Irina Hron*

Dangerous Vicinity: Theorizing the Neighbour in August Strindberg's "The Roofing Ceremony"

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Abstract: This article examines the manifold relationship between vicinity, intrusion, and neighbour-love (agape) in August Strindberg's short novel "The Roofing Ceremony" ("Taklagsöl") from 1906. It throws new light on a series of topical issues such as the (Kierkegaardian) dichotomy of equality and dissimilarity, as well as various notions of intrusion and parasitism between neighbours and 'near-dwellers' (Heidegger). Strindberg's novel offers a model for understanding the dynamics of spatial and spiritual aspects of vicinity and proves to be a key text as to the ongoing cultural construction of 'the neighbour' which, in a period of social and geographical mobility, is more topical than ever. By drawing analogies with other world literary texts (Kafka, Fitzgerald, Tolstoy, Philip Roth), this article seeks to foreground the contemporary force of the Swedish author's highly timely text by focusing on the notion of 'being neighbours'.

"Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbour as Thyself":¹ Agape and the Abolition of Dissimilarities

In the superb second chapter of his 1847 treatise *Works of Love* (*Kjerlighedens*

¹ Mat 22.39, cited from the King James Version of the Bible (KJV). In his 'ethics of love' Kierkegaard primarily focuses on Mt 22.39: "And a second [commandment] is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The commandment to love (God and neighbor) originates in the Hebrew Bible and is repeated frequently in New Testament teachings. It is most prominently formulated in the following Bible passages: Lev 19.17–18 ("You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself [...]."), Mk 12.31 ("The second [commandment] is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"), Mt 5.43 ("You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"), Gal 5.14 ("For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"), and, finally, Rom 13.9 ("The commandments, [...] and any other commandment, are

***Corresponding author: Irina Hron**, University of Gothenburg, Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion, Box 22, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden, e-mail: irina.hron@lr.gu.se

Gjerninger)² Søren Kierkegaard gives a highly intriguing depiction of the biblical commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself.³ With his discursive variations on the Great commandment, the Danish philosopher and theologian still challenges ethical reflections today, focusing on the fundamental tension between equality (*Lighed*) and dissimilarity (*Forskjellighed*).⁴ In his ethics of love,⁵ set forth in the form of "Some Christian Deliberations",⁶ Kierkegaard addresses the question of how to secure love against change: While both erotic love and friendship are necessarily preferential and thus vulnerable to alterations, neighbour-love (agape) is not. Agapeistic love is all-inclusive, reaching out to every human being, excluding no one for preferential reasons. But how can such a demand for equality in loving avoid being shipwrecked on man's natural inclinations? Is it desirable or even possible to love without making distinctions? One of Kierkegaard's answers is, indeed, staggering: Only in death, he argues, do all dissimilarities disappear; a disappearance which proves to be a precondition for unconditional neighbour-love:

Go, then, and do this, take away dissimilarity and its similarity so that you can love the neighbor. Take away the distinction of preferential love so that you can love the neighbor.

summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'."). All biblical citations apart from the first one follow the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV).

2 References to Kierkegaard's text in the Danish original will be identified in parentheses by KG, followed by page numbers. Accordingly, the English translation by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong is identified in parentheses by WL, followed by page numbers.

3 The biblical notions of neighbour-love and agape have been the subject of recent discussions in philosophy and political theory. Questions of ethics, love, and the neighbour have for example been dealt with by Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (2001), by Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phénomène érotique* (*The Erotic Phenomenon*, 2003), by Alain Badiou, *Éloge de l'amour* (*In Praise of Love*, 2009), or by Byung-Chul Han, *Agonie des Eros* (*The Agony of Eros*, 2012). It would go beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail the many philosophical, theological, and philological implications. For an introductory discussion, see Guanzini 2016a and 2016b.

4 It is precisely in this context that the eponymous phrase "a dangerous neighbor" (*farligt Naboskab*) is used: "The most mediocre defence against hypocrisy is sagacity; indeed, it is hardly a defence, but rather a dangerous neighbor. The best defence against hypocrisy is love [...]" (WL, 15; *italics added*). ("Det maadeligste Værn mod Hyklerie er Klogskab, ja den er neppe et Værn, snarere et farligt Naboskab; det bedste Værn mot Hyklerie er Kjerlighed [...]" , KG, 23; *italics added*.)

5 For more on Kierkegaard's "Liebesethik" ("ethics of love", Dalferth 2002, VIII), see for example Arne Grøn's article on "the ethical significance of vision or the act of seeing" (Grøn 2002, 112); Grøn argues that "[r]eally seeing [the neighbour] seems to mean seeing the other as he or she really is, with all imperfections and faults" (ibid., 119). See also Jamie M. Ferreira's article which points out the "suggestive connection between nourishment and nearness/proximity" (Ferreira 2002, 152) that is closely related to questions of charity and neighbour-love.

6 In the Danish original: "Nogle christelige Overveielser i Talers Form".

[...] Death, you see, abolishes all dissimilarities, but preference is always related to dissimilarities; yet the way to life and to the eternal goes through death and through the abolition of dissimilarities [...].⁷ (WL, 61–62)

Pointedly formulated, all forms of love that prefer one individual to the other – be it parental love (*storgē*), erotic love (*eros*), or friendship and affection (*philia*)⁸ – present an obstacle to the Christian's unconditioned love for the neighbour.⁹ Following a provocative line of argument by Slavoj Žižek, in Kierkegaard only death alone levels all distinctions:¹⁰ “In actuality, alas, the individual grows together with his dissimilarity in such a way that in the end death must use force to tear it from him”¹¹ (WL, 88). In his cursory interpretation of Kierkegaard's “Book of Love”, Žižek goes to such lengths as to claim that “the ideal neighbor that we should love is a dead one – the only good neighbour is a dead neighbor” (Žižek 2005, 3).¹²

7 “Saa gaa da hen og gjør det, tag Forskjelligheden og dens Lighed bort, at Du kan elske ‘Næsten’. Tag Forkjerlighedens Forskjel bort, at Du kan elske Næsten. [...] See, Døden afskaffer alle Forskjelligheder, men Forkjerlighed forholder sig altid til Forskjel, dog gaaer Veien til Livet og til det Evige gennem Døden og gennem Forskjellighedernes Afskaffelse [...]” (KG, 68–69).

8 With regard to the different types of love (Affection, Friendship, Eros, Charity), there is an excellent account available in C. S. Lewis' book *The Four Loves* (1960). Compare further Guanzini's elaboration on the Greek term ἀγάπη (*agape*) and the blending and overlapping of the above-mentioned different forms of love (2016a, especially 212–214).

9 Compare: “[E]quality appears in love's humbly turning outward, embracing everyone, and yet loving each one individually but no one exceptionally” (WL, 67). (“Ligeligheden fremkommer derved, at Kjerligheden ydmygt vender sig ud efter, omfattende Alle, og dog elskende Hver især, men Ingen særligen”, KG, 73.)

10 According to Kierkegaard both the relationship to the neighbour and man's ‘pursuit of happiness’ are literally matters of life and death: “As long as he [man] is living, his fortune can change; *not until he is dead* and fortune has not left him while he lived, not until then is it manifest that he – has been happy” (WL, 31; *italics added*). (“Saa lenge han [Mennesket] lever, kan nemlig Lykken forandre sig, *først naar han er død*, og Lykken ikke har forladt ham, medens han levde, først da viser det sig, at han – har været lykkelig”, KG, 39; *italics added*.)

11 KG, 93: “Ak, i Virkeligheden groer den Enkelte saaledes sammen med sin Forskjellighed, at Døden tilsidst maa bruge Magt, for at rive den af ham.”

