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TRANSLATING FOR THE STAGE — the Case of Strindberg

Because dramatic translations are intended for two kinds of recipients, readers and spectators, Egil Törnqvist asks whether we do not really need two kinds of translation: one for the reader (*lästexten*), another for the spectator (*speltexten*). While the literary translation attempts to capture the verbal nuances and stylistic features of the original, the theatrical translation is "constantly aware of the interplay between verbal and visual/aural elements."¹ He further suggests that

comparison between two such translations might tell us much about media differences and about the skill with which [the playwright] [...] has managed to direct himself to two kinds of recipients.²

Of course English translations of modern playwrights, like Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov, are generally *intended* for the stage, even though they may fail to fulfill what Inga-Stina Ewbank calls

the troublesomely contradictory aims of dramatic translation: faithfulness to the original text, speakability for the actors, and intelligibility for the audience.³

Translations of the *lästext* tend to be one reader's interpretation of the original; at its best the *speltext* is the result of interaction between translator, director, and actors, as was the case in the mid-1980s when I became involved in a translation project for The Source Theatre

¹Egil Törnqvist and Barry Jacobs 1988: 145.

²Egil Törnqvist 1995: 53.

³Inga-Stina Ewbank 1995: 134.

Company in New York City. Founded by a talented theatre director, Susan Flakes, The Source Theatre was dedicated to staging (or to presenting staged readings of) plays by Ibsen and Strindberg. Dissatisfied with existing translations of the Strindberg plays she wanted to produce, Susan Flakes enlisted my aid in providing as accurate a literary translation of each of these plays as I could come up with. Then we would begin to try to wrestle the *lästext* into a workable *spelttext*, for only after producing an accurate *literary* translation of the original text can the translator, usually working closely with a director and with actors, begin to achieve the latter two aims of dramatic translation: to make the lines speakable for the actors and the dialogue and action intelligible to the audience.

The first thing the translator of Strindberg learns, however, is that achieving an accurate literary translation is far from easy, because the manifold pitfalls that lay in his path. Professor Ewbank calls attention to the four most common ways in which translators betray Strindberg's original text: 1) failures of comprehension; 2) failure to understand culturally-bound practices; 3) failure to understand class assumptions; and, finally, 4) failure to capture the tone. I shall use these categories in my discussion of the problems one encounters in translating Strindberg for the stage.

Failures of comprehension are all too easy to spot in translations by other people — one of my favorites occurs in Southerington's translation of *Miss Julie* when, confusing *mågen* and *magen*, he translates Jean's sneering response to Julie's accusation that he has stolen her father's fine wine — "*Duger inte det åt mågen?*" / "Not good enough for his son-in-law?" — as, "It's good for the stomach!"⁴ Misreadings of this sort, especially by translators (like me) who are not native speakers of Swedish, should be the easiest to eliminate. Searching through dictionaries and consulting native speakers can save us from at least some howlers. Yet few translations of Strindberg's plays that I have examined, even some done by native speakers of Swedish, are free from mistranslations.⁵

⁴See Strindberg 1975: 28.

⁵For detailed discussions of translation problems in Strindberg's *Fadren* see Jacobs

Some mistranslations of words with multiple meanings result from choosing a meaning in the target language that does not fit the context of the original. In *Oväder / Storm*, for example, the elderly protagonist tells his brother that though it has its drawbacks, living alone is preferable to the married state because it gives one freedom: "ensamheten," he continues,

är ju si och så, men när ingen har anspråk på ens person, så är friheten vunnen. Friheten att få gå och komma, att tänka och handla, äta och sova efter eget val.⁶

A recent English translation of this play distorts this speech in a way that is very out of keeping with the reclusive nature of the speaker:

Solitude need not be such a bad thing; as long as you haven't got any creditors you're free to come and go as you please, to think and eat and sleep and go shopping just as you like.⁷

Strindberg's protagonist is thinking, of course, of emotional involvement, not financial indebtedness; and *tänka och handla* in this context can only mean "think and act," not "think ... and go shopping"!

Idioms are particularly troublesome for translators, because only the most familiar idioms seem to find their way into ordinary Swedish-English dictionaries.⁸ In Strindberg's one-act play *Moderskärlek /*

1986 & 1995.

⁶Strindberg 1991: 18. All subsequent quotations of Strindberg's Swedish texts in this essay are taken from various volumes in the new "national edition" of his works, *August Strindbergs Samlade Verk*. These quotations will be identified in parentheses in the body of the text by *SV*, followed by the volume and page number—in this case (*SV* 58, 18); unless otherwise indicated, all translations from works cited in this edition are my own.

⁷Strindberg 1989: 13-14.

⁸Unfortunately, there is no English language counterpart for the excellent *Wörterbuch der Schwedischen Phraseologie in Sachgruppen* by Schottmann & Petersson.

Motherlove, for example, there is an exchange between Héléne (The Daughter) and Lisen (really her half-sister), who has just caused Héléne's domineering mother to faint by accusing her of trying to redeem her own lost reputation at the cost of her daughter's future:

DOTTREN

till Lisen

Gå ut ur detta hus. Du som icke har något heligt, icke ens moder-
skapet.

