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A Prophet in Tophet
August Strindberg interprets Jeremiah

Extended summary of the doctoral research

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Summary

Key words: August Strindberg, prophet Jeremiah, prophetic theatre, performance studies, prophecy

Is it possible for a gesture made during a theatre performance and a prophetic gesture to be alike? Can a theatre text be “prophetic” in the sense of awakening the consciousness of the recipients who see its representation on stage in the same way that a prophet aims at changing the lives of his listeners through a message associated to a gesture?

This is the question underlying this research. In order to find an answer, we propose studying the way in which the Swedish playwright August Strindberg (1849-1912) interprets and updates Jeremiah’s prophecy in his last drama, *The Great Highway*. August Strindberg, a Swedish writer, playwright and publicist, is one of the creators of modern theatre, known especially for his naturalist tragedies written in the 1880s, from which we mention *Miss Julie*. Always at war with his contemporary world, starting from his first novel that brought him fame, *The Red Room* (1879) and until *Black Banners* (1907), a realistic satire of the early 20th-century intellectuals, Strindberg’s texts generated the most diverse answers, from lack of trust to enthusiasm. In his attempt to understand his times and the wrongdoings of his epoch, Strindberg finds a reading key in the Bible, especially in the Book of prophet Jeremiah,¹ which helps him conduct a social critique in the light of man’s relationship with God². Jeremiah, the prophet sent to spread the word of God in Jerusalem especially at the end of the 6th century B.C., was also sent to Tophet, a place near the Holy City (Jer 7,31.32; 19.6.11.12.13.14), to condemn idolatry (Jer 19,1-20.2). In Tophet, the prophet must fulfil a prophetic gesture – by uniting gesture and word, i.e. he must break a jar to announce the destruction of Jerusalem.

God said: Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching, and say to them, “I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter’s jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.” (Jer 19,10-11)

¹ From his first historical drama, *Master Olof*, until the *Blue Book*, Strindberg identified Jeremiah and especially the story of the prophet’s vocation with his own vocation as writer, asked to destroy, and at the same time to build (Jer 1, 4-5).

² Strindberg presented his viewpoint on God’s presence throughout history in “The Mysticism of World History”. Sophie Grimal places this text into context, by stating: “Cherchant une tribune pour exposer en détail ses réflexions sur la place de la religion dans la société humaine, entre le 20 février et le 30 mai 1903, il publia dans *Svenska Dagbladet* une série d’articles nommée *La Mystique de l’histoire universelle*.”, in Elena Balzamo (ed.), *Strindberg – Cahier de l’Herne*, Paris, l’Herne, 2000, p. 222.

The oracle mentioned here also refers to changing the name of Tophet, a place that must never again be called so.

In *The Great Highway*, a Japanese merchant, who emigrated to the Western city of Tophet, regrets his life, as well as the trade with fake products. Day and night, he is haunted by his mistakes and wishes he were dead. When he meets the Hunter, the protagonist of *The Great Highway*, the Japanese man asks him to help him die and, at the city gate, in front of the crematorium, to place his ashes in his most valuable vase³. The surprising aspect about a text written in 1909 is that the epitaph on this vase indicates the changing of the name of the merchant to match the name of his native town: Hiroshima⁴ (GH⁵, p. 485). Unexpectedly, Strindberg talks about Tophet and announces the destruction of the modern city, where people worship idols, choosing the symbolic name of the very city that was reduced to ashes at the end of the Second World War, on 6 August 1945. But the prophetic character of Strindberg's drama does not arise from the projection we now see in a future he could not have suspected, but from the intertextual connection that the author created between his drama and God's Word in the Bible.

The essential message of the stories in *The Great Highway* and of the Book of Jeremiah is similar: the arrival of a prophet or a preacher at the city gates, in a place called Tophet, where he buys or received a jar from a merchant, which becomes the sign of the city's destruction. Despite the many differences and specific elements, the two stories describe symbolic events related to the destiny of men or of a people and its relationship with God, based on everyday life.