12 I agree with Žižek that for Kierkegaard the way to non-preferential neighbour-love goes through death and through the abolition of dissimilarities, but I do not agree that “the ideal neighbor that we should love is a dead one” (2005, 3). As I understand it, Kierkegaard is not particularly interested in “keeping the intrusive neighbor at a proper distance” (*ibid.*) but, as part of his discursive rhetoric, he invites the reader to enter into the act of reflection by taking certain discourses to extremes: The love for the neighbour, according to the Danish philosopher, by no means stands or falls with the contingency of its object, may the latter be scintillatingly alive, sickish, dying or dead. In the discourse titled “The Works of Love in Recollecting One Who Is Dead” (“Den Kjerlighedens Gjerning at erindre en Afdød”), Kierkegaard even describes the

In the following remarks, I will take a closer look at the disturbing image of the dead or rather dying neighbour and the variations of *agape*,¹³ vicinity and intrusion in August Strindberg's "The Roofing Ceremony" ("Taklagsöl"),¹⁴ a short novel from 1906 and one of the Swedish poet's last narrative works.¹⁵ I intend to shift the scope of investigation from a more traditional approach that, apart from few exceptions, mainly focuses on problems of narrative technique¹⁶ to a nuanced close reading that is directed to foregrounding the topicality and the contemporary force of Strindberg's multilayered text. By examining in detail a series of tropes of 'being neighbours' as well as a number of selected images of the eponymous "dangerous neighbor",¹⁷ I seek to expand upon and complement more conventional readings of the Swedish author's late prose text. "The Roofing Ceremony", as I will argue, serves as a unique archive for manifold concepts of 'being neighbours' while at the same time exemplifying that just what constitutes the multifarious figure of the neighbour is constantly changing. Of particular importance are the semantics of several domestic spaces, first of all the private apartment which is inhabited by, as Martin Heidegger puts it, a "being that dwells".¹⁸ This culminates in a close examination of the (protagonist's) private bedroom as

duties we have to the dead. The much debated issue as to how far neighbour-love necessarily is in conflict with preferential love (*Forkjerlighed*) and also the question of what to make of a command to love is comprehensively dealt with in the 2008 volume *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements*, edited by Edward F. Mooney.

13 Apart from a philosophical discussion of the general term *ἀγάπη* (*agape*), Guanzini's article also offers informative material on controversial etymological aspects (see 2016a, especially 47).

14 In this article all citations from "Taklagsöl" are taken from Strindberg 1906. References to this volume of *August Strindbergs Samlade Verk* will be identified in parentheses by TLÖ, followed by page numbers. Accordingly, the English translation by David Mel Paul and Margareta Paul (Strindberg 1987), quoted in the running text, will be identified in parentheses by RC, followed by page numbers.

15 Barbro Ståhle Sjönell's editorial comments (1984) in volume 55 of the critical edition of *Strindberg's Samlade Verk* offer excellent material on historical sources and manuscript variants.

16 When "The Roofing Ceremony" appeared in print in 1906, most scholars agreed that it was Strindberg's "most boldly 'modernist', non-dramatic work" (Jacobs 1997, 123), foreshadowing Joyce, Woolf and Beckett. However, in 2010, Stenport, in her monograph on *Modernism, Transnationalism, and Setting*, is the first to point out the static domestic setting in a conventional prosaic middle-class apartment as critical to the novel's construction which is, in turn, central to this article's notion of neighbourly vicinity. Moreover, critics have for the most part continued to overlook the comprehensive spatial, spiritual and physical aspects of the neighbour in "The Roofing Ceremony".

17 See footnote 4.

18 Heidegger [1951], 150: "Wesen des Wohnens". The German term 'Wesen' denotes both 'the basic or inherent character of something' (nature) and 'a living creature or entity' (being).

a metonymy of intimacy and death. Further discussion is dedicated to the significance of the two opposite buildings that not only dominate the text as a whole but quite literally overshadow the storyline from beginning to end: While the first of the two buildings seems to gain power by progressively rising or growing, thus counterpointing the decay of the agonizing and eventually dying protagonist, the other one is inhabited by a strange and ambiguous creature – a nameless and faceless neighbour, called the ‘Green Eye’ (“Gröna Ögat”).

My approach builds and expands on developments in philosophy, theology, and political theory, and in particular on Žižek’s, Reinhard’s and Santner’s seminal book on neighbour-love as well as on Isabella Guanzini’s remarks on the re-interpretation of the Biblical notion of agape, which has proven to be highly stimulating for my own work: In their essay collection *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theory* (2005), the authors discuss, from quite different angles, the biblical commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself as an enigma that calls us to rethink the very nature of subjectivity, responsibility, and community. However, in Strindberg, friend-enemy relations are seldom set in stone but are, on the contrary, frequently decided on an individual basis:¹⁹ “It is not for word or deed one loves some people, but for secret, often inexplicable reasons. Sometimes, shared antipathies are firmer bonds of friendship than shared sympathies, yet since everything changes no relationship can be depended on”²⁰ (RC, 47). Tying in with some of Žižek’s intriguing reflections, Guanzini argues that agape in the biblical sense of the ‘love of one’s fellow man’, actually “can achieve a new legibility through a process of dislocation and translation in other contexts”, generating “a new common discourse” (Guanzini 2016a, 39). This is even closely connected to the role Christian narratives and symbols, and especially the biblical account of neighbour-love, play in the self-understanding of the present.²¹ In the context of these ideas, “The Roofing Ceremony” translates the (Kierkegaardian) discourse of the neighbour into a highly topical and contemporary narrative about various friend-enemy distinctions, about intrusion, and about love and hate between neighbours.

19 For a detailed discussion on the status of preferential love in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*, including the question if all forms of exclusive love are morally reprehensible, see especially Quinn 1998 and Ferreira 2008.

20 “Det är icke för ord och handlingar man älskar somliga människor, utan av hemliga, ofta oförklarliga grunder; gemensamma antipatier äro stundom fastare vänskapsband än gemensamma sympatier, men enär allting växlar, så är ingen förbindelse att lita på” (TLÖ, 42).

21 Guanzini 2016b, 43–44: „Es geht um die Frage, welche Rolle die christlichen Narrative und ihre Symbole eine entscheidende Bedeutung [sic] für das Selbstverständnis der Gegenwart spielen.“

‘Of Parasites and Neighbours’: Elements of a Poetics

In his 1951 lecture “Building Dwelling Thinking” (“Bauen, Wohnen, Denken”) Martin Heidegger reflects on what he calls the “nature of dwelling”²² (Heidegger 2001, 146): “We work here and dwell there. We do not merely dwell – that would be virtual inactivity – we practice a profession, we do business, we travel and lodge on the way, now here, now there”²³ (ibid., 145). Apart from the ontological dimensions of Heidegger’s well-known metaphor of being and the productive interplay between private dwelling and public workspace, there is also an aesthetic element, hidden between the lines, that allows us to reflect on a further ‘being that dwells’, namely, our fellow man in the shape of the *neighbour*.²⁴ In this regard, I would like to quote the perhaps most famous literary depiction of that particular ‘being’, from the forty-ninth note of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, 1910):

There is a being that is completely harmless if it passes before your eyes, you hardly notice it and immediately forget it again. But as soon as it gets into your hearing in some invisible fashion it develops there, it creeps out, as it were, and one has seen cases where it penetrated the brain and thrived devastatingly in that organ, like the canine pneumococcus that enters through the nose. *This being is the neighbor*.²⁵ (Rilke 2008, 124; *italics added*)

Rilke emphatically describes the neighbour in terms of parasitism²⁶ – a notion that is, in fact, closely related to the concept of vicinity and community in “The

²² Heidegger [1951], 150: “Wesen des Wohnens”. See also footnote 18.

²³ Ibid.: „Wir arbeiten hier und wohnen dort. Wir wohnen nicht bloß, das wäre beinahe Untätigkeit, wir stehen in einem Beruf, wir machen Geschäfte, wir reisen und wohnen unterwegs, bald hier, bald dort.”

