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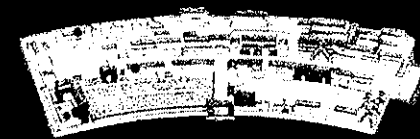
DESHIMA

REVUE D'HISTOIRE GLOBALE DES PAYS DU NORD

Strindberg et la ville /
The cities of Strindberg



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*Stockholm-Paris:
Interaction as Structure in
Sleepwalking Nights on Wide-awake Days*

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In September of 1883, Strindberg left Stockholm and went, with his family, to Paris, after he had submitted his first collection of poems *Dikter på vers och prosa* (Poems in Verse and Prose) to Bonnier, who was to publish it in November. By voluntarily leaving Sweden, he wanted to protect himself and his family from the expected and inevitable attacks of the conservative front against his new work. Similar reactions had affected him after *Röda Rummet* (The Red Room), *Svenska Folket* (The Swedish People) and *Det nya riket* (The New Kingdom). Even before he finally decided to leave, he had, in fact, expressed a desire to do so for some time.¹ The absence from his home country was, however, not intended to last for long.²

¹ See the letter to Helena and Carl Rupert Nyblom on 24 January 1882, in *Brev*, 2, p. 357, and the letter to Edvard Brandes on 26 July 1882, in *Brev*, 3, p. 52. See also: Spens, James, "Kommentarer", in Strindberg, August, *Dikter på vers och prosa; Sömngångarnätter på vakna dagar; och strödda tidiga dikter*, SV, 15, p. 289-290; Brandell, Gunnar, *Strindberg - ett författarliv*, 2, *Borta och hemma 1883-1894*, Stockholm, Alba, 1985, p. 11-13; Lagercrantz, Olof, *August Strindberg*, Stockholm, Wahlström & Widstrand, 1979, p. 118-119.

² See the letter from Grèz to Albert Bonnier on 26 September 1883 in *Brev*, 3, p. 309-311. See also Brandell, Gunnar, *Strindberg - ett författarliv*, 2, *op.cit.*, p. 11; Lagercrantz, Olof, *August Strindberg, op.cit.*, p. 126.

Afsked (Farewell) was also the projected title of a new poem, which Strindberg enthusiastically announced as “ett stort skaldestycke” (a great piece of poetry) in a letter from France to his publisher, when *Dikter på vers och prosa* had not yet come out and he still considered enlarging that first collection:

Det är romantiskt – satiriskt – realistiskt – idealistiskt och spelar i Adolf Fredriks Kyrka, på Nationalmuseum och i K. Biblioteket. Det skall lyfta hela boken! Och kanske hjälpa mig något vid den odiösa concours som troligen kommer att anställas af kritiken då jag ju samtidigt med de stora skalderna skall ut i verlden med vers!³

At the very beginning Strindberg imagined therefore only a series of Stockholm settings. However, he changed his plans after one week. In a new letter, he renamed the ongoing poem *Sömngångar-nätter* (Sleepwalking Nights) and added that those “nights” would now be held in “utländska ramar” (foreign frames):

Emottagit nyss Edert bref af den 20e. Verspoemet ”Sömngångar-nätter Första natten” (omdöpt således!) afgick i torsdags i förra veckan i afskrift och bör vara framme! Efter tiden är förliden må vi nu sätta under dess titel ordet ”(Fragment)” samt under stycket eller också under titeln, hvilket herr B. finner bäst: ”Paris 1883”! Och dermed är verssamlingen slut. Att stycket ej blef längre, berodde på att det icke var så långt tillämnadt. Nu blir det (d.v.s. nästa år) ett långt stycke på fyra à fem nätter infattade i utländska ramar och kunna då göra en liten fin julbok beritad af Carl Larsson som tycker om mina dåliga vers.⁴

³ Letter from Passy to Albert Bonnier on 17 October 1883 in *Brev*, 3, p. 329-330: “It is romantic – satiric – realistic – idealistic and is set in Adolf Fredrik’s church, at the National Museum, and in the Royal Library. It will lift up the whole book! And it may give me some help in the odious competition which will probably be arranged by the critics as I shall publicly come out with verses at the same time as the great poets.” Translations are mine if not indicated otherwise.

⁴ Letter from Paris to Albert Bonnier on 23 October 1883, *ibid.*, p. 334: “Have just received your letter of the 20th. A copy of the poem, “Sleepwalking Nights The First Night” (thus renamed!) was sent last Thursday and ought to have arrived! Because time has run out, we must put the word ‘(Fragment)’ under its title and ‘Paris 1883’ under the poem or also under the title, as Mr. B. prefers! Thereby the collection is finished. The fact that the poem did not grow longer is because it was not intended to. Now (i.e. next year) it will become a long poem of four to five nights set in foreign frames, which can then make a fine, little Christmas book illustrated by Carl Larsson, who likes my bad verses.”

Because the project had thus widened its scope and acquired new and specific traits, he proposed to include only a fragment of it, “The First Night”, in *Dikter på vers och prosa*, a solution that was accepted by the publisher.