LISEN

Så heligt! Alldeles som när pojkarne spotta för sig och säga *pax*, så äro
de också heliga. (*SV*33, 206)

Though Héléne herself obviously regards motherhood as "*heligt* / sacred," a secondary meaning of the Swedish word prompts a very sharp response from Lisen. The idiom she invokes, "*pax* (or *pass*) *för mig*," comes from the vocabulary of sports and children's games and means "to call time out" or "to suspend play temporarily," at which time one becomes, as Gunnar Ollén explains, "free," or "released from the rules of the game" (*SV*33, 386). Lisen puns on these two meanings of *heligt* in order to suggest that Héléne's mother regards her relationship with her daughter as a game, the rules of which she can suspend and reinstate at will. There is no way to preserve this clever bit of wordplay in an English translation, but Arvid Paulson does not even convey the sense of Lisen's speech when he translates it as, "Sacred — yes ... As sacred as the boys are when they spit out their prayers! That's holiness, too!"⁹

And finally Strindberg sometimes gives his characters enigmatic lines that prove to be stumbling blocks even for the best of translators. One such speech occurs in *Storm*:

BRODERN

Man hör helt svagt en vals spelas en trappa upp.

⁹Strindberg 1969*b*: 257.

Alltid valser, kanske de har dansskola, men nästan alltid samma vals;
vad heter den där?

HERRN

Jag tror minsann ... det är Pluie d'Or ... den kan jag utantill ...

BRODERN

Har du haft den i huset?

HERRRN

Ja! jag har haft den och Alcazar ... (SV58, 19-20)

The problematical lines here are the Brother's question, "*Har du haft den i huset / Have you had it in the house?*" and the Gentleman's reply, "Yes, I have had it and Alcazar." As Inga-Stina Ewbank points out in the excellent notes to her translation of this play, it is not really possible to determine whether nostalgia or irritation is the emotion expressed in the Gentleman's reply.¹⁰ Given his decided preference for classical music, however, and his obvious fear that the noisy dancing and gambling that takes place in the apartment above him will destroy the "peace of old age / *ålderdomens ro*," Susan Flakes and I opted for irritation in our translation of this play and rendered his response, "Yes, I had to endure that — and the 'Alcazar' as well ..." All other translations that I am aware of, however, read nostalgia into the Gentleman's reply and let him say that he used to play it himself.¹¹ This is an example of the kind of strangeness that crops up from time to time in Strindberg's later plays, where enigmatic or irrational responses give us glimpses into hidden aspects of the inner reality of his characters.

Let me discuss the other kinds of translation failure Professor Ewbank identifies — failure to understand culturally-bound practices, failure to understand class assumptions, and failure to capture Strindberg's tone — by choosing examples from one of Strindberg's most

¹⁰See Strindberg 1997: 55.

¹¹See Jacobs 1988.

frequently performed works, *Fröken Julie / Miss Julie* (1888). Since 1911, upwards of fifteen English translations of this play have been published; with a few exceptions, I shall confine my discussion of translation problems in this play to the six translations that are currently in print and readily available in popular paperback series: three British translations [those by Sprigge (1955), Watts (1958), and Meyer (1964*b*)] and three translations by Americans [those by Johnson (1976), Carlson (1981), and Sprinchorn (1986)].

The special problem with all earlier translations of *Miss Julie* stems from the fact that until 1964 the only available Swedish text of the play was corrupt. The textual tradition of *Miss Julie* is very complex. In 1888, after Karl Otto Bonnier (his usual publisher) refused the manuscript, Strindberg sent it to Joseph Seligmann, who agreed to print the play, provided he be given a free hand to make some necessary, *minor* revisions. Eager to get the work into print, Strindberg granted permission for these "few, necessary changes," but was later furious when he found that they were both numerous (870 to be exact) and decisive — in short, his play had been bowdlerized! In the meanwhile, however, he had lost his own copy of the manuscript. Landquist, who began to bring out Strindberg's collected works nearly a quarter of a century later, merely reprinted the corrupt Seligmann text. The inadequacy of Landquist's edition of the play has been apparent to a few scholars ever since 1936, when the original manuscript came to light; and in 1954 Harry Bergholz published a learned article in which he attempted to establish an authentic text of the play.¹² In 1964 C. R. Smedmark published his reconstruction of the original; and twenty years later Gunnar Ollén brought out the definitive text in the new *Nationalupplaga* of Strindberg's collected works — one that eliminates all disputed readings and restores the play to its original state.¹³

¹²See Bergholz 1954. On the basis of his studies of Strindberg's and Seligmann's handwriting, Bergholz divides the alterations in Seligmann's copy of the original manuscript into four categories: (a) typographical errors; (b) alterations in Seligmann's hand; (c) alterations of dubious origin; and (d) alterations in Strindberg's own hand.

