

“Project Strindberg”

The History and Context:

“Project Strindberg” is creating new English language translations from the original texts and plays of 19th and 20th century Swedish playwright and essayist, August Strindberg (1849-1912).

August Strindberg, along with fellow Scandinavian, Henrik Ibsen and British writer, Bernard Shaw, were primary founders of the modern theatre. All of Shaw’s work is accessible to English-speaking audiences; Ibsen’s work has been translated and retranslated numerous times. Since the beginning of the 20th century until now, however, only two-thirds of Strindberg’s plays, short stories, prose and essays have been translated into English. Most of these translations are out of date and stilted in language, and thus, are not often read and/or produced in American theatres.

The time has come (with a Strindberg Centenary approaching in 2012) to bring the work of August Strindberg back into its place in the canon of English-speaking Western Theatre and Literature. The project is and will continue to create new and vibrant translations of his major and minor plays and translate into English those works (both drama and prose) that have been neglected, in some cases, for over a century.

Laurence Carr, creator of “Project Strindberg”, is a full-time Lecturer at SUNY New Paltz, teaching Dramatic and Creative Writing and heading The SUNY Playwrights’ Project. The background for the work centered on Strindberg began in 1995 when Carr was asked to teach as a guest artist/faculty member in the Dramacommunication School at the University of Linköping in Sweden. While there, conducting workshops in playwriting and literacy, he worked with theatre specialists, and laid the groundwork to create new English translations of the works of Strindberg.

In 2001, Ms. Malin Tybahl, an actress and theatre-in-education artist, moved to New York City from Sweden to continue her dramatic studies at the Academy of Dramatic Arts. With mutual colleagues in Sweden, Carr and Tybahl decided to work together on The Strindberg Project. Tybahl would serve as the primary translator from the Swedish.

After several months of work, the full translation of the first work, Playing With Fire, was completed and is ready for full theatrical productions. Carr and Tybahl are now at work on other translations, including Mr. Bengt's Wife.

Issues to be addressed by the project:

August Strindberg is a major force in modern world theatre, both as a playwright as an essayist. But too many translations of his work are stuck in outdated or stilted language with references that no longer make sense to a modern audience. The main goal of the project is create modern translations that speak to modern American sensibilities and will be published, read, produced and viewed by a broader audience.

Another goal is to create modern English language translations of works that have never been translated. All of Strindberg's works need to be added to the English language canon so that scholars and artists can see the breadth of his work and rethink his worth and dynamic as a writer who was at the forefront of the modern theatre movement.

Expected outcomes or benefits:

Carr decided early on that the focus of this project should be housed at SUNY New Paltz. He is a full-time Lecturer of Dramatic and Creative Writing in the English Department, a professional working writer and the playwright-in-residence of the Mohonk Mountain Stage Company, a local theatre company run by Robert Miller, a lecturer in the SUNY Communications Department. Many of the Mohonk Mountain Stage productions bring together local university and town artists and audiences and The Strindberg Project will continue this tradition.

Malin Tybahl was hired in the fall of 2006 to teach a Swedish Language Intensive through the Language Immersion Program here at SUNY. Through this, she has become a member of the SUNY academic family.

One of the goals for the project is to create an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental support team from The English Department, The Foreign Language Department, The School of Theatre and The Language Immersion Program. Bringing together the strengths of these departments and programs

will help the project succeed and will bring together professional academics and artists that would normally not cross paths. It will make SUNY New Paltz a stronger institution for both students and faculty and administration.

An outside source, Robert Greer, has also been asked to work on the project. He is a New York City educator working at CUNY and a director who travels extensively throughout Scandinavia. He has met there with major theatre artists who are interested in seeing the project come to fruition. He is also in contact with the Swedish Consulate who has expressed interest in the project and has given an informal invitation to have the finished works read both in Sweden and in NYC.

A symposium will be created at SUNY New Paltz to further support the project and to discuss its goals and ongoing progress. Students, faculty, administration and the Hudson Valley community will be invited to these discussions as each step of the project is worked through, culminating in a reading (both in English and Swedish) of the material with the help of the SUNY English and Theatre Departments and Mohonk Mountain Stage Company.

Publication of the project's materials (the translated plays and related pedagogical material) is a major goal of the project as well as the creation of theatrical productions (professional and college) throughout the country. SUNY Press will be approached about publishing the finished texts.

Ongoing discussion about the project will decide if it qualifies for additional academic focus such as a one credit class uniting the disciplines of literature, foreign languages and theatre.

This project can be both a major academic and artistic contribution to western literature and theatre and it deserves to be created and housed at SUNY New Paltz.

Specific plans for the ongoing project:

Co-translator Malin Tybahl returns to Sweden to conduct additional primary research needed for the project. With the help of colleagues in Stockholm and other cities, she is collecting additional information and original texts.

Robert Greer will continue to be a consultant and a source both in the United States and in Sweden to gather information and stimulate support and funding for the project.