Afsked represented then, in this respect, only the initial stage of a narrative poem that rapidly grew to more than 1500 verses in two and a half months, resulting in the writer’s second volume of poetry *Sömngångarnätter på vakna dagar. En dikt på fria vers* (Sleepwalking nights on wide-awake days. A poem in free verse), published in February 1884.⁵ The cycle consists of an introductory lyric without a title and four long poems in *knittel*-verse, respectively called “Första Natten”, “Andra Natten”, “Tredje Natten” and “Fjärde Natten” (The First, The Second, The Third and The Fourth Night).⁶ The idea of night on wide-awake days, conceived by Strindberg and connected to the exile motif, corresponds more or less to the activity of daydreaming: a Swedish writer and poet dreams of revisiting Stockholm while he, sleeping as it were, is traveling to Paris and, above all, walking around in Paris in broad daylight.

It is known that Strindberg’s absence from his home country lasted much longer than he had initially planned. The writing of *Sömngångarnätter* coincides, as a matter of fact, with a critical turning point in his life and literary career – the beginning of his first long exile, which not only occurred in a material sense but also reinforced the state of mind of a permanently rootless and homesick intellectual. Through the so-called foreign frames, the architecture of his new poem becomes more complex and ambitious; the protagonist’s thoughts and flashbacks (his ‘night side’) are certainly directed towards Stockholm, the hometown he left, but at the same time they are anchored in his

⁵ Earlier than the end of 1884, as Strindberg initially proposed to Bonnier in the quoted letter (see note 4: “a fine, little Christmas book”).

⁶ The *knittel*-verse was imported from Germany during the Middle Ages and employed in the most important literary works that have been preserved in Old Swedish, such as the translations of courtly romances and the historical chronicles. It was a rather free verse form, with normally four stresses for each line and a varying number of unstressed syllables, with rhyme or assonance. That is also why Strindberg, in reshaping it, could call it free verse. About the *knittel*-verse in Sweden see Ståhle, Carl Ivar, *Vers och språk i Vasatidens och stormaktstidens svenska diktning*, Stockholm, Norstedts, 1975, p.12-57.

wide-awake condition, in his present life, while experiencing France and the metropolis of Paris during the last months of 1883.

The word “frame” can, however, also be interpreted pejoratively and suggest a qualitative hierarchy. In 1931 the first scholarly study on *Sömngångarnätter* was published, an article by Henry Olsson that was eventually reprinted with minor changes in a collection of essays more than thirty years later.⁷ This article shows commitment and interest in the complicated poem, while trying a close reading of it. In this way, Olsson gives some suggestions for our understanding of the work, such as the presence of a more outspoken autobiographical trait some years before the publication of Strindberg’s first ‘real’ autobiography in prose, *Tjänstekvinnans son* (The Son of a Servant). This study, however, also formulates a distinction between “tavla” (picture) and “ram” (frame) that will have consequences for later interpretations:

Den viktigaste förändringen är emellertid, att de svenska avskeden nu skola infattas i utländska ramar [...]. I de följande nätterna från och med den andra får man alltså en alternerande serie av svenska tavlor och franska ramar. Men därvid påpekar jag, att första diktplanen, där ramarna ännu icke voro påtänkta, redan hade utförts till tre fjärdedelar. Tydligt har han först utformat sin dikt med enhetliga svenska lokaliteter, Adolf Fredriks kyrka, Nationalmuseum och K. biblioteket, och sedan insprängt de franska ramskildringarna. Med denna omläggning hade emellertid arbetet ånyo kommit i gång [...].⁸

Olsson’s argument creates a sharp divide between “picture” and “frame”, as far as both the genesis of the poem and its contents are concerned. After studying the manuscript, Olsson is convinced that all the so-called French frames were added later, after the ‘real’ core of the work – the Swedish “nights” – had been completed:

⁷ Olsson, Henry, “Strindbergs Sömngångarnätter”, *Nordisk Tidskrift*, 1931, p. 329-350, and Olsson, Henry, “Sömngångarnätter”, in Brandell, Gunnar (ed.), *Synpunkter på Strindberg*, Stockholm, Aldus/Bonniers, 1964, p. 111-134.

⁸ Olsson, Henry, “Strindbergs Sömngångarnätter”, *op.cit.*, p. 335: “The most important change, however, is that the Swedish farewells shall now be set in foreign frames. From the second night on, we have an alternating series of Swedish pictures and French frames. But here I must point out that three fourths of the first composition plan, where the frames had not yet been conceived, had already been carried out. [Strindberg] has apparently first shaped his poem uniformly with Swedish localities, the church of Adolf Fredrik, the National Museum and the Royal Library, and then inserted the French frame descriptions. With this rearrangement the work got properly started again.”

