

# Between Vision and Doubt

## Re-assessing the Radicalism of Strindberg's Italian Travel Writing and *Likt och olikt* (1884)

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AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS VOLUNTARY EXILE in France and Switzerland, August Strindberg planned and published a series of social and political essays, some of which explicitly reflected his travel in Europe. *Likt och olikt* (A Bit of Everything) was conceived as a platform for his campaign to be recognized as a radical, politically committed writer, one of his main goals during his first period abroad. As the title implies, the series was meant to cover a wide range of topics (*Brev* 4: III), but only two issues that included four essays in all were published in the late spring of 1884. The first consisted of one long essay that has become a minor classic at least in part due to its evocative title, “Om det allmänna missnöjet, dess orsaker och botemedel” (On the General Discontent, Its Causes and Cures). The second—and last—contained three shorter essays, less often read today, but equally compellingly entitled: “Livsglädjen” (The Joy of Living), “Kulturarbetets överskattning” (The Overestimation of Cultural Work), and “Nationalitet och svenskhet” (Nationality and Swedishness).<sup>1</sup>

With titles like these, Strindberg's essays and socio-political prose of the mid-1880s provide a revealing lens through which to observe the fascinating ways in which a late nineteenth-century writer becomes entangled in the dilemmas and paradoxes of modernity that promise liberation while threatening, at the same time, new forms of subjection (Berman 15–36). In this respect, Strindberg's peculiar and idiosyncratic form of radicalism is interesting more for its general cultural implications than for any biographical interpretation seemingly portraying

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1. I use the English titles of Strindberg's works consistently according to Michael Robinson's list of English titles in *The Cambridge Companion to August Strindberg* (xxxii–xxxvii).

the writer as contradictory and whimsical. Contemporary readers have no difficulty recognizing Strindberg's critique of modernity in *Likt och olikt*, including what can be understood as a significant environmental concern. Strindberg's critique is more effective than the rather vague and Arcadian remedies he proposes. In this sense, *Likt och olikt* shares the problematic aspect of utopian writing generally in which dissatisfaction with the state of affairs causes the author to relinquish contradictions and advance a vision of a comprehensive solution. While these texts thus display Strindberg's regressive and anti-modern tendencies, as some of his contemporaries already could see, they express, at the same time, a decidedly democratic and anti-monarchic radicalism. This stance is part of an overall progressive and optimistic vision of a parliamentary federal system that, while allowing more direct democracy, could eventually lead to the political unity of Europe and constitute a stronger guarantee of peace among nations, a perspective derived from Strindberg's experience of living in Switzerland. As Elena Balzamo has suggested, some political visions can sometimes come true (25); others—most of them, in fact—remain the object of the writer's yearning.

The contradictions in Strindberg's thinking become particularly interesting in relation to the subjective strategy brought to bear on the narrative style in the essays of *Likt och olikt* and in other near-contemporary essays. By means of a basically subjective approach, Strindberg can express not only his vision of a cure, but also his doubts and questions as well as his awareness of being implicated in the general social disease being analyzed. This attitude becomes particularly relevant when the analysis in "Om det allmänna missnöjet" deals with the social function of art and literature. Strindberg's scrutiny is general and objective and, thus, yields a sociology of literature. It is also necessarily, however, individual and subjective and thus a self-examination. Since Strindberg is a writer, he cannot but include his own professional experience—and his own controversial relationship to art and writing—within his observations.

The primary aim of this essay is to discuss Strindberg's ideas on the future role of art and literature within the frame of the simultaneously progressive and regressive social theory advanced in *Likt och olikt*. I subsequently intend to elucidate related views as expressed in the long poem *Sömngångarnätter på vakna dagar* (Sleepwalking Nights in Broad Daylight), the first four sequences of which were written in Paris in late fall 1883 while Strindberg was gathering his source material and preparing to write the essays on social issues (*Dikter* 161–224). In so doing, I will

explore a further paradoxical relationship between Strindberg's political and poetic writing and show how the political essays take advantage of the transnational perspective developed in the poem while at the same time rejecting the social function of poetry altogether.

*Likt och olikt* was initially conceived as a long-term project. Other essays were written and might have been included in subsequent issues of the journal had Strindberg been more consistently engaged in the project and had his publisher—Bonnier—encouraged such nonfictional, essayistic writing (Lindström 363–74). In the conclusion, I seek to connect the above with two little-studied, near-contemporary texts that were among those Strindberg intended to include in *Likt och olikt* (*Brev* 4: 267): “Från det vaknande Italien: Sommarbrev i mars” (From the Awakening Italy: Summer Letters in March) and a portrait of Strindberg's Norwegian fellow writer: “Björnstjerne Björnson.” The first was written during a two-week visit to northwestern Italy in the first half of March 1884, the second (in French) in May 1884. In these essays, his commitment to democratic politics and to a transnational, European perspective are reinforced: the birth of Norwegian parliamentary government is interwoven with the egalitarianism inspired by Switzerland. A more accurate contextualization of “Från det vaknande Italien” in these terms can, moreover, foster a more penetrating understanding of the essay than a slating reportage about the purported beauty of the Mediterranean country as it has generally been known.

Through all these interrelated steps the ultimate purpose of this article is, thus, to gain a better understanding of Strindberg's democratic radicalism during a phase of change and the emergence of new orientations as well as of his intellectual attitude and narrative strategies in the subjective, political, and transnational essays written in 1884.

Among the essays in *Likt och olikt*, “Om det allmänna missnöjet” is the most analytic and ambitious attempt to consider the state of contemporary society as a whole and to find remedies for what is diagnosed as the veritable disease of modernity. “Livsglädjen” and “Kulturarbetets överskattning” vary the themes formulated in the main essay, whereas “Nationalitet och svenskhet” develops a new theme. According to Strindberg, the economic and social organization had brought about a deleterious separation between the exploited and nourished members of society, i.e. between the farmers, on the one hand, and the exploitive urban population on the other. Specialization had rendered the civilized part of humanity unable to accomplish practical tasks and undertake

physical labor. The social hierarchy was dangerously distorted when the rural work of providing nourishment was marginalized vis-à-vis the urban pursuit of science, art, and industry, which was socially valued more highly. From his Rousseauian and physiocratic standpoint, Strindberg considers science, art, and industry as excessive—an expression of mere luxury and privilege. He rejects urbanization, industrialism, and the contemporary optimistic attitude towards material and technical progress. He emphasizes, on the contrary, the destruction of nature and the impoverishment of the earth's resources for the sake of consumption (Bourguignon 69). Corresponding themes and points of view expressed in the form of a poetic *réverie* characterize *Sömmgångarnätter*, in particular “Andra natten” (The Second Night), “Tredje natten” (The Third Night), and “Fjärde natten” (The Fourth Night), three of the four sequences the long poem included in its 1884 version (*Dikter* 177–224).

