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Harriet Bosse's Autobiography
Feminist Historiography and the Counter-Story of a Labelled Muse

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ABSTRACT

This article is a close reading of Swedish-Norwegian actress Harriet Bosse's (1878–1961) unpublished autobiography. The theoretical points of departure are feminist historiographical theory and historical contextualization. The purpose is to offer a counter-story of Bosse in the history of theatre- and literature research that releases her from the role of Swedish author August Strindberg's muse and puts her career in the context of the modern breakthrough.

The counter-story is about an actress who both resisted and embraced the transition of the modern breakthrough, who fought for her artistic ambitions to position herself as a diva, but in the end, was marginalized, primarily because of a combination of age, gender, and animosity. Bosse represents herself as modest, but we know that she regarded herself as an important actress in Swedish theatre history whose talent was God-given. Bosse's specific acting style and some of her thoughts on the art of acting are also briefly discussed.

KEYWORDS
Feminist historiographical theory, professional history of actresses, diva, actresses' autobiography, historical acting style, Harriet Bosse

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Figure 1: Harriet Bosse standing behind August Strindberg who is sitting at the desk. Denmark 1901. Reproduction: National Library of Sweden (Kungliga Biblioteket).

In a photograph taken during Harriet Bosse's (1878–1961) and August Strindberg's (1849–1912) honeymoon in Denmark in July of 1901, he is sitting at a desk and looks straight into the camera (Fig. 1). It gives the impression that he had just been interrupted, looked up, and was caught in the midst of his creative act of writing. The pen in his hand is made out of an eagle's feather that he had taken from Bosse's hat on their first meeting.[1] He appears to never rest, as befits a genius and a future national icon. Behind him we see Harriet Bosse's soft figure in a white lace dress, also a celebrity in her own right at the time as an upcoming actress. The photograph radiates a dreamlike artistic union of Scandinavian *fin de siècle*. Bosse leans slightly forward and holds her hands behind her back. With a little imagination, we can imagine her admiringly looking down at the desk over Strindberg's shoulder and curiously reading what he is writing. And imagination is precisely what the viewer must have. It is not possible to see if she is looking down at the desk, at the man, directly into the camera or dreamily in the distance. Her head is

1 Strindberg 1932, 21.

deliberately cut out. Strindberg thus represents the creative mind, while Bosse is reduced to a headless body. Even though the decapitated Bosse of the photograph foremost reflects the crises of their marriage, it also uncannily predicts her future position in historiography.

In 1956, Harriet Bosse wrote an autobiography, despite denying her intentions to record her memories in an interview in the Norwegian paper *Aftenposten* the year before.[2] She offered the text to a publisher whom she had befriended in 1932 when she had published her letters from Strindberg.[3] The autobiography was refused with the argument that the only subject that would attract a large readership was an in-depth story of Bosse's three marriages with three famous men.[4] That was a story Bosse was not prepared to tell. Thus, the text remained unpublished and has so far received little research attention.

This article is a close reading of the autobiography from a feminist historiographical theory point of view. Filling in the female blanks has been a common theme in feminist historiography, but the aim here is not to restore a forgotten actress to historiography.[5] Bosse is, on the contrary, quite present in both literary history as Strindberg's muse and in Swedish theatre history as part of the modern breakthrough, especially as an interpreter of some of Strindberg's female characters, but also sometimes mentioned as a popular actress in her own right. But, as theatre researcher Maria Delgado highlights, when an actress in historiography is positioned as a playwright's muse, her creativity and authority are discursively passivated. Delgado gives examples of several actresses who have received this treatment, and one of them is Bosse.[6]

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to a counter-story of Bosse that releases her from the role of muse and puts her career in the context of the theatre of the modern breakthrough. It revolves around the questions: How did Harriet Bosse understand and articulate her professional role as an actress? How does she formulate her view of acting? Does Bosse discuss her gradually diminishing power as a star actress? According to Jacky Bratton, the actress' autobiography is "a process of identity formation that extends beyond individuals to the group or community to which they want to belong".[7] In turn, Viv Gardner highlights that a polyfocal reading of the actress's biography is required with aspects that are not always present in the text itself, such as context to norms within social life and the theatre organization.[8] Consequently, the methods of this close reading are mainly a text- and discourse analysis, but also a historical contextualization.

In his infatuation, Strindberg named Bosse "the actress of the new century".[9] Therefore, the close reading will zoom in on the knowledge and traditions she brought to this appointed role. From examples in the autobiography, I also briefly touch upon the interplay between her words about acting and some remains of her actual performances. The overall purpose of the article is to give Bosse the opportunity to be heard in her own right, to contribute to the knowledge of historical acting style and the general field of the professional history of actresses.

Historical Contextualization

When Bosse debuted in the 1890s, the popular star actors and great female stars, the so-called "divas", had power over their repertoire, but during the first decades of the twentieth century, larger ensemble plays began to be favoured, and the power of the director gradually grew at the expense of the actors. Bosse's career was highly influenced by this shift.