Studerar man originalmanuskriptet till diktverket, [...] kan man i själva verket ganska tydligt urskilja de vittgående ändringar, som företagits i planen. Enligt ursprunglig uppläggning föreligga i denna handskrift, vars senare strukna övrrubrik varit *Tre farväl*, endast första natten och senare delen av tredje natten, besöket i biblioteket; den franska ramen till denna tredje natt saknas helt i handskriften. Däremot ingår andra natten, museibesöket, med tillhörande fransk ram, men utskriften av denna andra natt har verkställts på annat papper och är tydligt tillfogad. Hypotesen att de franska ramarna senare inskjutits, bekräftas alltså av handskriften.⁹

This does not mean that Olsson does not appreciate the literary quality and thematic density of “The Third Night” and “The Fourth Night”, where the Parisian “frames” occupy a major space.¹⁰ A glide in the philological and hermeneutical discourse has yet taken place, and this glide is accomplished by Martin Lamm, for whom the hypothesis has become a fact: the text of *Sömngångarnätter* consists of an “actual” core and of an external frame. Lamm refers to Olsson’s analysis and states without any doubt “that the frames, which have a French setting, have been achieved later than *the actual poems*”, and even the epilogue of “The Fourth Night” is considered by Lamm to have been composed “after *the actual text*”.¹¹

Within a field of research it can happen that hypothesis and valuations are transmitted as facts. Olsson’s hypothesis becomes a fact for Lamm, one that reveals a prejudice about Stockholm being a more important *topos* than Paris in *Sömngångarnätter*. By insisting on the metaphor of picture and frame, Lamm conveys the idea that the descriptions of Paris during the day are peripheral, i.e. less important when we try to

⁹ Olsson, Henry, “Strindbergs Sömngångarnätter”, *op.cit.*, p. 335-336: “Studying the original manuscript of the work, one can quite clearly distinguish the far-reaching changes that have been undertaken in the plan. In this manuscript, the eventually struck title of which was *Three farewells*, only the first night and the latter part of the third night, the visit in the library, exist; the French frame of this third night is totally missing in the manuscript. In contrast, the second night, the visit at the museum, is included with its corresponding French frame, but the transcription of this second night was written on different paper and was evidently added later. The hypothesis that the French frames have been interposed later is thus confirmed by the manuscript.”

¹⁰ See Olsson, Henry, “Strindbergs Sömngångarnätter”, *op.cit.*, p. 340-350.

¹¹ Italics are mine in both cases. See Lamm, Martin, *August Strindberg*, Stockholm, Bonniers, 1948, p. 99: “Utkasten och originalmanuskripten visa, såsom Henry Olsson utrett [...], att ramarna, som ha fransk miljö, utförts senare än själva dikterna”, and p. 102: “I denna efter den egentliga texten tilldiktade epilög [...]”

understand the meaning of the reflections displayed in the poem during the “nights” (while sleeping or daydreaming), reflections that constitute the true core of the poem (its “picture”).

In this process of interpretation, an interesting role has been played in more recent years by James Spens. Through his closer observation of the manuscript Spens denies that the Parisian descriptions were added later. From a philological point of view his analysis represents a well-founded correction of the chronology proposed by Olsson:

Henry Olssons hypotes [...] att Strindberg lade till de franska ”ramarna” i efterhand, efter att ha skrivit de tre första nätterna med enhetliga svenska motiv, godtas av Lamm [...] men torde knappast vara riktig. Hypotesen bekräftas enligt Olsson av ett par iakttagelser som han gjort i konceptmanuskriptet: att *Andra Natten* är utskriven på annat papper än de övriga ”nätterna” och att ramen till *Tredje Natten* saknas. Han observerar dock inte ett par andra omständigheter – att det första bevarade bladet i konceptmanuskriptet till *Tredje Natten* är paginerat “7” och att det saknar rubrik – vilka tvärtom tyder på att ramen har tillkommit före fortsättningen. Dessutom kan Strindberg mycket väl ha bytt papperssort medan han första gången skrev ned texten.¹²

In addition to this, Spens shows a picture of a sheet of paper used by Strindberg to draw a plan for *Sömngångarnätter*, where the author jotted down both the protagonist’s French points of departure and the Swedish destinations of his freely soaring spirit, a clear sign that the writer, certainly through drafts and gradual changes (which usually occur in the creative process), eventually arrived at an integrated concept, where there was no hierarchy between Swedish “picture” and foreign “frame”, and where “the actual text” – to quote Lamm’s definition – undoubtedly combined both parts.¹³

¹² Spens, James, “Kommentarer”, *op.cit.*, p. 380: “Henry Olsson’s hypothesis, according to which Strindberg added the French ‘frames’ later, after uniformly writing the three first nights with Swedish motifs, is accepted by Lamm but is unlikely to be right. The hypothesis is confirmed, according to Olsson, by some observations that he made with regard to the concept manuscript: that the *Second Night* was written on different paper from that of the other ‘nights’ and that the frame of the *Third Night* is missing. He does not, however, observe some other circumstances – that the pagination of the first preserved sheet in the concept manuscript of the *Third Night* is ‘7’ and that it does not have a title – which suggests, on the contrary, that the frame was composed before its continuation. Moreover, Strindberg might have changed the type of paper that he used when he wrote the first draft.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 380-381.