In order to find a remedy for this disquieting social imbalance, Strindberg proposes in “Om det allmänna missnöjet” opposite criteria for establishing a social reputation, so that working the land for the well being of the coming generations could be considered as a fundamental achievement. This strategy implies a closer relationship with nature and a return to simpler living conditions and to self-sufficiency. Even the abolition of towns is taken as part of this vision in that Strindberg, with reference to Swedish eighteenth-century history, finally proposes “ett storskifte,” i.e. a redistribution of land implying the dissolution of the urban centers and their “green” transformation (“Om det allmänna missnöjet” 78).

Besides employing handbooks on various subjects in order to gain a better understanding of the issues,<sup>2</sup> Strindberg, as a social theorist, takes a stand on different authorities in *Likt och olikt* (Edqvist 239–56). The most important of them is Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Poulenard 17–31, 87–101) and his critique of civilization in *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (*Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*) and *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*). Physiocracy sees in agriculture the basis of the wealth of nations (“Om det allmänna missnöjet” 17; Edqvist 404, n. 54). Further inspiration comes from Max Nordau's *Die conventionellen Lügen der*

2. Strindberg asks to have books sent in economics, statistics, technology, political and social sciences, law, history, and aesthetics. Compare *Brev* 3: 342, 349, 351, 356, 391; *Brev* 4: 17–9, 29, 32, 43.

*Kulturmenscheit* (1883; *The Conventional Lies of Our Civilization*), which Strindberg read in the original German edition shortly after its publication (*Brev* 3: 383–4, 396; *Brev* 4: 9, 10). This work became especially useful in evoking a sense of discontent and emphasizing modernity's spiritual and physical disease. As to the utopian tradition, the basic source is still Plato's *Republic*, an explicit intertext in the part of "Om det allmänna missnöjet" dedicated to the artist (45–55; Plato 79–102, 344–62).<sup>3</sup> During his research, Strindberg comes across a more recent Swedish version of utopia also partially based on Plato: *Slutliqvid med Sveriges lag* (Final Settlement for Sweden's Law). It was written by Nils Herman Quiding (pen name Nils Nilsson, Arbetskarl) and published in four volumes between 1871 and 1876. This work was important for Strindberg and for several of the other founders of the social-democratic movement in Sweden (K. Svensson). Quiding's fundamental dualism *överklass* versus *underklass* (upper versus lower class) was later employed by Strindberg in a series of political articles written in 1884 (*Likt och olik* 143–75; Lindström 379–84), and he developed his own utopian vision in the short stories of *Utopier i verkligheten* (1885; *Utopias in Reality*). As early as "Nationalitet och svenskhet," however, Strindberg mentions Quiding and rejoices at his agreement with him, which gives Strindberg an indirect substantiation of his own attempt at social analysis (110).<sup>4</sup>

This attempt to understand the essence of and reasons for these social problems as well as the inclination to address fundamental dilemmas are recurring traits in utopian writing as they are in *Likt och olik*. Confronted with them, the reader cannot always distinguish between open and closed discourse or, in other words, between a clarifying mode of thought on one hand or a tendency to draw drastic conclusions lacking any nuance on the other. Significant examples include Strindberg's directly equating culture and luxury ("Om det allmänna missnöjet" 62) or defining big cities as "en orimlighet" ("Om det allmänna missnöjet"

3. This part—where Strindberg compares Plato's negative conception of art, as a second-degree imitation of the divine idea, with Aristotle's positive conception of *mimesis* as a human activity combining pleasure and yearning for knowledge—shows a close connection to *Sömngångarnätter*, especially with the epigraph taken from Aristotle's *Poetics*, and "Andra natten," where art is discussed in Plato's terms (*Dikter* 162, 177–89).

4. In this passage (a note), Strindberg's liberal spirit reacts, though, against Quiding's all too well defined ideal state, which he finds "motbjudande emedan den dödar—andens frihet" ("Nationalitet och svenskhet" 110) [repulsive, as it kills—the spiritual freedom]. This is an eloquent reminder of how far Strindberg could actually go in terms of state system, and, ultimately, a nice expression of his contradictions.

68) [an absurdity].<sup>5</sup> One may feel irritated that Strindberg—a cultured and professional writer—makes such simplistic statements. Was he just being hypocritical when he condemned culture and modernity?

Such irritation could in turn produce an ahistorical interpretation. Strindberg was, to be sure, idiosyncratic and particularly contradictory, but such contradictions were not unique. Martin Kylhammar has published a historically well-grounded analysis of Strindberg's purported regressivity in *Likt och olikt* and of how he conceived of the role of the small farmers as part of his radical and progressive campaign (47–67). Strindberg was not alone in feeling concerned about the unsustainable development of Western civilization. The contemporary dystopic literature to which Kylhammar refers eloquently elaborates on this point. As Kylhammar observes (49, 53–4), Strindberg's anti-modern trait was recognized as “reactionary” by his radical contemporaries. From a clearly disapproving standpoint, Hjalmar Branting, Edvard Brandes, and Georg Brandes criticized Strindberg's Rousseauian creed. In their reviews of Strindberg's works in 1884, they found this creed bizarre and at odds with the modern radicalism they all were promoting. Strindberg was aware of this difference but did not abandon his ideas; one may even conclude that between 1884 and 1886 he tried to present himself as a truly progressive intellectual against all odds competing with his former allies on the radical front in spite of his nostalgic views of some issues, in particular of modern civilization and of marriage.

Without fully engaging Strindberg's conservative views, it is important to point out—as does Marshall Berman—how the great writers of the nineteenth century were often both modern and anti-modern:

To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction.... It is to be both revolutionary and conservative: alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic depths to which so many modern adventures lead, longing to create and to hold on to something real even as everything melts. We might even say that to be fully modern is to be anti-modern: from Marx's and Dostoevsky's time to our own, it has been impossible to grasp and embrace the modern world's potentialities without loathing and fighting against some of its most palpable realities. (13–4)

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5. The anti-urban tendency and the utilitarian approach to arts and culture are crucial for Quiding (1: 75–6, 103–7, 133–4, 160–6; 2: 9–10, 91, 114; 3: 16–20, 41–3). The fourth book of *Final Settlement* is a visionary summary in dialogic form, called *Platos stat i korrigerad bild* (Plato's State in a Revised Image) (4: 1–113).