²⁴ For a more thorough analysis on the relation between dwelling, working, and aesthetics, see my 2013 article on Kafka and Rilke.

²⁵ Rilke [1910], 141; *italics added*: „Es giebt [sic] ein Wesen, das vollkommen unschädlich ist, wenn es dir in die Augen kommt, du merkst es kaum und hast es gleich wieder vergessen. Sobald es dir aber unsichtbar auf irgendeine Weise ins Gehör gerät, so entwickelt es sich dort, es kriecht gleichsam aus, und man hat Fälle gesehen, wo es bis ins Gehirn vordrang und in diesem Organ verheerend gedieh, ähnlich den Pneumokokken des Hundes, die durch die Nase eindringen. *Dieses Wesen ist der Nachbar*.”

²⁶ Compare also the French philosopher Michel Serres’ influential book *Le Parasite* (1980, *The Parasite*) which explores the relationship between a parasite and its host body as model for all forms of exchange. In his monograph Serres argues that all acts of exchange are based on exploitation.

Roofing Ceremony”: “This branch of my family [...] had now crept up on me, gnawed apart my marriage, and was going to separate me from my wife, my child, my home”²⁷ (RC, 47). Instead of seeking what is good for him, regardless of their own interests and preferences, the protagonist’s family behave like parasites, gnawing incessantly away at his physical and mental health. Once more, it is Heidegger who gives an illuminating etymological account of the German *Nachbar* (neighbour), illustrating the provenance of the term: “The Nachbar is the Nachbar, the Nachbarbauer, the near-dweller, he who dwells nearby” (Heidegger 2001, 145).²⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary*, in its second edition, defines a neighbour in the first of three sub-entries simply as “a person who lives near or next to another”, focusing on a certain spatial relation between individuals. Thus, the neighbour is basically someone who “occupies an adjoining or nearby house or dwelling”. But there is of course still another aspect that exceeds bare contiguity and is brought to bear in Kierkegaard’s brilliant variations on the notions of neighbour-love: The Greek *πλῆσιον* (*plēsion*)²⁹ which means ‘neighbour’ or simply ‘fellow man’ is someone who is nearby, someone who is so close that he or she can be seen, heard, felt and touched. And this is exactly why this other one “concerns and affects us with a special intensity [...] *beyond every spontaneous contiguity*” (Guanzini 2016b, 201; *italics added*). In neighbour-love both spatial proximity and the readiness for practiced charity are mutually dependent:

At a distance the neighbor is a shadow that walks past everyone’s thoughts on the road of imagination, but that the person who actually walked by at the same moment was the neighbor – this he perhaps does not discover. At a distance everyone recognizes the neighbor, and yet it is impossible to see him at a distance; if you do not see him so close at hand that before God you unconditionally see him in every human being, you do not see him at all.³⁰ (WL, 79–80)

²⁷ “Denna släktgren som jag alltid skyddat mig för genom mitt sunda instinktiva hat, den hade nu krupit på mig, ätit sönder mitt äktenskap, skulle skilja mig från hustru, barn och hem” (TLÖ,42).

²⁸ Heidegger [1951], 148: „Der Nachbar ist der ‚Nachgebur‘, der ‚Nachgebauer‘, derjenige, der in der Nähe wohnt.”

²⁹ A good introductory account into the main concerns of the biblical double commandment of love and the notions of *plēsion* and *agape* is provided by Guanzini (2016a and 2016b).

³⁰ “Og dog, paa Afstand, er ‘Næsten’ en Indbildning, han, som jo er ved at være nær ved, det første det bedste Menneske, ubetinget ethvert Menneske. Paa Afstand er ‘Næsten’ en Skygge, der ad Indbildningens Vei gaaer ethvert Menneskes Tanke forbi – ak, men at det Menneske, der i samme Øieblik virkeligen gik ham forbi, var Næsten: det opdager han maaskee ikke. Paa Afstand kjender Enhver ‘Næsten’, og dog er det en Umulighed at see ham paa Afstand; dersom Du ikke seer ham saa nær, at Du ubetinget, for Gud, seer ham i ethvert Menneske, saa seer Du ham slet ikke” (KG, 85).

Thus, being neighbours is not exclusively, but to a certain extent, a matter of spatial and thereby quite frequently imposed proximity. The trope of ‘being neighbours’³¹ literally balances on the fine line between intimacy and distance, between familiarity and impenetrable – and sometimes even ‘uncanny’ – strangeness.

Actually, this clash of intimacy and hostility is typical for the extremely productive period in which Strindberg wrote not only “The Roofing Ceremony” but also texts like *Alone* (*Ensam*, 1903) and his famous chamber plays (*kammerspel*).³² As will be shown further on, it is no coincidence that in the sequence of five chamber plays, four of them are set in modern apartment buildings – the most common urban form of dwelling that has a great symbolic value in Strindberg’s turn-of-the-century writings.³³ The term ‘chamber’, especially in the German context of *Kammerspiel*, generally refers to an enclosed space, a small-sized room, often a bedroom, and it also provides the exclusive setting of “The Roofing Ceremony”.³⁴ Strindberg’s highly symbolic urban chambers offer a domestic space where various friend-enemy distinctions are at stake, and where neighbours, in the most confined possible space, instead of practicing neighbourly love, start to torment each other in many different ways, consequently corrupting the supreme ideal of agapeistic love.

‘As I Lay Dying’: Talking Bodies in Pain

In the opening passage of Strindberg’s 1906 novella the reader witnesses the blending together of quite different scenes: The main setting is a characteristic domestic location, namely, the protagonist’s private bedroom which serves as his sickroom and, as the reader learns in the course of the narration, also as

³¹ This article is linked to a comprehensive book project on figures of vicinity, provisionally entitled *Poetics of the Neighbour*, which explores concepts of community formation, vicinity, and neighbourhood in (mostly German-language and Scandinavian) contemporary literature.

³² Strindberg was indeed highly interested in a dramatization of “The Roofing Ceremony” and expressed his interest to his German translator Emil Schering: “The Roofing Ceremony is a Chamber Play” (“Taklagsöl är ett Kammerspiel [...]”, TL, 167).

³³ The four chamber plays set in urban apartment buildings are *Storm Weather* (*Oväder*, 1907), *The Ghost Sonata* (*Spöksonaten*, 1907), *The Pelican* (*Pelikanen*, 1907) and *The Black Glove* (*Svarta hansken*, 1909). Only *The Burned House* (*Brända Tomten*, 1907) is set in a fictitious house that is an accurate copy of the house where August Strindberg was born.

³⁴ For more on the significance of the concept *Kammer* in Strindberg’s oeuvre, especially in “The Roofing Ceremony”, see Stenport 2010, 182–184.

his death chamber.³⁵ Confined to his bed, the badly injured curator seems to be constantly talking in a flow of semi-conscious first-person speech, telling and re-telling the most intimate episodes of his forty-year-long life. Given the protagonist's serious illness, the flow of words, and consequently also the narration, is constantly "menaced by the danger of atrophy and collapse" (Perelli 1987, 137). Rather soon we understand that the bedroom serves as a kind of incubator for the protagonist's train of thoughts: Inside his apartment he talks nonstop, producing a "morphine-induced, semiconscious, first-person speech" (Stenport 2010, 156). However, the moment he is moved out of the apartment, the reader has no access to the curator's thoughts anymore and the story line is nearly brought to an end. We quickly understand that the moment the patient is moved out of his setting, he no longer exists: "The patient was brought to the hospital in a wagon, was opened and examined, sewn up again, and brought home"³⁶ (RC, 55). One would imagine a deathbed scene to be a prototypical scene of forgiveness and reconciliation, since 'Charity begins at home'. Therefore it is most striking that there are virtually no others at the curator's deathbed; at least no others that would qualify as family or friends, and thereby as neighbours in terms of his next of kin:³⁷ "Have I no friend, then, am I such a bad person! No, I'm not so worthless! Speak!"³⁸ (RC, 71). The curator has to face death entirely on his own. He is turned into a talking machine, speaking to an imaginary figure on the wallpaper, finally reduced to a talking body in pain.