¹³See Strindberg 1964*a* and Strindberg 1984 for these two restored editions of the

Obviously all serious discussion, and all new productions of this play must now be based on Ollén's edition of the literary text (or on translations of it).

One of the most significant changes Seligmann made in Strindberg's text of *Miss Julie* occurs in the central section of the play. After deciding to flee with Jean, Julie begins to drink wine immoderately and reveals the secrets of her wretched childhood, including her mother's love affair with a local brick manufacturer and her subsequent mysterious [mental] "illness." One revelation that Seligmann suppressed was that Julie was born out of wedlock. After her long confession, Jean tells Julie that he knows how her engagement really ended; from her vehement assertion that she and not her fiancé ended the engagement he concludes that she hates all men, including him. She agrees that she does hate all men, except when her disgusting "weakness" gets the better of her and says she could let him be killed like "a beast." Strindberg was alluding to the punishment demanded by Swedish law for acts of bestiality (*tidelag*), but Seligmann changed the sense completely by letting Jean identify the animal Julie is referring to as a "mad dog." The restored Swedish text reads as follows:

JEAN

"Den brottslige dömes till två års straffarbete och djuret dödas!" Inte så?

FRÖKEN

Just så

JEAN

Men nu finns ingen åklagare - och inte något djur! Vad ska vi då göra?

FRÖKEN

Res!

play.

JEAN

För att pina ihjäl varandra?

FRÖKEN

Nej! För att njuta, två dar, åtta dar, så länge man kan njuta och
så - dö. (SV27, 164)

JEAN: "The offender shall be sentenced to two years at hard labor
and the beast shall be put to death." Is that what you're
thinking of?

MISS JULIE: Exactly.

JEAN: But there is no prosecutor--nor is there any beast! So what do
you suggest we do?

MISS JULIE: Leave!

JEAN: To torment each other to death?

MISS JULIE: No, to enjoy life--for a couple of days, a week--for as
long as we can, and then--to die.

(Jacobs and Flakes)

By replacing this clear reference to bestiality with the less offensive image of a mad dog that one hastens to shoot — an image that perhaps recalls Julie's pregnant bitch, Diana, in a misleading way — Seligmann no doubt hoped to make Strindberg's play more acceptable to a late nineteenth century audience, but in doing so he obscured the meaning of a crucial passage. Julie has been angry enough to threaten to shoot her thoroughbred hunting dog, Diana, because she had been impregnated by the gatekeeper's pug. The irony of this palpable symbol resides in the partial inappropriateness of the reference to the virgin huntress. Besides being emblematic of Julie's misalliance with her father's valet, her pregnant bitch also exemplifies the futility of trying to suppress sexual desire. But though Diana helps clarify the ambiguous nature of Julie's sexuality, Strindberg certainly did not intend to invoke a canine image at this point. On the one hand, Julie feels that intercourse with Jean was an act of bestiality; on the other,

she cherishes a romantic notion of love that will culminate in a *Liebestod*. By juxtaposing her deep loathing of Jean with her ardent longing for fulfillment in death Strindberg is defining her tragic dilemma. Seligmann's revision of the text destroys this dramatic moment in the play.

Because the Landquist version of the play was the only text available to Sprigge (1955) and Watts (1958) when they published their translations of *Miss Julie*, they reproduce Seligmann's distortion of the text at this point, as does Arvid Paulson, whose translation appeared five years after the publication of Smedmark's amended edition of the play. All subsequent translations that I am aware of, except for that of Southerington (1975), follow the restored versions of Strindberg's text. Though Sprigge and Watts can hardly be blamed for following the only text at their disposal, there can be no excuse for literary translators who themselves distort Strindberg's text in an attempt to clarify the subtext, to redesign the stage set, or to force their own interpretation onto the original.

The stage set for *Miss Julie* is a case in point. As Strindberg describes it, the set affects the spectator much more effectively than it does the reader:

A large kitchen, the ceiling and side walls of which are concealed by the theater's tormenters and borders. The back wall is set at an angle, and on the wall are two shelves with copper, brass, iron, and tin utensils..... Stage left is the partial view of a large porcelain stove, part of its hood visible At the right, just one end of the servant's white pine dining table is visible, along with several chairs' (SV27, 117).

The summoning bell above the door and the gaping mouth of a speaking tube show the reader/spectator that this is the domain of servants who are ever at the beck and call of their superiors. The table and the back wall of the set are angled so that the actors will be seen in half-profile by the audience. In the Preface to the play Strindberg explains that he has borrowed the idea of the unsymmetrical and truncated scene from Impressionist painters, because being unable to

see the whole room and all its furnishings "creates the opportunity for surmise, that is to say, stimulates the imagination to complete the picture" (SV 27, 111). In other words, Strindberg deliberately engages the spectator as set designer. To one side of the set lies a mysterious, indeterminate area where the most significant action of the play will take place — off-stage.

