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**DRAMA TURNING INWARD:
STRINDBERG'S STATION PLAY
and its Expressionist Continuum**

“In art man wants to play God, not in order to create anything new (that he can't do), but in order to repeat, order, improve.”¹ Olle Montanus, the sculptor in Strindberg's first novel, *The Red Room* (1871), writes these words in a suicide note in which he reflects on his own life as an artist and on the compulsive drive to create. Throughout the novel, Montanus serves as the author's mouthpiece and his last observation is no exception, as it reveals in many ways the nature of Strindberg's own artistic drivenness. In particular, it sheds light on Strindberg's ongoing search as a playwright for new dramatic forms that, though signifying a clear break with the immediate tradition, were still embedded in the literary tradition at large.

This philosophy of continuous reform finds its most significant reflection in Strindberg's rearrangement of medieval techniques as employed in late medieval English, French, and German passion plays and mystery cycles. Strindberg studied the ecclesiastical dramatic tradition and was intrigued by the religious content and scenic sequence of medieval plays. He adapted the formal structure of these pieces, which were performed on several stages or stations, for his own semireligious metaphysical plays.² By doing so, he linked his work to a religious dramatic tradition that offered ample opportunity for experimentation. Furthermore, by recreating this century-old, nonclassical dramatic form, he found an instrument which clearly broke with nineteenth century classical drama and the tradition of the

¹August Strindberg, *The Red Room. Scenes of Artistic and Literary Life*. Transl. Elizabeth Sprigge (London: Dent, 1967) 261.

²Among other works, Strindberg consulted Herman A. Ring's, *Teaterns historia* (1898) which provided information about the structure of medieval morality plays.

well-made play. What emerged was a radically modern revival of a tried technique: the Station Play.

The objective of this study is to examine the interplay between form and content in the Station Play, a genre which surprisingly has not been subject to the critical review it deserves. Though it is true that scholars such as Walter Sokel, Peter Szondi, Paul Stefanek, and Helmut Vriessen have discussed certain aspects of this primarily expressionistic genre, much work remains to be done in evaluating the origin, formal principles, and various manifestations of the genre. The need for this becomes especially apparent when one considers the infrequent references to this genre in comprehensive studies on expressionist literature: an example which may come to mind is J.L. Styan's otherwise excellent three-volume *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice* (1981), in which there is no mention of the station play, despite the fact that Styan dedicates several chapters to German Expressionism in the theater in general and to August Strindberg (1849-1912) as forerunner of Expressionism in particular. In this inquiry, the station play will be analyzed in light of the pervasive influence of August Strindberg's dramatic experiments with this new genre. The paper discusses Strindberg's rationale for creating a new dramatic form and examines his methodology. It contrasts the station play's revolutionary novelty with classical drama and studies its main characteristics. Special attention is given to the hypersubjective perspective enabled by the centralized position of the main character, the secondary characters' subordination to the main character, the sequential organization of the scenes, and the network of leading motifs. The paper furthermore applies the genre's defining criteria to a number of German expressionist station plays and juxtaposes the Strindbergian play to its German counterpart.

The Turning Inward of Theater

Strindberg's adaptation of medieval religious plays is apparent in some of his earlier works, for instance *Lucky Per's Journey* and *The Keys to Paradise*. But in 1898, recovered from his well-known "Inferno crisis,"

he wrote a play that came to be looked on as the matrix for the genre of the station play: *To Damascus I*. Together with his later plays *A Dream Play* and the lesser known, even esoteric, *The Great Highway*, it gives the dramatic shape for this new genre, introducing a dramatic technique that would suit the changed subject matter—the isolation and analysis of the individual—better than traditional drama. Strindberg had arrived at the conviction that classical drama was rapidly becoming obsolete, in that it was unable to facilitate the psychological study of man, whose complex inner life had started to be unveiled by psychoanalysis. Therefore, his drive to find a new dramatic vehicle is explained by his urge to develop a format which would enable him to focus on internal conflict. Drama now begins to assume a new role as the externalization of the character's inner world, thus facilitating a new kind of theater: "a theatre with no 'outside', a theatre sufficient to itself and freed from the tyranny of [...] external reality."³

Drama has long been considered the most objective genre,⁴ in that the dramatic development is based on dialogue, an exchange of rational thoughts in a dialectical process. Thus Strindberg's attempt to compose a subjective drama to express his inner struggles is often regarded as an attack on drama itself, and his new form is regarded as anything but dramatic. Yet in his analysis of expressionist drama, Ludwig Marcuse already in 1924 argued that "there are no undramatic plays: all literary works that are founded upon speaking and acting *Ichs* are plays."⁵ In this context, Christopher Innes also points out that the criticized undramatic nature of expressionist drama as a whole derives from its high level of abstraction. In his view, however, this negative evaluation is "mainly based on reading the plays in literary form. But with their relegation of dialogue to a minor role, these are not so much

³Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms. A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 156.

