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## Bragi Boddason, the First Skald, and the Problem of Celtic Origins

William Sayers

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RÉSUMÉ: *D'après Hans Kuhn, plusieurs éléments de la biographie du premier poète scaldique, Bragi Boddason, suggèrent une origine parmi les Scandinaves installés dans les régions gaéliques des Îles Britanniques. Un nombre important de ceux-ci ont figuré dans la colonisation de l'Islande. Que cette biographie et son détail onomastique soient historiques ou légendaires, elle porte sur la vision que les Norrois ont élaborée de l'art poétique et sur la possibilité d'une influence celtique sur la poésie scaldique. Jusqu'à présent une telle influence s'est montrée difficile à tracer dans la métrique et dans les images. Malgré la réticence islandaise médiévale à l'égard de l'immigration celtique, cette influence aurait pu opérer sur le mythe étiologique du chaudron de la poésie, et sur les conceptions de la formation du poète et de la langue comme matière brute susceptible à raffinage sous l'égide divine. L'article fait le bilan du témoignage celtique sous cette perspective plutôt qualitative que quantitative.*

In *Das Dróttkvætt* Hans Kuhn wrote of the search for foreign models for the metrical structure of skaldic verse:

[Der] Blick [der Forschung] fiel da vor allem auf Irland. An seinen Höfen scheint in der Zeit, die in Frage kommt—der ersten Hälfte des 9. Jahrhunderts—, eine Dichtung gepflegt worden zu sein, die zum Dróttkvætt alles das beigesteuert haben kann, was die germanische Dichtung dieses Zeitraums schwerlich hergeben konnte. Es sind, außer den gesteigerten Ansprüchen der Hofkunst allgemein samt dem Fürstenpreislied, dreihebige Verse mit fester Silbenzahl und Innenreimen, dazu dann auch die Kennungen und die strenge Strophengliederung. Für die beiden letzten war zwar kein Vorbild nötig, aber beides kann doch dadurch gefördert sein. Mehr als zur Nachbildung angeregt hat das fremde Vorbild wohl auch im übrigen kaum. Vielleicht kommt auch noch die Achtung der Dichterpersonlichkeit hinzu (1983:274).

But Kuhn went on to regret that his lack of a deeper knowledge of Old Irish did not authorize him to form an independent judgment in the matter.

In her overview of the present state of skaldic studies in *Old Norse–Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, Roberta Frank returned to the vexed question of possible Irish models. Listing more than a dozen significant investigations of the question published in the last century and a quarter, she concluded: “The direct influence of Irish syllabic verse on the development of skaldic meter... is probably unprovable” (1985:178).<sup>1</sup> But, to return to Kuhn’s concluding statement, given the exposure to Irish poetic culture that the Norsemen based in the port towns of Ireland and in the Western and Northern Isles (Hebrides, Orkney) would have had, it is surely legitimate to continue to question the degree to which they might have been marked by concepts of the status and function of the court poet in the Gaelic kingdoms. In contrast to the study of the influence of metrical models, such an inquiry would be more qualitative than quantitative in nature.

No explicit statements of formative influence, whether on poetics or on the poet’s role, have come down to us, although historicizing statements on poetry are not lacking in the early Norse world. The best known of these is Snorri’s account of the acquisition of the art of poetry as recounted in *Skáldskaparmál* (the myth of Kvasir). A rather different kind of etiological account, but one not entirely without some of the trappings of myth, are the references to the first known skald, Bragi Boddason. It was to a consideration of this figure that Kuhn’s statements above served as introduction, and it is Bragi’s ‘file’ that this note will initially address.

Kuhn ventures the following biographical sketch, on the basis of the scant testimony of *Skáldatal* (in the edition of Snorri’s *Edda*, III.271), *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, *Sturlubók*, Ch. 43), Snorri (*Skáldskaparmál*; Finnur Jónsson 1931), and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (Sigurður Nordal 1932, Ch. 59).<sup>2</sup> Bragi was an assumed (or awarded) name for a poet living in the mid–ninth century. Bragi was also the name of the god of poetry, the name deriving from ON *bragr* “poetic art”. The son of a Gaelic–speaking father (*Boddi* seen as non–Norse because of the geminate *-d-*) and Norwegian mother, he initially bore a Celtic name and was raised in the British Isles. There he learned the new skaldic art (rather than creating it outright) and with it made his fortune at the Danish and Swedish courts. Later he settled in his mother’s homeland. His wife was