Nevertheless, through our research, we tried to dive under the surface narrative and discover the deep relation between a theatrical and a prophetic gesture, as built by Strindberg. We wondered whether we could infer general rules from his play to show a profound cognation between theatre and prophecy.

The common point of the two texts can be summarized as follows: the constant presence of the character of a prophet or a preacher who, through a series of

³ The exiled Japanese settled in Tophet to trade traditional products. As he got in contact with the Western life style, he had to change his mentality and adapt to a consumer society; however, many years later, he wants to kill himself as he feels guilty.

⁴ For Strindberg, Hiroshima symbolises a modern Jerusalem. The introduction to the thesis explains the reasons why the author chose this name, reminding of the parallel made by the writer between the history of Judaea and that of Japan, as well as the similarities he saw between the names of the two countries. In STRINDBERG August, *Språkvetenskapliga skrifter II. Världs-språkens rötter. Kina och Japan. Kinesiska språkets härkomst* (Samlade Verk 70. Nationalupplaga), Kretz Camilla and Ralph Bo (éds.) Norstedts, Stockholm, 2008, p. 236, available at: <https://litteraturbanken.se/forfattare/StrindbergA/titlar/SprakvetenskapligaSkrifter2/sida/236/faksimil> (accessed 20.02.2018).

⁵ The two initials are an abbreviation of the play title, *The Great Highway*. We used a French bibliographical source, STRINDBERG August, *La Grand-route* (Théâtre Complet 6), traduit par Carl-Gustaf Bjurström et André Matthieu, L'Arche, Paris, 1986, pp. 447-502.

performative announcement which use the same object in different ways, indicates the two paths man can take: that of life or that of death. The setting of this announcement is a place where hell and paradise are side by side: Tophet.

Focusing on three particular elements in *The Great Highway*, which are also found in the *Book of Jeremiah* (a prophet in Tophet, the jar and the highway), we aimed at revealing the dramatic and prophetic core of Strindberg's last text. The analysis was conducted from a performative point of view, including structural semantics elements proposed by A. J. Greimas⁶. We also analysed how Strindberg, a contemporary playwright, interprets Jeremiah, updates his message and, above all, highlights the dramatic aspect of the biblical text.

Finally, we wanted to find out whether the source and the modernity of theatre lie in the prophetic gesture, through which both the playwright, and the prophet test their contemporaries and take on the mission to show them the path of life. (Jer 6,27).

Methods of analyse (Chapter 1)

Through the performative analysis conducted, we tried to determine the communication form and the relation between the actor-narrator and his audience in *The Great Highway* (chapters 2 and 3); then, comparatively, we identified the story in the two texts (chapter 4), as well as the protagonists, the places where the action takes place, the loss, the conflict, and the resolution. The inclusion of the same object, i.e. a jar, in a series of performative gestures, brings to light the semiotic square (chapter 5) and the relation of men with God in both texts (chapter 6).

The performative analysis places the biblical text in the context of its oral communication and studies the means used by the actor-narrator to follow his objective of subduing, moving and influencing his listeners, by telling a story. This kind of analysis can follow several models, and here it includes theatre studies, speech act theories and narratives analyses. The relation between the actor-narrator, the one who tells and updates the biblical text and his listener becomes important. To better understand the meaning of a prophetic gesture, we used the analysis proposed by David Stacey⁷, Doan and Giles, Shimon Levy⁸, as well as recent narrative analyses of the biblical text, especially the one proposed by Elena di Pede⁹.

⁶ Algirdas Julien GREIMAS (1917-1992), Lithuanian semiotician who lived in Paris. He is known as the author of the actantial model and the semiotic square. See GREIMAS Algirdas Julien, *Sémantique structurale*, Larousse, Paris, 1966; GREIMAS Algirdas Julien, *Du sens, essais sémiotiques*, Éd. du Seuil, Paris, 1970.

⁷ STACEY David, *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament*, The Epworth Press, Londres, 1990.

