers to withdraw from social intercourse and reappropriate the presence that eludes him in speech in writing, most immediately in what that experienced man of letters, Samuel Richardson, calls, 'the converse of the pen[.] The pen that makes distance, presence; and brings back to sweet remembrance all the delights of presence; which makes even presence but body, while absence becomes the soul'.⁴ Thus 'Strindberg prefers the solitary, secondary, invented mode of writing, which arrests, fixes, abstracts from, and supplements experience, a mode of communication which eschews the immediacy and disorder of dialogue, and which is characterized by a double absence, or occultation, wherein the reader is absent from the writing of the book and the writer from its reading, to what is regarded, if only because of the anteriority of speech to writing in the individual's life and in history, as the primary, natural, even divine mode of communication in which the voice, borne by the breath, and guaranteed by facial expression, gesture, tone and inflection, signifies the presence of the speaker and his companions to himself and to others, in an interlocutory situation that binds voice and ear in the here and now'.⁵ As he tells Schering three days later, when he is still seeking to justify his absence from Berlin, 'My writings are myself (Mina skrifter är jag!) and any attempt to exhibit himself in public would be a form of 'prostitution' [XIV, 223; 2, 698].

The private letter, which straddles the gulf between presence and absence, is thus Strindberg's preferred genre, alongside the theatre in which the interlocutory situation described here may be realized by proxy. And consequently his reluctance to visit the theatre, which several of his biographers have chronicled, does not mean (as they sometimes argue) that he showed

little concern for the practicalities of performance, or even that he was so out of touch with what could be staged that he wrote such theatrically impossible works as *A Dream Play* and *The Ghost Sonata*. Indeed, the dominant trend of Strindberg studies has been so preoccupied with questions of biography and literary history that the theatrical dimension, and in particular its practical aspect, has frequently been lost.

In fact, alongside the *Open Letters to the Intimate Theatre*,⁶ where characteristically he appears before his theatre company in print rather than in person, Strindberg's letters provide a valuable corrective to this point of view. Certainly, there are periods when he has little or nothing to do with the theatre, and several volumes in his correspondence (5, 11, and 12, for instance) feature no letters to actors or directors.⁷ But just as he wrote more plays when there was a possibility of having them performed so he normally wrote to actors and directors only when they performed in them or were considering putting them on stage. As he tells August Falck, in 1910: 'If a new theatre really does come off at Birger Jarlsgatan there will doubtless be some new plays, should they be needed' [XIX, 12]. For much of his life Strindberg was essentially his own agent and P.R. man; he did not wish to write superfluously; and it is hardly surprising, therefore, that the majority of these letters should be written to the moment, when there was the prospect of performance or he had a new work that he was seeking to place. With the exception of a few items to Frans Hedberg, Ludvig Josephson, and August Lindberg in the 1870s and early 1880s there is thus little before a flurry of activity in 1888–89 when he sought to establish his Scandinavian Experimental Theatre in Copenhagen, a further group around the turn of the century when he has a whole new drama to be performed and certain works, *To Damascus I*, *Gustav Vasa*, and *Erik XIV*, enter the repertoire, and thirdly, and most especially, the long sequence of letters that he addressed to August Falck and the company of the Intimate Theatre between 1907 and 1910 when he is occupied with theatre business of all kinds, from ticket prices and the requisitioning of props to the staging, decor, costuming and acting of his plays. Then, quite literally, he gives notes to the cast in the form of notes, and we may thank his reluctance to appear in person for many of his most perceptive comments on the theatre. For as he writes to the young actor, Anton de Verdier: 'If you would let your comrades read this, that would save me repeating myself. There are perhaps some observations [here] that others might find useful! I am no speaker, therefore I write!' [XVII, 22].⁸

