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Strindberg in Portugal: 109 Years on Stage

Although many authors may consider it doesn't present the writer in a true light, the use of indirect translation is, sometimes, the way that allows the reception of playwrights who write in lesser-known languages abroad. That is the reality of August Strindberg's works' and plays' receptions in Portugal. The usage of French, English or even Spanish intermediary texts constituted a fundamental resource in the importation process of this Swedish playwright's literary products in Portugal.

Although evaluating the role of indirect translation in the importation phenomenon of dramatic texts in a specific social and cultural moment, the reception of Strindberg in Portugal outlines a particular situation of stage production in the Portuguese scene because it can be figured out how the same author and the same play can symbolise innovation or obsolescence according to the period of its staging.

The reception of this Swedish playwright is also interesting because the translator or the companies' directors are not only importing a Swedish model of literature or of theatre: Portugal imports the French and the English stage and performances as well as their models of translation and literature.

Swedish literature in Portugal has a direct relation with the promotion of Strindberg to an international writer (cf. *Casanova*, 1999)¹. It was especially during the fifties and sixties that Portugal started to import regular translations of Swedish authors.

¹ Casanova, Pascale, 1999, *La République Mondiale des Lettres*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil.

Swedish language and culture were never very close to their Portuguese counterparts. This is due to geographical constraints and quite different historical influences: while the countries of Southern Europe have been under a strong Roman influence linguistically and culturally that influence did not reach Scandinavian countries in the same way.

Given this historical explanation it is natural that Swedish culture has constituted an almost exotic element to Portugal, as it has always been practically unknown. It is true that relations between the two countries began to strengthen, especially in the nineteenth century, but the reality is that there was never a regular reception of Scandinavian literature in Portugal. The lack of tradition of importing Swedish literature has to do above all with the deficient affinity between the two countries, with the geographical distance and the fact that there weren't many Swedish speakers or natives in Portugal. The Portuguese public had to wait until Swedish writers were widely acclaimed in the international cultural system first, before entering our country, and obviously Paris was the contact point.

The first presentation of Strindberg in Portugal was in 1903 with the play *O Pae (Fadren)*. To understand the reactions that occurred during this first attempt of staging it must be taken a glance to the first Nordic playwright to be staged there. Ibsen wrote *Et dukkehjem* in 1879. Concerning the distance between Portugal and Norway and the long time that cultural approaches and influences used to take to reach the southern countries like Portugal and Spain or even Italy, surprisingly, it only took nineteen years to be staged in Coimbra² (Porto, 1994:19)³.

² «...acabei por verificar os meus papéis e lá estava: 1897 – o ano da estreia de Casa de Boneca, em Coimbra, pela companhia de Lucília simões. O espectáculo veio depois para Lisboa onde esteve três meses em cena, o que era notável naquela época, depois no Brasil, sempre com grande êxito.» Porto, 1994:19.

«I had checked my papers and there it was: 1897 – the year that A Doll's House has been first staged in Coimbra, by Lucília Simões' Theatre Company. Then the play was presented in Lisbon where it had been staged for three months, which is remarkable considering that time. Afterwards it went to Brazil and always with great success.» (translation)

³ Porto, Carlos, 1994, «Teatro em Portugal: relatório/reportórios», in *Vértice*, nº 62 (II série) Set/Out, Lisboa.

This staging occurred in 1897. *Casa da Boneca (Et dukkehjem)* had an outrageous reception by the public, but this was a common reaction of European stages to the play. The Portuguese actress, Lucília Simões, who played Nora, found the role of her life. After this presentation in Portugal she took her company to Brazil to present the same play and had great success. In Portugal, the play was once more presented in Lisbon and in Oporto, in 1923 and 1947 with the same actress but with different companies.

The first translation of *Et dukkehjem* was printed and available to the public in 1894, collected with *Espectros (Gengangere)*, and the next year *Hedda Gabler*, in 1895, (McFarlane, 1994: 11-15)⁴ was printed. It was a great influence on the drama *Sabina Freire* written by Manuel Teixeira Gomes, the seventh President of Portugal.