⁸ LEVY Shimon, *The Bible as Theatre*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton/Eastbourne, 2012.

⁹ There are few narrative studies on the Book of Jeremiah, but several interpreters are starting to reveal the meaning of the text for the reader in continuous reading and emphasize the reasons within the text to read it this way. This thesis is especially based on the studies advanced by DI PEDE Elena,

The principles of the performative analysis aimed at identifying the way the actor-narrator is catching the listeners' attention, the rhythm and the changes in tension, as well as the actor's project to transform real space and time, will be applied to a fragment of the *Book of Jeremiah* (Jer 18,1-20.6). Firstly, we will check whether the two chapters selected - the limits of the fragment are discussed in the chapter about *The Jar as a Sign* - can be interpreted unitarily from a performative perspective, the changes in space-time, the rhythm, to later identify the project of the actor-narrator. Above all, we want to discover how the actor integrates and uses the jar in different prophetic signs, that of the potter (18,1-6) and that in Tophet (19,10-11). This performative analysis is the tip of the iceberg, or, to be more precise, a small part of the analysis conducted in order to compare the play with the biblical text. Through this approach, we will find both the similarities, and the differences between the two writings.

Another step is to identify the deep structure of the two narratives¹⁰, whose object is the sign performed in Tophet, in both *The Great Highway*, and the *Book of Jeremiah*, where we find the same oracle three times, condemning idolatry and announcing the destruction of the place (Jer 7,24-25, 19.5-6, 32,34-35). The oracle is directly or indirectly connected to three different prophetic signs (Jer 18,1-6, 19,10-11, 32,6-15), whose object is a jar. In order to identify the deep structure, we will employ the concepts proposed by A. J. Greimas in his narrative grammar. We will thus develop the relation between the prophetic sign or the theatrical sign and the semiotic square. We reiterate that Greimas focuses on the syntax and the structure of a story and uses the notions of surface grammar and deep grammar. The first incorporates the actantial model and governs the superficial plan of a narrative. The deep structures are drawn from the narrative discourse or, the other way around, once

Au-delà du refus: l'espoir. Recherches sur la cohérence narrative de Jr 32-45 (TM) (BZAW 357), Berlin/New York 2005 and BRUEGGEMANN Walter, *A commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Cambridge, 1998.

¹⁰ The identification of the narrative elements in Jeremiah is based on the narrative analysis dedicated to fragments of the prophet's book and, most especially, on the fact that researchers suggest the possibility to see the prophetic text as a global narrative. Of course, there are objections to this way of reading, and Erwan Chauty lists the following arguments: "the lack of narrative studies on the Book of Jeremiah in its integrity, the existence of certain chapters with minimalistic narration, the absence of a unified narrative mode throughout the book, the contradictions between what is announced and what is accomplished, a difficulty to define conflict and, last but not least, chronological issues" (« une absence d'études narratives sur l'ensemble de Jr, des chapitres où la narration est minimaliste, un mode narratif non unifié tout au long du livre, des contradictions entre ce qui est annoncé et ce qui se réalise, une difficulté à définir l'intrigue, et enfin des perturbations chronologiques »). The three analyses indicated by Chauty are: DE LACY Abrego J.M., *Jeremías y el Final del Reino. Lectura sincrónica de Jer 36-45* (Estudios del Antiguo Testamento 3), Valencia, 1983; OSUJI A.C., *Where is the Truth? Narrative Exegesis and the Question of True and False Prophecy in Jer 26-29* (MT) (BETL 214), Leuven/Paris/Walpole, 2010 and DI PEDE, Elena, *Au-delà du refus: l'espoir*. See CHAUTY Erwan, *Qui aura sa vie comme butin ?* (Thèse de doctorat non publiée), Centre Sèvres – Université de Lorraine, 2017, p. 98.

the semantic square is identified, it can make up the source of the narrative's generative process.