It is therefore possible to see in Strindberg's critique of civilization a marked perception of a contradictory condition affecting everyone that he tried to understand. The subjective characteristic of *Likt och olikt* is crucial in that Strindberg's multiple narrative voices alternate between a general discursive mode in the third person and a personal one in the first, which may be either singular or plural. Strindberg, however, never positions himself outside the issues being examined: rather, he embodies the conflicts he is describing.

What also saves *Likt och olikt* from authoritarianism is Strindberg's focus on democracy. The establishment of a parliamentary system by means of political reforms is repeatedly mentioned as a future goal. What democracy means to Strindberg is of course a vast question open to different interpretations and approaches. In his impressive study of Strindberg's political thought from the 1860s to 1886, Sven-Gustaf Edqvist gives absolute priority to its anarchistic element and, moreover, sees in Strindberg's anarchism the common denominator of liberalism, Rousseauism, and socialism (16)—a problematic conclusion. Edqvist underscores Strindberg's skeptical and negative attitude towards parliamentary and professional political activity but also admits that *Sömmångarnätter* and *Likt och olikt*, especially the first essay, "Om det allmänna missnöjet," are exceptions. In these texts, political commitment, efforts promoting reforms, and parliamentary government assume positive connotations (247–8).

Strindberg's democratic radicalism is, thus, at work even when he criticizes the parliament as in the chapter "Arma Fosterland!" (Poor Country!) in his breakthrough novel *Röda rummet* (*The Red Room*) published in 1879 (87–97) or when he is bitter and pessimistic about the results of and the outlook for democracy in Sweden as in "Illusionernas dagar" (*The Days of Illusions*), the first story in *Det nya riket* (1882; *The New Kingdom*). Even Strindberg can, to be sure, show a typical skepticism towards professional politics. In a November 1881 letter to Edvard Brandes, who was at the time already a member of parliament, he exhorts his Danish colleague to definitely choose the literary field and abandon the political arena (*Brev* 2: 313). But on the whole, Strindberg nourishes a hope for democracy that is, for example, quite far removed from Henrik Ibsen's distrust as expressed in his well-known letters to Georg Brandes between 1870 and 1873 (G. Brandes, and E. Brandes 203–23; Edqvist 106–12). Strindberg finds instead a common ground with the politically committed Bjørnson, at least temporarily.

The idea that the social contract is not given to everyone at once but must be gained or actualized as a historical process is part of Rousseau's progressive and more constructive legacy in *Likt och olik* (Rousseau 235–336; Edqvist 393, n. 127). This point of view reoccurs in Strindberg's works and letters written during the 1870s and '80s. It constitutes, for example, the underlying structure of his cultural history *Svenska Folket* (1881–1882; *The Swedish People*; see also Ciaravolo, "Svenska Folket" 145–6). In this respect, I do not fully agree with Brandell's views that underscore Strindberg's roots in the bourgeois liberal and democratic radicalism of his time,<sup>6</sup> but sees Strindberg's Rousseauism in *Likt och olik* only in terms of a regressive conception of history are questionable (*Strindberg 2*: 37–40). It further seems that the notion of the social contract as a historical process is reinforced by Strindberg's experience with the construction of democracy in Sweden during his lifetime and by his familiarity with the institutions of the country's political life, thanks also to his work as a journalist during the early 1870s.<sup>7</sup> Strindberg's social and political commitment from the beginning of his career to the mid-1880s must be seen in connection with his insight into the social injustice and the failings of the political system during the reign of King Oscar II (1872–1907), which were particularly troubling after the hopes nourished by the radical front since the parliamentary reform in 1865. This is also concisely formulated in "Kulturarbetets överskattnings": "Vad väntade vi oss av 1865? Klass-skillnadens upphävande, sociala reformer, kyrkliga sådana, demokrati med ett ord. Och vad ha vi fått? Kapitalvälde med svindel, en ovärdig röstskala, stillastående och reaktion!" (106) [What did we expect of 1865? The abolition of class distinctions, social reforms, and reforms in the church, democracy in one word. And what have we got? The capitalistic domination by means of swindling, an unworthy scale in the voting system, stagnation, and reaction!].<sup>8</sup>

Strindberg's irreducible complexity undoubtedly remains political as well. Hayden White identifies four basic ideological standpoints in the historical accounts of the nineteenth century (22–9)—anarchic, conserva-

6. *Strindberg 1*: 9–38, 53–4, 175, 191–6, 252, 276–7; *Strindberg 2*: 27.

7. Compare *Ungdomsjournalistik* 9–13, 21–35, 113; Sandberg 384–5. On Strindberg's early journalism see also Brandell, *Strindberg 1*: 119–24, 175–81, 224–7.

8. The "unworthy scale" is precisely one of those technical obstacles to universal suffrage (universal, however, for men only, and here is the main contradiction in Strindberg's radicalism). This scale changed the influence of those entitled to vote according to their economic condition, an injustice that was abolished in Sweden only with the implementation of universal suffrage in 1918.

tive, radical, and liberal—and Strindberg’s peculiar challenge to readers and scholars is that he can embrace them all through his receptivity and anxious yearning for truth.<sup>9</sup> It is reasonable to conclude with Brandell that Strindberg had stronger roots in the liberal and democratic culture of his time and that his anarchism was more peripheral although important as a semantic source for tropes connected with demolishing or blowing up the establishment. The content of *Likt och oliket* and near-contemporary essays confirm this view.

Returning to “Om det allmänna missnöjet,” one sees that one fourth of the essay is dedicated to the social function of literature and art, which reflects Strindberg’s attempt to read contemporary life in terms of conflict between nature and culture. *Sambällsnyttan* (the benefit of society) is the key concept. Strindberg wants to assume the role of an intellectual who is useful to society. What society expects from writers is, however, mainly entertainment and aesthetic pleasure. When they, therefore, speak seriously, they are viewed as unpleasant and not appreciated by those attracted only by aesthetic values (36–40). The condemnation of art by both Plato in *Republic* and Rousseau in *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* is detectable in this part of the essay, but what is also evident is that in spite of Strindberg’s use of similes and metaphors, his language remains, as Annie Bourguignon has observed (72), expressive and vigorous, even when his doctrine condemns the poetic use of language. Strindberg’s dilemma—formulated at least following “En Tvivlares Anteckningar” (A Doubter’s Notes) (Brandell, *Strindberg* 1: 168–71), presumably written between 1872 and 1875 (Lindström 253–4) and often reaffirmed in his letters and works, the latest being in *Sömmgångarnätter*—is that his puritanical intention to renounce art—since it cannot either express ideas or reform society—goes against his own artistic instinct and the pleasure he finds in creation.