Although he is on a friendly footing with a number of the actors to whom he writes, and some, like August Lindberg, Tore Svennberg, or Ivar Nilsson, even become familiars at his Beethoven evenings in Blå tornet and elsewhere, these letters do not have the introspective quality of his correspondence with (say) Torsten Hedlund during 1895 and 1896 (and it is important to remember

that such a correspondence as the one he conducted with Hedlund need not be with someone who is a close personal friend: Strindberg, of course, never met Hedlund); nor do they share in the intellectual adventure of his exchanges with Leopold Littmansson during the 1890s or the burlesque humour that characterizes several of his letters to Carl Larsson, the energy of his correspondence with Verner von Heidenstam, the confessional letters that he addressed to Bjørnson, or even the pathos regarding money matters in many of his letters to Albert or Karl Otto Bonnier. Only when he is writing to Harriet Bosse do his letters to a performer attain this kind of level, but then it is rarely to the practising actress that he addresses himself: it is rather the unfolding drama of his private life that generally concerns him here, not the drama as such, and the same applies to his correspondence with Siri von Essen or their second daughter, Greta, where theatre business also becomes an occasional topic of importance.

Nor does he normally allow the personal peccadilloes that enliven much of his correspondence to interfere with his advice to a performer. It is therefore exceptional when he writes to the Danish playwright and actress, Nathalie Larsen: 'But play Miss Julie as it should be played – not as a sentimental vicarage miss but an emancipated (=prostituted) modern woman of the world. Show your passions, if you have any, otherwise: act them!' [VIII, 210; 1, 347] or when he instructs Siri Von Essen to perform *The Stronger* 'so that Pontoppidan and Fru Nansen get cystitis' (så att Pontoppidan och Fru Nansen få blåskatarrh [VII, 263; 1, 263]). Indeed, he rarely devotes much space even to the ideas informing the work he is discussing. In writing to actors or directors, he is more concerned with a play's structure or its effectiveness as theatre, and in particular how the individual parts should be realized. Thus, as soon as he hears that August Falck the elder is to play the Captain in *The Father* at Nya Teatern in 1887 he immediately sends him a letter full of practical advice, a great deal of which is derived from his experience of the play's Danish première earlier that year, with Hans Riber Hunderup in the title role. Although he disclaims any practical expertise and expresses an unwillingness to interfere in the actor's domain – 'As you know from times past, I haven't much idea of scenic detail, and I'm reluctant to disturb the work of the actors by interfering' – his comments have great practical relevance.

Beginning with a general observation, that the style of the play is 'not tragedy, not comedy, but something in between', and that it should therefore be performed 'as Lindberg performed Ibsen', he focuses on the tempo ('don't take too fast a tempo... Rather let it creep forward quietly, evenly, until it gathers momentum of its own accord towards the last act') and on character, stressing that 'the Captain isn't a coarse soldier, but a scholar who has risen above his profession'. And as with the reference to Lindberg's Ibsen style he feeds Falck

the names of several Stockholm figures who might be used as templates in preparing the role: 'Think, without copying him, of the late Captain P. v. Möller, a member of the Academy of Letters and History; the painter v. Holst, the philanthropist, v. Koch, etc.' He also gives detailed instructions for the Captain's entry in Act Three, which is precisely visualized ('when he enters in the third act, he is in his shirt sleeves (woollen shirt), has his books under one arm and the saw under the other') and supplies Falck with 'a rewarding moment in Act 3, Scene 1, when she sits at the same secretaire at which the Captain was sitting earlier. If she repeats or makes some gesture of the Captain's (e.g. putting the pen between her lips and saying a line with it there, always assuming the Captain really used that gesture), the contrast will make a fine effect'. Here, the notion of 'hjärnornas kamp' (the battle of the brains) and the unconscious influence of one mind upon another, which the play as a whole explores, is deftly absorbed into a piece of stage business.