The analysis of the theatrical and the performative sign will help us understand the similarities and the differences between the prophetic text and Strindberg's play. Finally, we compared the dramatic character and that of the biblical prophet, considering the existence of the pair creator-character, on the one hand, and of the pair prophet Jeremiah-character of the prophet Jeremiah, on the other. The stylistic, narrative and performative analysis can help paint a clearer picture of the destiny of the two characters - the Hunter in *The Great Highway* and Jeremiah - who have the duty to send a message to people, as well as the prophet's or preacher's symbolic gestures and actions. Below, we describe the analysis chapter by chapter.

Chapter 1 describes the method and the structure of the doctoral thesis. Actually, each of the following chapters tries to find an answer to the following questions:

- What type of writing is *The Great Highway* and what kind of communication with the audience does it propose?

- How does the Swedish author confer a symbolic dimension to his play by employing biblical quotations? Which are these? How important is the reference to the Book of Jeremiah in his text?

- How does Strindberg describe Tophet and what sources, other than the *Book of Jeremiah*, might he have used? How is the episode in Tophet within *The Great Highway* from a narrative point of view? How is this episode in the *Book of Jeremiah* presented?

- How is the sign of the Tophet jar built in Strindberg's text? Is there a performative dimension to the Book of Jeremiah? If so, how is the sign performed in Tophet built in the Bible from a performative point of view?

- Are the characters of the Hunter and of the prophet Jeremiah alike? If so, how?

Lastly, we ask whether both texts serve the same purpose. Can we talk about the connection between theatre and prophecy from the perspective of these two texts?

Chapter 2: August Strindberg, A Prophet of Modern Theatre

Identifying the theatrical presentation mode in *The Great Highway* is a first step in defining the relation with the spectator and the purpose of the performance.

In short, *The Great Highway* tells the story of the Hunter, who is getting ready to die, away from the world, on the mountain where a hermit lives. But the monk asks him to go back among people and to learn how to love (GR¹¹, p. 452). On his way

¹¹ GR stands for *The Great Highway*. See note 5, p. 7.

back, the Hunter is accompanied by the Traveller, who becomes his guide (*GR*, p. 454). On their first stop, they meet the Millers who fight out of jealousy and envy (*GR*, pp. 456-459). Then, they go through the Donkey Village, where the mayor - a tyrant and an atheist who hates intellectuals - almost arrests them (*GR*, p. 467-477). They reach the city, where the inhabitants, led by Moeller, the Murderer, only look for material gains and engage in unfair trade (*GR*, pp. 477-482). The Hunter and the Traveller's roads go different ways again (*GR*, p. 482). But a new character seems to mirror the Hunter: the Japanese Merchant. In him, the protagonist sees his own sins and destiny (*GR*, pp. 483-492). The Hunter admits that he traded dishonestly using false words, whether spoken or written (*GR*, p. 491). Unable to put up with the lie, he destroyed himself from a civic point of view years ago, admitting to his sins in front of the entire city (*GR*, p. 486). Now, it's the Japanese's turn, who can no longer bear his own guilt, to ask the Hunter to help him die (*GR*, p. 483). With a heavy heart, he accepts to accompany the man to the crematorium and place his ashes in the valuable jar. At the city gate, in a last attempt to secure justice and truth, the Hunter confronts Moeller and accuses him of murder (*GR*, pp. 488-489). The debate between the two people seems to yield no winner, as the Hunter, exhausted, retreats. Before he leaves, he says goodbye to his daughter and ends his life balance, in dialogue with the Blind Woman (*GR*, pp. 492-498), then alone on the mountain, by praying (*GR*, p. 500-502).