⁴Among others, Gero von Wilpert points out the importance of the "objektivierte Darstellung auf der Bühne" as one of the characteristics of drama. Gero von Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1969) 183.

⁵Ludwig Marcuse, "Das expressionistische Drama," *Weltliteratur der Gegenwart: Deutschland Teil II*. (Berlin: Franz Schneider, 1924) 137.

texts as deliberately incomplete scripts. They should be seen as a framework for mime accompanied by exclamations.”⁶ Thus, the dramatic quality first becomes evident on stage. In defense of the station play as the continuation of a “dramatic” tradition, it must be pointed out that this new genre does not entirely abandon the dialogical (i.e. dramatic) structure, but rather internalizes the dialogue in which the antagonists are aspects of the torn self.

From Station to Station

Strindberg searched for a form in which he could examine the self, show its multitude of often conflicting thoughts, expose it to different situations, and analyze the outcome of the confrontation. His first step was to establish the main character as the basis for all action, focussing on the main character’s worries, fears, and inferiority complex, while disregarding the development of an intriguing story. Essentially, the main character’s psychological struggle *becomes* the plot. These two most important characteristics of the station drama—the centralization of the main character and the fading of a traditional plot—mark the emergence of the “Ich-Drama,” a category first defined by the literary critic Bernhard Diebold and translated, or rather given a new English name, by J.M. Ritchie as “egocentric drama.”⁷ Because the dramatic action evolves entirely around the main character, the drama offers a solipsistic perspective. The stage becomes the visualization of the main character’s imagination; everything that exists in his inner world appears on stage. In its absence of attention to society and the details of the exterior world, this is a radically anti-realistic position. However, Strindberg claims the dramatic scenery to be more real than the world of everyday life, as it includes both the conscious and the transcendental world of the unconscious. In a letter to Gustaf af

⁶Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993) 42-3.

⁷J.M. Ritchie, *German Expressionist Drama* (Boston, 1976) 64.

Geijerstam, Strindberg speaks of a “frightening Half-Reality,”⁸ a twilight zone in which reality and dream world are interwoven. This world exists by the grace of the main character, which means that even the “antagonists” originate in his own imagination.

For example, *To Damascus I* has only one main character, *den Okände*, the Stranger, whose life is the subject matter of the play. He is not a well-balanced character whose actions are strictly logical, but rather, as Strindberg puts it, a “conglomerate” of psychological configurations. The play does not only describe the search of a man for his identity, a *stranger* trying to reach an understanding of himself and his interaction with his surroundings; it rather signifies the departure from a static existence without the sincere belief to ever reach a final destination. Therefore, it is, to use a term which Una Chaudhuri coined, a prime example of a “geopathological” state, a tragic indulgence in the sensation of placelessness and estrangement.⁹ The station play conveys the notion of non-belonging and serves as a new, powerful metaphor of exile.

To Damascus I is not a monodrama, a play in which only one character speaks. The Stranger confronts other characters who cross his path of self-analysis, but these characters do not develop independently of the Stranger. They are created through his inner eye and are consequently aspects of his mind. This implies that all dialogues between the Stranger and the other characters, the Lady, the Doctor, the Beggar, are actually monologues, self-reflections of the Stranger, that are projected outside himself into the other characters. Thus the Stranger “creates” the other characters in order to confront himself with certain aspects of himself that they embody. Without the Stranger, the other characters cease to exist; he is the cardinal point of the play, a play whose only limitations are his inner space. This signals a clear

⁸See also Egil Törnqvist, “Strindberg and the Drama of Half-Reality: An Analysis of *To Damascus I*.” *Strindberg and Modern Theatre* (Stockholm: Strindbergs-sällskapet, 1975) 119-151.

⁹Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place. The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) 13.

break from the classical tradition in which the dramatic action is evoked by the interplay of largely sovereign characters.

The dependence of the secondary characters on the Stranger becomes obvious during the first encounter between the Stranger and the Lady. He expresses his power over her by renaming her “Eve,” though her real name appears to be “Ingeborg.” She is the incarnation of his ideal woman, his “anima,” called to life through his desire for her. The Stranger says to her mother, “By giving her a name I selected I made her mine just as I intend to make her over according to my wishes.”¹⁰ This subordination also applies to the other characters: the beggar is the Stranger’s double, bearing a mark on his forehead similar to the Stranger’s mark of Cain, the outcast. The doctor is the Stranger’s *angst*-projection. By extruding this image of fear from his mind into his imaginary world, he can try to overcome his own anxieties through exposing himself to the incarnation of his fears—to the “doctor.” All characters have a specific function that relates directly to the Stranger. Without the Stranger’s need for them, they fade away until he calls for them again.