This theme recurs in “Om det allmänna missnöjet.” Strindberg observes that writers find it difficult, in spite of their sense of duty towards the proclaimed social role to “lämna poesiens fria lustgårdar” (37) [leave the free Eden of poetry]. Here, defining poetry as an “en olycklig medelväg” [unsuccessful middle way], he confesses in a note that this view is based on a personal error—“detta är en självbekännelse om en villfarelse” (37). Strindberg is probably referring to his

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9. Compare Edqvist; Brandell, *Strindberg* 1: 276–80; Brandell, *Strindberg* 2: 27; and Balzamo.

own recent attempt in the collection of poems *Dikter* and in the long sequence *Sömngångarnätter* to combine the pleasure of writing poetry with social criticism, political engagement, and intellectual constructs. Such a middle way must, according to the uncompromising standpoint in *Likt och olikt*, be rejected: the concrete quality of imagination and fiction cannot help when one wants to express ideas and tell his readers what Strindberg imagines to be the naked or unveiled truth.

Given this sharp division, the creative, literary writers are considered unreliable since they work “under ett tillstånd av partiellt vansinne” (44) [in a state of partial insanity]:

*Vem vill tro att en nutidens nyktrare författare som sitter med skrivbordet överlastat av handböcker i lagstiftning, statistik, patologi, kan fattas av den där “syran” som förr i världen spelade en så stor roll och gav skaldens ord en betydelse som om de kommo ovanifrån!* (44–5)

(Who is willing to believe that a contemporary, sober writer sitting at his desk that is overloaded with law, statistics and pathology handbooks, can be caught by that “delirium” that once upon a time played such a great role, and gave the poet’s words a meaning as if they were coming from above!)

This, again, is an example of indirect self-observation. By conceiving and composing *Sömngångarnätter* and his political essays in *Likt och olikt* during the same few months between the end of 1883 and the beginning of 1884, Strindberg shows how these two conflicting roles—the traditionally inspired, daydreaming poet and the essayist with social aims—play themselves out at his desk simultaneously and interactively. The author’s letters provide a vivid portrayal of the circumstance.<sup>10</sup> An instinctive denial of any objections to art occurs as a sudden inspiration in the composition of *Sömngångarnätter*. What Strindberg often defined as “useless” art is suddenly given priority over his own social agenda grounded in sober, non-artistic essay writing. This pause of creative joy against all odds becomes, in Strindberg’s terminology of that period, “syndigt” (sinful). On 17 December 1883, when the poem was almost finished, Strindberg writes to his publisher Albert Bonnier: “Och vers? Det är syndigt, när man har så mycket att säga på prosa!” (*Brev* 3: 378) [And poetry? It is sinful, when one has so much to say in prose!].

10. The span of the composition of *Sömngångarnätter* is August 1883 to January 1884 (*Brev* 3: 287–396; *Brev* 4: 15). The political essays were composed between August 1883 and April 1884 (*Brev* 3: 280–396; *Brev* 4: 9–113). Compare Spens 352–97, and Lindström 360–70.

It seems, thus, that the even more severe and radical connotations Strindberg gives his earlier doubts about the social benefit of art and literature in *Likt och olikt* are motivated by a sense of guilt towards his own recently committed "sin." This personal experience opens and closes in fact the part of "Om det allmänna missnöjet" dedicated to the writers (36, 45) and becomes a sort of meta-literary leitmotiv running through it. To express oneself about the social issue is clearly described as "en plikt, tung men bindande" (17) [an obligation, heavy but binding] because essayists force themselves to give up their artistic talent and creative instinct. But this is also the reason the essay is interesting in spite of its puritanical dogmatism. It is an expression of contradiction and duality, and the author is conscious of embodying the division he wants to represent in society at large.

What is even more interesting is that the existence of *Sömmgångarnätter* not only undermines the argument in "Om det allmänna missnöjet," but, in another sense, also supports it. Initially Strindberg planned the essays to be Swedish letters from abroad. The idea was to observe conditions and circumstances relating to recent Swedish history and society while taking advantage of being away from his home country (*Brev* 3: 310–1, 318–9). Yet, when *Likt och olikt* was published, the essays had in part changed their focus (Brandell, *Strindberg* 2: 36–7; Lindström 360–4). The social problems of the civilized world were seen in a broader, European context, and the Swedish circumstances were merely implied or relegated to the background. The thematic connections between *Sömmgångarnätter* and *Likt och olikt* have already been noted: the reflection on art and its role in social progress, the questioning of the meaning of that progress, the critique of modernity, and the environmental concerns. The transnational perspective on modernity developed in *Sömmgångarnätter* through the structural interaction of the urban spaces of Paris and Stockholm (see Ciaravolo, "Stockholm–Paris") had evidently informed Strindberg's analysis of modernity in *Likt och olikt*. In spite of his admitted difficulties in giving a concrete shape to his perhaps too ambitious speculations on the problems and destiny of modern life in both the poem and in the essays (*Brev* 3: 357), Strindberg knew also that such an interpretation "i stor skala" (*Brev* 3: 346) [on a large scale] was worth trying.