This brings to mind other famous literary deathbed scenes known from world literature such as Tolstoy's "Ivan Ilyich" and his horror as he battles with the idea of his own demise,³⁹ or even Philip Roth's *Everyman* whose last moments coincide

³⁵ The bedroom as a point of origin plays an important role also in Kafka's texts, something I will come back to in this article. Often the lines between working life and home life are blurred and the bedroom in particular appears as a symbolically charged hybrid space where business partners meet while one of the parties lies dying as it is the case in, for example, Kafka's "Das Ehepaar" ("The Married Couple", 1922). For a more detailed analysis on the blending together of the spheres of public and private, see my 2017 article on Kafka and Welles.

³⁶ "Den sjuke fördes till lasarettet i en vagn, öppnades och undersöktes, syddes igen och fördes tillbaka" (TLÖ, 48).

³⁷ Here, the double meaning of the term 'neighbour' as both 'a person living next door or near to another person' and simultaneously 'anyone who is in need of one's help or kindness' comes to the fore. Also Kierkegaard resorts to the suggestive metaphorical connection between 'neighbour' and 'nearness'. According to the Danish philosopher the neighbour is "the person who is nearer to you than anyone else" (WL, 21). ("Den, der er Dig nærmere end alle Andre", KG, 28.)

³⁸ "Har jag då ingen vän, är jag då en sådan dålig människa! Inte är jag så use! Säg!" (TLÖ, 61).

³⁹ Compare: "For those present his agony continued for another two hours. Something rattled in his throat, his emaciated body twitched, then the gasping and rattle became less and less

with the completion of the novel⁴⁰ – just as the curator’s death coincides with the completion of the building next door: “In that same moment, the tortured expression left his face, and he lay down in the bed; but, when he glanced in the mirror, he saw the newly built house decorated with wreaths and flags. [...] He stretched, drew a couple of deep breaths, and fell asleep, to all appearance, *but he died*”⁴¹ (RC, 74; *italics added*). What unites these depictions of a dying protagonist is, firstly, the unfolding scene of transfiguration and, secondly, the focus on the body’s materiality. In this respect, “The Roofing Ceremony” unfolds a highly symbolical second story-line that duplicates the protagonist’s demise on a material and metaphorical level – albeit in mirror-like fashion: During the last days of his life, the curator deals with his isolation by looking out of the window; he uses a mirror since he is no longer able to move his head: “The sick man glanced at the mirror, and now he saw how the house under construction had grown and threatened to shut the sun out of the sunroom”⁴² (RC, 26–27). What he sees is a five-story apartment building steadily rising on the other side of the street, or rather, the distorted mirror image of that building going up. Finally, and this is what he is waiting for impatiently, the new building will overshadow, will ‘outgrow’ *another* building, likewise opposite the protagonist’s house – the real building where the Green Eye (“Gröna Ögat”),⁴³ his *neighbour* and archenemy, lives: “When I am at home I sit mostly in the sunroom, and from the window I look

frequent. ‘It is finished!’ said someone near him. He heard these words and repeated them in his soul. ‘Death is finished,’ he said to himself. *‘It is no more!’* He drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died” (Tolstoy [1882], 137; *italics added*).

40 Compare: “He went under feeling far from felled, anything but doomed, eager yet again to be fulfilled, but nonetheless, he never woke up. Cardiac arrest. *He was no more*, freed from being, entering into nowhere without ever knowing it. Just as he’d feared from the start” (Roth 2006, 182; *italics added*). As an aside, I would like to point out that the prototypical figure of *Everyman* (“ethvert Menneske”) is a key also to Kierkegaard’s notion of the neighbour: “Since one’s neighbour is every man, unconditionally every man, all distinctions are indeed removed from the object” (WL, 77; *italics added*). (“Da ‘Næsten’ nemlig er ethvert Menneske, ubetinget ethvert Menneske, saa er jo alle Forskjelligheder borttagne fra Gjenstanden [...]”, KG, 73.)

41 “I samma stund upplöste sig de förpinade dragen i hans ansikte, och han lade sig ner i bädden; men när han kastade en blick i spegeln, såg han det nybyggda huset smyckat med kransar och flaggor. [...] Han sträckte ut sig, drog ett par långa andetag, och somnade, som det såg ut, *men han dog*” (TLÖ, 63; *italics added*).

42 “Den sjuke kastade en blick i spegeln, och nu såg han hur det under byggnad varande huset hade vuxit och hotade stänga ut solen från solrummet” (TLÖ, 26–27).

43 The motif of the ‘Green Eye’ or ‘Green Light’ is a piece of symbolism widely known through F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby*. Compare: “‘If it wasn’t for the mist we could see your home across the bay,’ said Gatsby. ‘You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock’” (Fitzgerald [1925], 70). Compare also: “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter –

out over a garden, beyond which lies a house; and in that house lives a man who is my enemy”⁴⁴ (RC, 13). Comparable to the much more renowned green light in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, Strindberg’s ‘Green Eye’ also appears as “the haunting lamp of the dying man’s neighbour” (Perelli 1987, 131). The neighbour turns out to be everything else than a Charitable Other but, on the contrary, as “an inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence that hystericizes [the other]” (Žižek 2005, 140). Due to his feebleness, caused by a mysterious accident, the curator is confined to his bed day and night and therefore the more anxious to get rid of the constant sight of his archenemy: “I could not move away, and therefore I wished that the trees in the garden might grow over his window, or that the house might be razed, but it remained, and his green eye was directed steadily at me and my fate”⁴⁵ (RC, 14). He is striving to escape what he experiences as the piercing gaze of the other, ‘directed steadily at him’. But instead of outgrowing his neighbour’s, his enemy’s house, the building is outgrowing the protagonist himself, or even the protagonist’s physical materiality.⁴⁶ Accordingly, the growing house parallels the growing pain of the curator, but, most notably, it acts as a counterpoint to the decay of his own dying body. In the end, the novel does not simply confront us with the dead body of its main protagonist, laid out in his death chamber, but simultaneously presents us with the triumphant ‘body’ of the new building as well as with its celebration, the eponymous roofing ceremony: “And the builders of the house gave three cheers for the leader of their work”⁴⁷ (RC, 74). Consequently, the narrative provides us with an audacious long-term replacement for the vulnerable and febrile male body. The adamant materiality of the non-organic building triumphs over both the protagonist and his body’s mortality.

The protagonist’s reduction to his dying body and slowly extinguishing mind is enforced by the apparent absence of his nearest (in the biblical sense of the

tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out arms farther... And one fine morning – ” (ibid., 140). With reference to the Green Eye, Ulf Boëthius attests that Strindberg’s novel has a “paranoid character” (“paranoid karaktär”, 1986, 50), which perfectly correlates with the hystericizing presence of the neighbour Žižek mentions. This article focuses, however, rather on issues of hostility and neighbour-love that are raised by the imagery of the Green Eye.

44 “När jag är hemma sitter jag mest i solrummet, och från fönstret ser jag ut över en trädgård, bortom vilken ligger ett hus; och i detta hus bor en man, som är min fiende” (TLÖ, 17).

45 “Flytta kunde jag icke, önskade därför att trädgårdens träd måtte växa över hans fönster, eller att huset revs, men det stod kvar, och hans gröna öga var stadigt riktat på mig och mitt öde” (TLÖ, 17).

46 Ulf Boëthius coins the expression “thinking backwards” (*baklängestänkande*, 1986, 56) which correlates with the reverse structure that brings about that the completion of the building and the completion of the curator’s life coincide. Per Arne Tjäder uses the imagery of a “mirror-inverted perspective” (*spegelvänt perspektiv*, 1978, 41).