Elsewhere in the letter he tips Falck on how to manage the lamp-throwing episode at the end of the second act ('Here we used a wicker lamp; the glass and shade can be fastened with putty so that the lamp may be lifted without the glass falling off, and thrown past Laura's head out through the door, but not before she has exited backwards, so the spectator is left in doubt as to whether or not it has hit her'), and he is particularly perceptive about the casting of Laura's role. 'If Laura is played by a younger and beautiful woman, she should be hard, for her appearance will soften the effect, and her influence over her husband will be motivated in that way. If she is played by someone older, the maternal aspect must be stressed, and the hardness somewhat underplayed' [VI, 337–8; 1, 259–60]. And so aware is he of the way in which an actor's appearance can influence the audience's reception of a role that six days later (this time in a letter to the publisher Claës Looström), he advances the candidature of his old friend Hilma Frankenfeldt over a certain Fru Gardt in Laura's role because her type will actually counterbalance the impact of his writing: 'Hilma F[rankenfeldt] would be excellent! The hardboiled, mean, mendacious side of Laura's character would be ennobled by her beauty and elegance, and in contrast to Fru Gardt she would be believable as a Captain's wife, someone who through her feminine charms could have exerted such an influence on her husband' [VI, 349]. Taken together with his advice to Manda Björling concerning the protagonist of *Kristina* (Queen Christina), namely that 'Even when Kristina is coarse, you must be charming' [XVII, 43], Strindberg here touches upon Stanislavsky's dictum that an actor should always seek the opposite aspects of the role he or she is playing – the young man in the old, for example, or the good woman in the wicked.

What is characteristic in this letter to Falck is Strindberg's attention to detail and the ready confirmation that in thinking about his plays he was also

visualizing them. In this respect casting is certainly one among several of his recurring preoccupations, not least because, unlike much nineteenth-century theatre practice, he knows that ‘a role can never be distributed early enough. In that way, it develops slowly and ripens well’ [XIII, 338]. ‘I could write a whole chapter about the distribution of roles, which is the touchstone of a director’, he tells August Falck’s son, and his collaborator with the same name at the Intimate Theatre: ‘To be able to recognize an actor’s aptitude at a glance and place him in the right slot!’ [XVI, 302]. In his first major letter to an actor, written in 1871 to his friend August Dörum, who was to play Orm in the forthcoming première of *The Outlaw*, he questions the wisdom of much of the other casting, and has the temerity, at this early stage in his career, to seek through Dörum to influence the Royal Theatre and its dramaturg, Frans Hedberg, regarding the disposition of roles. Sometimes, however, his concern is opportunistic. In 1910, for example, he writes temptingly to the great French director of symbolist theatre, Aurélian Lugné-Poë, to offer him ‘Reine Christine! Voici un beau rôle pour [votre femme] Suzanne Desprès’ [XIX, 218] and in 1900 he approaches the current director of the Stockholm Royal Theater, Nils Personne, with a somewhat disingenuous ‘word about the girl’s (Eleonora’s) role [in *Easter*! You know my weakness for Fröken Bosse. I miss in her colleagues the wealth of poetry and “Seriousness” which she possesses; and her childlike figure is well-suited for a girl with a pigtail down her back’ [XIII, 335; 2, 666]. Likewise, the following year he remarks to the director Emil Grandinson, apropos *The Virgin Bride* (*Kronbruden*), that ‘as I’ve written to Personne, my only condition is that Fröken Bosse gets Kersti’. And then, remembering Bosse’s slight stature, he adds, with disarming good sense: ‘in order to obtain nice proportions between [their] figures I had in mind Fröken Sjöberg for Brita’ [XIV, 49]. However, once Bosse comes to play a central role in Strindberg’s life, as well as in his stage works, certain parts are out of bounds to her. Although she created the role of The Lady in the première of *To Damascus I* in 1900, her subsequent assumption of the role of Strindberg’s third wife made it impossible for her to take the same part in a production of *To Damascus II* or, indeed, in any revival of Part I: ‘I have nothing against it being performed, but request that my wife be spared “The Lady”, just as she also asks to be excused the same role in Part I, should it be revived!’ [XIV, 99].