Including many autobiographical clues, the text is Strindberg's - the great playwright of the 20th century, one of the creators of modern theatre - goodbye to the world. We could say that, in this last play, the author is making an inventory of his life and work. Including numerous quotes from the Bible¹², *The Great Highway* also seems to symbolically illustrate the life of each human being, gaining a prophetic dimension. Moreover, we can detect the critical and polemical tone of the man who, in the last few years of his life, triggered the mediatic *Strindberg feud*.¹³ Confronting Swedish society, Strindberg wanted to expose the historic truth and the idolatry of his contemporaries, like a prophet. Strindberg felt ever obliged to criticise society's excesses and to show the real road to his contemporaries. He himself said that his artistic vocation resembles prophet Jeremiah's vocation:

¹² Cedergren widely researched the biblical quotes within Strindberg's trilogy, *Inferno*. She states: "Ever since he wrote the novel *Inferno* (1897), the Bible became a clear reference, documented as quotes." In CEDERGREN Mickaëlle, *August Strindberg et la Bible: Étude textuelle des citations et allusions bibliques dans Inferno, Légendes et Jacob lutte* (Cahiers de Recherches 26), Institutionen för Franska, Italienska och klassiska språk Stockholms Univ., Stockholm, 2005, p. 3.

¹³ During his last years, Strindberg became more involved than ever in the Swedish social and political life and expressed his sympathy to the popular cause after the 1909 general strike. He launched the debate on the *Popular State*, fighting against the *Pharaohs' Cult* and talking about a *Religious Rebirth*. In italic letters, we mentioned the titles of three of his reflections published in the press in 1910-1912, which triggered the so-called "Strindberg Scandal". See GRIMAL Sophie, « *Un livre bleu: le testament spirituel d'August Strindberg* », in Elena Balzamo (éd.), *Strindberg – Cahier de l'Herne*, Paris, l'Herne, 2000, pp. 217-228, quote at p. 221.

“Other times, like Jeremiah, I “broke, tore, ruined, destroyed”, while, in this book, “I built, and I sowed.”¹⁴

In the same period when he published *The Blue Books*¹⁵, a series of reflections on God, man, society, nature, the universe, contemporary with the Strindberg’s feud, the scenes in *The Great Highway* revealed, in a burlesque and poetic manner, the deviations of the early 20th-century society and raised the issue of believing in God and of the existence of sin in a time when atheism was booming. The author proposed a difficult-to-grasp combination of genres, and perhaps the only way to clarify the way in which this mosaic works is through directing experience. The key to reading the text proves to be the play within the play, which is resumed at each station in the drama, through which the author confronts the audience with its own idols.

The analysis in the second chapter contributes to a better understanding of the prophetic character of a single episode of his seven-station drama, the meeting between the Hunter and the Japanese Merchant, in the city of Tophet, which remains the main topic of the research.

Chapter 3: Biblical Quotes in *The Great Highway*

The third chapter looks at how the main character in *The Great Highway*, the Hunter, is defined by using Bible quotes. Before approaching the parallel analysis between Strindberg’s and the prophetic text, we must define the importance of the reference, within *The Great Highway*, to this particular biblical book of Jeremiah. We thus try to identify all the biblical books quoted, how the characters are defined through the type of biblical references included in their language¹⁶, and how the quotes used define the character’s journey¹⁷. This analysis leads us to the conclusion that the structural element, which stands at the core of the biblical quotes and

¹⁴ STRINDBERG, *Un livre bleu*, p. 168.

¹⁵ *A Blue Book, A New Blue Book, and A Blue Book III (1908) and An Extra Blue Book (1912)*. See the introduction by Elena Balzamo in STRINDBERG August, *Un livre bleu*, French translation by Elena Balzamo and Pierre Morizet, Ed. de l’Herne, Paris, 2006, p. 8.

¹⁶ Out of the thirty biblical references identified in *The Great Highway*, Strindberg mostly resorts to the text of the Old Testament. But the New Testament is also present.