A diva is a glamorous and skilled female performer who enchants the audience with her genius acting ability, who in turn embraces the diva with feverish admiration, which can, however, sometimes turn to disgust.[10] Diva tours were made possible by the impact of industrialism where urbanization led to big cities having a large potential audience, whilst technological inventions

2 Bosse s.a., 1, 51 (references that make it possible to date it); Waal 1993, 203.
3 Strindberg 1932.
4 Waal 1990, 192.
5 Davis 1989, 63.
6 Delgado 2007, 272–3.
7 Bratton 2003, 10.
8 Gardner 2007, 175–6.
9 Strindberg 1932, 23.
10 Ohlsson 2018; Rosenberg 2009.

such as trains and steamboats facilitated travel. Other innovations such as the scope of the press and the impact of advertising spread the fame of divas, making their tours financially lucrative. This gave divas both wealth and power. Through their embodiment of big business and role models of femininity, they gained the power to control both their repertoire and self-representation, although it is debatable the cost at which this came.[11]

1890s theatre consisted of traditional performing art that was popular, but also artistic renewal that was a precursor to the modern breakthrough. Divas began to be questioned through several combined ideas, but as theatre scholar Willmar Sauter emphasizes, "the modern breakthrough was, in fact, a rather long-winded, gradual change that first concerned the external, visual elements and only much later included the holistic interpretation that research likes to emphasize. The same can be said about the director's position, which was by no means radicalized overnight but needed a number of decades to marginalize the actor's right to artistic self-determination."[12]

Bosse's career lasted from 1896 to 1943, the precise period when the modern breakthrough began to gain momentum until it was definitively completed at the end of the 1920s with the establishment of directors as the main autonomous artists of theatre production. From that point onwards, the directors known as "demon directors", such as Olof Molander (1892–1966), alongside male dramatists, became the declared geniuses and the fixed stars of historiography.[13]

Bosse's relationship with Strindberg and her role as his muse has been described in literary research.[14] Otherwise, she mainly occurs in studies that deal with the history of the Royal Dramatic Theatre, colloquially called "Dramaten".[15] In the third part of *Ny svensk teaterhistoria* from 2007, Bosse is depicted on a full page as the title role in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Elektra, a portrayal that was one of her greatest triumphs in the tragic genre, but the descriptive text is only seven lines.[16] In *Teater i Sverige*, theatre scholar Karin Helander devotes more than one page to Bosse in a chapter dealing with various productions and paraphrases of two of Strindberg's plays.[17]

During Bosse's heyday as an actress, two short biographies were written, but to find a later, more detailed survey of her acting career one must turn to American theatre research.[18] Through Carla Waal's biography, built on archival work and interviews with Bosse's family, colleagues and friends, important information was collected.[19] In addition, there are descriptions of her in memoirs by actors who were her (somewhat younger) contemporaries.[20]

Feminist Historiographical Theories

Feminist historiography is becoming an increasingly common tool in all historical disciplines. Blossom Stefaniw, a historian of the religion of antiquity, writes: "It is not radical, it is simply accurate, to take very decisive steps toward fully feminist historiography given that patriarchal historiography ignores not just half the population, but is necessarily also colonial and racist and homophobic and ableist and classist historiography, treating the vast majority of the earth's population, past and present, as the scenery through which great men stride."[21]

Stefaniw's approach makes it clear that the position as Strindberg's muse and interpreter has reduced Bosse to a metaphoric landscape of young female beauty, intelligence, and wilfulness in which the iconic writer supposedly walked and developed.

Feminist historiography in theatre studies began in the late 1980s and took off in the 1990s and clarifies that the absence of women in historiography is not an indicator of a lack of women in

11 Ohlsson 2018; 2019; 2023; Rosenberg 2009.
12 Sauter 2019, 35; my translation.
13 Sauter 2017, 171, 175.
14 Lagercrantz 1979; Brandell 1989; Martinus 2007.
15 Bergman 1963; Hollinger 1963; Torsslow 1975.
16 Ek 2007, 30–1.
17 Helander 2004, 236–7.
18 Ljungberger 1917; Molander 1920.
19 Waal 1990; Waal 1993.
20 Adolphsson 1972; Pollak 1977; Tidblad 1967, Rydeberg 1970.
21 Stefaniw 2020, 282.

the theatre, but of an exclusion of women from historical writing.[22] Maggie Gale and Viv Gardner also emphasize the need "to avoid the valorising of textual over non-textual performance, a 'mission' identified as key by many theatre scholars in feminism's revisionist theatre history."[23] One might argue that Bosse worked in the literary theatre tradition and therefore was not affected by this hierarchy, but this is not only a dichotomy that can be applied to theatrical genres, but also to the art of acting. Even if an actress mainly works in a literary theatre tradition, she practices both textual- and non-textual corporeal performance as part of her craft. Or as Bosse herself wrote in a letter: "To boom out a speech, and later find nothing remains—that is sterile. (…) Without spirit—no art".[24]

According to Bratton, the questioning of the hierarchy between textual and corporeal performance means challenging several things, the most important of which here is the way research distinguishes between theatre as art and theatre as entertainment. As Bratton adds, "it would also allow a woman's work to undermine the fundamental binary, the distinction between mind and body, upon which Western patriarchal culture rests."[25] I concur with these reflections. The notion of theatre as art and/or as entertainment influenced choices Bosse took in her career and, as for many actresses, her body turned out to be a double-edged sword: In youth it represented a weapon to conquer the audience, but with age it led to her banishment.