Though the reader is informed before Strindberg even describes the set that "the action takes place in the Count's kitchen on Midsummer Eve" (SV 27, 115), the spectator must rely on visual clues to become aware that the action of this play is set on a very important Swedish holiday: the eve of June 23rd, the Feast of St. John the Baptist and the celebration of the summer solstice. Though the fact that the stove is decorated with bundles of birch branches indicates all of this to a Swedish audience, this culturally-bound detail is meaningless for an American audience. By contrast, other details in the set are universally "readable." "To the right," Strindberg specifies in the stage directions,

can be seen a partial view of a deep arched entryway with two glass doors through which are visible a fountain adorned with a statue of Cupid, lilac bushes in bloom, and some Lombardy poplars.

The lilacs in bloom tell an American audience that it is springtime or early summer. The statue of Cupid, visible throughout the action, introduces the rococo eroticism characteristic of the early sequences of the play and then, as the action progresses, comments ironically on the destructive power of human sexuality.

Though I have never seen a production of *Miss Julie* that attempts to follow Strindberg's stage directions to the letter, I believe that the literary translator's responsibility is simply to relay Strindberg's description of the set and allow the director and set designer to modify them to suit their own conceptions of the visual aspects of the play and to fit into the acting space at their disposal. Unfortunately, however, some translators tend to usurp the functions of the director and even those of the set designer. Sprigge, for example, invents a number of stage directions in her translation of *Miss Julie*. Whereas Strindberg's

initial stage direction mentions only one door (the glass double doors leading to the garden), she provides her own set design:

*The kitchen has three doors, two small ones into Jean's and Kristin's bedrooms, and a large glass-fronted double one, opening onto a courtyard. This is the only way to the rest of the house.*¹⁴

Strindberg does not indicate that the door to the garden is the only way to the rest of the house; indeed, when Julie leaves the kitchen to go upstairs and rob her father's safe, there is no mention of her exiting through the glass doors. Strindberg's acting direction reads "[JEAN] takes her hand and leads her off-stage," presumably to a stairway that we cannot see. Arvid Paulson too invents a "triangular opening in the wall, inside which are doors upstage and downstage leading to JEAN'S and KRISTIN'S rooms" and further specifies that the only door visible to the spectator is the one leading to Jean's room.¹⁵ In her recent translation of the play, Truda Stockenström appropriates Sprigge's scenic inventions and presents them as if they were part of Strindberg's original text.¹⁶ All of these additions diminish the complicity of the spectator that Strindberg was at pains to enlist by means of his "impressionistic" stage set.

Another point in the play that tempts translators to be inventive is the moment when the farm workers can be heard approaching the kitchen singing a ballad that Jean insists is aimed at him and Miss Julie. To win her sympathy, Jean had earlier told her of his boyhood discovery of the elegant latrine in the form of a Turkish pavilion in the garden of the estate. Recounting how he was once trapped there when someone from the manor approached, he describes the final degradation: "There was only one way out for the gentry (*herrska*folk), but for me there was another. I had no alternative but to choose it" (*SV*27, p. 140). This degrading situation is reversed when Julie finds herself trapped in the kitchen with Jean as the peasants

¹⁴Strindberg, 1955: 75.

¹⁵See Strindberg 1969*a*: 51-52.

¹⁶See Strindberg 1996: 11.

approach. In the Preface to the play Strindberg tells us that instead of inventing the slanderous ballad (*nidvisa*) that the farm workers sing, he has used a little-known ballad that he himself discovered in the Stockholm area, because

instead of improvising their malice, the people use already existing material that can take on a double meaning [...]. The words are only approximately apt and not quite on target, but that is intentional, for the underhandedness (weakness) of the slave prevents him from making a direct attack. (*SV27*, 111)

The ballad Strindberg used has a simple narrative involving two women who come from the woods; one of them is wet about the foot; they are speaking of a hundred *riksdalers*, but have hardly one *daler* to their name. Though Jean tells Miss Julie that the song is a satirical attack on the two of them, the text of the song appears to have very little to do with the fact that Julie is flirting with a servant. The last stanza, which can be translated as, "On thee my garland I bestow, [...] but to another my heart will go," is the only part of the song that might refer directly to Jean and Miss Julie. Jean urgently wants to get Miss Julie into his room and tells her that in a situation of this sort the only salvation is to flee. Julie says that they can neither leave by the kitchen door nor go into to Kristin's room — thus making Jean's room the only refuge, which, as Evert Sprinchorn points out, will become a scene of moral degradation for Julie similar to the physical degradation Jean suffered in his escape from the latrine.¹⁷

In her Danish translation of the play, which appears to have had Strindberg's full approval, Nathalia Larsen translates the acting direction "*Kören nalkas sjungande: / The chorus approaches singing:*" as "*Man hører Sang and Musik nærme sig / One hears song and music approaching*" and omits the words of the ballad altogether, because in the first production of the play they could not afford to hire extras to stage the "ballet" that Strindberg wanted to insert at this point both to show the passage of time and to suggest the maenadic frenzy of the

¹⁷See Sprinchorn 1966: 23.