¹⁷ Through the biblical quotes, Strindberg aimed to confer a universal value to this story, as he had already done in *Inferno*, for example. In that respect, Cedergren states: “The biblical quotes may then foreshadow the biblical text and may create a ‘scriptural allegory’, in which the events in the narrator’s life are bestowed with a meaning in light of the Holy Scriptures. Everything is predicted in the Holy Books and these references further characterize the narrator’s life.” (« Les citations bibliques serviraient alors à préfigurer le texte biblique et à créer une “allégorie scripturaire” où, du coup, les événements de la vie du narrateur prennent un sens à la lumière des Saintes Écritures. Tout est en sorte préfiguré dans le Livre Saint et ces continuels renvois caractérisent la vie du narrateur, l’exemplifient. ») In CEDERGREN Mickaëlle, *L’écriture biblique de Strindberg. Étude textuelle des citations et allusions bibliques dans Inferno, Légendes et Jacob lutte* (Cahiers de Recherches, 26), Stockholms Univ., Stockholm, 2005, p. 43, online at <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:195061/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (accessed 29.08.2017). In her text, Cedergren quotes OLSSON Ulf, *Levande dod. Studier i Strindbergs prosa (Living Dead. Studies in Strindberg’s prose)*, Brutus Österlings Bökforlag Symposion, Stockholm/Stenhag, 1996, p. 326.

references in *The Great Highway*, is the denunciation of idols by the protagonist in Tophet. Nonetheless, the author describes a triple journey by the Hunter, which reaches its dramatic moment in this biblical place. We thus discover:

- a journey that geographically follows the descend from the mountain to the valley where Tophet lies and the ascent back to the mountain;
- an inner journey through prayer, which begins and ends with the praise of God and ends with the prayer to God the Saviour, at the time of death;
- a road symbolizing the personal story of the main character projected on the background of the Bible.

The fact that Strindberg chose Tophet as the central place for the protagonist's journey emphasizes his text's prophetic character, making a clear reference to the place where the prophet Jeremiah preached and failed.

Chapter 4: Tophet, from Jeremiah to Strindberg

In the chapter about Tophet (chapter 4), we will see how, in *The Great Highway*, the same place can be heaven or hell, depending on the way in which man perceives at the world around. More profoundly, this relationship between man and God makes him live in paradise or in heaven. This place also proves to be the place of the "prophetic drama"¹⁸; in both texts, a hero, a prophet or a preacher denounces society's deviations through a certain staging, a prophetic and dramatic gesture. However, if the prophet brings God's word to people, the Hunter tells the story of man's wandering, far away from God, to show the return to the source of life. The story's outlook on the relationship between man and God changes, but the key message is the same: man dies when he chooses the route taking him away from God.

Chapter 5: The Sign of the Jar: the Prophetic Gesture and the Text's Deep Structure

Chapter 5 focuses on the prophetic gesture. At the end of this research, we wish to answer the question about the connection between the theatrical and the prophetic gesture. What does Strindberg propose through this form of modern theatre?

Analysing the theatre style in *The Great Highway*, we discovered a series of suggested stagings inside the play, proposed mainly, in the performance, by the Hunter. Through his protagonist, Strindberg offers the audience a kind of game, in which theatre convention is openly declared. Should the audience accept it, it will become a partner to the social and political critique, made through theatre, where popular theatre, medieval mysteries and oriental theatre innovatively combine. In the *Book of Jeremiah*, at least in chapters 18 and 19, which we analysed, the text invites

¹⁸Expression used by Stacey David, *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament*, The Epworth Press, London, 1990.

to its being spoken and even performed, suggesting an imaginary performance. Listeners are taken to the space and time when Jeremiah lived, and are even included in the dialogue between God and his prophet. This happens when God questions the people by addressing him directly, using the second person, but also when the prophet replies on behalf of the people, marked by the third person. The play of theatre within theatre in a performative announcement of the prophetic or the dramatic writing, made by an actor-narrator, seems to be the proposed performative formula in both texts.