Normally, however, Strindberg’s concern is to match an ‘actor’s aptitude’ to his conception of the role. Thus, in a long correspondence with Grandinson and one of Personne’s successors at the new Royal Dramatic Theatre, Knut Michæson, concerning *The Last Knight* (*Siste riddaren*, 1909), he is greatly agitated by whom to cast as the younger Sten Sture. Rejecting both the experienced Anders de Wahl and Gösta Hillberg, he argues for August Palme, ‘if he’s got a slim waist’, or Ivar Nilsson, ‘if he can be tender’ [XVII, 45], and for

a moment he even has the ‘ridiculous notion... that Sture should be portrayed by – Julia Håkansson!’ [XVII, 70], who was best known for her performances in Ibsen’s dramas of contemporary life, from Lona Hessel in *The Pillars of Society* to both the principal women’s roles in *John Gabriel Borkman* and Maja in *When We Dead Awaken*. Not surprisingly, Grandinson failed to run with this last idea.

However, if the vicissitudes of casting have now lost their urgency for all but the theatre historian, many of Strindberg’s other instructions to his actors and directors remain pertinent, both in the immediate context of how his plays might be staged and (as Gösta Bergman has rightly indicated)⁹ as part of the general theatrical revolution that took place around the turn of the century. For, like Gordon Craig, Fuchs, Appia and Meyerhold, Strindberg was then engaged in developing a new, post-naturalist language of the stage which was exclusively and uniquely theatrical. These instructions do not amount to anything like the system that Stanislavsky was currently uncovering in Moscow, nor do they argue a single-minded theory of acting as (say) Diderot does in *Le Paradoxe sur le comédien*: they are too diffuse and written to the moment. Nevertheless, fragmentary as they are they suggest that if Strindberg visited the theatre only rarely, he made good use of his time there.

He is, for example, aware from the outset that theatrical performance involves a collaboration between performers and audience, and that the actor needs to find ways of entering into a ‘rapport with those before whom she is speaking’ [XIV, 174]. The actor must be in ‘continuous contact with the public’ [III, 12], he tells Siri von Essen in 1882, and in the previously quoted letter to Dörum on *The Outlaw*, he makes a serious point in jocular fashion when he advises the latter:

... don’t overact! Understand me – your spectator is an idle dog who wants everything explained to him straight away – he can’t be bothered to think very much for himself – if he has to, he starts yawning and gets bored! But he’s amused by hints – this is how it works: if you make a slight gesture, a mere nuance of facial expression, he’ll understand it well enough – as long as he only has to think a bit – then he’ll be delighted with himself for being so quick on the uptake, and that’s when he turns to his neighbour and digs him in the ribs – as much as to say, ‘did you get that?’ [I, 81; 1, 17]

The audience must be engaged in the performance, and the long, one-act form of drama which Strindberg favoured from *The Outlaw* to *Miss Julie* and the Chamber Plays is in fact a ploy to gain and retain its attention. In a long play like *To Damascus I*, for example, he argues that the audience need to be kept in their seats for as long as possible: ‘let them out to discuss things, and arm themselves for conscious resistance, and we can lose the play’ [XIII, 322–3; 2,

665], he tells the director, Grandinson. Hence ‘the scene changes up to that point [i.e. the central asylum scene, following which an interval is permissible] must take place in blackout, but without a curtain. As soon as the curtain comes down, an audience gives itself a shake and rejects what it’s seen’ [p. 323]. On the other hand, where the performers experience technical problems even in a relatively short play, such as *The Bond*, Strindberg recognizes the need to assist them with an interval. Following a dress rehearsal of that play at the Intimate Theatre, he wrote to Falck: ‘As a result of yesterday morning: you must have an interval in *The Bond*, for you will tire, Fröken Flygare will tire, the audience will tire! But with an interval you and Fr. Flygare can *speak more slowly*, the audience catch what is said better, and the play will profit by it’ [XVI, 165].