The apparent discrepancy in importance given to the *dramatis personae* constitutes a terminological problem. Since most characters, i.e. characters in the traditional sense of the word, display a certain idea rather than individualize themselves by developing their own distinctive qualities, the word *character* seems a contradiction in terms. Therefore, the word *figure* would be better suitable for them and would capture their decreased significance. This would further be in agreement with Manfred Pfister’s ontological differentiation between character and figure: his description of ‘figure’ as something deliberately artificial, functional rather than autonomous as an individual,¹¹ approximates Strindberg’s previously mentioned notion of characters as “conglomerates” of psychological configurations, i.e. constructs rather than real-life persons.

¹⁰August Strindberg, “To Damascus I,” *Plays of Confession and Therapy*, transl. by Walter Johnson. (Seattle: University of Washington, 1979) 56.

¹¹Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 161.

The centralization of this main “figure,” then, is the most important characteristic of the station play. It is his journey through the scenes that creates the dramatic format, in which the unity of place and time is abandoned and the emerged spacial and temporal disunity mirrors both the breakdown of spacial order—implicating the impossibility of *being* and belonging somewhere—and the timelessness of this condition. The structure of the journey through the tableaux is not necessarily chronological, for this would limit the dramatic possibilities of the play and would give the erroneous impression of linear goal-orientedness. Strindberg adopts a “dreamlike structure,” as he explains in his much-cited preface to *A Dream Play*:

In this dream play, as in his former dream play *To Damascus*, the Author has sought to reproduce the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream [...]. The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallise, scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all—that of the dreamer.¹²

This dreamer is able to disregard boundaries that exist in real life: his world is a world far richer than the mere depiction of everyday life, but it is not a dream. It is a dramatic reconstruction of life in accordance with an underlying pattern of meaning which comes to light as the play progresses.

What we see in the station play is a revolutionary dramatic form that abandons the traditional, classical structure of exposition, intensification, climax, peripety and catastrophe, and disregards the unity of time and place and the development of a plot. To use Walter Sokel’s terminology, the play is “theme-centered”—the I-figure’s quest as the play’s thematic thread—rather than “plot-centered.”¹³ Though this may hold true for Strindberg’s station plays due to their thematic

¹²Preface to *A Dream Play*, transl. Elizabeth Sprigge (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955) 193.

¹³Walter H. Sokel, *Anthology of German Expressionist Drama: A Prelude to the Absurd*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) xxi.

repetition and lack of dramatic tension, its application to later German plays is problematic, as they tend to be conflict-centered: the archimedical point, as we will see in the discussion of German station plays, becomes the tension between the main character and his father, which then determines the psychological structure of the play. Peter Nicholls submits that the underlying pattern of expressionist drama is essentially the Oedipal conflict: "the family narrative is, in fact, everywhere in Expressionist theatre."¹⁴ This would constrain the expressionist drama of rebellion to a very narrowly defined frame, yet one could argue that Strindberg is able to transcend the "deterministic power of the Oedipal plot,"¹⁵ in that both the *Stranger in To Damascus I* and the *Hunter in The Great Highway* make no mention of their fathers and have abandoned their wives and children before the actual onset of the dramatic action. Their rebellion is turned against a metaphysical father image parallel to the conflict between Jacob and God. The patriarchal law from which they try to free themselves is a real factor, yet this constitutes a conflict very different from Nicholls' Oedipus plot. The entanglement of later German station plays with the Oedipal conflict would then present a clear deviation from the structure which Strindberg laid out in his drama. The Oedipal plot will be further discussed in the section "The German Station Plays."

Since the genre of the station play derives its very name from the structure it employs, the precise nature of these "stations" needs to be explored. It was Strindberg who coined this term in *To Damascus I*, when the Mother of the Lady says to the Stranger: "My Son! You have left Jerusalem and you're on the way to Damascus. Go there! The same way you came, and place a cross at each station but stop at the seventh. You don't have fourteen as He did!"¹⁶ Here the *station* is a dramatic episode in the form of an imaginary journey, directly associated with Christ's fourteen stations of the cross. In *To Damascus I*, these stations are not congruous with the scenes that structure the play, since the

¹⁴Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 159.

¹⁵Nicholls, 159.

¹⁶*To Damascus I*, 76.

seven stations on the Stranger's way to purify his soul are embedded in six scenes; hence the stations are smaller units than scenes.¹⁷ In *The Great Highway*, the station structure is followed through more consistently, because the seven stations on the I-figure's path correspond with the number of scenes. In the latter play, the formal unit of a station can be equated with a scene. In plays influenced by Strindberg, the station may denote a sequence of scenes (Georg Kaiser's *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*) or sometimes even an entire act (Reinhard Johannes Sorge's *Der Bettler*; and Georg Kaiser's *Hölle - Weg - Erde*).