A second issue we analysed is the story and the manner in which the same object highlights a character's evolution. In both texts, we notice that the same object - a jar - was chosen and was integrated into a performative gesture, which describes the relationship between man and God. The main gesture is different: the breaking of a jar, in the Book of Jeremiah (19.10-11) or the showing of a funeral urn (*GR*, p. 490-491). But in both cases, we previously notice a progressive way to identify the object with a person or a people and its destiny. In the Bible, the work of the potter, who shapes, destroys and remakes a jar determines the identification of people with the clay and the jar (Jer, 18,1-12). In *The Great Highway*, the affective memory of a flower jar placed on a happy family's table becomes the sign of human life (*GR*, p. 490). The jar is thus found in a sequence of gestures preceding the climax, which reveal the breaking off of man's relationship with God. This is the case of the jar broken in Tophet, which announces the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 19,10-11), and, in Strindberg's text, of the Japanese jar, which takes the form of a funeral urn (*GR*, p. 490). In the Book of Jeremiah, the announcement of the disaster is followed by a sign of hope, including also a clay jar: i.e. the document of land purchase, put in a clay jar and which announces the return of the people from exile (Jer 32,14-16). In the play, the funeral urn includes all the stages of human life, happy or unhappy, described in the Japanese monologue. From a visual point of view, at the end of life, the Japanese vase turned into a funeral urn is the carrier of man's destiny (*GR*, p. 490).

During the analysis of the two texts, the biblical and the theatre writing, it was unexpected to discover the signs including a jar, signs complementary to the main one under study. The object's fate, placed in parallel with the people or the Merchant's destiny, explained the deep structure created by the various signs. We thus understand that an object used by man undergoes changes determined by the conflict between the values in his heart. Truth or lie, obeying God or not, living or dying - we must always make a choice. The signs, described in each text, articulate in relation to the others, creating the semiotic square. This structure reveals the two roads that man can choose and follow: that of life and that of death.

Chapter 6 looks at the role of the modern prophet and preacher, as shown in *The Great Highway* and in the Bible fragments analysed. Thus, we get to the relation between man and God, visible in both texts. *The Great Highway* and the *Book of Jeremiah* are two complex texts, combining stylistic genres, but both include a prayer dimension, which contrasts with the different ways to denounce sin. The place where the prophetic gesture or the theatrical scenes in Strindberg's drama take place is a reduction of the great world stage. In the biblical Tophet, the prophet announces, through the word and the sign of the jar, the evolution of people's relationship with God, of the moment it breaks off and of the judgement (Jer, chapter 18 and 19), as well as the promise of the return from exile (Jer, chapter 32). In *The Great Highway*, the Hunter becomes the actor of a long wandering on the life road, but also of the returning to God.

Both texts draw inspiration from the life experience of a man who felt God's calling and heralded Him to his contemporaries: on the one hand, Jeremiah the prophet, on the other, Strindberg himself. But neither the character of Jeremiah, nor that of the Hunter can be reduced to their inspiration source. The text does not reflect a biography but contains a set of signs intended for the audience. The presence of God in the discourse represents a big difference between the biblical text and the play. In the Bible, God speaks explicitly and directly intervenes in history. In *The Great Highway*, man recognises Him as the Creator and feels His presence in his soul. From deep in the bottom of his heart, man hears his own consciousness condemning him for his bad deeds and quotes God's word from the Bible to support his announcements.

In his seven-station drama, Strindberg guides us, step by step, on the road of a rich artistic career, but also through a profound life and change experience. The richness of artistic intuition, of its creative experience, as well as of prayer intertwine in *The Great Highway*. This theatre pilgrimage is nevertheless not just a summary of the artist's life, whose destiny is to turn the spectator's eye to the past. It is above all an invitation for the spectator to look ahead, to meet the world, himself, and God. The protagonist says he was a preacher (*GR*, p. 491), "the lawyer of the one who was the Truth" (*GR*, p. 496). The Hunter is said to have preached the Gospel (*GR*, p. 497), but he became tired and stopped. We also find out he was an architect: "He came to Tophet, where we built the theatre" (*GR*, p. 498). Just like Strindberg and the prophet Jeremiah, the artist hopes he can change the world through his gesture.

Through *The Great Highway*, Strindberg proves that prophetic proclamation stands at the core of his last drama and can be acknowledged as a genuine source of theatre.