The Autobiography of the Actress

During the nineteenth century the autobiography of actresses grew into a popular genre, which could vary in terms of narrative. One strand was of a scandalous nature, like that of Swedish actress and opera singer Henriette Widerberg, where her various lovers are the focus.[26] Another strand was more virtuous and dealt mainly with entertaining anecdotes from theatre life, like the series of articles published by Swedish diva Ellen Hartman.[27] There are also exceptions from these narratives, such as Danish actress Johanne Luise Heiberg's, containing more in-depth discussions about the art of acting.[28] An actress's autobiography can be seen as a strategy for continued self-representation after her career, a performance on paper that instils the characteristics that were significant to her characters on stage, as a key novel, and as a more intellectual reflection on art and life.[29]

It also reveals how actresses wish to represent themselves as professional women and performing artists, both to contemporaries and to posterity. According to Thomas Postlewait, the autobiographies of many Anglo-Saxon actresses from the first half of the twentieth century were imbued with a self-representation of the norms of the so-called "good femininity". He writes: "In fact, self-interest in the form of ambition is seldom acknowledged. When admitted, it is balanced, often within a page or two, by an example of self-sacrifice, duty, service, or womanly passivity."[30] This tendency also exists in Swedish actress Emilie Högqvist's published journal.[31]

Bosse casually calls it "[a] few sketches" and clarifies in the first sentence that "the book has no claim whatsoever to being literary".[32] This echoes her preface of the book of Strindberg's letters to her, where she also stresses that she has "no literary pretensions".[33] I read these guarantees of not venturing into her ex-husband's field – literature – as the self-representation of a humble performer, which is in tune with the ideals of women as non-ambitious. This is entirely in line with a self-representation of the "good femininity", as Postlewaite calls it, conscious of her hierarchical position as a female performer next to a literary male genius. From this perspective,

22 Gale & Gardner 2000, 1–5.
23 Gale & Gardner 2000, 5.
24 Waal 1990, 137.
25 Bratton 2000, 10–11.
26 Widerberg 1850–1851.
27 Cederström 1934.
28 Heiberg 1891–1892.
29 Gardner 2007, 179.
30 Postlewaite 1989, 266.
31 Högquist 1847; Ohlsson 2020.
32 Bosse s.a., 1. Bosse's autobiography is written in Swedish and all translations to English are made by me.
33 Strindberg 1932, 12.

it can also be read as a reproduction of the separation of what Bratton calls patriarchal culture's fundamental binary – mind and body, even if that was not Bosse's conscious intention.

The autobiography was written in 1956, after Bosse's retirement.[34] The text is sixty-three typewritten pages and divided into a preface of fifteen short chapters. It is unknown whether Bosse had help editing the text, but regardless it is written in a personal and accessible narrative style. In many ways, it follows the genre of autobiographies of actresses that deal with past successes and humorous anecdotes, but she also addresses some professional conflicts and disappointments. She follows her career largely chronologically and talks about her longer engagements at Dramaten, Svenska Teatern, Dramaten again, Intima teatern, Konserthusteatern, and finally her last stint at Dramaten. These are interrupted by guest appearances in Sweden and across Scandinavia, tours around the countryside, and some small film roles. Bosse also writes about plans for an international career that never materialized, as well as about some private trips she made.

The autobiography is called *Both – and*. In the upper right corner of the margin of the first page is a side motto: "In most cases one could set/ as the motto of an artist's mood: 'Himmelhoch Jauchzend – zum Tode betrübt.'/ That's how it has been with me."[35] The quote in the side motto is by German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe from his play *Egmont* 1788; the expression means "up one minute, down the next".

The quote refers to her career, both how it actually turned out and her feelings about it, but I also read it as a reference to Bosse's emotional life. To describe herself as a young woman, she cites two short poems that she wrote in her youth, which may illustrate how "up and down" she was in her mind. She concludes that the "childish" verses can probably be characterized by the quote "Himmelhoch jauchzend – zum Tode betrübt".[36] This supports the interpretation of the double meaning in the title, which is repeated in the side motto, as an illustration of both the career and the key to Bosse's general temperament.

Willmar Sauter shows that theatre research during the latter half of the twentieth century "created a canonical iconography of the modern breakthrough where development and renewal are key words"[37]. Yet on the contrary, Bosse looks back with melancholy and nostalgia: "Perhaps I am bordering on the sentimental when I say that an entire era passed out of time, at about the same time as I left it [the theatre - HO.]" and she continues to list all the great actors she has worked with.[38] A belief in destiny is moreover present in the text, with expressions such as "it was surely never meant to happen".[39] Even the choice of her profession Bosse regards as fate: "I can't say that I – like so many!: – longed for theatre. I certainly didn't have a burning, indomitable desire to become an actress. It just happened. 'Someone' grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and dropped me onto the stage. It was kind of natural. 'Our Lord' had put me in place, and it was only for me to do my best."[40]

Bosse writes that even though she saw theatre as a child, it was an organ grinder's music that set her imagination in motion.[41] In her youth, Bosse thought about becoming a singer, and music continued to be important to her throughout her life.