47 “Och byggets murare höjde ett trefaldigt hurra för byggmästaren” (TLÖ, 63).

term) ‘neighbours’. In the early stages of his illness, for lack of company, he starts talking to an imaginary interlocutor who turns out to be a shape on the wallpaper:

The sick man had slept for a quarter of an hour when he opened his eyes, searching for a certain pattern in the wallpaper that formed a head with a distant resemblance to his friend, the director, who he thought was in the room, and with whom he spoke.⁴⁸ (RC, 8)

A blurred shape on the wallpaper is all that is left of the social community the curator had been part of for most of his life. During the last days of his suffering, he is watched over by Sofia, an archetypal Red Cross nurse⁴⁹ and an anonymous doctor who, however, only steps in to finally seal his fate: “There’s nothing to be done”⁵⁰ (RC, 15). Due to the lack of family and loved ones, the curator clutches at the two professional Samaritans like a drowning man will clutch at a straw: “[A]nd he began to flow outward, reached out *for those nearest*, the nurse and the doctor”⁵¹ (RC, 72; *italics added*). And indeed, the nurse and the doctor are the only ones who ever physically enter his sick room. But they do it merely for professional reasons and not for agape’s sake.

Serial Living: Narratives of Intrusion and Reduplication

Most often, the neighbour is *not* depicted as the Charitable Other, but rather as both an intimate stranger and the uncanny mediator who embodies the border zone between the houses and rooms next to each other. One key element in this rhetoric of the neighbour is the moment of resemblance, or even more precisely, of an *irritating* resemblance. The neighbour seems to act as a ‘projection screen’ par excellence exactly because he or she – even as a perfect stranger⁵² – is almost like us. What is most decisive here is the seemingly minor word ‘almost’: our neigh-

⁴⁸ “Den sjuke hade sovitt en kvart, då han slog upp ögonen sökande ett visst mönster på tapeten, som bildade ett huvud men en avlägsen likhet med hans vän, intendenten, vilken han trodde sig ha i rummet, och med vilken han talade” (TLÖ, 14).

⁴⁹ Comparable to the Green Eye, the nurse is a rather enigmatic figure. Filtered through the protagonist’s extinguishing mind, we get the impression that her task in the dying of the curator is mainly to witness the man’s death and report the progression of his dying to his neighbour, the Green Eye. This would make her a paradigmatic parasite in the guise of the Charitable Neighbour.

⁵⁰ “Här är intet att göra” (TLÖ, 18).

⁵¹ “[O]ch han började flyta ut, grep omkring sig *efter de närmaste*, sköterskan och läkaren” (TLÖ, 61; *italics added*).

⁵² Concepts of proximity and distance play a central role also in Georg Simmel’s “The Stranger” (*Exkurs über den Fremden*, 1908b) who represents a “distinct structure composed of remoteness

bour has *almost* the same address, *almost* the same way home, *almost* the same home as we have; therefore he puts the singularity of our most intimate activities at risk.

This is precisely the case in Strindberg's "The Roofing Ceremony", where nearly everything comes in doubles that irritatingly resemble each other.⁵³ From the very first page it is obvious that the protagonist's private apartment – "a modern, standardized middle-class Stockholm apartment" (Stenport 2011, 234), and in particular his bedroom, provide the main, and in fact exclusive location for the uncanny neighbour-story. On a literal level, in order to begin with, the apartment is simply a set of rooms that form a dwelling-place in a typical urban apartment building. At the same time, as Anna Westerståhl Stenport has convincingly shown, it carries a "high symbolical and structural value" (2010, 156), functioning both as a highly productive metonymy of intimacy and as an interior space where both people and reminiscences are constantly circulating. It is intriguing to consider Heidegger's intertwining of dwelling and contemplating, and then to read the apartment's interior as a sort of 'incubator' for its inhabitant's most intimate reminiscences, especially with regard to his living together with those next to him. From his sickbed the curator gives us a detailed account of the dissolution of his own marriage. Closely intertwined with and doubling the main narrative is, however, a second story, uncannily resembling his own: The protagonist contemplates in detail the decay of the marriage of his downstairs neighbours – a newly married couple in the apartment below. According to the former, this marriage is a direct reflection of his own desolate marital life: "Just like a year ago, upstairs, with us"⁵⁴ (RC, 17). However, in the telling of his neighbours' 'love story', elaborately and with rich detail, the adjoining apartment becomes the real scene of what happens. Most notable is the fact that "the curator evokes a picture of a

and nearness, indifference and involvement" (Simmel 1971, 145 – "besondere[s] Gebilde aus Ferne und Nähe, Gleichgültigkeit [sic] und Engagiertheit", [1908a], 766–767) that is 'almost like us'.

⁵³ According to Boëthius the many doublings and inversions are part of the protagonist's paranoid world view: "From this point of view the narration's many iterations, retakes and analogies bear witness to the fact that reality is arranged and incidents staged". ("I detta perspektiv framstår också berättelsens många upprepningar, omtagningar och paralleler som vittnesbörd om att verkligheten är arrangerad, händelserna iscensatta", 1986, 54.) Something similar can be found in Ulf Olsson's reading of the text: "It is this repeating and doubling which accounts for the novel's madness, its paranoia". ("Det är denna upprepning och dubbling som är romansens vansinne, dess paranoiditet", 2002, 276.) Johannesson even claims that parallelisms (two apartments, two couples, two marriages) represent "an essential aspect of [Strindberg's] dramatic technique" (1968, 255). Finally, Stenport discusses various aspects and "metaphors of recording, repetition, and transmission" (2010, 239).

⁵⁴ "Alldeles som för ett år sedan, däruppe hos oss!" (TLÖ, 20).

marriage simply by interpreting the sounds from below” (Johannesson 1968, 256) – a picture which is confirmed by his visit to the neighbouring apartment in order to make a telephone call. From the very beginning he is a keen observer of the others’ marital life, but from a distance. Neither a relative nor a friend, he inevitably turns into a spy who is first and foremost observing ‘Through the Ear’:⁵⁵ “From my own place upstairs, I had heard the whole story of this marriage’s origin and descent, without knowing its performers, without having really seen them on the stairs, and while remaining entirely unacquainted with the scene”⁵⁶ (RC, 17). This is reminiscent, once more, of Rilke’s famous depiction of neighbourly vicinity as source of inspiration:

I could simply write the story of my neighbors; that would be a life’s work. And then it would be more the story of the symptoms than of the diseases that they have produced in me; but they share with all such beings of the sort that they are known only by the disturbances they cause in certain tissues.⁵⁷ (Rilke 2008, 124)

In this vein, Strindberg’s protagonist also usurps his neighbour’s fate in order to tell his *own* story: “I am mostly alone, sit silently and write and, consequently, have to hear – and when I have no life of my own to live, I have to live that of others”⁵⁸ (RC, 18–19). It is no coincidence that in 1905 Strindberg started to outline a monodrama with the descriptive title *Grannarna* (*The Neighbours*), which is preserved among the drafts from the period in which “The Roofing Ceremony” was written. The content of the monodrama ties closely in with the curator’s account of the marriage of his downstairs neighbours; the drama was, however, never published.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Compare Michael Cowan’s article “Imagining Modernity Through the Ear. Rilke’s *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* and the Noise of Modern Life” (2006) where Cowan describes the noise coming from the main protagonist’s neighbours “as a kind of parasite that bores its way into the brain and saps the writer’s thoughts” (2006, 141).

⁵⁶ “Uppifrån mig hade jag ju hört hela detta äktenskaps uppkomst- och utvecklingshistoria, utan att känna de uppträdande personerna, utan att ha riktigt sett dem i trappan, och fullt obekant med skådeplatsen” (TLÖ, 19).