Still, in "Om det allmänna missnöjet," Strindberg seriously expects the literary writers' ultimate sacrifice: to cease to exist (40). Astonishing as it may sound, this proposal becomes the point of departure for

a sociology of literature based on the distinction between *skald* (poet), *författare* (novelist or playwright), and what Strindberg calls *litteratör*, an essayist or journalist. With this distinction, he proves that he is aware of the manifold positions of modern writers. The tripartite definition is based on Strindberg's analysis of the changes within Scandinavian literature during the 1870s and '80s, as well as his own self-analysis. In the current usage, Strindberg's *skald*, *författare*, and *litteratör* correspond to the highest, intermediate, and lowest social positions respectively. Questioning the legitimacy of the predominant social hierarchy, Strindberg inverts it so as to give the beneficial though humble *litteratör* the highest rank, while the prestigious but actually useless *skald* is bequeathed the lowest. The poet, Strindberg explains, is the one who writes verses—either good or bad—and speaks through images (40). What Strindberg argues here is the idea that aestheticism is an alibi and social privilege. It should not be forgotten, however, that condemning poetry was not just a personal gesture for Strindberg but also had an external target, i.e. the conservative, academic poets. Initially, *Likt och olikt* was to have included an even more aggressive essay entitled, “Hvad gäller striden?” (What Is the Fight All About?) written immediately after “Om det allmänna missnöjet” (*Brev* 4: 40–3). However, because of its personal attacks, Strindberg eventually decided to omit it, much to Karl Otto Bonnier's relief.<sup>11</sup>

Modern playwrights or novelists, Strindberg continues in “Om det allmänna missnöjet,” face a more serious and difficult task when they want to work for the advancement of society, find the causes of the inconveniences, and think of possible solutions (40–1). The *litteratör* is conceived as having made a significant leap forward in the course of realizing a radical transformation of the writer's social function. He is “framtidens skald och författare” [the poet and writer of the future] and as such is willing to make the sacrifice of abandoning literature as a form of falsification in order to “tala sanning” (41) [speak the truth].

As David Gedin has explained, the use of the term *litteratör* became political in Swedish cultural life during the 1880s. Used by the conservative literary establishment to define their radical opponents in a pejorative sense, the word was adopted by the radicals as an act of

11. With the title “Den litterära reaktionen i Sverige” (The Literary Reaction in Sweden), this essay was published first in a shortened, Danish version in 1886 and in Swedish in 1891 (Lindström 366–9; C. Svensson 393–401).

self-definition during their fight to gain a visible position in the Swedish literary arena of the 1880s (73–80). As such, it became synonymous with the modern (male) intellectual in Sweden and coincided with a general change in the sociology of Scandinavian literature during the modern breakthrough, when the distinction between imaginative writers, literature and art critics, journalists, essayists, and politicians became more fluid since the political discursive practices were more than ever intertwined with the cultural and the artistic ones. Gedin describes the front of the radical writers, and Strindberg's position in it, as follows:

*Många glider därför i sin verksamhet mellan olika områden—föredragsturnéer, kritik, journalistik. De arbetar som redaktörer på tidningar och förlag, som dramaturger på teatern, som akademiker, och utvidgar man kretsen till att omfatta också dem som inte skrev skönlitteratur, finner man ytterligare en mängd yrken som kombineras med radikal, offentlig samhällskritik.... Därför rör sig också författarna fritt mellan olika genrer i sitt skrivande, från debattinlägg i olika ämnen till sociologiska eller ekonomiska undersökningar. Strindbergs kreativa rörlighet, från Dikter till Bland franska bönder och Likt och olik, var med andra ord ett utslag av hans position snarare än av hans individuella läggning. (41)*

(Many of them glide between different areas in their activity—lecture tours, criticism, journalism. They work as editors at the newspapers and the publishing houses, as dramaturges at the theater, as academics, and if one widens the circle to include even those who did not write imaginative literature, one finds additionally more professions that are combined with radical, public social criticism.... Therefore the authors move freely among different genres in their writing, from contributions to debates on different topics to sociological or economic studies. Strindberg's creative mobility, from *Poems* to *Among French Peasants* to *A Bit of Everything* was in other words a manifestation of his position rather than of his individual disposition.)

It must be observed that the main protagonists in Scandinavia's cultural and political life at that time—such as Bjørnson, Edvard Brandes, and Branting—give different but equally vivid evidence of this new manifold role across the divide between politics and literature. They were also close to Strindberg and, at certain stages, important for his development. As to Strindberg's personal intention to abandon creative literature, he underscores in "Om det allmänna missnöjet" that he is postponing it to a distant future. In this respect, his subjectivity takes on a fundamental role in the essay as the author admits that he, owing to his literary heritage, cannot fully let go of artistic considerations (41).<sup>12</sup>

In “Om det allmänna missnöjet,” Strindberg finally makes clear that his *litteratör* corresponds to the journalist (41–5). The words of newspapers are defined, perhaps naively, as the pure and naked words beyond any *skönskriveri* (42), i.e. beyond belletristic writing (with negative connotation). The same ideas are applied in an individual case in the shorter essay “Björnstjerne Björnson,” published in the first issue of the French literary review *Le Monde Poétique* in June 1884.<sup>13</sup> The relevant difference is that Strindberg now for the first time tries to find a larger European forum for his ideas by writing in French. Strindberg’s contact with Björnson and Jonas Lie in Paris in December 1883 and January 1884 was brief, but intense, and it decisively reinforced his intention to assume the role of the committed writer who is a critic of contemporary society.<sup>14</sup> Björnson is depicted in the essay as the author of the future, i.e. a successful combination of poet and champion of freedom as well as imaginative writer and committed journalist. Applied to Björnson, the concept of politics acquires the noblest meaning in being idealistic and at the same time mindful of the word’s etymology, which is rooted in the citizens’ basic public concern in ancient Greek *polis*:

*För de vänner och välvilliga beundrare, vilka aldrig tröttna att komma med sitt: “så synd att skalderna börja att blanda sig i politiken,” har Björnson alltid sitt stora svar på reda hand: “politiken är nästans väl; vem kan klandra oss för att vi försvara andras intressen?” (“Björnstjerne Björnson” 114)*

(For those friends and benevolent admirers, who never get weary of their: “Such a pity that the poets begin to meddle in politics,” Björnson always has his great answer ready at hand: “Politics is your neighbor’s welfare; who can blame us for defending other people’s interests?”)

The multi-faceted intellectual role is something that Strindberg recognizes in his elder colleague and looks for within himself. In the essay, Björnson’s position and voice significantly represent a compromise in comparison to Strindberg’s absolute either-or. In Björnson’s opinion,

12. Strindberg deals with this dilemma even in two letters to Björnson and Lie respectively (*Brev* 4: 144–6, 168–70), where he adopts the genre of the confession. He has more soberly already reassured his publisher that he does not intend to abandon fictional literature (*Brev* 4: 54).

13. In July the same year it appeared in Swedish translation in the journal *Tiden* (C. Svensson 406–8).

14. *Sömngångarnätter* is dedicated to the two Norwegian writers (*Dikter* 163).

poet and *litteratör* can be conjoined in one writer. Admirably, Strindberg notes this nuance.