At the beginning of the 20th century – the precise year of the edition is unknown – the translator E. Nascimento Correia presented another translation of the play in a single volume to the press and, in this publication, includes a preface by the translator with some notes on the author and the play. The text mentions that there are huge cultural differences between Nordic and Mediterranean countries, and Nascimento Correia's purpose is to convince the public that Portuguese women could never behave like Nora:

Já digo: é possível que na Noruega, um paiz essencialmente frio, as mulheres sejam como Ibsen nol-as descreve, porque também acho demais que um autor, cujo nome a trompeta da fama atirou para todos os cantos do Universo, errasse logo na observação das duas mulheres que apresenta. Mas n'este caso, o que não me parece possível é que a maioria dos que exalçaram a peça, elevando-a ás mais altas culminancias da gloria conheçam sufficientemente o meio norueguez, para poderem asseverar o contrário do que aqui digo, que não é negar o talento indiscutível de Ibsen, mas que é protestar contra a auréola de impecavel de que o querem rodeiar, chamando-lhe derrubador e não sei quantas coisa mais [...] o que elle [Ibsen] tenta derrubar, pelo exemplo, segundo a minha opinião de meridional, é a santidade do amor materno, dando já de barato que seja razoável

⁴ McFarlane, James, ed., 1994, *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

o apresentar aos olhos do mundo, esse outro exemplo da mulher ter o direito de abandonar o marido, porque elle não tem o seu modo de ver...que é falso, como tem de ser, tudo o que sahe do cérebro d'uma desequilibrada.⁵ (Correia, s.d.: 4)⁶

According to this explanation and the reaction from the Portuguese public the differences between north and south were already established, and during the first stage of a Strindberg play, the first reaction was basically the same.

Theatre companies were, undoubtedly, the most responsible for the introduction of Strindberg in Portugal. There were other means that allowed his emergence, opening doors to different kind of publics.

Academics had a special role on that subject. António Feijó, for instance, was a Portuguese consul in Sweden and decided to translate *A Viagem de Pedro, O Afortunado* (*Lycko-Pers resa*) as a linguistic exercise to learn Swedish. At that time, Feijó was ahead of its publication in Portugal, in 1906 (Cf. Feijó, 1906)⁷. There were two different translations of this play into Portuguese, and finally, in 2002, Fernanda Lapa directed it in the National Theatre developing a great work of scenarios, combining several contemporary and baroque

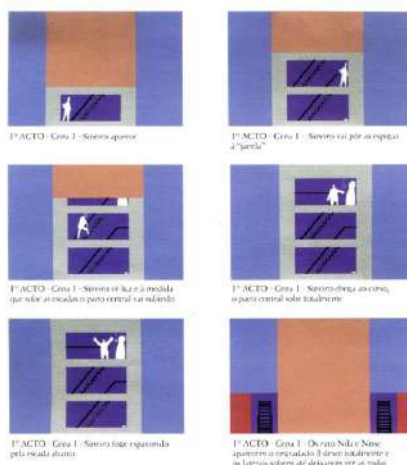
⁵ «So I'll tell you: it is possible that in Norway, a country essentially cold, women could be like Ibsen describes them to us, because I can hardly believe that a playwright whose name the trumpets of fame sounded in every corners of the universe, could be wrong in the description of the two women he presents. It could be possible. But, in this case, it doesn't seem probable that those ones who acclaimed the play – raising it to the highest culminations of glory – could know the Norwegian environment well enough to assert that I am wrong. I'm not denying the unquestionable talent of Ibsen, but I protest against that halo of impeccability that they want to surround him, calling him a knocker of I don't know what number of things. [...] [W]hat he [Ibsen], for instance, tries to overthrow, according to my opinion as a meridional man, is the sanctity of maternal love, and I'm not even questioning that it could be reasonable to present to the world's eyes that other example of a woman that has the right to leave her husband, just because he has a different way of thinking... this is absurd, as has to be everything that comes out from the mind of this insane woman.» (translation)

⁶ Correia, E. Nascimento (transl.), [s.d.], Prefácio in Ibsen, Henrik, *Casa de Boneca*, Ed. Livraria Popular de Francisco Franco.

⁷ Feijó, António (transl.), 1906, Prefácio, in Strindberg, August, *A Viagem de Pedro o Afortunado*, Porto, Livraria Clássica A. M. Teixeira e C.^a.

techniques on stage and working in a new translation with fragments of the two existing texts.

This performance began with the presentation of a scenario with different level floors that were covered with a large piece of fabric. Slowly, the fabric was raised while the old man in the tower (Den Gamle i Tornet) – the Portuguese character is Sineiro, which means the man who rings the bell – is climbing up the stairs and rings the bell on the third floor. Then he runs out in panic, the fabric covers all the structure again and on the first level two mice heels are finally shown. The play begins with the dialogue between the two mice: Nisse and Nilla.