Although the way in which the playwright has constructed his play may assist the actor, it is the latter who is immediately responsible for gripping the audience’s attention. Most of Strindberg’s advice is therefore directed to him. And while he could, on occasion, be cavalier (thus to the inexperienced Viggo Schiwe, who was to appear as Herr Y in the Scandinavian Experimental Theatre’s production of *Pariah* (Paria), and in desperate need of some direction, Strindberg merely advised: ‘act with some inspiration – improvise like the Italians – and let us see if the play holds!... Think yourself into the role and it will come of its own accord in performance but not before’ (VII, 269)), he was generally specific and pertinent. Even his seemingly casual remark to Schiwe is given some sense when placed alongside a later comment to the more experienced Manda Björling, to whom he writes: ‘rehearse the role in your memory first, then the expression and the mood will come by itself. I have never understood what to “study” a role means, because in a studied role the work and design are visible’ [XVI, 191]. What he, like Stanislavsky or any good modern director, was seeking to avoid was the slentrian and the mechanical; the question was how to assist the actor in finding his or her character in a well-written role.

To this end Strindberg argued from an early stage in favour of what Stanislavsky codified as affective, or emotion, memory. He asks Dörum to ‘ask [Alfred Hansson] to cast about in his memory for some deep sorrow – really deep, if he’s been fortunate enough to experience such a thing – and ask him to call it to mind when he says the word “Gunlöd”!’ [I, 80; 1, 16]. The actor, in short, is to bring his or her own experience to the role, and find in memory the appropriate key with which to inform the part at a particular moment. At other times, in a theatre that was only now freeing itself from the collation of individual parts at the expense of the play as a whole, he would (like Ibsen)¹⁰ tell an actor to ‘see what the other roles say about you; after all they give you your character’ [XVI, 173], a point which is of even greater relevance in a drama

like Strindberg's, where character was presented as multiple and relationships between the characters shifted according to their knowledge of each other.

Again like Stanislavsky he was aware of the importance of concentration, and the need for ensemble playing. Thus he advises Svea Åhman, who was to appear as the wife in *Playing with Fire* to: 'creep inside the role, but also into the mood which prevails on stage when you make your entrance; that's why it is a good thing to wait for your cue in the wings, listen to the intonation of those on stage, catch the mood and tone; and then make your entry; but not straight out of the dressing-room and its small talk' [XVI, 171]. He even tells Falck, apropos his production of *Easter*, to encourage a kind of hypnosis, a form of concentration in which one character continues to exert an influence over his fellow performers even when he is not in stage:

Once more: pay attention to the exits. An actor who rushes out takes with him something of the mood of those still on stage: but he should leave something of his role behind. And when he is off stage, he should not cut the thread by talking or doing something else. If he has a principal role he should absolutely not lose contact while he is off stage. His thoughts should remain on stage and lead the action from without; his soul should remain there although his body exits. Those who remain feel this, and when they talk about him the audience should seem to see him. [XVI, 278]

Strindberg also authorizes the actor to play against what might appear the dominant tone of the text. Thus, Hunderup in the role of Gustaf in *Creditors* is instructed to 'now act the whole part playfully and good-naturedly, as someone who is superior can... so that there is some truth in Tekla's words, when she finds Gustaf "so free from moralizing and preaching"... Therefore: Gustaf as the cat playing with the mouse before he bites him! Never nasty, never moral! never preaching!' [VII, 259]. Likewise, Harriet Bosse as The Lady in *To Damascus I* gets the important note: 'It was great and beautiful (Damascus), although I had imagined the character somewhat lighter, with little touches of mischief and with more expansiveness. A little of Puck! – Those were my first words to you! and will be my last!' [XIII, 337; 2, 668]. In every case he stresses the individual over the stock character, and is insistent on the avoidance of cliché. Svea Åhman, for example, is given copious advice on how to play the wife in *Playing with Fire*, ending with the assurance, 'One further bold trick, and you will be saved: Throw away that red wig from 1870, and have black Cléo de Mérode hair... and you will feel like another person in the role!' [XVI, 168]. Meanwhile Falck, who is appearing in *Pariah*, is told: 'Don't wear a red beard and hair in *Pariah*, as characterization it's over the top (= provincial). Villains seldom have red hair. Better take a wishy-washy blond (dirty)... but keep the cigar-end and thumb it, chew it' [XVI, 186].