Set in this context, Strindberg's serial "Från det vaknande Italien" becomes more comprehensible as part of a campaign to be seen as a radical social writer in 1884. It was written after the first three essays in *Likt och olikt* but before "Nationalitet och svenskhet" and the essay on Bjørnson, and it had already been published as a serial in ten parts in the Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* in April 1884 (C. Svensson 401–2). In this article, Strindberg focuses on northwestern Italy and on the coastal region of Liguria in particular. His critical vision is, at the same time, botanical, ethnographic, and social since he is striving for a comprehensive view of nature, the landscape, and the society, especially in terms of its binary counterparts: countryside and agriculture, industry and urbanized areas, rich villas and humble farms. With this purpose in mind, he writes something between a travel diary and a reportage. Since he did not have much time at his disposal, his strategy was to decipher the signs he found on his way as quickly as possible. They are found both in the external world and in the newspapers. This insight into the new country gained by reading the newspaper becomes an overt indication of Strindberg's effort to observe and visualize a more socially up-to-date Italy than the one typically depicted by many predecessors whose focus was solely on the art, monuments, and Mediterranean climate (C. Svensson 402–3). The reportage is therefore intertwined with the newspaper in a double sense: the serial not only appears in a Swedish daily newspaper, but it also uses the newspaper as a leitmotif and as a tool for orienting oneself in contemporary Italian society.

Strindberg was a quick observer who relied on impressions, memories, wide encyclopedic knowledge, and linguistic skills. He could undoubtedly draw wrong conclusions but was also a skilled observer who managed to acquire pertinent information and grasp contexts in a short time. His scrutiny of Liguria's landscape and its urban settlements is in this respect controversial but very precise. Strindberg does not deny that the landscape is beautiful, dramatic, and varied, but nature seems inaccessible to him. The narrow strip of shore is already occupied by towns and factories. On the luxuriant slopes, the orchards and fields are private and enclosed. Determined by his Swedish approach to nature and reinforced by Rousseau, Strindberg's attitude enables him to notice the problems with Liguria's landscape and its fragile balance—it can easily be devastated by human encroachments, even more readily by

modern civilization. Consciously assuming the strategy of the fault-finder (“Från det vaknande Italien” 83),<sup>15</sup> i.e. one who uses the dialectic power of contradiction by the illumination from opposing viewpoints, Strindberg conveys in a vigorous and sensual language his simultaneously sharp and idiosyncratic, even exaggerated, observations:

*Stranden utgjordes dock av en enda lång gata från Savona till Genova; ty stad ligger vid stad och alla vilja åt strandremsan. Här kokas tjära till skeppsvarven, här osas med asfalt, här rökes med stenkol—stenkol, industriens förfärliga bundsförvant; här blandas orangedoften med garveriparfymer, och att inbilla sig att det finns så mycket som en stenknalle i sjökanten att lägga sig på och andas havsluft, det förblir en inbillning. Går man sålunda på strandgatan, så är det antingen lugnt väder—men då bränner solen olidligt som före ett åskväder—eller också blåser det, och då dammar det.* (“Från det vaknande Italien” 90)

(The shore consisted however of a single, long road from Savona to Genoa, as the towns are situated side by side, and everyone wants to gain access to the shore. Here tar is boiled for the shipyards; here asphalt reeks and coal smokes—coal, the awful ally of industry; here the orange scent is mixed with the perfume of tannery, and to imagine that there is as much as one cliff by the water, where one can lie down and breathe sea air, remains a fancy. If one walks on the road along the shore, the weather is either calm—but then the sun burns unbearably like before a thunderstorm—or it is windy, and it raises dust.)<sup>16</sup>

While Strindberg is in a partially new and exotic environment, he recognizes European patterns in what he sees and reads. By reading newspapers, he surveys Italy as a European society. The newsstand gives him access to the public debate; he pays homage to the constitutional Italy and its parliament, and his mood seems optimistic and euphoric beyond measure with regard to the country’s outlook for implementing the modern parliamentary system. The chord of post-*Risorgimento* enthusiasm and of democratic, republican radicalism is struck when mentioning Giuseppe Garibaldi’s house and Giuseppe Mazzini’s

15. In “Från det vaknande Italien,” Strindberg uses this definition in English and Swedish, which was also the first title he proposed to Karl Otto Bonnier for the issues with the social essays, *Felfinnaren* (Brev 4: 35). Compare Lindström 365–9.

16. The dialogue between Indra’s Daughter and the Coal-bearers in *Ett drömspel* (*A Dream Play*; see 80–3) from 1902 may contain reminiscences of the contrast Strindberg experienced in Liguria between orange trees and industrial coal, natural paradise, and privatized landscape.

statue in Genoa (“Från det vaknande Italien” 92). The conversations with Bjørnson and Lie in December 1883 and January 1884 might have reinforced this attitude in Strindberg, as the Norwegian colleagues had been supporters of *Risorgimento*, the Italian liberation movement (Næss; D’Amico; Carbone; Dahl). Furthermore, as a reader and admirer of the Swedish poet Carl Snoilsky, to whom he dedicates part of his French essay “Lettres de Stockholm” (1886), Strindberg was probably already familiar with the *Risorgimento*-motif.<sup>17</sup>

In the Genoa newspaper *L’Epoca* he reads an article, part of an “Inchiesta agraria” (“Från det vaknande Italien” 94) [agricultural survey], wherein he finds confirmation of his own physiocratic standpoint.<sup>18</sup> This motivates him to visit the editorial offices of *L’Epoca* in central Genoa to pay homage to the hero of the modern age:

*Vid bordet satt redaktören. En lång, kraftig man i sina bästa år; med hatten på huvudet, cigarren i mun och pennan i handen. Pennan gick fram över papperslappar, fullskrivna i ett tag, men som vanligt bara på ena sidan. Gummiflaskan och saxen saknade jag.... Detta är det nya Italien! Haec est Italia—nova! Parlamentarism och tidningar! Ja, det är vägen, den rätta vägen! Farväl Tasso och Rafael, som roade och gladde påvar och resande engelsmän! God dag alla arbetare som vilja gagna alla människor!* (“Från det vaknande Italien” 95)

(The editor was sitting at his desk. A tall, robust man in his best years, with a hat on his head, a cigar in his mouth and a pen in his hand. The pen went over scraps, which were fully written in a moment, but usually on just one side. I was lacking a glue bottle and scissors.... This is new Italy! Haec est Italia—nova! Parliamentary rule and newspapers? Yes, this is the way, the right way! Farewell, Tasso and Raphael, who amused and delighted popes and travelling Englishmen! Good day to all workers who want to benefit all people!)<sup>19</sup>

Strindberg insists on the affinity of his ideas—the opposition between the useless fine arts and the humble, beneficial work for progress—with

17. *Kvarstadsresan* 268–73; C. Svensson 440–53. This part about Snoilsky was written in 1884 probably for a never published, independent essay in *Le Monde Poétique*, (*Brev* 4: 175; C. Svensson 443) and reveals strong connections with the themes discussed in this article, especially the dilemma of aesthetic values and social commitment.