I. «A Viagem de Pedro Afortunado». Lycko-Pers resa, 2002, Director: Fernanda Lapa, TNDMII – Teatro Nacional D. Maria II (Dona Maria II National Theatre, Scenário. 1st Scene, in Presentation Book of the play.⁸

While *Lycko-Pers resa* was being stage in the National Theatre, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* was being performed in the theatre next door, the Teatro Aberto. This allows us to conclude that Strindberg and Ibsen were seen as direct rivals but, at the same time, as agents of the same kind of theatre: Nordic theatre.

Academic reviews and newspapers also had importance in Strindberg's reception. There were some news and articles about the author himself, his diaries, and his life and a few studies on the subject

⁸ Photo: courtesy of Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II, Lisboa. TNDMII, 2012, *A Viagem de Pedro Afortunado* – Caderno do espetáculo, Ed. TNDMII, Lisboa, pg. 24.

were presented: João da Silva Duarte, Jacinto Denis, Luís Francisco Rebello and Gonçalo Vilas Boas are some authors that I must underline. Finally, in national school curricula for high schools, the play *Fröken Julie* was one of the choices for students in the literature syllabus as well in academic courses related to Cinema and Theatre degrees. However, theatrical companies and editors were and still are the main people responsible for the importation and presentation of Strindberg's works. There were twenty-six different translations into Portuguese including novels, short stories, essays and plays. Concerning drama translation, the text is usually re-written for a specific production and then published.

Strindberg's staging in Portugal has a very remarkable course because it has been received in different chronological periods of our national history with completely dissimilar reactions. Like Ibsen, the first presentation was done when our constitutional monarchy was already collapsing. *Fadren (O Pae)*, had its official presentation in December 1903 but it was only staged in January 1904. It had a single presentation because the royal chancellor prohibited the next sessions. The play was suspended because it questioned the legitimacy of paternity and the actor that performed O Capitão (*Ryttmästarn*) resembled our King D. Carlos the first. Just after the murder of the king in 1908 the actor Ferreira da Silva staged this play again and again in some theatres in Lisbon and Oporto. 1916 was the last year that Ferreira da Silva performed *Ryttmästarn* in *Fadren*. After a long period without being staged, Strindberg was taken onto the National Scene again during Estado Novo – Salazar's regime between 1933 and 1974 – with *Fröken Julie (A menina Júlia)*. Sweden was never so close to Portugal. Jacinto Ramos, the director who performed Jean as well, conceived a production which referred to the Sjöberg film and stage performances. Sjöberg had presented the play in Paris, during international theatre festivals. Redondo Junior wrote the stage translation, using Boris Vian's French text.

Sjöberg staged *Fröken Julie* in 1949 in Dramaten with Inga Tidblad playing Julie and Ulf Palme playing Jean. When the play was transposed to cinema Anita Björk replaced Inga Tidblad, but during its itinerancy

in the Festival Intenational d'Art Dramatique, in 1955 and in 1959, it was Inga Tidblad who performed Julie once again.



II. Jacinto Ramos, Lurdes Norberto and Helena Félix, *A Menina Júlia*, 1960, TNDMII. Director: Jacinto Ramos.⁹



III. Ulf Palme and Anita Björk casting *Fröken Julie*.¹⁰

⁹ Photo: Courtesy of Museu do Teatro – Archive.

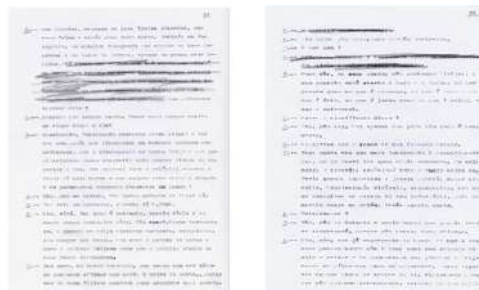
¹⁰ Photo: *Fröken Julie* (film). Direction: Alf Sjöberg, 1951, 00:22:12. Public domain.