the daughter of Erpr lútandi and her Norse name was *Lopt-Hæna* "Air-Hen", "sicher aus einem gänzlich fremden Namen entsteht." In *Erpr* Kuhn recognizes an adjective, *iarpr/erpr*, used in older poetry preferentially of dark-haired or dark-complexioned Celts or Huns.<sup>3</sup> He also notes the Erpr Meldunsson of *Laxdæla saga* (and *Landnámabók*, one might add). But the full name, "Crooked" or "Stooping Brown", he interprets as a derisory nickname, assuring the Celtic identity of its bearer.<sup>4</sup>

This interpretation, which I would not choose to refute in detail, takes the available evidence as historically reliable. My approach will rather be from the perspective of mythology and etiology, without wishing to deny the likely historical existence of the poet, with or without Celtic antecedents. Here, fragmentary evidence, selectively and atomistically adduced, is the hallmark of the comparative method in its weakest realizations. This must be borne in mind in establishing causality and drawing conclusions. In myth and legend the life of the hero, military or cultural, is marked by various exceptionalities, well known to us through the studies of Lord Raglan, Campbell, Eliade, de Vries and, more recently and with a focus on the Celtic world, Ó Cathasaigh (1977) and Ó Buachalla (1989). In this world, the hero's parentage may be both divine and human, and nurturing may be one-sided. From this perspective it is legitimate to question whether Boddason may not be a matronymic, as in the case of the legendary king Conchobar mac Nessa (Meyer 1884). No single Irish name suggests itself in either case, but a variety of circumstantial evidence will permit an informed suggestion.

Óðinn's pledge of an eye to Mímir for knowledge and wisdom is a central Norse example of the surrender of a body part for accrued power in the sphere of influence where it normally was active (Irish reflexes in Carey 1983). This reciprocity between the human and the supernatural or divine is also found in heroic biographies, in the burned thumb of Germanic Sigurd or Irish Finn, the latter's mangy scalp (Nagy 1981), the bounteous feast of the thigh-pierced Fisher King (Picard 1989). The same positive and negative poles can also be set on a generational axis. Another skald with Celtic affinities, Kormákr, had a mother whose name was *Dalla*, which can be derived from Irish *dall* "blind". Dallán Forgaill was the name of a legendary Irish poet. Poetic vision is then gained in restitution for deficient physical vision. OIr. *rosc* "eye" was also the name of an archaic vatic verse form.

Patrick Ford (1990) has traced a number of poetic biographies in Irish and Welsh literature where the maturing poet or his art, or the poet's ancestors and he are seen to move from a crude, raw state, symbolized by physical ugliness or illness, and sensory deficiencies (blindness, dumbness), to a taxonomically superior state characterized by beauty, resplendence, heightened creativity.<sup>5</sup> Just as Morand, the eloquent judge, could have a prior stage of dumbness and bear the epithet *maen* "mute", Bragi's parental name could have drawn on Irish *bodar* "deaf" (*DIL*) and, in this, closely parallel Kormákr's case. But the required phonological development, from the intervocalic Irish *-d-*, which to a Norse ear would suggest *-ð-*, to the *-dd-*, is difficult to accept. On the other hand, names, are generally less respectful than most words of sound laws.