sexual intercourse that is taking play off-stage. All of our translators, however, supply a text for the peasants to sing. Five of them stick close to the original, as Susan Flakes and I decided to do; the other four (Watts, Meyer, Carlson, and Sprinchorn) provide completely different and quite suggestive versions. Watts creates a ballad about a lady who lost her "shoe" in the woods; six months later, when she begs her seducer to marry her soon, he replies that he has already bestowed a wedding wreath upon another. Meyer too tells a story of seduction, but in his ballad it is the young woman who tells her seducer that she loves another. Carlson, who believes that the "thematic armature" of *Miss Julie* is the fairy tale about the swineherd and the princess, forces his reading of the play as a "fairy tale manqué" on the unsuspecting reader/spectator of his translation by replacing Strindberg's "indirect" ballad with an elaborate story of the unhappy love of a swineherd for a princess.¹⁸ Finally, Sprinchorn has composed a simpler, more generic narrative, which, though it follows Strindberg's notion of the oblique attack, by invoking Jack and Jill suggests more directly than Strindberg does the gender conflict at the heart of this play.

At key moments in the play actions speak louder than words for the spectator, and this fact makes Strindberg's acting directions very important. Jean's delicate repast in the opening sequence, when he dines on kidney accompanied by some of the count's finest Burgundy, is designed to show his affected refinement and his egotistical self-indulgence. He criticizes Kristin for serving his meal on an unwarmed plate and rudely rejects the tumbler she thoughtlessly offers him instead of a wine glass. He is equally sensitive to foul odors (the abortifacient Kristin is preparing for Julie's pregnant bitch Diana) and to alluring scents (Julie's perfumed handkerchief). Finally, he objects to coarse expressions and criticizes Kristin for referring to the concoction for Diana as *fanstyg*, a vulgar expression that has proved to be another stumbling block for translators. It has been variously translated: "bloody muck" (Sprigge), "devil's brew" (Watts); "filthy mess" (Meyer); "hellish concoction" (Johnson); "slop" (Carlson); and "damn mess" (Sprinchorn). What is important here is not so much the word she uses

¹⁸See Carlson 1982: 70.

as Jean's reaction to it, and only Sprigge's rendering seems strong enough to provoke Jean's sharp rejoinder. But in America "bloody" lacks the force it has in Britain.

Though most of Strindberg's acting directions in this play are straightforward and easy to translate, one of the most important of them defies accurate translation into English. It occurs in the sequence where Jean refuses to go out into the garden with Julie to pick lilacs. He is afraid that the social gulf between them will occasion gossip. When Julie offers to step down to his level, he warns her that the people on the estate (*folket*) will not believe that she has not stepped down voluntarily, but that she has fallen. "I have a higher opinion of the people than you do. Come and let's see. Come on," she replies (*SV* 27, 135). Her speech is followed by a significant unspoken thought that must be conveyed by a look: "*Hon ruvar honom med ögonen.*"

This use of the verb *ruva*, the primary meaning of which is "to brood," that is, "to sit on or incubate eggs," is difficult to translate. As in English it also means "to cherish," and "to think anxiously or moodily upon, to ponder." *Ruva* is what a hen does to protect her newly-hatched chicks on the nest and to keep them warm; it is also what medieval dragons did to protect the treasure hoards they guarded so jealously. Strindberg's use of *ruva* here seems to indicate both duration — this is a long and searching look — and tender cherishing. The reader of the literary text must simply try to imagine how Julie "broods" Jean with her eyes, and the actress playing Julie must depend on the translator's attempt to capture the striking image Strindberg uses here to direct her. Our translators render it variously:

Sprigge: "*Gazes into his eyes.*"

Watts: "*She challenges him with her eyes.*"

Meyer: "*She fixes him with her eyes.*"

Johnson: "*She 'examines' him searchingly with her eyes.*"

Carlson: "*She stares at him broodingly.*"

Sprinchorn: "*She gives him a long, steady look.*"

Sprigge's "gaze" to translate *ruva* is too general; and "challenge," "fix," and "examine" seem wrong to me. Carlson and Sprinchorn come

closer: Carlson conveys Julie's mood; Sprinchorn conveys the duration of the gaze. Susan Flakes and I settled for "*She gives him a tender, pleading look.*"

Difficult though it is to find an English equivalent for a word like *ruva*, one faces even greater translation problems in trying to make the culturally-bound practices and the assumptions about class in *Miss Julie* intelligible to a contemporary American audience. The two sources of conflict in this play are the class struggle and the battle of the sexes. In this play Jean embodies divided class loyalties. Is he only a cringing menial who ultimately proves incapable of transcending his hereditary baseness — or is he (as Strindberg described him in a letter to Georg Brandes) another Figaro?¹⁹ At a higher level, Julie, the daughter of a count and a liberated woman of "very simple common origin" (*SV27*, 160), embodies the same divided class loyalties. She also incarnates a preoccupation with sexual duality — masculinity in women, femininity in men. Is she a degenerate half-woman, the last scion of a decadent strain — or is she an incarnation of Nietzsche's "*Master morality*"? Are "determined" characters like Julie and Jean the innocent victims of forces they cannot control, or must they assume responsibility for their actions? These are questions the translator must come to terms with before attempting to reconstruct the verbal unity of Strindberg's original text.

