

Tekla – a witch in Swedish Destinies and Adventures II

Tekla is the daughter of a prison guard and leads a very simple life in Stockholm. Then she meets the son of a more prosperous young merchant, a liking arises and they marry. Tekla climbs the social ladder and ends up in a significantly fancier environment. But then, fascinated, she witnesses a witch's water test, and saves a young woman from drowning a young woman who happens to fall into the water as a spectator.

The extremely grateful family then invites Tekla to live with them for a few weeks. There she meets an even more glamorous environment. She falls in love with the fiancé of the young noblewoman whom she at the same time begins to suspect is a witch.

Tekla also begins to interpret signs that she herself is a witch. After a tender encounter with her fiancé, who is discovered, she is forcibly driven from the castle.

Tekla then accuses the noblewoman of witchcraft to the Witchcraft Commission. At the same time, she is fascinated by the role of being a witch herself and getting everyone's attention during a water test. Get to be in the absolute centre.

But when the witchcraft accusations are dealt with by the Witchcraft Commission, Urban Hjärne comes forward and credibly argues that the accusations are false, but also that Tekla should not be burned for her false statement. Instead, he sentences her to ten years in prison. On the way to the spinning house, she walks through the torture chamber, and believing that she will be tortured, she dies of fright.

For me, this is a fascinating female destiny, but how should it be interpreted? Is it a caricature of a mean woman? Or is it a class analysis. Or a psychological study? I would argue – all three interpretations are valid, intertwined. It is often this kind of complexity that makes Strindberg so interesting.

The fear of falling back into the anonymous and degrading poverty contributes to her actions, regardless of the consequences. She wants revenge on the nobility who humiliated her with the only reasonable means, to label the noblewoman as a witch. But - she also came to consider herself a witch, without fearing the water test. Her background meant that she herself sought a role that still gave her a kind of respect, in the eyes of others but perhaps mainly in her own eyes.

She became someone out of the ordinary.

Stefan Bohman, former director of the Strindberg Museum