IV. Ulf Palme (Jean) and Inga Tidblad (Julie), *Fröken Julie*, Théâtre Hébertot, 1955. Director: Alf Sjöberg.¹¹

The Portuguese performance was clearly influenced by the heroine model, scenarios and costume design. The copy of Anita Björk's dress and blondish hair, for instance, are evident in the Portuguese first presentation. The white furniture, the lilacs above the table, and the ceiling lamp were a copy of Sjöberg's film and the French performance.

After this play other independent companies tried to stage the Swedish playwright but censorship was always erasing and adapting the lines. That was the case of *Credores (Fordringsägare)*. In the pictures below examples of text erasure can be seen where complete paragraphs about the women's bodies and feminine language were censored.



V. Translation Júlio Gesta, *Credores (Fordringsägare)*, 1962, TEP - Teatro Experimental do Porto (Oporto Experimental Theatre). Direction: João Guedes.¹²

¹¹ Photo: Courtesy Théâtre Hébertot – Archive, Paris.

¹² Photo: Courtesy TEP. Pages of the play *Credores* (manuscript), Translation Julio Gesta in 1962, pages 18 and 35.

During Estado Novo eight plays of Strindberg were performed in Portugal. Five plays were staged during the sixties:

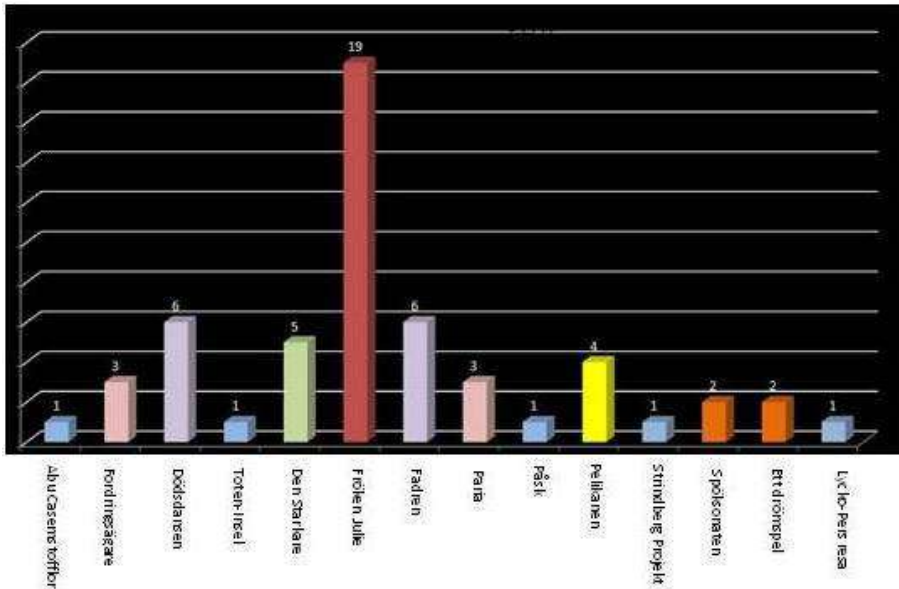
- 1960, *A menina Júlia (Fröken Julie)*, TNDMII (National Theatre)
- 1962, *Credores (Fodringsägare)*, TEP (Oporto Experimental Theatre)
- 1962, *O Pai (Fadren)*, TNDMII (National Theatre)
- 1963, *O Pária (Paria)*, Teatro Moderno de Lisboa – Sociedade de Actores (Lisbon Modern Theatre – Actors’ Society)
- 1969, *A dança da morte (Dödsdansen)* Casa da Comédia (Comedy House) and three during the seventies, before the Carnation Revolution
- 1970, *Dança da Morte em doze assaltos (Play Strindberg) (Play Strindberg)* Adaptation by Dürrenmatt – Casa da Comédia (Comedy House)
- 1971, *Um Sonho (Ett drömspel)* Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa (Lisbon Studio Theatre)
- 1971, *As Babuchas de Abu Kassem (Abu Casems tofflor)* Teatro do Gerifalto (Gerifalto’s Theatre)

After the collapse of the regime and the Carnation revolution in 1974, every independent company wanted to stage Strindberg and *Fröken Julie* was the easiest Strindberg play to be performed by small companies because they didn’t have to invest too much money in sets and actors.

During the 80’s and 90’s Strindberg cycles or trilogies were on the top of the Portuguese scene and Luís Miguel Cintra made one of the most remarkable performances of Strindberg at Teatro da Cornucópia in Lisbon, with avant-garde sets.