The instability of these "characterless" characters — as Strindberg calls them in the Preface (*SV27*, 104) — and their ambiguous attitudes and divided class loyalties means that they easily can — and do — switch roles. For example, with Kristin in the first sequence in the play Jean enacts the finicky gourmet and wine connoisseur; but the moment Miss Julie enters the kitchen he resumes his role as lackey. Later, when Julie orders him to lay aside his livery, he looks the gentleman, plays the gallant, addresses elegant speeches to her, toasts her and even kisses her shoe; but when he really does try to kiss her, she slaps his face and they return to the rigidly-defined roles of mistress and servant. Upbraiding him for being conceited enough to imagine that she had taken him seriously, she gives a precise definition of the

¹⁹See Strindberg 1992: I, 292.

role conflict that now governs the situation: "Perhaps you're a Don Juan? Or a Joseph? Upon my word, I believe you're a Joseph" (SV27, 138). The two roles are, of course, diametrically opposed. As the male, Jean considers himself to be the sexual aristocrat, the seducer; as a servant, however, he must play the passive, subservient role.

At this point Jean takes refuge in his menial role and his social baseness. For the remainder of the play he is alternately ashamed and proud of his humble origins. This is where the translator encounters almost insuperable problems with culturally-bound concepts and outmoded class assumptions. Jean says that he grew up on the neighboring estate, a *statbarn*, a "cotter's" child. *Statare* were the lowest level of farm workers whose labor was at least partly paid for with natural products like milk, potatoes, and firewood. But this class of farm worker has long since vanished in Sweden, and "cotter" does not mean very much to most Americans. The other untranslatable class word Jean uses to describe his low status is *dräng* ("farm hand"). Unable to win Miss Julie's sympathy as a bogus gentleman, Jean tries his luck with what one might call his *drängegenskaper*. The episode he relates about being trapped in the estate's elegant latrine (in the shape of a Turkish pavilion) shows social degradation in its most disgusting form. He tells how, emerging from the place of excrement, he saw Julie, the unattainable little aristocrat, in a white dress and pink stockings strolling in the rose garden. The sight of her, he claims, made him aware of the injustice of earthly life:

If it's true that a thief can enter the kingdom of Heaven and be with the angels, then it's strange that a cotter's child here on God's green earth cannot come into the Count's park and play with his daughter. (SV27, 141)

In the continuation of the story, which Jean later admits that he found in a newspaper, he creates yet another base social role for himself: "Oh, Miss Julie, oh! A dog can lie on her ladyship's sofa, a horse's muzzle can be stroked by a noble hand, but a ... *dräng*—" (SV27, 141). Now how is one going to translate that bothersome word in this context so that it will convey Strindberg's meaning to an

English-speaking audience? All six of the translators I am considering translate *dräng* in this speech as "servant," which seems pale and much too general. (Since *dreng* is the regular word for "boy" or "lad" in Danish, Nathalia Larsen used *tjenestekarl* ("farm hand") here. German has an even better equivalent for *dräng*: *Knecht*, which is what Peter Weiss uses in his German translation of the play.) By trilling the "r" and landing heavily on the nasal termination of the word, one can fill *dräng* with a degree of contempt that English "servant" is incapable of conveying.

Jean's desire to rise in the world is based on the assumption that aristocrats really are noble; his greatest fear, however, is that there is no essential difference between "people" and "people." His hope has been that his *drängegenskaper* are really inessential, that they are the part of himself that he can easily shed when he gets to a country with a democratic form of government. Julie's social ambivalence has been reinforced by her fiancé, whose egalitarian principles she has temporarily espoused. She wants to believe that rank is something easily laid aside and that people of all classes are capable of the same delicate feeling. But Jean's callousness after the seduction causes her to change her mind:

JEAN

Tänk på Kristin därinne. Tror ni inte att hon också har känslor!

FRÖKEN

Jag trodde det nyss, men jag tror det inte mer! Nej dräng är dräng ...

JEAN

Och hora är hora!

(SV27, 154-155)

JEAN: Think of Kristin in there. Don't you think she has feelings too?

MISS JULIE: I thought so a while ago. But I don't think so any more. No, a churl's a churl ...

JEAN: And a whore's a whore!

(Jacobs and Flakes)

When Julie uses this loaded word *dräng* to label Jean's vulgarity, he immediately equates his social baseness with her moral depravity: "A whore's a whore." The two insults must be equally forceful. But are they so in these translations? Sprigge uses the awkward, polysyllabic word "menial" to translate *dräng* here: "A menial is a menial."²⁰ All the other translators use the rather colorless word "servant" at this point to translate Julie's stinging epithet. Because it can deliver at least some of the contempt of *dräng*, Susan Flakes and I finally settled for the archaic and much too literary word "churl." The tone here must depend more on sound than on sense.