To return to the exceptionalities of the hero, another is birth or fosterage in base conditions, e.g., the infant threatened by a powerful ruler, abandoned but found and raised by rustics. An interesting Irish double version of the motif is found in the tale of Mes Buachalla "herdsmen's fosterling", mother of the future king Conaire Mór, who will be fostered among wolves (*Togail Bruidne Da Derga* [*The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*], Knott 1936, Gantz 1981). Modern Irish has a disparaging term *bod* "churl" (derivatives with similar meaning: *bodach*, *bodachán*, *bodaire*, *bodaireach*) not attested in our medieval texts, which understandably have an aristocratic bias (*Foclóir*).<sup>6</sup> "Churl" figures are not uncommon in early Irish literature, e.g., the *bachlach* that arrives at the hostel where Conaire attends his final fatal feast. Wielding an iron staff, often controlling animals, they appear to have a tie with elemental forces, and to be agents in the vengeance taken by the powers of nature when the ruler has proved deficient or otherwise in need of replacement. Such a base, crude, elemental figure as the parent of the subsequently aristocratic, refined, highly evolved poet would also fit the earlier established paradigm of the maturation of the artist. We may cite the poet Aimergin, whose father was Ecet Salach "the Dirty, Impure", a smith.<sup>7</sup> Like so many other heroes, e.g., Cú Chulainn first called Sétanta, Bragi would have borne a different name before his transformation into a mature poet. While Norse *bragr* is the chief resonance here, we would do well to recall Irish *brága* "neck, throat", figuratively "vanguard", and entertain the image of the poet, evolved from deafness and dumbness, as the mouthpiece of the divine and the forerunner of all subsequent skalds.<sup>8</sup>

Continuing on the onomastic track, we might attempt to translate *Erpr lútandi* back into Irish, since there is evidence for interplay in both

directions between Irish and Norse in calques on personal names. For example, the Úlfr hreða “troublesome wolf”, who is said to be allied with King Brian in the account of the Battle of Clontarf in *Njáls saga*, can quite plausibly be identified with Brian’s great-nephew, Cú Duilig “troublesome hound” or “wolf” (Sayers 1991:172ff.).<sup>9</sup> We should also not be too ready to subscribe to Kuhn’s assumption that Erpr’s name was simply derisory. Even attested historical personages bore telling nicknames as in the case of the Norse king of Dublin Óláfr kvaran (c. 938–80), where the epithet is interpreted by modern commentators as less likely in reference to an Irish shoe type than derived from *cúar(án)* “bent, stooped”.<sup>10</sup> Erpr, too, is listed among the first skalds, so that for later generations his mastery of the Norse language was not incompatible with full or partial Celtic ethnicity. Erpr’s swarthyness recalls Irish *donn* “dun, swarthy, dark”, the name of the Irish Dis Pater, whose “House”, *Tech Duinn*, now Dursey Island off the Cork coast, was the Isle of the Dead (Meyer 1919). Irish *cromm* “crooked” also figures in the name of what may have been a local divinity or its effigy, Cromm Crúach, which has affinities with Donn in what appears to be another reflex under the name *Cromm Dubh* “Crooked/Bowed-Black” (Mac Néill 1982:Ch. 3). As the putative name of Bragi’s father-in-law, some combination of the foregoing (*donn, dubh, cúar, cromm* or *cam* “bent”)—like the poets’ archetypal parents also displaying some physical impairment—would represent the alliance with divine power that accompanied the artistic maturation of the poet, here symbolized by the marriage union. Parallels can be found in the many epithets of Óðinn that highlight his chthonic dimension, while not contradicting his association with poetry.

The partner in this union, Lopt-Hæna, must now be addressed. Old Irish *cerc* “hen” is an attested, if not common, personal name. The noun also entered into compounds as the names of various non-domesticated birds. We find such rudimentary kennings as *cerc fraich* “heather hen” for the red grouse (cf. Scottish *capercaillie* “horse of the woods” for the larger *Tetrao urogallus*), *cerc uisci* “water hen” for the moor hen and in Modern Irish *cerc coille* “forest hen” for the partridge (cf. Scots “wood hen”; *DIL, Foclóir*). \**Cerc aeir* “air hen” is not documented but may have been used of another game bird, not a ground or aquatic bird but one hunted in flight, possibly the pigeon or dove.<sup>11</sup> With regard to the hen motif, in another account of a poet in the making, Gwion Bach, after ingesting the magically prepared drops that the witch Ceridwen had intended for her son, is pursued by her in the form of a hen and, transformed into a grain

of wheat, is eaten, only to be reborn, after this passage through the darker medium of the witch and her art, into the poet Taliesin (*Ystoria Taliesin, The Mabinogi*, Ford 1992 and 1977).