Above all, however, Strindberg is concerned with movement and speech, and in particular those moments when they are in symbiosis. Obvious clumsiness on stage is always to be avoided. Thus Nathalie Larsen is told not to walk with her feet splayed [VII, 254] and he is severe on anyone whose arms hang limply by their sides. In this respect, as when he tells Greta Strindberg to 'Pay attention to your walk; elasticate the sole from heel to toe, and don't lift the foot straight up rigidly. Never run, don't waddle... and don't mince on stage' [XVIII, 195, 228], he recalls Goethe's concern with stage propriety in his notes to his Weimar actors: certain things are simply not done on stage, as when he tells Manda Björling, to avoid being 'cross' in *Sir Bengt's Wife* (Herr Bengts hustru) since it is unbecoming a woman [XVI, 191]! More significantly, however (and this is an observation unusual in a non-practitioner), Strindberg is aware that 'When your whole being has the role in it, it lives in every muscle, nerve and sinew. The gesture follows automatically with the word; not a muscle lacks life.... the hands follow the movements of the mouth if the words come from the heart, so one doesn't think of it' [XVI, 278]. And again, this time to Helge Wahlgren: 'eat yourself inside the role, so that the gesture is born with the word' [XVII, 87], a remark that perhaps unfairly implies precedence to the word over gesture when, as the practising actor is aware, it is generally more a case of speech accompanying or following on from gesture and movement. What characterizes theactable script, like *The Father* or *Miss Julie*, is its 'potential gesturality',¹¹ a linguistic text with these gestures and movements implicit in it.

It is here, where voice and speech are concerned, that Strindberg appears to be at his most conventional. Or certainly, at his most prescriptive. And yet appearances may mislead. When writing to his daughter Greta or to members of the Intimate Theatre he is evidently concerned with what would once have been called their elocution, and therefore takes them to task over their '*phrasing* or musical punctuation, that is the stressing of the more important words and the withholding of unimportant ones together with a proper dividing up of the phrase; *modulating* or observation of raising and lowering, *accelerando* (speeding up) and *ritardando* (slowing down), pausing, *legato*, and *staccato*' [XVII, 18 – Strindberg's emphases]. The musical terms employed here are typical of the period (Meyerhold, for example, uses a similar vocabulary to describe *The Cherry Orchard*)¹² and 'legato' ('Det stora legato' [XVI, 166 – the great *legato*], as he describes it to Falck) and 'staccato' become Strindberg's shorthand for the desirable and the undesirable. In everyday conversation speech becomes careless and jerky, and this cannot be transferred to the stage, even in the interests of realism, without detracting from the performance and its reception by an audience. As he tells Greta, '*Don't chat*, but speak, on a big scale and with breadth; bind (sing) words and periods, and don't chop

(*staccato*)! [XVIII, 167 – Strindberg’s emphasis]. One must practise either by speaking ‘carefully in everyday use’ [XVI, 327] or, as in British drama schools some thirty-five years ago, by verse speaking. Thus, when confronted by poor articulation, Strindberg’s recurrent recommendation is the poetry of Esaias Tegnér (1782–1846). ‘Tell the Prince in *Swanwhite* to read Tegnér’s poetry [aloud] every day, then he’ll get the *legato*’ [XVI, 135], he requests Falck. Even Manda Björling is advised to ‘Find your natural voice once more, hold on to it, cultivate it by vocalizing poetry (Tegnér)’ [XVI, 191] while his inexperienced protégée, Fanny Falkner, is encouraged to ‘Exercise your voice everyday with poetry; e.g. Tegnér’s *Asatiden*’ [XVII, 112] and Alrik Kjellgren: ‘If you will learn Tegnér’s “Aolsång” by heart and come and recite it for me, I shall tell you the secrets of speech... You are a splendid actor, born to the stage. But now it’s time you became perfect! You speak properly, where tone and mood are concerned, but it must sound beautiful!’ [XVI, 332]. But in almost every instance here he is, of course, writing to inexperienced and even untrained performers, whose voice control is likely to be their weakest point. Pedantic and old-fashioned as these remarks appear, it is therefore hardly surprising that audibility and articulation should be of such concern to Strindberg, and he rarely comments on his speech when writing to an experienced performer like Falck.