Near the end of the play the troublesome word *dräng* comes back, when Jean discovers that his *drängegenskaper* are part of his permanent makeup. After the count's return, when he dons his livery once more, Jean finds that he is no longer free to exercise power over Julie. He blames his paralysis on "den djävla drängen som sitter i ryggen på mig" (*SV* 27, p. 188). Here only one of our translators, Johnson, uses "servant" to translate *dräng*:

Sprigge: "Well, that devil of a lackey is bending my back again"

Watts: "It must be this livery I've put on my back"

Meyer: "Oh, it's this damned lackey that sits on my back"

Johnson: "It's the damn servant in me"

Carlson: "Ah, it's the damn lackey in me!"

Sprinchorn: "I've got the backbone of a damned lackey"

Watts blames this relapse into servility on the livery, and all the others invoke the word "lackey" to characterize the reappearance of Jean's *drängegenskaper*. Sprinchorn seems to come closest to capturing Jean's self-contempt by changing *rygg* ("back") to "backbone" and using it in a figurative rather than a literal sense. In order to show that Jean is now accepting the denomination he so violently rejected earlier in the play, Susan Flakes and I resorted to "It's this damned churl in

²⁰Strindberg 1955: 94.

the marrow of my bones!" Because of historical differences in class structure between Sweden and America, where small landholders and poor farm workers have never been involved in feudal or semi-feudal relationships to a landed gentry, it will always prove difficult to make class assumptions in a play like *Miss Julie* fully intelligible to American theater audiences. British English, which has a richer active vocabulary of words denoting class distinctions, may be better suited than its American counterpart to conveying Strindberg's sense of class in this play.

I have saved until last the most difficult task for the translator of a protean writer like Strindberg, namely, capturing his tone. Let us see how our six translators deal with a sudden shift in tone on Jean's part. Soon after they emerge from Jean's room, Julie, observing that there are no longer any boundaries between them, asks Jean to address her with the familiar "du" form — always a problem for the anglophone translator; but, insisting that those class barriers will obtain as long as they remain in her father's house, Jean continues to address her either with the formal "ni" or in the third person as "fröken" or "fröken Julie."²¹ Yet after the seduction, having cast aside the mask of the sentimental *dräng* that helped him win Miss Julie's sympathy, Jean reveals a degree of insensitivity and coarseness that shocks her and makes her wonder what could ever have attracted her to him. When she asks him if he knows what love is, he brutally drags her down to his level and crudely equates love and sex. At one point, in order to deflect her attempt to assert her moral as well as her social superiority to him, he becomes both coarse and insultingly familiar in retaliation for her criticism of his vulgar language and his base thoughts. And finally in the flush of sexual triumph he offers her some of her father's purloined burgundy:

FRÖKEN

... Vet ni vad kärlek är?

²¹For an excellent analysis of Strindberg's subtle use of the complex modes of address in this play see Perridon 1998: especially 164-172.

JEAN

Jag? Jo, det vill jag lova; tror ni inte jag varit med förr?

FRÖKEN

Vilket språk ni talar, och vilka tankar ni tänker!

JEAN

Så har jag lärt, och sådan är jag! Var nu inte nervös och spela inte fin, för nu äro vi lika goda kåsupare! - Se så min flicka lilla, kom så ska jag bjuda dig på ett glas extra!

Öppnar bordslådan och tar fram vinbuteljen; fyller två begagnade glas.

(SV27, 153)

Strindberg reinforces this abrupt change of tone with a significant gesture: in the opening sequence when he opened the bottle of fine wine, Jean scornfully rejected the tumbler Kristin offered him and asked for a wine glass; now he pours the wine into the same tumblers from which he and Julie had earlier drunk beer. Let us see how our six translators deal with this shift of tone:

1) Sprigge:

JULIE. Do you know what love is?

JEAN. Do I? You bet I do. Do you think I never had a girl before?

JULIE. The things you say, the things you think!

JEAN. That's what life's taught me, and that's what I am. It's no good getting hysterical or giving yourself airs. We're both in the same boat now. Here, my dear girl, let me give you a glass of something special. *Opens the drawer, takes out the bottle of wine and fills two used glasses.*

2) Watts:

MISS JULIA: Do you know what love is?

JEAN: Me? You can take my word for it! — do you think I've never been there before.

MISS JULIA: That's no way to talk — you have a vulgar mind.

JEAN: That's the way I've been brought up — you must take me as I am. Now don't lose your head, and don't play the fine lady with me — we're in the same boat now. Come on my girl, and I'll treat you to something special. [*Opening the drawer, he takes out the bottle of wine, and fills the two used glasses.*]

3) Meyer:

MISS JULIE: Do you know what love is?

JEAN: I? Yes, of course. Do you think I've never had a woman before?

MISS JULIE: How can you think and talk like that?

JEAN: That's life as I've learned it. And that's me. Now don't get nervous and act the lady. We're both in the same boat now. Come here, my girlie, and I'll give you another glass of wine. [*Opens drawer, takes out the bottle of wine and fills two used wine glasses.*]

4) Johnson:

JULIE: Do you know what love is?