But OIr. *aer* “air” had a near-homonym *áer* “satire”, the semantic nucleus of which meant “cutting”. The early Irish poet continued what we assume to be the dual Indo–European function of the poet as the bestower of both praise and censure, the latter often in the form of satire.<sup>12</sup> One of the fanciful etymologies early Irish literati proposed for *fili* “poet” (actually deriving from Proto–Celtic \**uelēts* “seer”; cf. the Kormákr story) was as a compound of *fí* and *lí* “poisonous” and “resplendent”. Ford, after stating “the semantics of the proper names in this account about nascent poetry are striking”, called attention to the poetess Dulsaine who was the wife of Aimergin. *Dulsaine* meant “mockery, satire” and this Ford identifies as the “darker side of the poetic art”. *Cerd* “smith” or “craftsman” was also used of the Irish poet, and a compound with the meaning “satire–smith”, \**cerd áere*, would not lie, phonologically, too far from *cerc aeir*. Another of the early skalds mentioned with Bragi in *Skáldatal* bore the name *Fleinn* “pike; fluke; dart, shaft”, a suitable name for one who could wield words as weapons, as well as rewards. These possible parallels are, admittedly, no more than suggestive, and one should not succumb to the temptation to err in the opposite direction from Kuhn’s historical reading of the Bragi file. This may then be a far–fetched reading of *Lopt–Hæna*, but at a minimum a quite plausible Irish name, without overtones of satire, can be proposed. In the alternative reading, we could see the same progression as noted in the evolution from deafness to eloquence, or from baseness to eminence, in a generational movement from an darker, earth–bound supernatural figure to a lighter, aerial descendant.

It should also be recalled that the Norse accounts of the origins of poetry contain many of the same elements reviewed above. Frank (1978:71) calls attention to such names as *Lóðurr* “shaggy”, *Dvalinn* “torpor, stupor”, *Hár*, perhaps originally the “blind” or “one–eyed one”. Even the spittle that went into the making of Kvasir could be equated with the bodily effluvia so prominent in the descriptions of the Irish proto–poets. The comparative evidence also lends credibility to the derivation of the word *skald* from the root that generated English *scold*. And to OIr. *áer*, both “satire” and “cutting” we may compare the Norse expression *níð bítar* “defamation bites”.<sup>13</sup>

Kuhn's biographical sketch (pseudo-biographical may be more appropriate) did not note that Bragi the Old figures in at least one narrative context, aside from being listed and cited among early poets. This is in the account of the sons of King Hjǫrr of Hǫrðaland (*Landnámabók* S 112). After plundering in Permia, Hjǫrr (called *kvensamr* in *Njáls saga*, Ch. 100) took captive the king's daughter, Ljúfvina. While the king is absent on a Viking expedition, she gives birth to twin sons, Geirmundr and Hámundr, both very swarthy (*svartir*). At the same time her bondmaid has a child by a slave, Loðhǫttr. This child, Leifr, is very fair. Ljúfvina exchanges her sons for the base-born son, but when Hjǫrr comes home, he finds Leifr a puny-looking thing and takes a strong dislike to him.

When the king again leaves to go raiding, the queen invites Bragi to look over the three-year old boys, while she is hidden under a dais. Bragi extemporizes a skaldic stanza, expressing his trust in Hámundr and Geirmundr, whom he recognizes as the king's own sons, and the poor prospects for the slave's son, Leifr. He then strikes the dais with his wand. On the king's return, the queen confesses. The king says he had never seen such *heljarskinn* ("hell-skins", Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1972:57).<sup>14</sup> The theme here is one met at numerous other points in medieval Icelandic literature: free, aristocratic origins transcend ethnicity. The episode may provide a legitimization of Norse intermarriage on the level of ruling families with Sámi and Finnic peoples in northern Scandinavia. It has recently been suggested that Icelandic conceptions of magic (*seiðr*) may owe something to northern shamanism and have been introduced by immigrants from Hálogaland. We find this same concern for the distinguished pedigree of settlers, now in a Celtic context, in *Eiríks saga rauða*. Auðr frees Vfill, captured in the British Isles, and gives him land, even though she said his worth was recognized without it. Later his son Þorbjörn will deny the hand of a daughter, Guðríðr, to the wealthy son of a freed but less well born slave, thereby sparing her for the eventual union with Þórfinnr Karlsefni.<sup>15</sup>