Even if Strindberg conceived the idea of the “foreign frames” shortly after he had developed the idea of the “farewells” and the “nights”, he combined these ideas to create a single text, thereby expressing a definitive authorial intention which he would not modify again, except when, about six years later, he added “The Fifth Night,” which rather confirmed and completed the chosen concept of the poem.¹⁴ The fact that Strindberg was the first to use the expression “foreign frames” should, therefore, not have anything to do with their literary status: they are not outside the text but a part of it. As John Eric Bellquist points out, *Sömngångarnätter* “is a unified narrative”, and “it would be simpler to define all four [‘Nights’] as comprising mental flights from specific stages on the poet’s physical journey.”¹⁵

In spite of his own philological results, Spens continues to interpret the French and Parisian settings as “ramskildring” (frame description) of the text, a definition he takes over in a later study and which he again uses to indicate a qualitative hierarchy: when the protagonist’s thoughts fly back to Stockholm, we are in the poetic core of the work, where his existential and philosophical quest is concentrated.¹⁶ The problem is that Spens’s description of the structure of the poem, as consisting of “tankedikt” (speculative poetry or poetry of ideas) during the “nights” and of foreign frame description during the days, does not correspond to the text. The very central monologues which in “The Third Night” question Western modernity with its technical and scientific progress do not take place during a flashback in Stockholm, but, rather, while the protagonist is strolling in Paris in the daytime, going from a crowded and noisy Parisian boulevard into Saint-Martin-des-Champs, a former church transformed into a museum of technology and science after the French Revolution.¹⁷ A similar circumstance occurs in “The Fourth Night”, when the protagonist, during another walk in the Bois de Boulogne in the daytime, reflects over the instrumental manipulation

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 407-409. “The Fifth Night” was composed in the autumn of 1889 and first published as an independent poem in March 1890. It was eventually included in the second edition of *Sömngångarnätter* in 1900 and has since then been a part of it.

¹⁵ Bellquist, John Eric, *Strindberg as a Modern Poet. A Critical and Comparative Study*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press, 1986, p. 80 and 85.

¹⁶ Spens, James, “*I Musernas bide*”. *En essä om Strindbergs “fula” poesi omkring 1883*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2000, p. 70-118.

¹⁷ Strindberg, August, SV, 15, p. 190-196.

of the natural and animal kingdom by mankind.¹⁸ The physical contact with Paris is evidently as important as the psychical contact with Stockholm to arouse the sleepwalker's thoughts and reflections.

Olsson had already noticed this contradiction, which he tried to explain as follows:

Den franska ramen, som ju från början var en senare tillsats [sic], har i denna tredje natt växt ut till ytterligare betydenhet, den är icke längre blott yttre miljöskildring utan har fått samma intensiva karaktär av *avsked* som själva sömngångarvandringen. Strindbergs första avsikt var ju att hålla en uppgörelse med sina *gångna* livsstadier, men i denna och följande natt går han i lika hög grad till rätta också med nuets makter.¹⁹

James Spens is more drastic. Because the texts of "The Third Night" and "The Fourth Night" do not correspond to the purported structure of the poem, indicated as "tankedikt i utländska ramar" (poetry of ideas within foreign frames), he draws the conclusion that the poetic cycle falls to pieces, and, in particular, that *Sömngångarnätter* is mainly interesting as poetry of ideas, whereas its narrative element is rather poor; also, that too much thought and reflection end up invading even the "frame," thereby breaking up the structure of the poem and leading to the failure of Strindberg's project that deals with realistic poetry of ideas; finally, that this failure depends on the fact that Strindberg is detaching himself from realism and approaching a new idealistic and platonic conception, already shown in the poem by a recurrent metaphysical urge and by a condemnation of artistic activity as *mimesis* in "The Second Night".²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 204-210.

¹⁹ Olsson, Henry, "Strindbergs Sömngångarnätter", *op.cit.*, p. 341: "The French frame, which was a later addition from the start [sic], has in this third night grown more important; it is no longer a simply exterior description of the setting, but has acquired the same intensive feature of *farewell* as the very sleepwalking. Strindberg's first goal was in fact to settle up with the *past* stages of his life, but in this and in the following night he also attacks the powers of present time."

²⁰ Strindberg's urge to observe reality and his Christian heritage are not, however, things apart in *Sömngångarnätter*, and the reference to Plato's condemnation of art is balanced by the reference, in the same poem, to the human need to imitate nature that Aristotle defined as *mimesis*. According to Erich Auerbach, the need to represent reality, even in its "low" spheres, is strictly connected to a long Western literary tradition that extends from the Gospels to Woolf, Joyce, and Proust, with a need to deal with the highest aspects of existence; higher aspects are, however, not represented without experiencing lower ones and giving them historical significance. See: Auerbach, Erich,

It is possible, however, to read this poetic cycle in another way. Its protagonist, a writer, is a split and ambivalent subject. Already his condition as a sleepwalker expresses a cleft: in the world of the senses he is on his way to, and in, Paris, but in his conscience and memory he is often, with a mixture of nostalgia and critical distance, in Stockholm. This double, simultaneous dimension in the perception of the urban space – a 'real' and material space, as well as a psychical space, which unfolds in the protagonist's conscience and memories – represents one of most modern, pioneering and fascinating aspects of *Sömngångarnätter*.²¹ The protagonist's conscience is certainly active not only in his flashbacks but also in the present, while he interacts with Paris in broad daylight. His reflections and speculations can, in this respect, only ironically be seen as detached from the reality he is plunged into; on the contrary, they always proceed from the actual and material conditions of his life.