Bosse's Education

Bosses describes her childhood chronologically, her early career in the theatre and her studies in Paris. She was born in Norway where her family had moved from Denmark. Her German father was a book publisher who also owned a bookstore in Stockholm, but how much time she actually spent in Stockholm during her childhood remains unclear. Bosse presents her father as "a good businessman" and they lived in solid bourgeoisie neighbourhoods both in Kristiania (now Oslo) and Stockholm. She describes her Danish mother as "an incredibly sweet, well-

34 Bosse s.a., 1, 51.
35 Bosse s.a., 1.
36 Bosse s.a., 13–14.
37 Sauter 2017, 171, 175.
38 Bosse s.a., 1–2.
39 Bosse s.a., 21.
40 Bosse s.a., 55, underlining in the original.
41 Bosse s.a., 5.

formed woman", all members of the family were musical and several of the many siblings were professional artists. Bosse thus positions herself and her family within a solid and cultured bourgeoisie, which distinguishes her from actresses with working-class origins, such as her future rival Tora Teje.[42]

When Bosse turned sixteen, she moved to Stockholm to study at the Royal Musical Academy, but soon she received an offer from her eldest sister Alma Fahlström (1863–1946), who, together with her husband Johan, had started their own theatre company. Bosse debuted as Juliet in a few scenes from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, with which the company toured Norway. Afterwards she returned to Sweden to continue her musical studies, but when the Fahlströms opened a permanent theatre in Kristiania, Bosse became their *ingénue*, the young, innocent woman that features in many classical dramas. For a year and a half, she played several leading parts with good results. Bosse had no formal training as an actor, but emphasizes that her early success was due to the influence of her eighteen-year-older sister. Bosse describes Alma Fahlström as one of Norway's best directors, both wise and skilled and that she was "always right when she remarked on something", but she is not mentioned further.[43]

This makes it obvious that Bosse uses the same narrative strategy in the autobiography as she does in her comments on Strindberg's letter.[44] She simply refrains from telling certain things that she probably considered too intimate. What she avoids to mention is that she left the Fahlström's theatre because of a falling out with her sister. Bosse and Johan Fahlström had a love affair and Alma put the entire blame for her husband's infidelity on her sister.[45]

The period that followed must have been a most upsetting time and a turning point in Bosse's life. Although she later received an offer of engagement at the National Theatre in Kristiania, she chose to settle in Stockholm. According to Bosse, this was on a Stockholm-based sister's suggestion, and that Bosse herself had not thought about it herself. This explanation is noticeably skewed. The love story with the brother-in-law was probably a major reason why, as Eivor Martinus puts it: "Sweden won and Norway lost one of Scandinavia's most talented actresses at the turn of the last century".[46]

Education in Paris and Stockholm

In 1898, Bosse chose to use the inheritance from her father to study in Paris, where she stayed for a year. She was twenty years old and had lost both her parents, her immediate opportunity to earn a living, and had just become *persona non grata* for parts of her family (and possibly also for others in Norway's theatre circles who knew about her love affair). When Bosse's situation is evaluated, the journey appears like an escape, but if the getaway is Paris, this can also bring valuable knowledge with it. The period that later came to be known as *La Belle Epoque* was beginning to materialize in the French capital during the 1890s. The art, culture and theatre scene in the city was in an intense and expansive stage of development.

At the Conservatoire de Paris she was allowed to follow the lessons of actor Maurice de Féraudy (1859–1932). Bosse writes that he taught her all she knew about comic acting: "It was important to turn a line light and classy", and it was especially central "to have both heart and elegance in the line".[47] She later used Féraudy's lessons particularly in the productions of the French comedies *The King* (de Flers & Cavaillet) at the Svenska Teatern in 1909 and as Hélène in the *Adventure* (de Flers) at Dramaten in 1915 and 1923.[48]

Through a letter of introduction from her family connections, she was able to procure free tickets to the theatres in Paris, and even managed an entire box at the Théâtre Antoine. For an actress who was still learning her trade, it must have been invaluable to be able to study both the stars of the time and actors at the smaller avant-garde theatres free of charge. The following year, when Bosse applied to work at Dramaten in Stockholm, she was well acquainted with both

42 Ohlsson 2021.
43 Bosse s.a., 7.
44 Strindberg 1932.
45 Martinus 2007, 216.
46 Martinus 2007, 216.
47 Bosse s.a., 12.
48 Bosse s.a., 12.

the modern theatre styles that existed in Paris and classical French acting.

She auditioned by reading a fairy tale by H. C. Andersen for the manager of Dramaten, actor Nils Personne, who said: "Well, if Miss Bosse can learn to speak like a human being, you are accepted."[49] Around the turn of the century, it was a requirement for actors to speak without either accent or dialect. As late as after the premiere of *Elektra* in 1912, actress Thekla Åhlander came into Bosse's dressing room and thanked her, "but added sourly: 'Then if we could only learn to speak Swedish'".[50] Bosse, who admired Åhlander, implicitly reveals that the comment stung, because even at the time of writing she defends herself by emphasizing that she had proved this many years before, and adds proudly: "on the other hand, my voice always kept its light, Norwegian timbre – and I was not sorry for that".[51]

Before starting at Dramaten, Bosse studied Swedish diction with actress Berta Tammelin. Bosse writes: "She poked out every single word – I said, for example, 'äj' instead of 'ej' (almost like two J's), and since I'm quite musical, I am very sensitive to the nuances of the language".[52] In the quote, Bosse again represents herself as unassuming by describing herself as quite musical, when she in fact was a trained singer and a good pianist, but she admits that she was sensitive to the nuances of the language, which also became distinctive for her acting style, unique compared to her contemporaries.[53]

Berta Tammelin, who had been a successful actress at Dramaten 1856–1887, had learned declamation from her mother, actress Carolina Bock who had worked out a system for Swedish diction, which she passed on to her daughter. When Bosse learned to speak Swedish as it befitted an actress of the ensemble of Dramaten, she followed a long tradition that stretched back into Swedish theatre history. Through Tammelin, Bosse came into contact with threads that led back to the origins of Swedish theatre in the eighteenth century, which also illuminates the long, unbroken theatrical tradition that existed at Dramaten around 1900. It is also significant that many of the actors Bosse mentions with admiration in her autobiography came from the realistic conversational acting style that was cultivated from the 1860s at the so-called old Dramaten, situated at Kungsträdgårdsgatan, such as the previously mentioned Åhlander "whose masterful, biting repartee always hit the spot" and the "great actress" Hilda Borgström's skill which "with small means" brought out "the finest nuances".[54] Bosse was both schooled and influenced by the nineteenth-century conversational acting style.