Bragi, himself perhaps the product of a mixed union and with a similarly swarthy father-in-law, may have been thought qualified to voice an opinion in these circumstances. Of equal interest is that the fact that we see the poet cast in a judgmental, vatic role that transcends praise and blame of the ruler. A similar judicial function has been ascribed to the early Irish poets (Kelly 1988:43). The wand borne by the poet, by the stroke of which he seals his judgment, as it were, while also signifying

that he knows of the queen's concealment (the poet as visionary), is reminiscent of that carried by Icelandic magicians, but is perhaps more closely allied with the staff of another mouthpiece for performative utterances, the god Hœnir, who in Gimlé will prophesy of doings in the new world of gods and men (*Vqluspá*).<sup>16</sup> But if there were, at any historical period, more of a Celtic 'aura' associated with Bragi, we might expect some further narrative evidence, unless we are to assume its gradual suppression as a consequence of evolving Icelandic attitudes towards Celtic antecedents of quite different kinds, e.g., sexual unions with imported Celtic slaves and the consequent problems of offspring.

Bragi the Old is also cited by Arinbjörn, the friend of Egill Skallagrímsson, who claims him as an ancestor (*Egils saga*, Ch. 59). This is in the context of Egill's unwilling visit to Eiríkr and Gunnhildr at York. Bragi provides an archetypal antecedent for Egill's ransoming of his head by means of a praise poem and illustrates the underside of the reciprocity between patron and poet: the poet as hostage in a situation where, physically, the sword is more powerful than the (pre–pen) voice, a political struggle where the poet was, nevertheless, a significant player. The incident also points up the (mostly) competing claims of poetry and magic as symbolized by Egill and Gunnhildr, who tries to dissuade Eiríkr from sparing the poet overnight and then attempts to disrupt his poetic composition in the form of a twittering swallow. In *Skáldatal*, in a rare narrative expansion, Bragi's father-in-law, Erpr, is ascribed a similar incident, his crime having been the killing of a man in a pagan sanctuary, his redeeming poem being on the subject of the king's dog. With some of the incongruity of myth and the economic juxtaposition of *dráp* and *drápa* (two faces of Óðinn), this further underlines the status of the poetic act, where form is of absolute value, content of only relative value, and authorial stance is not judged outside the context of the work itself. The anecdote also offers circumstantial evidence on the sacral role of the early king, since he appears to have had the discretion to pardon religious offences such as a killing in consecrated space.

Finally, we may briefly note Irish parallels to the Norse concept of the cauldrons and mead of poetry. Dumézil has explored more distant parallels in his consideration of Indic evidence, and here one is authorized to look for common Indo–European sources, whatever difficulties continue to attend such an inquiry.<sup>17</sup> In the following I would only call attention to the susceptibility to other conceptions of poetic art that Norsemen in the Celtic lands might have experienced when they learned

of the treatment of a theme also represented in their own tradition. The difficulty here is that the only full narrative account from the Norse world is that of Snorri, writing centuries after these putative Norse–Celtic contacts. Frank (1981) has shown to what degree Snorri may have modified the disparate source material of skaldic verse in his reconstruction of the myth.

A text whose title has been translated as “The Three Cauldrons of Poetry and Learning” (although perhaps better known as “The Caldron of Poesy”) opens, in Liam Breatnach’s translation (1981:63), as follows:

Mine is the proper Cauldron of *Goiriath*,  
 warmly God has given it to me out of the mysteries of the elements;  
 a noble privilege which ennobles the breast  
 is the fine speech which pours forth from it.  
 I being white-kneed, blue-shanked, grey-bearded Amairgen,  
 let the work of my *goiriath* in similes and comparisons be related  
 —since God does not equally provide for all,  
 inclined, upside-down (or) upright—  
 no knowledge, partial knowledge (or) full knowledge,  
 in order to compose poetry for Éber and Donn with many great chantings,  
 of masculine, feminine and neuter,  
 of the signs for double letters, long vowels and short vowels,  
 (this is) the way by which is related the nature of my cauldron.