18. Bruno Berni, translator and editor of *Dall’Italia*, the anthology of Strindberg’s texts about Italy, has reported the sources used by the author. Here: “Inchiesta agraria.” *L’Epoca* 8–9 Mar. 1884 (qtd. in Strindberg, *Dall’Italia* 46–7).

those in an editorial in a Rome newspaper, *Il Messaggero*, entitled “Arti belle... e brutte” (The fine arts... and the ugly ones).<sup>20</sup> In this article, priority is given to the democratization of society from a utilitarian perspective and to the anti-intellectual emphasis of which Strindberg approves whereby art is reduced to being considered both a luxury of the privileged and a parasite. Long passages of the article are quoted in Strindberg’s Swedish translation, which is accurate on the whole in spite of moments when he merely summarizes. It is a new sign: since *Il Messaggero* means “the messenger,” Strindberg interprets the article “som om den blivit skriven enkom för mig” (“Från det vaknande Italien” 98) [as if it had been written specifically for me]. Strindberg’s typical intertextual strategies, into which other sources are readily incorporated when needed, are displayed in a nutshell in “Från det vaknande Italien.” He is evidently reinforcing the campaign he is launching as a committed, social, and anti-artistic writer in the forthcoming issues of *Likt och olikt*.

During his journey, Strindberg considers another relevant problem for the establishment of the Italian state: the role of literacy and elementary school. He buys and scans schoolbooks while continuing to interpret signs. The country he visited in 1884 was developing rapidly; it was a time of change and growth even in the cultural field, as the Italian historians point out: literacy increased; some publishing houses successfully specialized in schoolbooks; daily newspapers, periodicals, and books began to diversify their publications to reach a broader readership; and the open debate contributed to the general growth of society. On the other hand, old, deep-seated problems remained such as the lack of a unified national infrastructure, limited book distribution across the country, the continuing high illiteracy rate, and, as a consequence, the uneven and fragile democratic development.<sup>21</sup> Strindberg emphasizes the positive aspect of contemporary Italy (“parliamentary rule and newspapers”), though Bjørnson and Lie’s awareness of the problems of post-*Risorgimento* Italy might have suggested a different conception.<sup>22</sup> Strindberg decides, however, to play down this awareness in “Från det

19. A reading of this passage in the context of gender studies would undoubtedly draw attention to the many phallic symbols connected with this Italian *homo faber*. It confirms Gedin’s observation that the role as *litteratör* excluded women (74–7).

20. Pazzi, G. “Arti belle... e brutte.” *Il Messaggero* 14 Mar. 1884 (qtd. in Strindberg *Dall’Italia* 52–5).

21. Compare Gigli Marchetti; Decleva; Ridolfi; Ragone VII–XIV, 3–79; Tranfaglia, and Vittoria 3–16, 63–131.

vaknande Italien,” as he explains to Karl Otto Bonnier, because of the overall progressive tendency of his writing (*Brev* 4: 165–7).

The positive emphasis of Strindberg’s democratic campaign culminates in the article’s conclusion. He avoids the famous Milan cathedral (“Från det vaknande Italien” 103). On the way back to Switzerland, Strindberg visits Como, where the press again plays a role in discussing European identity. The democratic weekly magazine *Il Baradello* publishes an article in which Norway is described as a model country.<sup>23</sup> It deals more precisely with the dramatic turning point in the fight for parliamentary rule that was going on in the Nordic country when Christian Selmer’s conservative government was forced to resign in March 1884 (Danielsen). The discussion here returns to Bjørnson and his public, political role as a writer (*Hoem* 387–92, 396–407). Strindberg mixes languages in quoting *Il Baradello* in his Swedish translation and citing Bjørnson concerning the Norwegian people’s right to withstand king Oscar II’s veto in the Italian version of the magazine. Strindberg comments: “Aldrig har italienskan klingat så skönt som nu, tyckte jag! Och så fick jag se att demokratin också—och kanske mest—blir den som gör oss alla en gång till européer” (“Från det vaknande Italien” 106–7) [Italian has never sounded so nice as now, it seemed to me! In addition, I could see that democracy is also, and perhaps mostly, what will make us all Europeans again].

As the conclusion of the article makes clear, Italy is only a brief, parenthetical digression for Strindberg, whereas Switzerland is both his new home and the platform for his political agenda. In the last essay of *Likt och olikt*, “Nationalitet och svenskhet,” the author’s fundamental democratic idea expands into a vision of a European federation of states, which—as in the Swiss miniature example—does not sacrifice national diversity. Parliamentary rule becomes, as in the case of Norway, a decisive step towards democracy for the optimistic Strindberg in March and April 1884. In “Nationalitet och svenskhet,” he writes: “Vägen går genom nationens självbestämmerätt till folkvälde och från folkvälde till folkförbund” (112) [The path goes through the nation’s right to self-determination to democracy and from democracy to confederation].<sup>24</sup> It must again be observed that Strindberg’s myth of Switzerland, which

22. Compare D’Amico 20–3; Carbone 122; Dahl 228–9.

23. “La Norvegia insegna.” *Il Baradello* [Como-Lecco] 14–15 Mar. 1884: 1 (qtd. in Strindberg *Dall’Italia* 64–6).

plays an important role in *Likt och olikt* but has a more implied presence in “Från det vaknande Italien,” is not simply a regressive, Arcadian myth reinforced by Rousseau; it is at the same time a progressive, democratic myth. The idea of peace, Strindberg writes in “Nationalitet och svenskhet,” is the nineteenth century’s finest thought, and Switzerland represents Europe’s “bättre jag” (112–3) [better self]. It is a complex of ideas that points to the short stories in the collection *Utopier i verkligheten*.