⁵⁷ Rilke [1910], 141: „Ich könnte einfach die Geschichte meiner Nachbarn [sic] schreiben; das wäre ein Lebenswerk. Es wäre freilich mehr die Geschichte der Krankheitserscheinungen, die sie in mir erzeugt haben; aber das teilen sie mit allen derartigen Wesen, daß sie nur in den Störungen nachzuweisen sind, die sie in gewissen Geweben hervorrufen.”

⁵⁸ “[J]ag är mest ensam, sitter tyst och skriver, måste följaktligen höra, och när jag icke har eget liv att leva, så lever jag andras” (TLÖ, 21).

⁵⁹ For more on the unpublished manuscript, see Barbro Ståhle Sjönell’s editorial comments “Tilkomst och mottagande” (“Origin and Reception”) in volume 55 of the critical edition, especially page 164.

Keeping the unpublished monodrama and its urban setting in mind, I would like to draw yet another analogy that reinforces the importance of the modern apartment and its fascinating inhabitant as a typical turn-of-the-century arrangement. The modernist author I am referring to here is Franz Kafka and his narrative text “Der Nachbar” (“My Neighbor”) from 1917, a story comprising less than three pages.⁶⁰ Both Kafka’s “My Neighbor” and Strindberg’s “The Roofing Ceremony” employ various strategies of reduplication, thus playing an intriguing numbers game: In both texts the protagonist’s private apartment provides the main setting; and in both texts the apartment is duplicated by a second neighbouring apartment that seems to be much more noteworthy since it discloses the real story that should be told. In both texts the protagonists conjure up life stories from scraps of evidence they collect, constantly observing their neighbours “whose lives [they] can follow through the walls of [their] apartment” (Jacobs 1997, 126).⁶¹ The solid frame separating the two apartments, the floor/ceiling, has changed into a delicate membrane that no longer separates the self from the other, and the curator, restlessly waiting in the others’ apartment, is no longer able to distinguish between himself and the neighbour, between imagination and reality:

However, now I’m sitting down here, and imagining myself walking up there. [...] I imagine, now, how I look from their viewpoint, here below; how they have observed our life up there, witnessed our struggle up there, our child-cries, our musical repertoire – until the eternal silence descended, after two souls had consumed one another, eaten one another up, neutralized one another – [...].⁶² (RC, 26)

Even the once impenetrable walls are transformed into permeable membranes: “When, in the face of her expectations, I did not get up, I felt her hatred radiate

60 For a more in-depth analysis on the figure of the neighbour as a kind of parasite invading the purity of interiority from the outside, see my 2013 article on Kafka and Rilke.

61 Examples from “The Roofing Ceremony” have already been given in the beginning of this chapter. With regard to Kafka, compare for example: “[W]hile I at the other side must fly to the telephone, listen to all the requests of my customers, come to difficult and grave decisions, carry out long calculations – but worst of all, during all this time, involuntarily give Harras [the neighbor] valuable information through the wall” (Kafka 1971, 465–466). („[I]ch dagegen muß, wenn geläutet wird, zum Telephon laufen, die Wünsche des Kunden entgegennehmen, schwerwiegende Entschlüsse fassen, großangelegte Überredungen ausführen – vor allem aber während des Ganzen unwillkürlich durch die Zimmerwand Harras Bericht erstatten”; Kafka [1917], 372.)

62 “Emellertid, nu sitter jag härnere, och tänker mig selv gående däruppe, [...] jag föreställer mig nu hur jag tar mig ut härnerifrån deras synpunkt; hur de observerat vårt liv däruppe, bevittnat vår kamp däruppe, vårt barnskrik, vår musikrepertoar – tills den eviga tystnaden inträdde efter att två själar konsumerat varandra, ätit varandra, neutraliserat varandra” (TLÖ, 26).

through the wall, the shattered evil, the thwarted outrage, and it was as though my room filled with a poisonous vapor”⁶³ (RC, 52).

In both Strindberg and Kafka nearly everything comes in pairs,⁶⁴ but there are a few crucial objects that exist only once, taking the similarities between the two texts to extremes: There is only *one* telephone in both texts, and this telephone – the modern hearing apparatus – is, unsurprisingly, the link between the two adjoining apartments. But whereas Kafka’s increasingly hysterical protagonist never gains access to the other’s apartment,⁶⁵ Strindberg’s curator forces his way into the downstairs dwelling and takes immediate possession of the neighbour’s telephone: “And so I found myself at last within those doors that for four years I had passed by”⁶⁶ (RC, 16–17). Furthermore, there is only one narrative voice and, accordingly, only one perspective on the phenomenon of the relationship between the narrator and his neighbour. In both Strindberg and Kafka, the particular narrative voice is presented in the form of discursive monologues in the protagonist’s first-person speech, which is why both of them appear as hystericized and even paranoid characters. While Kafka’s narrator is a most solitary being, enclosed within the four walls of his room and fantasizing about the other’s life on the other side of the wall, the curator in “The Roofing Ceremony”, in the guise of a parasitic intruder, self-confidently assures himself of the reduplication of his own life:

63 “När jag mot hennes beräkning icke steg upp, kände jag hennes hat stråla genom väggen, den inslagna ondskans, det misslyckade nidingsdådets, och mitt rum liksom fylldes av giftig dunst” (TLÖ, 46).

64 In Kafka’s “My Neighbor” the reader is informed about two girl clerks (*Fräulein*) with each their respective typewriter. Even more decisive is the fact that there are two young men: the ‘quite young’ narrator and the new neighbour, a young business man: “At the beginning of the year a young man snapped up the empty premises next to mine, which very foolishly I had hesitated to rent until it was too late. They also consist of a room and an anteroom, with a kitchen, however, thrown in [...]” (Kafka 1971, 464). („Seit Neujahr hat ein junger Mann die kleine leerstehende Nebenwohnung, die ich ungeschickter Weise so lange zu mieten gezögert habe, frischweg gemietet“, Kafka [1917], 370.) The new neighbour owns “a business similar to mine” (ibid., 465) („Geschäft ähnlich dem meinigen“, ibid.) and even the two apartments resemble each other in many respects: “They also consist of a room and an anteroom, with a kitchen, however, thrown in [...]” (ibid., 464). („Auch ein Zimmer mit Vorzimmer, außerdem aber noch eine Küche“, ibid.) Due to the doubling of the two apartments the narrator projects his very own fears and anxieties onto his neighbour, looking for the presence of selfness within the otherness of the neighbour.

65 Compare: “Harras does not require a telephone, he uses mine, he pushes his sofa against the wall and listens” (Kafka 1971, 465). („Harras braucht kein Telefon, er benutzt meines, er hat sein Kanapee an die Wand gerückt und horcht“, Kafka [1917], 372.)

66 “Så befann jag mig slutligen innanför dessa dörrar, vilka jag gått förbi i fyra års tid” (TLÖ, 19).