JEAN: I? Yes, I certainly do! Do you think I've never been in on this before?

JULIE: What a language you speak, and what thoughts you think!

JEAN: That's what I've learned, and that's how I am! Don't get nervous now, and don't act refined, for now you're no better than I! — There, there, my girl, come here and I'll offer you a glass of fine wine! (*Opens the drawer in the table and takes out the bottle of wine; fills two used glasses*)

5) Carlson:

JULIE: Do you know what love is?

JEAN: Me? What do you take me for? You don't think this was my first time, do you?

JULIE: The things you say, the thoughts you think!

JEAN: That's the way I was taught, and that's the way I am! Now don't get excited and play the grand lady, because we're in the same boat now!-----Come on, Julie, I'll pour you a glass of

something special! (*He opens a drawer in the table, takes out a wine bottle, and fills two glasses already used.*)

6) Sprinchorn:

MISS JULIE: Love? This? You don't know what love is!

JEAN: Want to bet? Did you think I was a virgin?

MISS JULIE: You're coarse--vulgar! The things you say, the things you think!

JEAN: That's the way I was brought up. It's the way I am! Now don't get hysterical. And don't play the fine lady with me. We're eating off the same platter now. That's better. Come over here and be a good girl and I'll treat you to something special. (*He opens the table drawer and takes out the wine bottle. He pours the wine into two used glasses.*)

Except for Meyer, who takes "ett glas extra" to mean "another glass of wine," all of these translations convey the gist of the original. But how successfully do they render the problematical words that determine the tone here? The "Jo" in Jean's answer, which indicates that he knows Julie anticipates a negative reply to her question, is untranslatable. Four translators render the colorful idiom *lika goda kålsupare* incorrectly with "to be in the same boat," that is, "to be in the same situation"; another Swedish idiom — *sitta i samma båt* — means that. He and Julie are not, as he certainly realizes, in the same boat; for the consequences of their intercourse are potentially far more serious for Julie than for him. What he says really means "each of us is just as good — that is, just as bad as the other." Johnson's otherwise stilted translation of Jean's speech conveys the correct meaning of the idiom, and because a *kålsupare* was originally a person who eats *kålsoppa*, "cabbage soup," Sprinchorn comes very close to the source of this idiom. Whereas Jean has formerly often addressed her with her honorific title, "Fröken Julie," he now cruelly parodies it with the contemptuous "*min flicka lilla*. The fall from *fröken* to *flicka* is great indeed, and the inversion of noun and adjective — "flicka lilla" instead of "lilla flicka" — further belittles her by placing greater emphasis on *lilla*. And now in offering her some of

her own father's burgundy, he uses the familiar form of address for the first time: *så ska jag bjuda dig på ett glas extra*. In this context, however, the familiar objective pronoun *dig* is not a sign of intimacy, but one of contempt, which only Carlson manages to sneak into his translation by letting Jean call her Julie here. *Nervös* has such a wide range of meanings in Swedish that it is very difficult to decide just what Jean uses it to mean here; the one thing it seems not to mean is "nervous," which is simply too mild for the context. *Spela fin* indicates that Jean believes that Julie's upper class propriety is nothing but an act. Among these translations only Sprinchorn's seems to me to come close to conveying the full venom of Jean's speech. Using a slightly different approach, Susan Flakes and I have tentatively settled for the following translation of this passage:

MISS JULIE: Do you know what love is?

JEAN: Me? I sure do! Don't you think I've messed around before?

MISS JULIE: What a way to talk — and to think!

JEAN: That's how I was brought up and that's how I am. So just don't get edgy and don't put on airs, because now we're both tarred with the same brush! So there, little miss! C'mere, I'll treat you to something special. (*He opens the drawer of the table, takes out a wine bottle, and fills two dirty glasses.*)

Tone, like subtext, is ultimately elusive and indeterminate. And yet it is perhaps the most important ingredient in the performance text of a translation. When the tone is wrong, spectators are at a loss to know how to react: serious, pathetic or angry speeches strike them as laugh lines, especially in Strindberg's later, more difficult plays like *Dödsdansen / The Dance of Death* or *Spöksonaten / The Ghost Sonata*. Of course, each director will try different ways of transposing the literary text for the stage, for film, or for a radio version; but I believe that the surest way for a theater director and for actors to capture Strindberg's tone in a performance text is to base it on a heavily-annotated literary translation like those in Inga-Stina Ewbank's *Three Chamber Plays*. Professor Ewbank says that her aim in her translations was "to be as faithful as possible to Strindberg, that is

to try to preserve a sense of his style and use of language: not to explain or clarify his sometimes apparently irrational associations and incoherent sentence structures and dialogue patterns." When explanations seem necessary, she places them in the notes, which, she admits, are "primarily aimed at the directors but may also help readers."²² Her sort of painstaking work as a translator provides what I consider the perfect basis for the establishment of a variety of production texts; and such, I think, should be the aim of all literary translators.

²²Strindberg 1997: 8-9.

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