Far from being an external frame or a mere biographical context, the urban space of "Paris 1883" is crucial to providing the poetical inspiration for *Sömngångarnätter*, constituting an important cultural and historical condition for the protagonist's existential reflections. Strindberg wants to represent his past life through his flashbacks and, at the same time, his present condition of exile, for only when taken together do they form the emblematic image of a destiny. Here Strindberg is bold enough to use a medieval form, the *knittel*-verse, to depict a new, cacophonous and disruptive reality, the metropolis of Paris and all that it has stood for, and still stands for, with respect to the development of our civilization.²² This is the very point of departure for the spirit's flights back- and forward in time, and even upward,

Mimesis: dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur, Bern, A. Francke, 1946; Spens, James, "I Musernas bide", *op.cit.*, p. 70-118, particularly p. 71-72, 82-93; and Ciaravolo, Massimo, "Parigi 'capitale del XIX secolo' nella visione strindberghiana", in Chiesa Isnardi, Gianna & Marelli, Paolo (ed.), *Nord ed Europa. Identità scandinava e rapporti culturali con il continente nel corso dei secoli*, Genova, Tilgher, 2004, p. 361-388.

²¹ It is, incidentally, this same psychical quality that makes Strindberg's plays a fundamental formal contribution to modern drama. See Szondi, Peter, *Theorie des modernen Dramas*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, [1956] 1959, p. 33-47.

²² By adapting this traditional verse, Strindberg showed the literary critics that he could handle poetic forms (see his concern in the letter quoted in note 3). In doing so, he made an early modernistic move, as the medieval verses collide with the signs of the contemporary big city.

in a vertical direction, towards metaphysical questions. The choice of Paris cannot, in this sense, be considered accidental, even taking into account what would come more than a decade later in Strindberg's novel *Inferno*.

Bellquist observes that *Sömngångarnätter* "is not just an index to its author's own complicated life; it offers a table of contents to his age." He adds that "the spirit of Strindberg's age [...] is still ours."²³ The experience of modernity and, connected to this, the questions about the real meaning of Western progress and emancipation, are important clues in the poem.²⁴ By employing his own life experience as first-hand material, Strindberg is able to convey a sharp and tangible image of modernity, giving us elements of material history as well as cultural history and, through them, a deeper understanding of what Paris meant to mankind and how it was generally perceived.²⁵ Walter Benjamin has called Paris "the capital of the nineteenth century" and he regards Charles Baudelaire's attempt at creating beauty out of that modern inferno as heroic.²⁶ In a similar way, *Sömngångarnätter* saves fragments of the Parisian melting pot, which for Benjamin has become the symbol of human life in the sign of high capitalism. Concepts that Benjamin discusses in *Das Passagen-Werk* (The Arcades Project) – such as the flâneur as observer of the metropolis; intellectual and literary skills as commodities sold on the market; technology, science and progress as phantasmagoria; museums; as well as dreams and awakening – can become tools for our understanding of *Sömngångarnätter* and confirm

²³ Bellquist, John Eric, *Strindberg as a Modern Poet*, op.cit., p. 102-103.

²⁴ My article is indebted to a seminal work, Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, New York/London, Penguin, [1982] 1988, although Berman does not deal with the works of Strindberg.

²⁵ I agree with Ulf Olsson when he criticises the shortcomings of the traditional biographical readings; biography is not the only evidence of the historical value of Strindberg's oeuvre. See for example Olsson, Ulf, *Levande död. Studier i Strindbergs prosa*, Stockholm/Stehag, Symposium, 1996, p. 17: "Den tid som representeras av författarens levnadslopp ersätts av den historicitet som en analys av texten, och av 'författaren' som en av textens funktioner, kan konstruera."

²⁶ See Benjamin, Walter, „Das Passagen-Werk“, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5.I-II, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1982, and Benjamin, Walter, „Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus“, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1.II, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1974, p. 509-690. See also Berman, Marshall, „Baudelaire: Modernism in the Streets“, in *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, op.cit., p. 131-171.

that Strindberg grasps in this poetic cycle something important about Western civilization towards the end of the nineteenth century.²⁷

Sömngångarnätter is a complicated and heterogeneous tale. Like other narratives, the poem has its own laws and strategies, often based on parallels, contrasts and recurring motifs. The interplay between Paris and Stockholm is one among the elements within this comprehensive structure. A deeper analysis of this interplay is needed, and although it cannot be accomplished in the space of this article, some interesting aspects can at least be pointed out. When we know, for example, that "The First Night" ends with a farewell to church, in particular the church Adolf Fredrik in Stockholm, which represents the protagonist's childhood faith, how do we read his new entering a church, this time Saint-Martin-des-Champs in Paris, in the first part of "The Third Night?" The protagonist – a freethinker full of questions and doubts, who is looking for a spiritual dimension beyond the triviality and materialism that surround him in the big city – is again compelled to take leave from a place which, as he discovers, has also become a temple, a museum now dedicated to the deities of contemporary times: technology and science.²⁸ We find, furthermore, the image of the writer as commodity in the prologue short poem "Vid Avenue de Neuilly..."²⁹ This image is set in a central place of Stockholm, Norrbrobasaren, where people, before the breakthrough of the big department stores, used to stroll and act as flâneurs, looking at the goods and buying them:³⁰

Vid avenue de Neuilly
Där ligger ett slakteri,

²⁷ See Briens, Sylvain, *Paris: laboratoire de la littérature scandinave moderne, 1880-1905*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, in particular p. 187-188, 217-221.