[A]nd now here I sit in his workroom waiting for a telephone call. It is his room, but a counterpart of mine [...]; his tile stove is like mine, his wallpaper the same, but this is my room, abandoned, plundered, in disarray. [...] The door to the hallway and the nursery stand open; through two openings, I see...yes, that's my wallpaper...my former bedroom, that became the nursery...I am in my place, and yet, in another's...⁶⁷ (RC, 22–24)

As in Kafka's similar neighbouring apartments, the two workrooms in "The Roofing Ceremony" are described as counterparts of each other, even though they are coded quite differently: "I see only house drawings, but no house; no living objects, no growing things, no color. [...] I see my warm room, with its colored light and shadow, filled with living plants and stuffed animals, with paintings"⁶⁸ (RC, 22). In this crucial scene the curator is, in a way, at home, and yet in another's home which appears to him as "a distorted mirror image of [his] own study" (Stenport 2010, 160). This position in between makes him the perfect observer – a spy in the double meaning of the word: He is the one who watches, who listens, who takes part in the other's most intimate gatherings, but unseen and without participating himself. Although he, apart from his visit to make a telephone call, never actively invades the other's private sphere, he is present; his motionless figure listening from above, even spying through the neighbour's mail slot in the outer door,⁶⁹ appears as an incessant intrusion upon the neighbour's life, doubling "the inevitable intrusion of the others [his extended family]" (Johannesson 1968, 259). Thus, Strindberg's curator enters invisibly into the everyday life of his neighbours while remaining a detached observer, who envisions how they live together by listening to the sound of the house, snatches of conversations and tunes played. It is striking how often Strindberg's protagonist figures as a seer, as one to whom 'revelations' are made – be it regarding the future of the family in the downstairs apartment or regarding the uncanny nature of certain of the curator's family mem-

⁶⁷ "[N]u sitter jag här i hans arbetsrum väntande på en ringning. Det är hans rum, men det är en pendang till mitt; [...] hans kakelugn är lik min, tapeterna desamma, men det är mitt rum, övergivet, plundrat, ostädad. [...] Dörren till korridoren och barnkammaren står öppen; genom två dörrspringor ser jag...ja, det är mina tapeter...min forna sängkammare, som blev barnkammare... jag är hos mig, men dock hos en annan..." (TLÖ, 23–24).

⁶⁸ "Jag ser endast byggnadsritningar, men inga hus; inga levande förmål, inga växter, ingen färg. [...] Jag ser mitt varma rum, med färgat ljusdunkel, fyllt av levande växter och uppstoppade djur, målade tavlor" (TLÖ, 23).

⁶⁹ Compare: "On the evening of the wedding I climbed the stairs and saw, through the mail slot in the outer door and through the foyer, how the dining table stood filled with flower vases between lighted candelabras [...]" (RC, 17). ("Bröllopsaftonen steg jag upp för trapporna, såg genom brevluckan på ytterdörren, in genom tamburen, hur salsbordet stod fyllt med blomglas mellan tända kandelabrar", TLÖ, 19–20.)

bers.⁷⁰ The consequence, however, is that the protagonist increasingly seems to be surrounded by ghosts and other dubious creatures:

I would be ashamed, having intruded in this way, innocently in the beginning, of course, but in the end as a spy. [...] Did these people match my images of them, or had my imagination made them unrecognizable? One makes homunculi of the people one doesn't know, and those one knows become ghosts as soon as they are away for awhile.⁷¹ (RC, 26)

Consequently, the domestic scenery is turned into that of a haunted house, the curator's life into "a shadow life in a haunted house"⁷² (RC, 57), and the neighbours into enemies, ghosts and homunculi, including visitations of danger and ghostly presences that haunt the curator's wife's apartment.⁷³ Obviously, the Green Eye watching him from the other side of the street is not the curator's only enemy; rather, the text is crawling with enemies, once more invoking the imagery of parasitism. This 'infestation' includes everyone who threatens his intimate togetherness with his small family, be it the voice of the band sergeant in the very first paragraph,⁷⁴ or his own cousin, the snake charmer who bewitches his wife.⁷⁵ "Gradually, the masks were put aside, and the family vampire began to harass and humil-

70 Tjäder attests the curator a "voyeuristic perspective on reality" ("voyeur-perspektiv på verkligheten", 1978, 37) while Jacobs is more interested in how the protagonist observes people both microscopically and telescopically (1997, 126).

71 "[J]ag måste skämmas, som på detta sättet inträngt, visserligen från början i oskyldig avsikt, men slutande som spion. – [...] Motsvarade dessa människor mina föreställningar, eller hade jag diktat om dem till oigenkännlighet? Man gör ju homunkler av de människor man icke känner, och de man känner bli spöken så snart de äro borta en längre tid" (TLÖ, 26).

72 Compare: "It was in this fashion I lived with my dear shadows, a shadow life in a haunted house" (RC, 57). ("Sålunda levde jag med mina kära skuggor, ett skuggliv i spöket", TLÖ, 50.)

73 Compare: "There now began a stampede through the hallway; it sounded like hundreds and hundreds of barefooted people were running through the house. I did not dare to open my door and see what was going on, but lay there freezing to death with the cold shudders" (RC, 53). ("Då börjar en gallopad genom korridoren; det lät som om hundra sinom hundra barfotade människor travat igenom huset. Jag vågade icke öppna min dörr och se efter vad som stod på, utan jag blev liggande beredd att frysa ihjäl av rysningarne", TLÖ, 46.) Compare even RC, 34: "A few nights later, I woke in anxiety; I saw nothing, heard nothing, yet sensed the presence of someone in the bedroom; someone was watching me, staring at me in an unpleasant way." ("Några nätter efteråt vaknade jag i ångest; jag såg ingenting, hörde ingenting, men förnam någons närvaro i sovrummet; någon fixerade mig, uppmärksammade mig på ett ubehagligt sätt", TLÖ, 32.)

74 Compare: "[I]t must be he [the band sergeant] who has hounded me all the way here" (RC, 4). ("[D]et måste vara han [musiksergeanten] som förföljt mig ända hit", TLÖ, 9.) The band sergeant appears as a voice without a body penetrating the private space of the curator and thereby, again, as a variation of the uncanny.

75 Compare also RC, 43: "Yet his vampire nature had revealed itself again; he sucked at her soul, pulled it toward him, wanted to win her over, to impart his views about everything, to establish

iate me right at my own table”⁷⁶ (RC, 44). The story of the curator’s life is soaked in “[o]ld family feuds, blood revenge, Nemesis tales”⁷⁷ (RC, 38). This holds true even for his immediate family, his blood relatives:⁷⁸

She [my wife] read his books, played my sister-in-law’s music, and gathered their flowers, which were placed on my table; I ate their new dishes, drank their wines and their variety of coffee. My wife dressed in their fabrics, my child played their games and spoke their language.⁷⁹ (RC, 44)

In “The Roofing Ceremony” the categories of ‘my’ and ‘yours’ are completely out of kilter and the friend-enemy distinction no longer functions. In order to kill his enemy, the dying hero would have to turn against himself – he would have to kill *himself*: “I was defenseless, could not hit back, not kill, for the enemy was within my own skin”⁸⁰ (RC, 57). The imagery of neighbours as parasites, eating their way through the protagonist’s innards, is intriguing, and even his own wife is part of this vast and sinister conspiracy: “My wife [...] commenced to delve into my silent innards, clawing out my intestines so that I bled from the pain”⁸¹ (RC, 6).

Concluding remark

Finally, it becomes clear that the underlying enmity between the dying curator and his neighbour, the mysterious Green Eye, can be tied to a longstanding recip-

a friendship, to discover sympathies and antipathies, in a word, to crowd me out. He looked like a snake-charmer, sometimes shrinking down so as not to alarm, at times swelling up so as to impress [...]”. (“Men hans [kusinens] vampyrnatur hade blottat sig igen; han sög i hennes själ, drog åt sig, ville vinna, bibringa sina åsikter om allt, etablera vänskap, upptäcka sym- och antipatier, tränga ut mig, med ett ord. Han såg ut som en ormtjusare, gjorde sig ibland liten för att icke skrämma, rest sig emellanåt för att imponera”, TLÖ, 39.)

76 “Så småningom kastades maskerna, och familjens vampyr tog sig för att hetsa och stuka mig vid mitt eget bord” (TLÖ, 40).

77 TLÖ, 35: “gammalt släkthat, blodshämnd, Nemesishistorier”.

78 Compare: “I conceived an aversion to the whole family, and began to hate them; by hate, I mean a posture of warding off bad influences, the justified self-defense of one’s personality” (RC, 36). (“Jag fick aversion för hela familjen och började hata dem; med hat menar jag försvarstillståndet mot onda inflytelser, personlighetens berättigade nödvärn”, TLÖ, 34.)