Each station is an intersection on the main figure's path of life, where he meets certain personages and faces problems he must overcome—or at least consider—in order to continue his quest. The sequence of stations, meticulously planned, depicts the road on which the main figure journeys. The image of the road in the station play serves two purposes: firstly, it is a metaphor of transition that conveys a sense of rootlessness and facilitates the continuing yet vain search for self-realization. It allegorizes a rupture of the social construct of which the main figure can no longer be a part. In this respect, it exemplifies what Una Chaudhuri calls “ecological transit,” during which characters are “utterly and irremediably at odds with their environments.”¹⁸ Secondly, the image of the road is an important formal device that holds the otherwise loosely structured scenes tightly together.¹⁹

¹⁷In his otherwise enlightening article *Zur Dramaturgie des Stationendramas* (“Beiträge zur Poetik des Dramas,” ed. Werner Keller. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), Paul Stefanek considers the smallest station-unit to be the scene. This would, as shown here, disagree with Strindberg's play, because the scenic structure clearly spans the stations on the Stranger's journey.

¹⁸Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place. The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) 81.

¹⁹See also Ruprecht Volz, *Strindbergs Wanderungsdramen: Studien zur Episierung des Dramas mit einer Edition unveröffentlichter Entwürfe zu “Till Damaskus IV”* (München: TUDUV-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1982).

In Strindberg's station play, the relatively free structural arrangement replaces, for the first time, the principle of logical sequence: here the selection and disposition of elements is dictated not by a syllogistic principle—the "Aristotelian" demand for the three unities—but mainly by a necessity arising from the playwright's inner sense of design. This stresses the anti-mimetic nature of the station play and allows an analogy to expressionist art in which, according to Wassily Kandinsky, the guiding force should be the internal necessity, creating a sovereign structure. Christopher Innes even goes as far as to compare what he calls "arc of discontinuous scenes (*Bilderbogen*)" to the "visual artists' preference for curvilinear forms."²⁰ This "internally necessary" design in *To Damascus I*, as is well known, consists of a mirror-construction, in which the first eight stations on the Stranger's journey towards the central scene, *the Asylum*, are reflected in the last eight stations, which regress in reverse order, creating a cyclical arrangement. In essence, the play ends where it begins.

Strindberg had come to believe that life is repetitive: confrontations with aspects of one's life again and again cause a constant struggle with one's own past. This conviction is displayed in the dramatic technique of his station play: certain leading motifs in the play are repeated over and over. Episodes from the past are constantly revived by these suggestive touches; by means of leitmotifs, the drama is woven together into an organic whole. To these motifs, Strindberg assigns a symbolic meaning that recurs throughout the play. The Stranger in *To Damascus I* is fully aware of the repetitive character and wonders about the meaning he can derive from it: "Why does everything have to repeat itself [...] dead bodies and beggars and madmen and human destinies and childhood memories."²¹ As the Stranger reflects on the repetition of motifs, he suspects a metaphysical power to be the impetus behind his inner torture. Hence the landscape he journeys through becomes a highly symbolic landscape in which each detail is to be interpreted within a moral frame. Repetition of certain symbols

²⁰Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre. 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993) 39.

²¹*To Damascus I*, 40.

emphasizes their importance for the main character's search. The play becomes a cluster of repetitive elements embedded in repetitious stations.

Strindberg's Reception in Germany

Strindberg's new dramatic technique was adapted by a whole generation of German playwrights, whose work was frequently little more than imitative. After 1905 Strindberg's plays, such as *To Damascus I* and *A Dream Play*, were performed in German theaters more frequently than Gerhard Hauptmann's or Frank Wedekind's dramas, and the latter of Strindberg's plays soon became much more popular. In fact, a controversy arose about the question whether or not *To Damascus I* could at all be performed adequately. Therefore, if one only took the sheer number of performances into consideration, the influence of *A Dream Play* would have to be much greater. Yet, as Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer rightly points out, Strindberg's influence was not only exerted through the actual performances, but rather through his intentions.²² There was a general consensus about the highly modern and innovative qualities of *To Damascus I* which, enstaged, proved to be much less of a success. In general, one could say that Strindberg's influence on expressionist drama was of the same magnitude as Nietzsche's influence on expressionist thought. Strindberg's station play concept was received as a technical breakthrough, offering the playwright a vast field of dramatic expression that captures the essence of human struggle.