This text is dated to the second half of the ninth century and its concepts, which doubtless predate its composition as they certainly held sway long after it, were then in circulation in the same era in which we must place Bragi. The tract builds on a complex metaphor of three cauldrons of knowledge, each susceptible to three positions which determine their relative degree of fullness. As this metaphor is without a Norse parallel, although Snorri’s account does mention multiple cauldrons, Breatnach’s excellent discussion will not be summarized here. But the underlying temporal conception is that the acquisition of poetic craft is in the nature of an initiation and an apprenticeship, as illustrated in the accounts discussed by Ford. As the above extract illustrates, the poet’s status is privileged and his knowledge is arcane. The speaker is the ‘original’ poet, Aimergen (namesake of that discussed above), who accompanied the Milesians Éber and Donn (sharing a name if not a superposed identity with the divinity) on their invasion of Ireland in the legendary past. The objective look at language is reminiscent of the Icelandic *First Grammatical Treatise*, while the reference to similes invites comparison with Norse use of kennings. Another section of the

work quotes the poet Néde mac Adnai, who acclaims another of the three cauldrons, among whose attributes figure:

the exalting of the ignoble  
 the mastering of language  
 quick understanding  
 the darkening of speech  
 the craftsman of synchronism...  
 a noble brew in which is brewed the basis of all knowledge (69).

We do not find here a direct parallel to the myth of wise Kvasir, formed from the spittle of the gods, then killed by dwarves who mixed his blood with honey to form the mead of poetry. It must also be admitted that the cauldron image figures frequently in Irish tradition as vessels of healing, regeneration, and bounty, supplying the Everlasting Feast and holding the Champion's Portion, the 'hambone of contention' in the banquet hall.

In his discussion of the metrics of the verse in which a portion of the tract is cast, Breatnach cited another early text of relevance to the question of shared Celtic and Norse conceptions of the origins of the poetic art:

I am not a boy, I am not a man, I am not a youth;  
 mysterious (hidden) gods have granted me knowledge.  
 I am a dwarf, a master of poetic wisdom,  
 a poet from Segais, Senbecc is my name,  
 the grandson of Ébrec from the *síd* [Otherworld mound].

*Senbecc* means "small and old" (cf. Bragi *inn gamli*), while Segais was the well into which the hazel nuts of poetic knowledge and inspiration fell, a complex image not that dissimilar from Mímir's well. Here we have the conception of the poet both as superior being but also as outsider, a status which equips him to provide impartial praise or blame, while also shielding his art from the common man.

Recent studies have identified a significant degree of interaction between Anglo-Saxon and Norse poetic culture at courts in England (lexical borrowings, shared motifs, alliteration and other metrically conditioned devices), and this finds narrativized expression in Egill Skallagrímsson's appearances before Athelstan and Eiríkr.<sup>18</sup> Kuhn seems disposed to believe that such hybrid cultural environments were likely settings for new artistic departures. Irish culture and Irish language were at a greater remove from Norse than was Anglo-Saxon, but history amply illustrates how quickly culture-confident colonizers can be impregnated with aspects of indigenous tradition. In Ireland's case, this culture was certainly no less confident than that of the invaders, shored up by



precocious literacy in the vernacular and participation, albeit on its own terms, in the European Christian community.<sup>19</sup> The Norse capacity for adaptation, illustrated in the settlements in England, Normandy, Russia, Iceland, Greenland, service at the Byzantine court, and so on, may have been complemented by a receptivity to new cultural ideas.

While several of the associations advanced above may be spurious, the light Celtic coloration in the ‘origin story’ of the first Norse skald, plus the two cultures’ shared view of the poet’s role, does encourage us to accept that Norse and Celtic–Norse immigrants to Iceland from the Celtic lands, thought to number between 15 and 25 per cent of the total (without counting unredeemed Celtic hostages and slaves), must have brought to this new society an awareness of the potential of vernacular literacy and evolved conceptions, perhaps ultimately Norse in origin but with immediate Celtic reinforcement and enhancement, of 1) the creation of poetry, 2) the due formation of its rightful practitioners, and 3) language as an almost concrete medium that nonetheless requires near–divine inspiration and skill in its manipulation.

In the most direct treatment, the Celtic fact in the post–Settlement years of Iceland was assimilated (the freed nobles Erpr and Vífill in *Landnámabók*) or eliminated (rebellious slaves executed), guided by the programmatic statement in an early version of *Landnámabók*, *Þórðarbók* thought to be drawing on *Melabók*:

Þat er margra manna mál, at þat sé óskyldr fróðleikr at rita landnám. En vér þykjumsk heldr svara kunna útlendum mǫnnum, þá er þeir bregða oss því, at vér sém komnir af þrælum eða illmennum, ef vér vitum víst várar kynferðir sannar (336n1).

