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August Strindberg and Ingmar Bergman. Comparative Perspectives on the Pain of the Innocent

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SUMMARY

The PhD thesis "August Strindberg and Ingmar Bergman. Comparative Perspectives on the Pain of the Innocent" represents, *prima facie*, a research of comparative literature that aims to archive and analyse Strindberg's influences on Bergman's *oeuvre* with regard to the theme of the pain of the innocent. *Lato sensu*, this paper intends to approach the work of several Swedish/ Norwegian/ Danish creators (writers, philosophers) such as Em. Swedenborg, S. Lägerlöf, Tomas Tranströmer, H. Ibsen, P. Lagerkvist, K. Hamsun, S. Kierkegaard, Kaj Munk, by circumscribing their influence on Bergman, *i.e.* by tracing the development from the pain of the innocent Job to suffering, guilt, humiliation, solitude, faith and despair, against the Lutheran background and the subject of *Deus Absconditus*. With a *Janus Bifrons* face, the pain of the innocent appears in all these signs and it is described in its negativity – experienced in intimacy, it must always be shared with the others by the character that we could generically call the passionate Job. Certainly, another objective of this paper is to highlight the "contamination" between Bergman and his Swedish/ Danish or German expressionistic masters: Sjöström, Stiller, Sjöberg, Molander, Dreyer, Pabst, Murnau, Lang. August Johan Strindberg (1849-1912), as the naturalistic playwright of the "clustered soul", as a poet, as an author of confessions/ journals and novels, of funeral and occult studies, of chemistry, genetics, botany and biology, as an alchemist, painter and photographer, is considered to play an important role not only in the process of rebirth of the dramatic movement of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century (in proto-expressionism or proto-surrealism for instance), but also in the reconfiguration of the reminiscences of tragedy, both classical and ancient. Ingmar Ernst Bergman's work (1918-2007) – his art films, journals, interviews, confessions of stage craft or dramatic compositions transformed first into juvenile plays, later into the Great Text of the film – represents an archeological assertion of Strindberg's distorted vision of humanity - pessimistic, dysfunctional, even nostalgic and apocalyptic; moreover, we shall examine Bergman's work in the context of Strindberg's creative "demons", but also in connection with the modern European cinematography.

Considering the current cultural circumstances in Romania, where the study of foreign literatures is achieved within the departments of comparative literature, and the European film is analysed less from an aesthetic point of view, but mostly through its narrative content (which is difficult to avoid if the aim is to have an overview) or through the montage technique, our approach of such a serious, intangible, inexhaustible, extended and eccentric topic might be surprising, even in this academic and institutionalized space. This might be due to language obstacles, to the distance between the cardinal points, the cultural differences and the very opacity of the pain theme itself.

However, having studied the most important directions (including the first film theorists from the late nineteenth century up to contemporary Lacanian and Freudian scholars who apply psychoanalysis in relationship with these arts), we can sincerely and faithfully affirm that approaching the topic of the pain of innocent from a comparative and aesthetical perspective represents indeed a novelty and a fundamental necessity. This paper does not aim at offering a synthesis of the history theater or of the Swedish film (or even of the Nordic film), nor does it constitute a cinematic primer or a book of aesthetics. Our method does not fall into a simplistic or simplified comparison and it will not bear an hermetic conclusion. Therefore, it is not a classical or proportionate interpretation of the pain of the innocent, it is not progressive or gradual, *au fur et à mesure*, but a demonstration "in branches", divided and segmented, conducted with and through each chapter – speaking with Professor Muthu's peculiar metaphor, the current interpretation is a multiple one, like the "eyes of the cockchafer", having plenty of facets and thousands of compounded eyes. Correspondingly, the theories of film and theater are used here only for their relevance to the topic of pain. The symbiosis between a literary work and its cinematic accomplishment (and we don't mean here one screening or the other, but an essential conveyance of themes) involves numerous specific aspects: the particularization of the artistic beliefs of both Strindberg and Bergman, but also the modern mutations of the tragedy or the reconsideration of Volkelt's conviction that destiny has got in modernity an immanent/intrinsic position. When analyzing a cinematic realization, we use a different kind of technical discourse and distinctive instruments; nevertheless, cinema is the art that always reverberates profoundly with the modifications in literature (let's just think of the narrative technique of the stream of consciousness). In addition to this specialized language, there are in certain places also signs of a biblical language related to our subject. If we were to adopt J. Aumont's appreciation, we could say that the film in its entirety is the place where cinema meets non-cinematic elements, but the personal contribution of the researcher would be inconclusive, even insignificant if he did not uncover all these layers. In fact, modern theories of film and theater - two areas that, undoubtedly, interfere - are separated by a boundary as thin as a pellicle. Thus, beyond the didactic objective of writing a PhD thesis, the mission of this project would remain in the shadows, marginal or unnoticed, without an *inter*, *multi* and *transdisciplinary* approach where various methods of research such as literary critique and literary theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis, criticism and theory of film and theater coalesce.