During her early days at Dramaten, Bosse also reacted to certain Swedish actors' old-fashioned style, who "roared and carried a temper in the old honourable theatrical manner, which was foreign to me coming from the modern acting style in Norway".[55] Bosse thus categorizes the Norwegian style as more modern, which would be challenging for research to investigate further.

Bosse suggests several times that the art of acting is tied to national identity and the domestic drama is an outgrowth of national knowledge; for example, it is difficult for an Englishman to understand Nordic temperament.[56] She also points out that Swedish actors cannot play the Danish-Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg. She writes: "In Norway, you take Holberg so easily and naturally, in Sweden, you don't meet the juicy, lively Danish humour – you kind of twist and turn him around too much, so the humour is never original, never natural".[57] The opinion of acting being tied to national identity seems to have been common around the turn of the twentieth century and is also found in Strindberg's text on theatre and in Emilie Högqvist's journal.[58]

49 Bosse s.a., 15.
50 Bosse s.a., 23–4.
51 Bosse s.a., 23–4.
52 Bosse s.a., 15.
53 Ohlsson 2018a.
54 Bosse s.a., 1–2.
55 Bosse s.a., 16.
56 Bosse s.a., 40.
57 Bosse s.a., 8.
58 Strindberg 1999, 112; Högquist 1847.

The Breakthrough

In February 1900, Bosse premiered at Dramaten as Puck in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which she regarded as her breakthrough. This role also changed her life since Strindberg saw her and decided to give her the leading female role in his drama *To Damascus* the following year. That was the beginning of their love story.

Bosse opened the performance by sitting swinging on a large leaf while Mendelsohn's overture played. Bosse wanted to add action to the picture and devised the idea of an insect flying around her, which she tried to catch. Finally, she got hold of it, blew on it, and just as the overture ended, it flew away. This pantomime, where the insect flies away just as the music ends, shows how Bosse was influenced by the music and used it rhythmically in her movements.

Bosse writes that she had wanted to make Puck look like a mischievous boy dressed in something grey and colourless and ideally, she would have liked to have an electric lamp on her forehead so that when she flew across the stage, only the light would be visible.[59] But the costume department demanded that she would wear the same type of costume as her predecessors. The director Emil Grandinson helped her move on from the tulle skirt, but the result "was something feminine in any case" (Fig. 2).[60]

Figure 2: Harriet Bosse as Puck in a A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Royal Dramatic Theatre 1900.
Reproduction: Musik- och Teaterbiblioteket), Helledays samling /The Swedish Performing Arts Agency, Helleday Collection. Helleday Collection.

59 Bosse s.a., 17.
60 Bosse s.a., 16–17.

The production was not new, it had originally premiered in 1860 when Elise Hwasser, Dramaten's biggest female star in the 1860s and 70s, played Puck (Fig. 3). In 1883 it went to Ellen Hartman, the diva of Dramaten during the 1880s and 90s. There are photographs of Hwasser in the costume, and of Hartman in the opening scene where she is sitting on a leaf (Fig. 4), probably the same as Bosse did. When comparing their costumes, there are some differences, but also similarities. Hwasser's headpiece is unique, while Hartman's and Bosse's caps slightly resemble each other. Hwasser's and Hartman's costumes are nearly identical, but Hartman's upper part is more loosely fitted. They both have animal skin sections and a butterfly attached to their shoulder, and their arms are bare. Their costumes look significantly more girlish than Bosse's, which is darker, simpler, plainer, and covers her arms. There are no insects or animal skin elements attached to it. However, all three costumes end at the knee. Obviously, the femininity of the character was highlighted through the actresses showing their legs. This tradition had started at the premiere and would not be changed, not even by the director. Later Strindberg teasingly told Bosse that he offered her his role because of her pretty legs.[61] The comment highlights Puck's conscious sex appeal. When Bosse interpreted the role for the first time, it was the 105th occasion the production had been performed. It had been seven years since the previous performance, but it was the same set, same scenes, and the same mise-en-scène as at the premiere in 1860.

Figure 3: Elise Hwasser as Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Royal Dramatic Theatre 1861.
Reproduction: Musik- och Teaterbiblioteket, Helledays samling /The Swedish Performing Arts Agency, Helleday Collection.

Figure 4: Ellen Hartman as Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Royal Dramatic Theatre 1883.
Reproduction: Musik- och Teaterbiblioteket, Helledays samling /The Swedish Performing Arts Agency, Helleday Collection.

61 Strindberg 1932, 19.

It should be noted that Bosse's first stint at Dramaten between 1899 and 1904 was marked by a nineteenth-century theatre tradition where a production could be kept alive for forty years or more. The roles followed more or less the same pattern generation after generation, although the actors were able to adjust their interpretation to their personalities and make slight changes that were accommodated within the framework, such as Bosse's pantomime in the overture. In Bosse's interpretation of Puck, however, there are shadows of Hwasser, Hartman, and other actresses.