[People often say that writing about the Settlement is irrelevant learning, but we think we can better meet the criticism of foreigners when they accuse us of being descended from slaves and scoundrels, if we know for certain the truth about our ancestry (Pálsson and Edwards 1972: 6).]

More subtle management of the historical and legendary record could be put under the heading of marginalization: Hebrideans associated with proscribed magic (Kotkell) or Celtic ethnicity associated with matrilinearity (Óláfr pái) in *Laxdæla saga*, poets with Celtic affinities practising socially unsanctioned erotic poetry (Kormákr), assumption of the Irish *geilt* “wild man of the woods” motif in the expression *verða at gjalti* “to go mad with terror”, with its suggestion of deficient manliness and even gender ambiguity.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective it is unsurprising that in the syncretic figure of the poet Bragi Boddason we have the Norse god of poetry, Bragi, at one pole of attraction and at another only some

onomastic hints of Celtic affinities. In narrative we find Bragi's recognition of what was finest in a foreign culture (the 'Permian admixture' to the court of Hǫrðarland), but no open acknowledgement of outside influence on the theory or practise of skaldic poetry. The native Norse myth of Kvasir appears to provide a sufficient etiology. But understanding the reasons for the absence of testimony, the lack of a critical mass that would emit a Celtic resonance, cannot count toward proof of a cultural transfer. Rather than argue further from silence in the matter of Bragi's British origins as proposed by Kuhn, Frank's "probably unprovable" may, here too, have to be the last word.

### NOTES

1. For a recent, brief and largely dismissive review of possible Irish influence on Norse literature, see Jakobsen (1988).

2. Other brief mention and early secondary studies noted by Nordal (1932:182n2).

3. For a discussion of the name *Erpr* in the Hunnish context, e.g., *Atlakviða*, *Hamðismál*, see Belsheim (1925–33:364f.), and more recently, on its possible negative connotations, Scardigli (1988:203f.). The name also figures in Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*.

4. Necessarily brief accounts of Bragi are also found in Frank (1983:359f.), Hermann Pálsson and Simek (1987:44f.). Frank has allowed of the possibility of extra-Norse ties ("Bragi, a court poet thought to have British relatives") as recently as 1991 (48). Attention has quite properly focussed on Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*; see Lie (1968:647ff.) for early secondary literature; more recent studies in Frank (1985), complemented by listings in her review article (Frank 1987b:380n1). On the question of Bragi's *floruit*, c. 830 or c. 960, as established by the identity of his patrons, Swedish or Norwegian, see Turville-Petre (1976:xxi). Without explicit reference Kuhn (1983:274f.) rejects Turville-Petre's contention that the period between the first Viking raids in the late eighth century and the second quarter of the following century would have been too brief for skaldic poetry as a rigorously defined formal genre to develop in the nurturing environment of a mixed Irish–Norse culture. Turville-Petre's observation on the length of time for such a hybrid culture to emerge does, however, command attention. English renderings of Bragi's verse, as quoted by Snorri, in Faulkes (1987). Another poet, whose name suggests Celtic ties, is the Ormr Barreyjarskáld (<Barra in the Hebrides) mentioned as the object of a *fornaldarsaga* in *Porgils saga ok Hafliða* (Kristjánsson 1988:343) and excerpted in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*.

5. To Ford's discussion may be added the Old Testament precedent of Moses' lack of eloquence, in response to which God states that he alone grants the needed faculties to the dumb, deaf and blind (Exodus 4:10ff.).

6. Early Irish knew a *bot* (var. *bod*) “penis, tail” and an apparent homonym as an arcane poetic word for “fire”; the modern Irish *bod* most likely derives from the former.

7. The use of metallurgical imagery in the refinement of the hero, military or cultural, is examined in Sayers 1985.

8. Other Irish terms that might be entertained in this onomastic inquiry are *braich* “malt liquor” (< *mraich*), with reference to the “mead of poetry” of myth and poetic metaphor, and *brag*, a variant of *bruth*. “heat, fury; molten mass; boiling”, which would be comparable to ON *óðr* “furious, in a state of emotional arousal”, thought to underlie the name *Óðinn*, and also compatible with the earlier discussed notions of divinely instigated artistic inspiration and refinement.