The station play's centralized main figure served as an adequate medium to show the apparent disassociation of the self, one of the main concerns of expressionist playwrights. The antirealistic visualization of a journey through a symbolic inner landscape fascinated writers who tried to express psychological and irrational processes in the human

²²Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer, Hans Otto Horch, Georg-Michael Schulz, *Strindberg auf der deutschen Bühne. Eine exemplarische Rezeptionsgeschichte der Moderne in Dokumenten (1890 bis 1925)* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz, 1983) 38.

mind. However, one has to recall that the journey displayed in Strindberg's plays clearly removes the main figure from society, whereas the expressionist playwrights' first and foremost concern was the possibility—after the necessary break with tradition and paternal structures—of a reunion of the alienated and isolated self with society. This indicates an important difference in ideology between Strindberg and the generation of expressionist dramatists.

The German Station Plays

Approximately fifty German plays written from 1911 to 1920 are structured according to the station play technique, developing this genre and trying out its dramatic possibilities. Among these plays are Johannes Sorge's *Der Bettler* (1912), Hasenclever's *Die Menschen* (1918), Kaiser's *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts* (1917), Toller's *Die Wandlung* (1919), Brecht's *Baal* (1919) and Zuckmayer's *Kreuzweg* (1920).

The term *station play*, assigned to this genre by literary critics, was seldom used as a subtitle of a play. Only a small group of plays define the scenes as "stations," such as Julius Becker's *Das letzte Gericht: Eine Passion in vierzehn Stationen* (1919) or Hermann Kasack's *Die Schwester: Eine Tragödie in acht Stationen* (1920). The first drama in which the term "stations" is used as a formal unit was Strindberg's *Wanderdrama (Vandrardrama)*:²³ *The Great Highway: Journey in Seven Stations* (1909).

Most German expressionist station plays are structured in accordance with the scenic sequence in *To Damascus I*, a monological main figure wanders through a set of scenes that are structured around him and that reflect his inner life. Yet this dramatic frame is presented in a number of varieties which together show the multitude of possibilities

²³As Ruprecht Volz states in his study *Strindbergs Wanderungsdramen*, it was Gunnar Ollén who reintroduced this term coined by Strindberg to describe the type of drama that displays an inner journey. Gunnar Ollén, *Strindbergs dramatik. En handbok* (Stockholm: Sveriges Radio, 1961) 359.

this genre offers. Expressionist playwrights, keenly aware of the station play's popularity, exhausted themselves in searching for different subtitles for their plays that would show their indebtedness to the station structure, while at the same time advertise their originality and newness, such as Friedrich Wolf's *Der Unbedingte: Ein Weg in drei Windungen und einer Überwindung* (1919) or Dietzschmidt's *Die Verfolgung: Ein Alpdruck in sieben Stationen* (1918). However, the variety in titles is countered by the repetitiveness in subject matter, since most plays show a single man's existential struggle with himself and his surroundings.

In all but two German station plays—Toller's *Masse Mensch* (1919) and Zuckmayer's *Kreuzweg*—the main figure is a man, accompanied on his journey by a woman. Frequently the figure is nameless, so as to illustrate his loss of and search for identity. He is simply called "He" or "the Man"—the dramatic representative of mankind. He is furthermore named after his profession (oftentimes "der Dichter") or his name conveys a symbolic meaning ("der Jäger," "Hart," "Peregrinus," or "Bitterlich").

Characteristic of the main figure in the expressionist station play is his obsessive—Strindbergian—self-exploration, a mostly metaphysical preoccupation with his inner world which brings about a completely solipsistic view on life. In short, the "I" becomes the center of the universe around which all secondary figures are structured subordinately. Yet paradoxically, this notion coincides with a deeply felt loneliness, an awareness of his self-inflicted break with society. The central figure is torn between his longing for isolation, for an existence as a self-contained being, and his desire to be a part of that very society from which he consciously broke away. Yet what sets the majority of German plays apart from their Strindbergian model is the maintained illusion that the connection between the individual and the "other" is not lost indefinitely, but that it can be re-established. The suffering becomes meaningful, even instrumental, whereas in Strindberg's plays one is seldom left with a sense of purposefulness.

But other, far less optimistic, views are presented in which the central figure remains embraced by an unwavering self-centeredness that nourishes his ultimate conviction to be a sublime superego,

preventing him from a reconciliation with his community and driving him into complete isolation. This is paradigmatically evident in Franz Csokor's *Die Rote Straße*.²⁴ The main figure, "He," in his obsession with the diabolic side of his psyche and with the worship of his own "Weltschmerz," gives no attention to the people close to him and is therefore abandoned. His self-inflicted social exclusion is inevitable. Other examples are "Bitterlich" in Paul Kornfeld's *Die Verführung*,²⁵ who detaches himself from the omnipresent petty-bourgeoisie which he despises, and "Peregrinus," after whom Reinhard Koester's play is named.²⁶ Peregrinus chooses to live in solitude after many disillusionments in his relation to other people.