The International Career That Never Came About

Early on, Bosse showed an interest in an international career, although she writes that it was mainly Strindberg's idea, which is probably not the whole truth. The autobiography, on the contrary, shows that she always had half an eye on making it abroad and made regular attempts over the years to make international guest appearances both in Germany and England.

However, one episode is revealing as to why she never succeeded in her international endeavors. When Bosse made a private trip to the United States in 1924, she thought to combine it with an offer she had received to participate in a musical comedy, which consisted of different numbers. The genre was unknown to Bosse, but she prepared a small monologue in English. Bosse writes: "I found myself in the director's office and read my monologue. Then one of the gentlemen sat down at the piano and turned the little song I had to sing in the monologue into the wildest jazz – with little tunes and pirouettes in a modern style. He said that if I was prepared to perform the little monologue written by Johan Ludvig Heiberg around 1830, changed to jazz, they would be happy to engage me."[62]

Before she made up her mind, she wanted to see a musical comedy. The performance started at noon and continued throughout the day, so the audience brought lunches that they ate in their seats. The first number was a cyclist, and the second a man on roller skates, both performed to jazz tunes. When the third number appeared, a seal doing tricks with a ball, Bosse had had enough. She writes: "So I refused – although, when I later learned that both Sara Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse had performed in this environment with a small number from their repertoire, I thought I was stupid not to have done so also and taken the big sum of money that was offered to me."[63]

This anecdote is instructive. Bernhardt and Duse were divas of the old tribe who knew they had to flirt with popular entertainment to spread their celebrity and get an audience to their shows. At the turn of the twentieth century, entertainment and performing arts were not completely separate. But in 1920s Stockholm, the theatre had been divided into popular theatre that was classified as entertainment, and the other category that was considered literary high art. Bosse was part of the latter and protected her artistic integrity, which prevented her from performing in a genre that was considered pure entertainment. Though when she heard that Bernhardt and Duse had performed in such a genre, she lamented her refusal. This opens up to the possibility that there were more refusals that she had made in her career which Bosse also regretted, although she keeps silent about them in her autobiography.

Primadors, Directors and Theatre Managers

Bosse writes with an implication that is poorly hidden: "There were those among my male comrades who were aware of their own greatness."[64] Bosse makes it clear that a professional life in the theatre for a woman was marked by men with power and/or pretensions. Among those were some male actors that she calls "Primadors", and who were highly competitive. During one performance, a Primador literally took over her monologue and then plainly removed her out from the audience's focus. Another used to lift her up in his arms during the applause, to demonstrate publicly how much he appreciated her, but would drop her "like a sack of potatoes" backstage.[65] Another time, a Primador did not appear at the scheduled rehearsal because he

62 Bosse s.a., 39.
63 Bosse s.a., 39.
64 Bosse s.a., 25.
65 Bosse s.a., 26.

was rehearsing at the opera at the same time, claiming that it was "on royal command": "Hedberg [the theatre manager - HO.] replied: "But isn't it the case, that you are engaged at Dramaten?" The Primador replied: "I'll be there at eleven." He didn't turn up, and we waited until two o'clock – then he came, but didn't apologize for keeping us waiting. But then I erupted! I told him he was insolent, ignoring both the theatre and his comrades. A lovely quarrel arose, which prompted Muck Linden, who was the director, to turn off the lights on the stage – we stood and quarrelled in the dark and it seemed to have no effect. Then the Primador refused to apologize to me, but anyway, Hedberg coaxed him into my dressing room, where he knelt down, and promised never to behave like this again. Then he stood up, took me under the arm and danced off with me to the stage. "Tralla-lala" – and everything was forgotten! What a childish kid![66]

The quote shows several things: Firstly, Bosse dared to stand up to men like the Primadors. Secondly, even Dramaten's manager between 1910 and 1922, Tor Hedberg, shows subservience and has to use all his diplomacy towards a self-proclaimed great actor.

Bosse writes that Tor Hedberg was honest and that during his time as theatre manager, there were no intrigues at Dramaten, which with the story above, is a claim that can be debated. With this statement, she also implies that during other times at Dramaten, under other theatre managers, schemes and conspiracies thrived, but she never explains this further.

There is a small film preserved from the Swedish Cinema Theatre's weekly review from 1916, where the cartoonist Paul Myrén draws Harriet Bosse's portrait. The image signals a disgruntled diva dressed in a luxurious fur coat. Myrén ends his drawing with the explanatory text: "Harriet Bosse who, due to a lack of work, wants to leave 'Dramaten'".[67] This was the image of Bosse that went on to periodically flourish in the press. She was seen as an ungrateful, spoiled diva who, in her late thirties, was considered too old to have pretensions.[68]

Bosse writes that for many years she was in "disfavour" and "punished", which meant that she did not get a contract with Dramaten, even though she more or less begged for it over a number of years. Finally, she was given a one-year contract that she describes as a friendly gesture. However, when Olof Molander, the next manager of Dramaten, took office in 1934, she was given a contract with a low salary that did not increase for nine years. Bosse's anger can still be heard in her words, which also clarify how she positioned herself in theatre history: "(...) [I], who had done Swedish theatre credit for many years!"[69] She positions herself as one of Sweden's great actresses, which problematizes her recurring self-representation as humble and unassuming.

During her career, she made enemies with certain people in power, like Olof Molander, who probably wanted to marginalize her or at least put her in her place. It is very likely that her lack of roles during the 1930s was a kind of punishment for the fact that she as a younger woman had tried to set her own conditions by, among other things, demanding certain roles. This type of behaviour was categorized as diva conduct in the 1930s. This is coupled with the fact that the repertoire had few good roles for middle-aged actresses.