²⁸ Strindberg's criticism against the positivistic age of machines and technology includes a fascination with it. "The Third Night" confirms that his literary language is able to draw from the semantic fields of modern science and technology, as shown in Kärrnell, Karl-Åke, *Strindbergs bildspråk*, Stockholm, Gebers, 1969, and that his ideology contains a contradiction between hatred of and fascination with modernity, as described in Kylhammar, Martin, *Maskin och idyll. Teknik och pastorala ideal hos Strindberg och Heidenstam*, Malmö, Liber Förlag, 1985.

²⁹ This poem untitled is given here, for practical reasons, a title corresponding to its first verse. Hence the dots.

³⁰ See Björkrum, Svante, *Stockholm: en resa i tiden från ett sekel till ett annat*, Stockholm, Norstedts, 1998, p. 76-77, and Andersson, Magnus & Monasträ, Nino, *Stockholms årsringar. En inblick i stadens framväxt*, Stockholm, Stockholmia Förlag, 1998, p. 54.

Och när jag går till staden,
 Jag går där alltid förbi.
 Det stora öppna fönstret
 Det lyser av blod så rött,
 På vita marmorskivor
 Där ryker nyslaktat kött.
 I dag där hängde på glasdörrn
 Ett hjärta, jag tror av kalv,
 Som svept i goffrerat papper
 Jag tyckte i kölden skalv.
 Då gingo hastiga tankar
 Till gamla Norrbro-Basarn,
 Där lysande fönsterraden
 Beskådas av kvinnor och barn.
 Där hänger på boklådsvinstrycket
 En tunnklädd liten bok.
 Det är ett urtaget hjärta
 Som dinglar där på sin krok.³¹

Finally, the novelty of the so-called *Esplanadsystem* (boulevard network) of Stockholm, implemented by the city planner Albert Lindhagen, impresses at first glance the homecoming protagonist in “The Fifth Night”, but eventually acquires gloomy overtones, reminding him of Bismarck Germany and becoming a symbol of the oppressive power of the upper classes and of their definitive victory against the oppositional and democratic forces in Sweden towards the end of the Eighteen-Eighties:³²

³¹ Strindberg, August, SV, 15, p. 165. See Strindberg, August, *Sleepwalking Nights on Wide-awake Days and Biographical*, transl. by Arvid Paulson, New York, Law-arts publ., 1978, p. 15: “At Avenue de Neuilly / lies a slaughterhouse nearby; / whenever I go to the city / I always pass it nigh. // The large, wide open window / is gleaming with blood-red meat, / and on clean, white slabs of marble / lie fresh-slaughtered chunks to entreat. // Today there hung on the glass door / the heart of a calf, I believe; / it was wrapped in fluted paper, / from the cold seemed to quiver and heave. // My thoughts fled back to Norrbro / with its old bazaar-shops gay, / where women and children stand gazing / at the lighted window display. // There hangs in its book display window / a slender little book... / That book is a piece of heart torn out – / now dangling there on a hook...”

³² See Eriksson, Eva, *Den moderna stadens födelse. Svensk arkitektur 1890-1920*, Stockholm, Ordfront, 1998, p. 43-59, and Andersson, Magnus & Monastra, Nino, *Stockholms årsringar*, op.cit., p. 54-63; on the political, cultural and literary struggle in Sweden during the 1880's see Gedin, David, *Fältets herrar. Framväxten av en modern författarroll. Artonhundraåttitalet*, Stockholm / Stehag, Symposion, 2004.

Ensam går han på folkfylld gata,
 Irrar hemlös och knuffar tål
 Tycker han hör hur mänskorna prata
 Främmande tankar på utländskt mål
 Råkar vaktmän i pickelhuvor –
 Vaktande gathörn som vore det Rhen,
 Mörka blickar inunder luvor
 Söka skydd under torgets trä.
 Ser palatser som Rhentrakts-borgar
 Milliard-hus, berlinerstil,
 Torn och spiror och järntrådkorgar
 Gallerfönster som trotsa fil
 Allt är skyddat, solitt och präktigt,
 Och som bakgrund syns en kasern.
 Fosterlandet är vordet mäktigt
 Kryat upp sig med blod och järn. [...] ³³

We are dealing with phenomena – the flâneur and the boulevard – which originated in nineteenth century Paris and rapidly spread to other major European cities; and they are included in a poem where the protagonist's existence is split and, as it were, swinging between Paris and Stockholm.³⁴