Confronting the Other

An important similarity between Strindberg's plays and the body of German station plays is the emergence of imaginary figures, offsprings of the main figure's own mind with whom he engages in conversation. His psychic dichotomy frequently finds expression in the appearance of a "Double," the "Other," who represents an idea that arises from the central figure's mind, though he himself had not been forced to confront it directly. The Double challenges him to a dialogue that reveals his schizophrenic disposition and—in most German plays—enables him to ultimately eliminate the paralyzing effects of his torment. The secluded main figure becomes aware of his responsibility in society as a member and a leader. His obsession with the self paradoxically evokes his "transformation" from self-indulgent egocentrism to selfless love, compassion, and leadership: the emergence of the "New Man".

²⁴Franz Theodor Csokor, *Die rote Straße: Ein dramatisches Werk in vierzehn Bildern* (Weimar: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1918).

²⁵Paul Kornfeld, *Die Verführung: Eine Tragödie* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1921).

²⁶Reinhard Koester, *Peregrinus: Drama in neun Bildern* (München: Kurt Wolff, 1919).

The most frequently appearing secondary figure is a woman who accompanies the main figure on his journey. As the man assigns certain symbolic names to himself, he himself is confronted by a female figure whose name allows insight into her specific role in the main figure's life. According to their relevance in the transformatory process that the main figure is going through, it is helpful to divide these female figures into six "types" that together capture the essence of her relation to the central figure: the woman as *Maria*, *Eve*, the *fallen woman*, the central figure's personified *Anima*, *femme fatale*, or *Sybil*. All of these originate in the main figure's deep longings for direction and companionship.

The Maria figure, repeatedly described as "radiant" or "luminous," embodies the positive energy to which the wandering main figure orientates himself. Her role in his "becoming" is crucial, since she sets him an example of purity and selflessness and convinces him of his mission. Eve's fate is intertwined with Adam's, the main figure's. Her name symbolizes a primal solidarity in fate—a shared responsibility for their wrongdoing and a joint effort to reach inner purification. The fallen woman has a naive yet pure love for humankind, a forgiving nature, and utter selflessness that strengthens the main figure's will to overcome his resentment and guides him on his way to becoming a *New Human Being*. Furthermore, the woman embodies the central figure's female principle or the projection of his anima, with which he pursues unification in order to regain his inner balance. Sealed together with his anima, his shattered self becomes whole again. The woman depicted as Sibyl conveys crucial insights into the very nature of the main figure, which together are the key to his final understanding of himself and his mission. In sharp contrast to these types of female figures in the expressionist station play is the *femme fatale*, "la belle dame sans merci." While in most cases the female figure is a catalyst for the man's personal change and a mental guide, the *femme fatale* seduces the man through her sexual attractiveness, entices him into her web of lust and temptation, and finally abandons him and leaves him in despair.

The central figure's desperate need for direction crystallizes furthermore into a *dramatis persona* who personifies friendship and guidance, the figure of the Friend. As opposed to the woman, who

accompanies the central figure on his journey throughout the scenes, the friend usually appears only in one station to give him advice. The friend is the answer to the main figure's cry for help, and his only function is to enlighten him, after which he does not reappear. The friend shows no development, as the main figure and the woman do, but he derives his ability to help and guide the central figure from his own experiences as an alienated wanderer; the friend's advice originates in the depth of his own personal inferno.

A topic that certainly deserves mentioning is the main figure's resentment toward his parents, yet its discussion is less helpful for the definition of the generic boundaries than for the understanding of the main figure in the social context of Germany before the Great War. In the central figure's view, the parental home is the very source of his misery, because it represents a whole (Wilhelminian) generation defined by stifling oppression, authoritarianism, and bourgeois narrow-mindedness. By breaking away from his parents—in itself an expressionist topos and by no means limited to the genre of the station play—he hopes to rid himself of the wounds his youth had left him and open up new perspectives in his life. The confrontation between the two generations and the final break with the old becomes a *conditio sine qua non* for the central figure's further development and the examining of the self. Richard William Sheppard, in his study of four expressionist *Ich-Dramen*,²⁷ views the very structure of these plays as Oedipal, in that it reflects the I-Figure's Lacanian attempt to overcome the "state of castration" inflicted by the Father by distancing himself from, even eliminating this symbol of authority. This analysis is useful for our understanding of the dramatic structure insofar as it reveals as the cause of all action a deeply felt sense of "lack" of something indispensable. Yet the Oedipal plot only applies in its most abstract, unclassical form, i.e. with the understanding of the father as the patriarchal Law, whose power is felt not only through physical presence, but as an abstract, even absent entity. Sheppard convincingly applies the Oedipal conflict to four *Ich-Dramen*, which are also good