Bosse writes very appreciatively about certain directors. She highlights the skill of Victor Castegren, with whom she had a successful collaboration both at Stora Teatern in Gothenburg and at Svenska Teatern in Stockholm, as well as the two brothers Tor and Karl Hedberg. She also gives her appreciation to Emil Grandinson who "gave us personal instruction without imposing his own opinion or will on us".[70] With this compliment, Bosse suggests that many other directors had done the opposite, that is, pushed their will against that of the actors. Bosse explicitly writes that she has a hard time with modern music and modern art, and she does not appreciate certain modern theatre directing, such as that of Max Reinhardt, who turned Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into a hairy "rough German troll".[71]

But Bosse also writes appreciatively about her time in theatres that worked with modernist directors and drama. Concerning the expressionist director Per Lindberg, who started

66 Bosse s.a., 25.
67 Myrén 1916.
68 Waal 1993, 143–4.
69 Bosse s.a., 61.
70 Bosse s.a., 16.
71 Bosse s.a., 17.

Konserthusteater in 1926 with Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which Bosse played the female lead, she writes: "He had an incredible imagination", and she didn't even seem to mind that the space behind the stage was tiny and cramped with all the changes of costumes when the result was so "brilliant".[72]

This shows that Bosse was not always against modernity on stage. In Pär Lagerkvist's expressionist play, *The Secrets of Heaven* at Intima teatern in 1921, for example, set designer Yngve Berg had "built the stage like a globe, and we walked on it with rubber soles, to hold on".[73] Bosse admired this small theatre, "this pearl, this leading stage", where the repertoire consisted of both new plays and classics, and Bosse revealingly adds: "I got all the parts I wanted."[74] The key to her appreciation of a theatre or a director will always be found in her power over her roles.

The Art of Acting and the Importance of Music

In the poems that Bosse wrote in her youth, God is present, and her Christian faith also appears in the way she articulates the art of acting: "Every great creation – be it in science, poetry, music, theatre, is the manifestation of God. Being an artist, I mean a significant one, is something you are born to do – it's a birthday present from a higher power. But it is important to take care of that gift – through work. An artist who receives divine inspiration, but does not work, can never reach perfection. (...) Spirit and labor together makes the perfect creative work."[75]

The penultimate chapter in the autobiography deals with the art of acting. Bosse discusses Denis Diderot's (1713–1784) *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, where his thesis is that the actor should perform his role coldly, without his own emotions. She means that Diderot touches on "delicate aspects of the actor's psyche, questions that cannot be answered once and for all", but regards his model to be outdated.[76] To support this she quotes, for example, Sarah Bernhardt, Louis Jouvet, Denis D'Inez, Charles Dullin. She refers to Konstantin Stanislavskij as the person who has written most aptly about acting. She has nothing to add but has some reservations about his detailed certainty of the actor's process. Bosse means that "after all, there are many roads that lead to Rome – the main thing is to get there."[77] She does not discuss this further, nor the quotes from the various theorists, but adds that her view and experience are completely coherent with Russian actress Ludmilla Pitöeff: "The artist is an instrument – who plays on that instrument is a mystery. Of course, parallel with the role, there must be control, but this is only in the subconscious."[78] Bosse thus saw her art as a vocation, the empathy with the character and the imagination that rules the actions were of a divine nature, which must be exercised with a certain instinctive control, but which belongs to a part of the actor's psyche that is fragile and inexplicable.

Most of the role interpretations are fleetingly touched on in general terms, with a few exceptions. "I played Elektra in a delirium from the first line to the last. Since I laid the foundation for the role during the rehearsals, I let go completely and put everything on my nerves – and inspiration."[79] Bosse thus used her own emotions when acting but also focused on her nerves and the inspiration of the moment.

Although with Indra's daughter in *A Dream Play*, she subdued all outbursts and moved "to a sphere where I found that the daughter belonged".[80] This shows that Bosse focused on her imaginary powers while acting. She regards herself as an authority on how the role should be played: The daughter's question to Indra before she climbs the pyre "is not a human outburst, it is a painful wonder 'why?'".[81] Presumably, she had often witnessed the opposite in the many interpretations she had seen over the years.

She also sees herself as an authority on how the play should be staged. Even though director

72 Bosse s.a., 36–7.
73 Bosse s.a., 35.
74 Bosse s.a., 35.
75 Bosse s.a., 53.
76 Bosse s.a., 59.
77 Bosse s.a., 53
78 Bosse s.a., 59, underlining in the original.
79 Bosse s.a., 54.
80 Bosse s.a., 54.
81 Bosse s.a., 54.

Max Reinhardt's guest performance in 1921 was considered a success in Sweden, Bosse thought it was "inauthentic throughout, contrived and fake."[82] She detested both Reinhardt's and others' productions which featured "crazy decorations", revolving stages, and spotlights which "kill" the whole atmosphere.[83] She emphatically defends Victor Castegren's production in 1907 at Svenska Teatern where she played Indra's daughter: "Everything was simple, the author's words came into their own – and that's probably the most important thing, the lines came out sublimely, without disturbing intrusions."[84] Bosse loved a literary drama where the author's words came into their own and were allowed to resonate, even though she also, in Elektra's dance for example, triumphed in her use of corporeal movements.[85] Often though it is as if she as a spectator found visual theatrical techniques disturbing.