He, on the other hand, is taken to task because in *The Pelican* he “shouted and made a racket”, went over the top, it’s what one calls provincial... The modern or new art of acting is: not to gesticulate and not to shout... But to be inside the role, behind the proscenium, keeping the mood [of the performance]’ [XVI, 111]. Here Strindberg touches upon what has become, with Stanislavsky, a key notion of acting in the modern realistic theatre, namely the mystical gulf that separates the stage, on which the actor appears to have no knowledge of the audience, from the auditorium. In this theatre the art of acting resides in concealing its art so that the actors appear to behave quite naturally. Thus, the performer in a play like *Miss Julie* must appear oblivious of the public and yet, as Stanislavsky also knew, must operate in circles of concentration that admit a lateral awareness of an audience that would otherwise be excluded from the action, and lost. As any practitioner knows, the dividing line is a fine one, and Strindberg draws it with some precision in a long letter to Falck, in which he defines the difference between a performance that crudely draws attention to itself, one that loses itself in introspection on stage, and one that finds the appropriate balance.

Now I have finally discovered that maximum illusion is achieved if one does not think of the audience, but acts [within the framework of] the stage. That’s what Kjellgren did as Benjamin and Falck as Lindqvist. Flygare sometimes had to speak with her eyes directed out front, when

the words did not suffice in themselves, and she did that well. For a while Rydell put on an act, or played to the gallery; that appeared old-fashioned and she became detached from the frame. De [V]erdier was just right. One can turn one's face towards the auditorium without 'speaking to the audience'. That's what V. did; he directed his performance outwards, but kept himself behind the curtain; that's what matters. [XVI, 279]

Or, as he tells Manda Björling, as if it were the simplest thing in the world, 'speak to the mass of people out there at the same time as you are within the scene, on the stage' [XVII, 12]. What, of course, he does not say, presumably because he does not know, is how to do this; that remains the prerogative of the true practitioner.

However, what is admirable about Strindberg's correspondence with actors and directors is his flexibility and his willingness to learn. For example, although he argued for the primacy of the spoken word ("In the beginning was the word!" Yes, the word, the spoken word is everything!' [XVI, 304]), he was generally prepared to adapt his texts in the light of experience. Thus, having at last seen *Master Olof* staged in 1881, he acknowledged that it needed shortening and wrote at once to his director, Ludvig Josephson, to suggest that he cut part of the tavern scene at the beginning of Act Two, the nobleman's harangue in Act Three, and the churchyard scene at the beginning of Act Five [11, 340]. Regarding the Swedish première of *The Father* he gave August Falck some cuts and told him, 'Cut more if you want. You will no doubt hear during rehearsal what jars' [VI, 337] while during rehearsals of *The Stronger* in 1889 he told Siri von Essen to 'change any phrases that don't come naturally' [VII, 263; 1, 307]. Thus, although the text for Strindberg was crucial and the theatre he finally acquired in 1907 was a playwright's theatre, devoted almost exclusively to his own works, he was ready to adapt to prevailing circumstances and take the exigencies of staging into account. Indeed, the latter sometimes encouraged him to break with current practice and experiment. For example, anticipating problems with *The Great Highway* he writes to Falck, in January 1910:

If you are afraid of the scene with the child in *The Great Highway* or children are forbidden, then don't cut it, but proceed as follows; using the monodrama method.

You say: 'Here comes the sovereign –' (As it happens she doesn't come.) Then you say: 'I've experienced this scene – before – somewhere – She comes – and says: Go quietly, etc.'

Then *You* speak the entire scene, partly as you think it should take place, partly as 'You' have experienced it!