The comparative and archaeological study of the influences between a playwright and a film/theater director (both Strindberg and Bergman having gone beyond the attributes of national writers in order to become international cultural phenomena, both having outdistanced their contemporary literary and philosophical movements) goes beyond the "orderly", "proper" and conventional limits of a doctoral thesis; it is an activity expanded over several years or, why not,

over one's entire life. The three-year period of study and writing is rather modest, that is the reason why we gave up writing some tangential chapters ("Inhibition and hysteria in modern cinema", "The dramatic modernity – the stage of the battle of the sexes and the combat of the brains") – they shall be developed later in post-doctoral projects. This research was started about ten years ago and it was preceded by an undergraduate thesis analyzing the sacred and the unsacred of the human being in comparing Strindberg with Bergman and Bergman with Strindberg. In the PhD thesis "August Strindberg and Ingmar Bergman. Comparative Perspectives on the Pain of the Innocent", Strindberg is read and revisited *sorrowfully* and *painfully* (i.e. in terms of his pain), simultaneously with Bergman; as a consequence, Strindberg unveils his numerous metamorphoses, the radiations of his ego. While Strindberg is indebted rather to a "real balzacianism" (a referential propensity for the significant detail) than to Zola's naturalism - his writing reveals the reality, the imperfection and the incompleteness of his troubled psyche, touched by a fatal pain, always current and always brought up-to-date –, Bergman's work reveals a Shakespearean vein (doubled by a Chekhovian and a Brechtian one): the director conceives the theatrical scene as a Shakespearean state of mind in which the Faustian artist is affected by the impossible pain of possessing his own art. Throughout his life, Bergman claimed that Strindberg was his "demonic" companion and he felt a great literary and spiritual affinity with him. As a matter of fact, the occurrences of Strindberg's written work increase and reproduce themselves in the "body" of Bergman's both written and cinematic work. In other words, our purpose is to find the traces of the influence – an influence that never articulates what what was there before, an influence that does not reproduce the entire metamorphosis, but only, probably, the different forms of the transfiguration, the decisive process. Accordingly, the influence becomes reversal, reprise, repression, release, discovery, vitalization, an *inter/ sub/ supra*-textual presence. Reassembling retroactively the roots of the influence, but also dealing with the subsequent "cut wounds", we could talk in this case about a future tense in the past of the innocent's pain theme. So, what we are trying to prove in our interpretation "in branches" is that, by reading Strindberg through Bergman, the influence does not represent itself entirely restored, but always as a remnant or residue, under a changing form and essentially indebted to the three main names of the Bergmanian father – the real father (the Lutheran minister Erik Henrik Fredrik Bergman), the symbolical father (August Strindberg) and the imaginary father (this one being composed from distinctive images: firstly, the director Victor Sjöström, further by literary or cinematic paternal images, especially expressionistic). Even if a pure redrawing of the influence appears initially to be unfeasible and unbearable, the identity of Job's pain is found in the difference that is never symbolically exhausted by a performative reader – he, who moves back and forth in the room of a future tense in the past, moreover, he, who disposes of the necessary resources to anticipate what was, paradoxically, never represented.