79 “Hon [min hustru] läste hans böcker, spelade svägerskans musik, plockade deras blommor som ställdes på mina bord; jag åt deras nya maträtter, drack deras viner, deras kaffesort. Min hustru klädde sig i deras tyger, mitt barn lekte deras lekar, talade deras språk” (TLÖ, 39–40).

80 “[J]ag [var] värnlös, kunde icke slå igen, icke döda, ty fienden satt innanför min egen hud” (TLÖ, 50).

81 “Min hustru [...] började gräva i mitt tysta inre, klösa ut mina inälvor, så att jag blödde av smärta” (TLÖ, 11).

rocal animosity that dates back to the time they spent together in Congo. While the dying man reflects both on his own tragedies and those in his neighbours' lives, he suspiciously keeps the window with the green lamp on the other side of the street under careful observation: "[W]hen I see him sitting there, opposite, in his window, lonely and unfortunate, I fancy that he sits there waiting for my misfortune"⁸² (RC, 14). However, the relationship between the two neighbours remains obscure: It remains forever uncertain whether the Green Eye really exists as a person, whether he might even act as a secondary narrator, as Boëthius claims,⁸³ or if it is nothing more than a green lamp in a stranger's window that helps to build up the illusion of a neighbour onto which all his fears are projected. The story of the two schoolmates further substantiates the suspicion that the various strategies of duplication serve mainly to tell 'the story of the symptoms the neighbours have produced in him' (see Rilke 2008, 124):

In school, I had a schoolmate who was so like me that we were mistaken for each other by the teachers; we looked so much alike that my own uncle mistook him for me. We kept company without liking each other; we were simply drawn to one another without seeking each other, for like is repelled by like. But we were embarrassed, too, found little to talk of, and went around wondering who would be the first to reveal the secret whose existence we sensed without suspecting its nature. One fine day he died; I did not mourn him but felt his absence.⁸⁴ (RC, 64)

Both the narration of the deceased schoolmate and even the story about a painter who is conned out of his payment⁸⁵ are stories about guilt, punishment, and the (Christian) doctrine of forgiveness, invoking once again the biblical com-

82 "[N]är jag ser honom sitta där mitt emot i sitt fönster, ensam, förolyckad, så föreställer jag mig att han sitter och väntar på min olycka" (TLÖ, 17).

83 See Boëthius 1986, 58.

84 "I skolan hade jag en kamrat som var lik mig, så att vi förväxlades av lärarne; vi voro så lika att min egen morbror tog den andra för mig. Vi följdes åt, utan att tycka om varann; vi drog bara till varann utan att söka varann, ty lika skyr lika; men vi voro generade också, hade litet att säga, och gingo undrande vem som först skulle röja hemligheten, vars tillvaro vi anade utan misstänka dess art. En vacker dag dog han; jag sörjde icke honom, men kände saknad" (TLÖ, 55).

85 Compare: "I asked to buy it [a little painting at the place of a painter I knew] on credit, received it, and thought it my property. [...] Six months later, very shyly and cautiously, he reminded me of my debt. This made an unpleasant impression on me, not as if I thought that, by my favor to him, I had paid for the painting, but because I had become accustomed to regarding the painting as my property" (RC, 66–67). ("Jag bad få köpa den [en liten tavla hos en målare jag kände] på kredit; fick den, och tyckte den var min egendom. [...] Ett halvt år senare påminde han mig mycket blygt och försiktigt om skulden. Detta gjorde ett obehagligt intryck på mig, icke som om jag i mitt sinne ansett mig ha betalt målningen med återtjänsten, utan därför att jag blivit van betrakta tavlan som min egendom", TLÖ, 57.)

mandment to love one's neighbour as oneself.⁸⁶ In particular, the story about the schoolmate who is "so like [him] that [they] were mistaken for each other"⁸⁷ (RC, 64) is essentially a story about (not) loving the other as yourself; that is, (not) loving an Other who is almost like you, illustrating the fundamental Kierkegaardian tension between equality (*Lighed*) and dissimilarity (*Forskjellighed*). Hence, at his deathbed the curator struggles with forgiveness and his guilty conscience: "Do you think, Sophie, he [the Green Eye] has forgiven me?"⁸⁸ (RC, 68).

This brings us back to where we started, namely, to the biblical notion of agape, to Kierkegaard's book of love and the abolition of all differences through death. In Strindberg's "The Roofing Ceremony", the approaching death proves to be the precondition for human relations, finally purified of both love and hatred: "I am certainly very sick, and can hate no longer, I haven't the strength. Everything shatters at the touch, hate as well as love [...]"⁸⁹ (RC, 70–71). The enemy's death and even his mortal struggle inevitably extinguish all differences, clearing the way to neighbour-love beyond enmity: "He [the Green Eye] sent word that one who is suffering has no enemies"⁹⁰ (RC, 73). In the end, the fundamental tension between equality and dissimilarity is leveled and the individual is united with his fellow men, interconnected by "one and the same bloodstream, in so many rivulets"⁹¹ (RC, 30). The dying man hallucinates one big community of people, resorting to the imagery of the net:⁹² "What a net, what a weaving is man's fate. All of us know each other, all are related or in other ways entangled [...]"⁹³ (RC, 30). Accordingly, the neighbour is a great deal more than simply "the near-dweller, he

86 With regard to Strindberg's own more syncretic understanding of religion, compare for example Henrik Johnsson's extensive 2015 monograph *Det oändliga sammanhanget. August Strindbergs ockulta vetenskap*, where the author takes up aspects such as vitalism, mesmerism, and in particular occultism (especially 249–320).

87 "lik [ham], så att [de] förväxlades" (TLÖ, 52).

88 "Tror du, Sofi, att han [Gröna Ögat] har förlåtit mig?" (TLÖ, 58).

89 "Jag är visst mycket sjuk; jag kan icke hata mer, jag orkar icke; ingenting håller att ta i, varken hat eller kärlek" (TLÖ, 60).

90 "Han ['Gröna Ögat'] hälsade, att den som lider icke har några fiender" (TLÖ, 62).

91 "en och samma blodström i så många rännilar" (TLÖ, 29).

92 For a more detailed analysis of the metaphor of the net in "The Roofing Ceremony", see Jacobs 1997 and Johannesson 1968, 262: "A leading motif is the image of human destinies hopelessly interwoven as in a web or a net". Also Kierkegaard resorts to the imagery of the net: "Dissimilarity is like an enormous net in which temporality is held; there are in turn variations in the meshes of this net – one person seems more trapped and bound in existence than another [...]" (WL, 71). ("Forskjelligheden er som et uhyre Net, i hvilket Timeligheden holdes, Maskerne i dette Net ere igjen forskjelligte, det ene Menneske synes mere fanget og bundet i Tilværelsen end det andet", KG, 78.)

93 "Vilket nät, vilken väv är icke människors öden; alla känna varandra, alla äro släkt eller på annat sätt intrasslade" (TLÖ, 29).

who dwells nearby”. In fact, finally arriving at a conclusion of the preceding train of thought, the neighbour seems to be unconditionally *every* human being:

But there are no limits to the objects, because the neighbor is all human beings, *unconditionally every human being*. Therefore the one who truly loves the neighbor loves also his enemy. The distinction friend or enemy is a difference in the object of love, but love for the neighbor has the object that is without difference. The neighbor is the utterly unrecognizable dissimilarity between persons [...].⁹⁴ (WL, 74; *italics added*)

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⁹⁴ “Men i Gjenstanden er der ingen Grændse, thi ‘Næsten’ er alle Mennesker, *ubetinget ethvert Menneske*. Den, der i Sandhet elsker Næsten, elsker derfor ogsaa sin Fjende. Denne Forskjel ‘Ven eller Fjende’ er en Forskjel i Kjerlighedens Gjenstand, men Kjerlighed til Næsten har jo den Gjenstand, som er uden Forskjel, Næsten er den aldeles ukjendelige Forskjellighed mellem Menneske og Menneske [...]” (KG, 74; *italics added*).

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