The cycle was composed by three plays: *A Ilha dos Mortos, Páscoa (Påsk)* and *O Pai (Fadren)*. One year later, Luís Miguel Cintra decided to stage *Spöksonaten* using the same line of direction and artistic creation.

Luís Varela provided another Strindberg cycle in Évora, a city in the south of Portugal, in 1996, presenting *Credores (Fodringsägare)*, *A mais forte (Den starkare)*, and *Pária (Paria)*, and the Company Mala Voadora directed a trilogy in 2003, in Famalicão, in the northern region of Portugal, performing the same plays.



VI. Portuguese performances of Strindberg plays since 1903 till 2012.

Analysing the chart above (numbering fifty five performances) that presents the Portuguese performances of Strindberg plays at a professional level, it is possible to conclude that *Fröken Julie* was the play staged most often in Portugal, but it still is attached to a naturalistic theatre and to an English classic model of performance. The last performance done in the National Theatre in Lisbon resembled Mike Figgis' film, like in 1960 Jacinto Ramos' production resembled Sjöberg's film.

It seems there is a tradition of importing cinematographic versions onto the National Theatre Stage, keeping the lines of naturalism and classic theatre. Considering professional companies, there was only a single performance of *Fröken Julie*, staged by Portuguese directors, that had completely broken with the nineteenth century count's daughter's image and classic staging.

This performance was directed by Rui Sena, in 1996, in an interior town of Portugal, Covilhã, and it was tailored to a public that was not used to attending the theatre. The repertoire in this theatre company was mainly attached to the classic Portuguese playwrights, such as Gil Vicente, and live animals were kept on stage to recreate pastoral scenes.

Rui Sena brought avant-garde ideas of performance to this company, influenced by the years he spent in RDA and with foreign performers. To present *Fröken Julie*, Sena conceived a ramp as the main set, an inclined wood structure all covered with sheepskin, which is a typical product of that region of Portugal. When the public entered the dark room there was a smell of burnt rosemary to recreate Noite de São João, which is a national celebration and the nearest equivalent to the Swedish Midsommarafton.

It was a contemporary scene and the kitchen was on the upper level of the stage while in other performances the kitchen is commonly on a lower one. The action took place on the ramp which resulted as a comfort zone for both actors. With the development of the action, Jean moved up on the structure while Julie was always descending. The environment was dark and the light seemed to be projected through the festivities' paper candle lights attached to the structure of the set.



VII. A menina Júlia, 1996, Teatro das Beiras, Covilhã.
Direction: Rui Sena.¹³

Considering the reception of Strindberg's dramas in Portugal, there is a possibility to understand what ways were chosen to present the Scandinavian author in our national territory. The procedure was then to consider the various norms of translational behaviour as well as norms of staging, reflecting on in whose favour they could have functioned. As Anthony Pym underlines, norms work according to features that

¹³ Photo: Courtesy Rui Sena, Teatro das Beiras.

can be effective or that can benefit certain groups, enabling others to cooperate: church, regimes, science, etc. (Pym, 1998: 111)¹⁴. As mentioned, the reception of Strindberg accompanied various political systems and social conjunctures: the monarchy, the First Republic, the Estado Novo, the post-revolutionary period and the present time in a democratic system.

Although Strindberg was performed earlier in Portugal, a regular staging of his plays was never performed either in Portugal or in Spain during this period. Some plays were inclusively performed first in Portugal and then in Spain. *Fröken Julie* is an example: it was first performed in Portugal in 1960 and then in Spain in 1961. It must be highlighted that although the texts were translated indirectly, the direction and artistic performance of Jacinto Ramos in the National Theatre D. Maria II imported Swedish models of staging.

Once the importation of Strindberg's plays, as theatrical performance and literary structure and identity, was and still is done through the use of indirect translation, the Strindbergian theatrological trace in Portugal reveals that is important to question the relevance of staging Strindberg nowadays, the meaning of cultural boundaries of interference and the categories of belonging that define the structure of the Portuguese stage and that define the foreign author. This case study intends to sketch out a kind of interdisciplinarity between intercultural studies and systems that evolved alongside and in cooperation with others because there is a clear intersection and overlap of cultures where more than two different cultures were mixed at once: source culture/language, intermediary cultures/ languages (mainly French, English, Spanish texts and models), and target culture/language according to the work of stage translators and performers.

¹⁴ Pym, Anthony, 1998, *Method in Translation History*, Manchester, St. Jerome.