Bosse writes: "Next to the art of the theatre, no art form is as close to me as music".[86] She believes that her love of music has affected the responsiveness of her role interpretations and says that music should take over when words are not enough. Her most beloved roles were therefore in productions where the music was highly present, such as Sibelius with Maurice Maeterlinck and Beethoven with Strindberg.[87] In the death scene of Mélisande in Maeterlink's symbolist drama *Pélléas and Mélisande,* she was so taken with the atmosphere that when the orchestra started to play, she cried every time.[88] Bosse writes: "I think Mélisande is one of my favourite roles. No one has brought out the downy nature of a woman like Maeterlinck. What was said with the lines was not the main thing – it was the air around the lines, which trembled and spoke. It was probably after that role that critics and audiences said that I stylized. I was not to blame, it was the delicate role – I didn't dare touch it with careless hands – then I would have torn the veil of the mystery, which Maeterlinck had drawn with a master's hand"[89]

There is a recording from 1947 where Bosse reads from *A Dream Play*, where her controlled, yet emotional diction emerges.[90] Bosse uses significantly long vowels with pronounced sounds and sonorant consonants to elevate the text's alliteration. When the music starts, her emotionality gradually increases. She merged music and action into a whole, a technique that became significant of her particular acting style.

Bosse was sensitive to dramatic text, could adapt her style to different genres, and also played realistically, like in her film role in *Appassionata* (1944). In the autobiography, though, she comes across as preferring more literary and especially lyrical texts, where she could develop her characteristic melodious diction. Bosse was trained in music, and, as the autobiography highlights, she was inspired by music in her actions and coloured her lines like a musician. This was probably what her contemporaries meant by her stylization, which was sometimes considered brilliant but occasionally perceived as mannered.

Conclusion

The counter-story of Bosse is that of an actress who both resisted and embraced the transition of the modern breakthrough, who took battle for her artistic ambition, but in the end was marginalized, probably because of a combination of age, gender, and animosity. It is the story of a woman with a strong faith in God who sees her art as a heavenly gift for which it is her duty to care.

Although Harriet Bosse's autobiography is thin in terms of scope, when put into context, it reveals itself as a presumptive basis for a well-cast history of the Swedish theatre of her time. The story is about the gradual transition from the tradition that prevailed around 1900 when actors enjoyed a more autonomous position as artists, through to the theatre of the modern breakthrough when directors began putting their signatures on performances.

82 Bosse s.a., 54.
83 Bosse s.a., 54.
84 Bosse s.a., 55.
85 Waal 1990, 73–5; Ek 2007, 30.
86 Bosse s.a., 56.
87 Bosse s.a., 56.
88 Bosse s.a., 21.
89 Bosse s.a., 32.
90 *Harriet Bosse framför stycken ur "Ett Drömspel"* 1947.

When Bosse left Dramaten for the second time in 1918, critic Carl Laurin was concerned that she would become a diva.[91] Her autobiography shows that, even early on in her career, she aspired to become a diva who was prepared to work hard but ultimately would have the power to choose her roles. The main reason why she left her longer engagements was dissatisfaction with the roles. At Svenska Teatern 1906–1911, she had to perform many popular comic roles, which she felt was "tiring and uninteresting", her happiest period was certainly that at Dramaten between 1911 and 1918, but she was not satisfied with the repertoire that she "eventually got".[92] She returns regularly to her love of a certain type of drama and roles. She expresses herself even more eloquently in a letter to Gustaf Collijn from 1943, where she writes about her time at Intima Teatern: "There, I could develop a special form of theatre. A drama that I loved, a form of intimate art that has meant the most to me – where the heart spoke to the heart, and that which lies above and behind the lines also comes out. This, in my opinion, is the most important thing in all the art of acting."[93]

Throughout her career, Bosse sought out certain roles, but she never quite managed to dictate her terms. In hindsight, it can be concluded that time had passed her by. Although she embraced modernist drama and the working methods of some expressionist directors, she was dissatisfied with her lack of influence. In the midst of the modern breakthrough of the Swedish theatre, her quest was futile, and, moreover, as a woman she was hit harder than some of her male colleagues.

It is impossible to get away from the fact that two keys to Bosse's marginalization are gender and age. As Bosse reached middle age, good roles for women became rarer, and they repeatedly went for younger actresses. Bosse was also a bit ahead of her time with the repertoire she advocated, such as Oscar Wilde's *Salome,* which she aspired to play in 1907. When it was staged 1915 at Svenska Teatern, Bosse was working elsewhere, and the role went to shooting star Tora Teje, fifteen years her junior.

When Bosse positions herself as a professional woman and performing artist, it is as an actress who both achieved great success in renowned theatres, but who also toiled hard in modest circumstances. However, despite her representation as humble, the autobiography also illuminates that she recognized her importance in Swedish theatre history.

Bosse is present in historiography, but she remains primarily an extra, mainly referred to as Strindberg's muse. As Stefaniw expresses, "women in the past, also function as property whose presence and actions should be determined by men and should serve male interests. This is achieved by constraining women in subordinate or dependent roles in academic hierarchies".[94] This opens up the possibility of reading Harriet Bosse as hitherto appropriated in historiography by the Strindberg research. Though with her unpublished autobiography she ultimately undermines what Bratton calls patriarchal culture's fundamental binary – body and mind.

AUTHOR
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91 Waal 1993, 116–17.
92 Bosse s.a., 28, 33.
93 Waal 1993, 133.
94 Stefaniw 2020, 271.

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