This is an expedient, you see, but it's debatable whether the scene [with you] entirely on your own shouldn't work better, have a greater, more mystical [mera mystisk] effect. [XVIII, 272]

Monodrama attracted considerable attention around the turn of the century; indeed, Strindberg had already toyed with the genre himself as a vehicle for Harriet Bosse, for whom he set out to adapt a number of works, including Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, as monodramas.¹³ But it is in his search for this 'more mystical' form of staging that he is at his most revolutionary. And again, as so often happens during the emergence of the modern theatre, it is the need to resolve the problems posed by the practical limitations of the situation in which one is working that occasions the development of new theatre practice. The premises of the Intimate Theatre at Norra Bantorget had room for 161 spectators and the stage itself was a mere 6 metres broad and 4 metres deep. Nor was there room in the wings to store any amount of scenery or the possibility of flying new sets in from above. (Not the least of the theatre's founding problems had to do with health and safety, and in particular the fire regulations.) Thus Falck and Strindberg were soon confronted by technical as well as artistic problems (as if, in the theatre, the two are separable!), and Strindberg's response, which he urged upon his sometimes doubting co-director, derived a great deal from his knowledge of developments elsewhere in Europe – in, for example, the ideas of Edward Gordon Craig, whose *On the Art of the Theatre* Strindberg had first read in 1905 [XV, 135], and Georg Fuchs' *Die Schaubühne der Zukunft* [XVII, 238] – and something from his reading about past methods of staging in Herman Ring's *Teaterns historia från äldsta till nyaste tid*. It was, for example, in Ring that he found the idea for what he called the Molière stage (in reality Abr. Bosse's widely reproduced picture of the farce actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1630) where a pair of balustrades on either side of the acting area could be used to indicate time and place, and a change of scene, by the removal or addition of one or another decorative prop placed upon them.¹⁴

But his principal source of inspiration was in fact the practice of working in the theatre itself, of, for instance, seeing for himself how a four-square solidly built set could be replaced by drapes in heavy velvet, on which the lights could play in various colours to achieve both a different sense of perspective and/or the impression of a change of scene. Hence his enthusiasm for staging *The Ghost Sonata*, again without an interval, but on a 'dematerialized' stage where a heavy and cumbersome setting has been supplanted by curtains: 'The Mummy, e.g., sits in an opening in the rear curtain as in a closet. It would raise the play up to its plane, which is not the material plane' [XVII, 322]. As he developed his ideas it was therefore continually in the direction of such greater simplicity that he moved, sensing that it was there that he would achieve the impression of 'dematerialization' that was implicit in dramas like *A Dream Play* and *The Ghost Sonata*, and which was undermined by the kind of staging conventional in larger theatres at the turn of the century. Seeking to dispense with what

he calls 'all these theatrical gee-gaws which nowadays engulf the stage'¹⁵ at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, he therefore urges on Falck the adoption of a 'permanent set – in the right tone so that it doesn't clash! If we go in for elegant furniture and props, we'll be back on the beaten track again... One table and two chairs! That's the ideal!' [XVI, 232].

This is a recipe that recalls his description of *Creditors*, at the height of his naturalistic period, as 'better even than *Miss Julie*, with three characters, one table and two chairs, and no sunrise!' [VII, 105; 1, 281], and in such a simplified staging he argues that even *The Father* will 'be raised out of its heavy everyday sphere and become a tragedy in the high style; the characters will be elevated, ennobled, and seem to come from another world... We have sunk back [he tells Falck] to what was called Molander, or realism, naturalism, all of which is over and done with' [XVI, 236], and consequently lost the immediate, uncluttered, dematerialized playing style at which they should be aiming. For, according to Strindberg, the gains for the performer as well as the dramatist in adopting this meticulous but unfussy form of staging are immeasurable: 'With simple sets what matters stands out: the character, the role, speech, expression, gesture... "In the beginning was the word!" Yes, the word, the spoken word is everything!' [XVI, 304; 2, 783]. As Gösta Bergman remarks, of this declaration, 'Strindberg was far removed from Appia's and Craig's speculations about the rhythm of movement and mimic force. In the beginning was the word, *not* the dance or rhythmic movement'.¹⁶ And yet, like the plays that he had already written for a theatre that was so far unable fully to accommodate them, these letters, notes and sketches to his fellow theatre workers between 1907 and 1910, indicate that in his thinking about the practicalities of staging, Strindberg had indeed crossed the threshold from the nineteenth to the twentieth-century stage.