

**STUDIES IN PERSONALITY
- I. STRINDBERG AND HIS
PLAYS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649763566

Studies in Personality - I. Strindberg and His Plays by Vance Thompson

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

VANCE THOMPSON

**STUDIES IN PERSONALITY
- I. STRINDBERG AND HIS
PLAYS**

STUDIES IN PERSONALITY

STRINDBERG *and his*
PLAYS *by* Vance Thompson

Published by Mc DEVITT-WILSON'S, Inc.
NEW YORK 1921

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA
STRINDBERG *and his* PLAYS

PT 9815
T5

by VANCE THOMPSON

AUGUST STRINDBERG—the greatest dramatist of his generation, the most tragic figure in modern literature—was a man who was hounded all his life by gods and by devils who had the faces of women—a tragic man.

First of all I shall try to show what kind of a man he was—what he looked like—as he went the way of life. For the Great Truth is this: Every man is exactly what he *looks!*

It was in the later nineties and the early part of this century, that I knew Strindberg. Those were the years when he walked in the shadow. A few years before he had known glory—he had stood, like a statue in a public square, with the light and crowd all around him. His plays held the theatres of Paris—three of them at one time. For the first

[7]

457546

and only time in his life, he was rich in money and applause. He had a pleasant house in the Quartier de Passy; a young and gentle wife, a pretty baby. At the Café Napolitain in the Boulevard des Italiennes—where the men of letters used to gather in those days: Catulle Mendès, Anatole France, Ernest La Jeunesse, Réthé, Richepin, Henri de Regnier—all the successful writers of the day—Strindberg held his little court. Days of glory! I did not know him in that proud moment; and it lasted but a little while.

The first time I saw him was in a little *crèmerie* in the Boulevard Raspail. Anyone of you who has ever known the Quartier Latin knows it well—a huddled, noisy little restaurant where the students and girls of the Quarter dined for a few pence and (sometimes) paid.

I had gone there to see a boisterous painter of my friends—then a poor, wild Bohemian; to-day the greatest of American landscape painters in France, John Noble. Noble was not there and I sat

down at a table and waited. A little model, whom everyone knew and everyone painted, came and kept me company. Her name was Minna. She was a silly, romping little girl, rather amusing.

The *crémèrie* was full of noise and laughter. Over in a corner sat one man—alone and gloomy. He was dressed in shabby, black clothes and crouched with his face in his hands, so you could see only a mop of grouse-coloured hair.

Minna was a little tipsy, and she began to bombard him with bread. He stood up and looked about him in a dazed way; and Minna, laughing, ran over and threw herself in his arms and kissed him.

It was just her hoiydenish way of being merry.

The man pushed her off; and stood there—in the babbling, noisy restaurant—*and so you may see him!* He was tall and lean and haggard, with staring eyes and a tortured face. He looked like a man who had come from hell and he was August Strindberg. He gave a harsh cry

and rushed out of the *crèmerie*, pursued by jeers and screams of derisive laughter. He was not sober.

A few days later I saw him. You know how it is, there are two streets. You hesitate which one you shall take—and you turn to the right. Then, strolling idly on, you come face to face with a woman—and your whole life is changed. Had you gone through the other street nothing had happened. So this day—*by chance which is not chance*—I passed the Brasserie des Lilas.

It was an afternoon in May, and there on the terrace, alone at a table, Strindberg sat brooding over a glass of absinthe.

I took a seat at his table and told him who I was, for we had many friends in common—notably Sinding, the sculptor. So we talked. And he said:

“Do you know an American named Schlatter?”

Schlatter!

You remember what we said? The

great truth—the only truth needed to take you through life—is that every man is exactly what he *looks!* Let me tell you what Strindberg looked like as he leaned over the table and asked me if I knew Schlatter. He was dressed, as I have said, in a shabby, cheap and ill-fitting suit of black, with dubious linen and a black shoestring sort of necktie. His hat was off and what struck me most was his hair. It must have been blonde in youth, but now it had become grouse-coloured like that of most middle-aged Swedes. It stood up—four inches above his scalp—and with his tortured and haggard face, he gave you the impression of a man who had been held up by the hair of his head and swung to and fro over an abyss.

His eyes were pale. There was a wild and fleeting look of agony in them. A long face, with high cheek-bones, an immense forehead, a nose that broadened at the tip, with flaring nostrils; and under it, shaded by a little, flat moustache, a

mouth like a woman's mouth—a sad, tender, unhappy mouth with bluish lips.

This was August Strindberg, as he leaned across the table that Paris afternoon—his bony, spatulate fingers nervously interlocked. /

“Do you know an American named Schlatter?”

I had heard of such a man. You may have heard of such a man. I think it was in Denver that he appeared—twenty years ago—as a “healer.” Thousands of vague dupes followed him and for a while the stories of his “cures” and his eccentricities and his “spiritual mission” filled the newspapers. And then, of a sudden, he disappeared. His mad disciples sought him world-over, in cities and in the desert; but Schlatter, the “healer,” had vanished.

Whither? Toward what new avatar?

This is what Strindberg told me: One day in the *crèmerie* he met an American—a strange fellow—with a most portentous face, fat, snub, dew-lapped, thick-