Strindberg’s essayistic production during the 1880s, be it about political, social, cultural, or aesthetic subjects, is remarkable for its quantity and, above all, for its intellectual intensity and literary quality. The specific texts that have been analyzed here reveal something about the type of radical writer with whom Strindberg could identify in an exciting phase of his career as well as something of his ideology and of his method of overstepping boundaries. In 1884, Strindberg was not only departing—he was also on his way to something. He was immersed in the cosmopolitan *milieux* in France and Switzerland, had an intense interaction with Norwegian writers, and wrote an article about Bjørnson that marked his increasing conviction that he could establish himself as an European author using French.<sup>25</sup> While acquiring a transnational profile, he moved from one genre to another, nonfictional prose genres included, and concretely experienced what H. Aram Veeseer, in the perspective of New Historicism, has defined the inseparable circulation of literary and non-literary texts (2).

The tradition of utopian writing with which Strindberg becomes associated and the aura of authorities such as Plato, Rousseau, the Physiocrats, Nordau, and Quiding that he gradually comes to share are a mixed blessing for him as both a modern as well as an anti-modern writer. Finding support in the texts of *Likt och olikt*, one could interpret some of his ideas as severely limited; as such, they are suspect within the contemporary horizon of expectation if Strindberg’s agrarian radicalism and anti-intellectualism are conceived only in terms of their tragic, authoritarian application in parts of the world during the twentieth

24. The idea of a European state is fundamental in Quiding’s utopia, which proposes a European constitution (3: 75–156). On the other hand Quiding, who has a distrust of rhetoric, rejects parliament as the place of empty words (1: 156–8; 2: 2–3, 19–24; 3: 46; 4: 25–6). Another point of disagreement underscored by Strindberg is that the universal language of the future state will be English for Quiding, whereas Strindberg evidently supports French (“Nationalitet och svenskhet” 126; Quiding 2: 81, 4: 36–7).

25. Compare Ahlström 38–52; C. Svensson 406–7; and Briens 76–88.

century. On the other hand, Strindberg's open, provisional stance can be detected in his awareness of the complications of the social issues at stake in spite of the proposed solutions. When he thus depicts civilized mankind's loss of nature and increasingly artificial existence, the questions he raises are still relevant. Does material and technical progress increase our freedom? If yes, at what cost? Is our universal myth of uninterrupted growth sustainable?

The voices of Strindberg—the anti-modern and the modern—become part of a complex pattern in his radicalism, and the political essays from 1884 give a glimpse of this complexity. Like so many of his experiments, the experiment with the socially committed, prosaic writer only lasts for a relatively short time. Especially the events of autumn 1884 associated with *Gästas I* (*Getting Married*) and Strindberg's conservative views on marriage and feminism will mark a turning point and, in the long run, a crisis in his democratic views as well as of his idea of a close connection between literature and politics, writers and society. Still something of them remains in Strindberg's workshop for later use (Meidal, *Från profet till folktribun*).

Strindberg's democratic campaign also became the frame of his peculiar and subjective image of Italy, which is different from a purely negative view. In this sense, some notions inherited from previous scholars can at least be questioned. According to Björn Meidal, it is impossible to detect in the realistic and naturalistic Strindberg of the 1880s any humble desire to learn from or empirically study the countries in which he lived because "Strindberg tog vad han ville och såg det han ville se" ("En klok råtta" 14) [Strindberg took what he wanted and saw what he wanted to see]. And in his latest, impressive biography, Meidal characterizes Strindberg's short journey to Italy as "Italienskt lustmord" (Meidal and Wanselius 132–4) [Italian sex murder]. Dealing with the initial reception of Strindberg's plays on the Italian stages, Franco Perrelli incidentally observes that Strindberg's writing simply intended to destroy the northern myth of Italy and that during his Italian journey, he did not have any significant contact with the local culture and theater life ("La prima fortuna di Strindberg" 5).<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Gunnar Brandell observes how Strindberg tries to acquire as negative an impression of Italy as possible so as to contradict the traditional image of the country of art and natural beauty, but he concedes that Strindberg's reportage

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26. Perrelli has published a shorter version of the same article in Swedish ("Och nu är Italien öppet för barbaren"), where this observation about Strindberg in Italy is not included.

tends to be more generous about Italy than his letters written at the same time (*Brev* 4: 65–6, 72, 76–9). Brandell believes also that choosing such a “backyard” of Italy as the area around Pegli, near Genoa, precisely served the purpose of giving an overall negative picture (*Strindberg* 2: 42), and Conny Svensson agrees with him (404).

It is debatable whether Liguria is seen by Strindberg as a backyard or, rather, as an ordinary mixture of “beautiful Italy” and complex, modern reality. In any case, backyards are also representative of something in the context of modern, critical writing because they help to avoid predictable commonplaces. How and why they become representative depends on the point of view adopted. Strindberg was precise about defining his as a socially committed, environmentally aware, fault-finding, prosaic, and anti-art. Also the fact that Strindberg ignored theaters and cultural personalities seems related to his tendentious stance against “art” and in favor of newspapers as the alternate cultural form of modernity.

In “Från det vaknande Italien,” Strindberg observes while traveling by train or tram or just walking. During a guided hike uphill, he even takes the opportunity to interview peasants and visit their small farm (“Från det vaknande Italien” 88–9). Strindberg is testing his method of, as it were, boring through the rock and examining the sample.<sup>27</sup> Bourguignon has convincingly analyzed this strategy as a new poetics of reportage—too documentary to be artistic, too subjective to be scientific—which Strindberg finally manages to practice on a larger scale two and half years later in France, the result of which will be *Bland franska bönder* (Among French Peasants), an account based on his journey in the autumn of 1886 (C. Svensson 403; Brandell, *Strindberg* 2: 41).

In the analyzed texts, Strindberg’s voice swings between doubt and vision, fault-finding discontent and hopeful utopianism, dogmatism and openness, as well as a critique of what he calls professional optimists and a personal, hard-won progressive view. With all his contradictions and shortcomings, Strindberg experiences the making of modern democracy as a process full of conflicts. In this respect, his courage and willingness to participate teach intellectuals something in a time when the word democracy risks becoming a hollow cliché.

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27. The metaphor is Strindberg’s (“ta borrhål här och der och sätta in profvarn,” *Brev* 4: 86), in a letter written some days after the Italian journey, where he proposes his friend Leopold Littmansson to join on an European journey in order to discover the native inhabitants, the peasants.

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