It is also symptomatic that “The Fifth Night”, included by Spens in the text of *Sömngångarnätter* for the fifteenth volume of the critical edition, *Strindbergs Samlade Verk*, is left out by the same scholar in his

³³ Strindberg, August, SV, 15, p. 232-233. See Strindberg, August, *Sleepwalking Nights*, op.cit., p. 75-76: “Lonely he walks now on swarming street, / roving homeless and enduring jostling, / thinks he hears people talking / alien thoughts in some foreign tongue; / encounters guards in helmets with spikes / guarding the street-corners as if at the Rhine; / somber glances from under hoods / seeking shelter 'neath trees in the square. / Palaces like River Rhine castles, / millionaire mansions à la Berlin; / towers and spires and steel wire baskets, / grated windows, defying break-ins. / All is protected, solid and grand, / and as a background is seen a barracks. – / The fatherland has indeed grown mighty, / through iron and blood rejuvenated. – “One of the “palaces” the poem refers to is probably the new Bünsowska huset on the parade boulevard Strandvägen, a symbol of the entrepreneurial upper class that was growing stronger in Sweden; see Eriksson, Eva, *Den moderna stadens födelse*, op.cit., p. 11-20; Andersson, Magnus & Monastra, Nino, *Stockholms årsringar*, op.cit., p. 57-59; and Björkrum, Svante, *Stockholm: en resa i tiden*, op.cit., p. 134-135.

³⁴ See Westerståhl Stenport, Anna, *Making Space. Stockholm, Paris and the Urban Prose of Strindberg and His Contemporaries*, Berkeley, University of California, 2004, p. 1-85, and Briens, Sylvain, *Paris: laboratoire de la littérature scandinave moderne*, op.cit., p. 265-270.

later study, with the explanation that this poem cannot be considered a part of Strindberg's realistic project of poetry around 1883, and that the writer "was already in a new phase of his authorship" in 1889.³⁵ If, on the contrary, one believes that *Sömngångarnätter* is a coherent work, its "Fifth Night" indicates a definitive authorial intention, and its (bitter) final perspective cannot but affect the interpretation of the whole cycle.³⁶

With the exception of the already quoted short poem "Vid Avenue de Neuilly...", *Sömngångarnätter* cannot evidently be included in anthologies of poetry. The lyric, however, is excellent, partly because it is able, in its concentrated and intimate form (called *centrallyrik* in Swedish), to express and anticipate the dynamic interaction between Paris and Stockholm that characterizes the entire long poem.

In "Vid Avenue de Neuilly..." the autobiographical condition of exile and homesickness produces a movement in the conscience of the poetic subject, expressed through a metaphorical link between the concrete everyday experience in a Parisian suburb and the memory of a central space in Stockholm. The link leads to a process of identification between the torn-out heart of a calf in the butcher's shop in Neuilly and the author's own destiny at home. In Strindberg's time, Neuilly was a suburb of Paris, while Norrbröbasaren was, as already pointed out, the most important market in Stockholm, before it was pulled down in 1903 in connection with the building of the new house of parliament.³⁷ The expression "i kölden" does not seem to refer only to the climate, but suggests also a state of mind, while the "lysande fönsterraden" (row of glittering windows) suggest both the Christmas season, with its friendly atmosphere and people shopping for presents. The bourgeois rite is contrasted, implicitly but strongly, with the situation of a suffering author who felt forced to flee from the bourgeoisie of his home country; the vulnerability of the exile is contrasted with intimacy and communion at home. At the same time, paradoxically, the writer, wanting to sell

³⁵ Spens, James, "I Musernas bidé", *op.cit.*, p. 7. A similar opinion is expressed in Olsson, Henry, "Strindbergs Sömngångarnätter", *op.cit.*, p. 331.

³⁶ See for example Söderberg, Hjalmar, "Sömngångarnätter (1901)", in *Samlade verk*, 10, *Litterärt; Varia II*, Stockholm, Bonniers, 1943, p. 7-11; see also Ciaravolo, Massimo, "Hur Söderberg läste Strindbergs Sömngångarnätter", in *Parnass*, 2006:3, p. 5-8.

³⁷ See Eriksson, Eva, *Den moderna stadens födelse*, *op.cit.*, p. 137-141, and Andersson, Magnus & Monastra, Nino, *Stockholms årsringar*, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

his work, cannot but appeal to the favor of the reading public and represent himself (his product) as one among the commodities that they want to buy. This poem illustrates, as Ulf Olsson has pointed out, what Walter Benjamin writes about the Parisian flâneur in the epoch of high capitalism: the flâneur becomes a symbol of the modern writer, who lives surrounded by market commodities and observes them, thereby understanding that the literature he produces has also become a commodity.³⁸ Thanks to Strindberg's unusual comparison this insight takes on an intimate form, conveyed by an extremely ordinary, everyday experience: the article that is sold is nothing less than the poet's book, his life, his heart.