²⁷Richard William Sheppard, "Unholy Families: The Oedipal Psychopathology of Four Expressionist *Ich-Dramen*," *Orbis Litterarum* 41 (1986): 355-383.

examples of station plays: Hasenclever's *Der Sohn*, Kaiser's *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*, Sorge's *Der Bettler*, and Johst's *Der Einsame*. A weakness is the rather unprecise conceptualization of the Father which strains the classical understanding of the Oedipal plot and which allows Sheppard to consider the "Kassierer" in Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* to be a "Kastrierter" who has been deprived by the absent Father, the bank, and who compensates his loss by stealing money. Also, the Lacanian notion of the Oedipal conflict as tragic, unsolvable, leaves little room for a possibility of changing the status quo: "Consequently, the four plays implicitly suggest, notwithstanding any revolutionary rhetoric in the foreground, that a nihilistic hopelessness is the only alternative to the dominant, patriarchal code."²⁸ Though this is certainly true for the station plays that Sheppard analyzes, it cannot be considered a formal hallmark of the station play in general.

Archetypes of Alienation

Crucial in all station plays is the central figure's perception of himself as an outcast—at odds with his parents, alienated from his community, deprived of his social privileges, and abandoned even by his closest friends. This notion provides a deep insight into his own mind. Yet his understanding does not contribute to his peace of mind, but rather causes his despair. Similar to the "Stranger" in *To Damascus I*, the central figure frequently looks upon himself as "Cain" or "Ahasuerus" and consequently admits his own guilt and largely accepts the responsibility for his deprivation. His reference to and identification with this archetypal outcast broadens the dramatic spectrum, as his fate is understood as a metaphysical punishment for his own wrongdoing.

Simultaneously, in trying to unwind the many threads that together spin his fate, the outlaw equates his sufferings with Adam's and

²⁸Sheppard, 376.

considers himself the “first man.” Consequently, his feelings of guilt become even stronger, as he takes Adam’s fateful disobedience to God on his shoulders. His identification with Adam supports the previous statement that the central figure in the station play doesn’t represent one isolated case or one man among thousands, but “der Mensch” as a representative of all mankind, his personal inner struggle as man’s struggle. In a number of station plays, a striking parallel can also be drawn to the biblical figure Jacob, exemplified in Strindberg’s “Stranger,” who is symbolically left limping after a mystical battle with God. The tormented figure challenges his fate and therefore not only turns against society, but also against God, whom he holds responsible for his misery. In several plays the main figure detects profound similarities to Christ’s calvary. During his moments of self-aggrandizement, he considers his torture to be a “*via dolorosa*,” which puts his torment in a teleological perspective: his wandering becomes a mission to save the very world that has eluded him.

Metaphorical Structures

The German expressionist station play, in all its formal variations, shows two distinctly different main structures: the circular and the linear structure. The station play’s dominant structure can be traced back to Strindberg’s *To Damascus I* and *The Great Highway*, in which, as was shown previously, both the “Stranger” and the “Hunter” end their journey at the very same point as where they had started it. The plays’ first scenes are congruous with the central figures’ final “stations,” an example of the circular structure. Yet many station plays are linear sequences of scenes, whereby the dramatic form supports the central figure’s teleological explanation for his wanderings; the action is geared to reaching a goal, whereas the circular structure conveys the pessimistic view that all attempts and all sufferings are futile.

Both structural arrangements convey the metaphor of the “way” or the “road” that leads the main figure through various tableaux of his life, and which concurrently functions as the prime leitmotif that

strings the isolated stations together to a whole. The titles of a number of station plays reveal the importance of this metaphor: Franz Csokor's *Die rote Straße*, Georg Kaiser's *Hölle - Weg - Erde* and Strindberg's *The Great Highway*. The metaphor is of vital importance to the coherence of the scenic structure, because it compensates for the frequent shifts in time and place, otherwise unjustifiable in classical Aristotelian drama. The stations on the main figure's wanderings are manifold and the dramatic action oftentimes spans months, years, and — in Frido Grelle's *Ahasver, der ewige Kampf!* — even centuries. The discontinuous entities of time and location are stripped of their formal functions and now take on a symbolic meaning. The main figure's journey leads him through the seasons that present various landscapes and environments in which he is constantly exposed to new thoughts and ideas, problems, and solutions.