"Vid Avenue de Neuilly..." has become a well-known poem in the Swedish canon, and rightly so, for perhaps, as no other text, it can grasp in few words a conflict that is typical of all independent artists. For this reason it can, to a certain extent, live on in the anthologies without the help of *Sömngångarnätter*. Still, this lyric performs an introductory function within a more comprehensive poetic structure, and only if we read it as such we do it full justice. As a prologue to the whole long poem, "Vid Avenue de Neuilly..." shows how formally and thematically fundamental the psychological movement between Paris and Stockholm is. It would indeed be impossible to separate here, as Lamm proposes for *Sömngångarnätter*, the "actual poem" from the "Parisian frame". And how can we separate the realistic and the idealistic elements, which so deeply imply each other?

If Charles Baudelaire represents the modern big city in his lyric poems and prose poems, Strindberg experiments with the long poem. And if this choice can appear surprising for a naturalistic writer and in a modern context, we should remember that the long poem plays a major role in 20th-century poetry.³⁹ One of the most outstanding modernist

³⁸ The categories proposed by Walter Benjamin are applied by Ulf Olsson to Strindberg's prose works in particular. See Olsson, Ulf, *Levande död*, *op.cit.*, and Olsson, Ulf, "I varans inferno. Utkast till en strindbergsläsning", *BLM*, 1990/1, p. 22-28. "Vid Avenue de Neuilly..." is taken as the starting point in the analysis of "literature and commodity form" in Olsson, Ulf, *Levande död*, *op.cit.*, p. 25-31.

³⁹ See Kamboureli, Smaro, "The Long Poem's Race away from Modernity", in Karlsen, Ole (ed.), *Krysninger. Nye perspektiver på moderne nordisk lyrikk*, Oslo, Unipub, 2008, p. 185-209; Kamboureli's descriptive theory of the modern long poem is seminal also if applied to *Sömngångarnätter*, although its perspective is post-modern and post-colonial.

poets, T.S. Eliot, made his debut in 1917 with his masterpiece “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, a searching, reasoning poem about the meaning of life (or rather about the lack of such a meaning), where walking and observing in the big city constitute central features, as, for example, in the introductory strophe:

Let us go then, you and I,
 When the evening is spread out against the sky
 Like a patient etherised upon a table;
 Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
 The muttering retreats
 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
 And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
 Streets that follow like a tedious argument
 Of insidious intent
 To lead you to an overwhelming question...
 Oh, do not ask, ‘What is it?’
 Let us go and make our visit.⁴⁰

Also *Sömngångarnätter* is a long narrative poem, where the original link between verse and foot continues to exist in the rhythmical pace of a more hectic flâneur in the streets, and in his observations, as in the beginning of “The Third Night”:

Ute på strövtåg hela dagen
 I det dimmiga höst-Paris;
 Häpen väl, men icke betagen,
 Och beundrar på eget vis.

Genom tunnlar av kalk och tegel
 Män skor knuffa sig rastlöst fram;
 Våta gatan som söndrig spegel
 Ligger solkig av dy och slam;
 Spegel ännu av himlen flikar,
 Ger en vrågbild dunkel och svag
 Av den fallna människans drag.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London – Boston, Faber and Faber, 1974, p. 13.

⁴¹ Strindberg, August, SV, 15, p. 190. See Strindberg, August, *Sleepwalking nights*, *op.cit.*, p. 37: “Strolling about in the town all day / in the haze of autumn-Paris... / full of wonder, but not enthralled, / yet I like it in a way. // Inside tunnels of mortar and brick / people restlessly jostle their way; / rainedampened street, like shattered mirror, / now

My conclusion is that we need a deeper thematic and structural analysis of *Sömngångarnätter* that would illustrate the inner logic of the poem and its narrative. The text is complicated, but it does not elude analysis and explanation. John Eric Bellquist and James Spens have contributed much in this respect, but Spens’s final opinion, that *Sömngångarnätter* is a failed poem is problematic. Gustaf Fröding, Ola Hansson, Hjalmar Söderberg and Gunnar Ekelöf did not think that *Sömngångarnätter* was a failure.⁴² Furthermore, the specific resources of the modern long poem as a hybrid and heterogeneous genre – a genre capable of mixing tradition and contemporary times, lyrical subjectivity and realistic, social gaze – are part of the author’s intention from the start.⁴³ We must try to specify these values.

lies begrimed by slush and sludge, / still reflecting patches of heaven, / with a distortion, dark and dim, / of the fallible human’s features.”

⁴² See Fröding, Gustaf, “Strindbergs lyrik”, in Drachmann, Holger [et al.], *En bok om Strindberg*, Karlstad, Forssells Boktryckeri, 1894, p. 151-169; Hansson, Ola, “August Strindberg”, in *Lyrik och essäer*, Stockholm, Atlantis / Svenska Akademien, 1997, p. 181-218; Söderberg, Hjalmar, “Sömngångarnätter (1901)”, *op.cit.*; Ekelöf, Gunnar, “Strindbergs dikter”, in *Skrifter*, 7, *Blandade kort och annan essästik*, Stockholm, Bonniers, 1992, p. 213-217.

⁴³ Kamboureli, Smaro, “The Long Poem’s Race away from Modernity”, *op.cit.*; see the first long quotation in this article (note 3).