The dramatic construct is further supported by a network of secondary leitmotifs, a technique Strindberg introduced in his station plays to illustrate life's repetitiveness and man's illusive sense of inner development. Each leitmotif conveys a symbolic meaning that is presented at the beginning of the play and that recurs throughout the scenes. Numerous examples occur in German expressionist station plays. Most remarkable is the abundance of arbitrary colors in the set design as well as in the text, to which a fairly consistent symbolic meaning within the play can be assigned. In Paul Kornfeld's *Die Verführung*, it becomes obvious that the use of colors is instrumental in externalizing the main figure's feelings when one of the figures says, "Gedanken strömen Luft aus [...] Pfu! Gedanken haben Farben!"²⁹ Colors create a sophisticated idiom, most apparent in Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, in which a range of colors is introduced and frequently reappears: the blue aconite or the blue sails in Fairbay, expressing hope, and the woman's fading blue dress in Foulhaven, coinciding with her loss of love; the lawyer's black hands or the blackened hills in Foulhaven, epitomizing sadness and despair; the officer's red bouquet of roses, symbolizing lost hope and love, and the red pennants in the

²⁹Paul Kornfeld, *Die Verführung: Eine Tragödie* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1921) 129.

boats' masts in Fairbay, contrasting sharply with the sulphurous yellow in Foulhaven and the yellow flag the quarantine master waves to prevent people from entering this infectious area. The Officer's answer to the Daughter of Indra's question about the significance of the red signal flag on the ship in Fairhaven reveals the nonverbal symbolic language of colors, arbitrarily and subjectively determined:

OFFICER: It means *yes*. It is the lieutenant's *yes* in red, red
as heart's blood, written on the blue cloth of the sky.

DAUGHTER: Then what is *no* like?

OFFICER: Blue as tainted blood in blue veins.³⁰

Besides the reiteration of semantically defined colors, the station play shows a variety of motifs whose prime function is the formal support of the main theme: leitmotifs frequently consist of one single word that is repeated or parodied throughout the play. This single-worded leitmotif is shown paradigmatically in Georg Kaiser's *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*, in which the key motif, the "Bank" (a monetary institution), is revealed to be a "Fleischbank" that ultimately leads the main figure to repentance at the "Bußbank." Furthermore, leitmotifs appear in reiterated aphoristic phrases, repetitiously presented Ideas, or "*Dingsymbole*" that either recur invariably or that change in the course of the play, such as the growing castle in Strindberg's *Dream Play* or the Lady's progressing crochet work in *To Damascus I*, whose threads stitch together all the Lady's and the Stranger's sorrows. Finally, in a number of station plays, musical fragments are repeated. This pursuit relates certain dramatic tableaux to previous ones in the scenic sequence, in that the music heard evokes associations that are constant throughout the play.

Conclusion

³⁰*A Dream Play*, 236.

August Strindberg's attempt to radically renew drama found its echo in the many dramatic experiments during the high tide of German Expressionism. One must agree with Thomas Mann's assessment of Strindberg not only as an important contributor to expressionism and surrealism, but rather as a pioneer whose groundbreaking work triggered important artistic impulses:

Als Dichter, Denker, Prophet, Träger neuen Weltgefühls stieß Strindberg so weit vor, als daß heute sein Werk im geringsten ermattet anmuten könnte. Außerhalb der Schulen und Strömungen und über ihnen stehend, vereinigte er sie alle. Naturalist so gut wie Neuromantiker, nimmt er den Expressionismus vorweg, macht sich die ganze Generation verpflichtet, die auf diesen Namen hörte, und ist auch zugleich noch der erste Surrealist—der erste in jedem Sinn.³¹

The "first in every sense of the word," Strindberg can also rightfully be called the architect of the modern station play which served as a blueprint for the dramatic experiments of many expressionist playwrights. These writers turned to and explored the genre of the station play as the innovative dramatic vehicle and model for the conceptualization of a dramatically changed world *par excellence*. The station play must be considered largely an expressionist genre, though one can certainly find dramatic examples that show its viability beyond the expressionist era. Noteworthy in this context is the indebtedness of one of postwar Germany's most important and successful plays to the station play technique: Wolfgang Borchert's *Draußen vor der Tür* (1947). It must be said, however, that the end of Expressionism coincides with a dramatic drop in station play productions. Many of the expressionist station plays were debuts for the playwrights; Franz Werfel wrote only one station play, *Der Spiegelmensch: Eine magische Trilogie* (1920), after which he turned to a more realistic style; Carl Zuckmayer's *Kreuzweg* (1920) was followed by a lighthearted comedy,

³¹Thomas Mann, 'August Strindberg', *Reden und Aufsätze 2* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1960) 371.

Der fröhliche Weinberg (1925); Hermann Kasack's fascination with the station play technique made him one of the more productive playwrights in this genre with *Das schöne Fräulein* (1918), *Die Schwester* (1920), and *Die tragische Sendung* (1920). Most of these station plays have been forgotten, due largely to their derivative character and their often highly idealistic content reminiscent of the expressionist *O Mensch-Dichtung*. However, their large number bears witness to the pervasiveness of this genre, a hotbed of dramatic experimentation and an important contribution to the development of modern drama.