9. On the *Darraðarljóð*, which caps the account of the Battle of Clontarf, see, most recently, Poole 1991:116–56.

10. Note, too, the early immigrant to the Faroes, Grímr *kamban* < OIr. *cam* “crooked” (?).

11. Modern Irish also has a *meannán aeir* “kid of the air” for the male snipe. The Irish Fenian tradition also gives evidence of a term for the female thrush or blackbird *céirseach*, a familiar name like Jenny Wren or Robin Redbreast (Bruford 1987:42n44). Although the development would have been anything but straightforward, one could envisage a recasting along the lines of the names of the Irish provinces, in which the Irish phrase was reversed and a Norse possessive ending added to the first element, e.g., *tír Ulad* “land of the Ulstermen” > \**Ulad-s-tír* > *Ulster*. *Céirseach* would then have had an intermediary stage \**aeirscerc* before being calqued into Norse. *Örvar-Odds saga* makes the hero the son of Grímr and Lofthæna.

12. See Williams 1972, and, for the legal dimension, Kelly 1988:43f., 137f. Early Irish and Norse conceptions of the efficacy of satire, down to the visible effects on the face of the object, its legal proscription, and related concepts of honour/“face”, defamation, and references to body wastes, display many striking similarities. At this point it is imperative to recall the possibility of common Indo-European origins for yet other aspects of these two western European poetic cultures whose comparability might otherwise suggest a Celtic-to-Norse influence (cf. Bloomfield and Dunn 1989).

13. Cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1965. By now standard works in this respect are Almqvist 1965 and Sørensen 1983.

14. Somewhat fuller account with no new detail in *Geirmundar þáttur heljar skinns* (Jónsson 1948:1–10) and *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* (Seelow 1981). Accounts of the hell-skins after their arrival in Iceland are not always positive, although the political sympathies of individual sagas must be recognized; *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939:Ch. 16). See, too, Ciklamini 1981.

15. *Eiríks saga rauða* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935); the Auðr/Vífill episode is also found in *Landnámabók* (S 100) and *Laxdæla saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934:Ch. 6).

16. See Sayers 1992b; in Irish regal tradition the poet received the king's wand as a gift after the inauguration; Williams and Ford 1992:48.

17. Dumézil 1924; for the Germanic reflex, see Doht 1974.

18. Recent studies are Poole 1987, Frank 1987a, 1990, Niles 1987, and, by way of overview, Niles and Amodio 1987. The close ties between Norse York and Norse Dublin prompt one to wonder in which ways the accommodation of Norse culture, in its very broadest sense, to local tradition may have been similar in both process and result in the two trading towns. Or did the Norse strive to be more English than the English (Frank 1987a:338) and more Irish than the Irish? A rather different cultural synthesis evolved in the north of the British Isles: Norse cultural dominance in the Northern Isles (Orkney), a more hybrid culture, apparently, in the Western Isles (Hebrides) (Power 1990, Cowan 1982).

19. See, for example, McCone 1990.

20. These subjects are pursued in Sayers 1992a and forthcoming.

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## Journey into Silence: an aspect of the late films of Ingmar Bergman

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RÉSUMÉ: *Les films d'Ingmar Bergman, au long de son cheminement de réalisateur, ont évolué de films pleins de chaleur humaine en films de plus en plus sévères. Bien que ce voyage n'ait pas été entièrement linéaire, les chaleureux échanges verbaux de Fraises Sauvages (1957) ont progressivement été éclipsés par le désespoir verbal que l'on retrouve dans les films plus récents tels que Persona (1966) et Une Passion (1969). Est-ce parce que Bergman est venu à se méfier de la valeur du langage dans le processus d'échange humain? Ou serait-ce plutôt parce qu'il est venu à se méfier de ses propres pouvoirs d'écrivain? Quelqu'en soit l'interprétation, une telle attitude changeante envers le langage représente un des aspects du modernisme des derniers films de Bergman, ce que l'auteur appelle le voyage vers le silence d'Ingmar Bergman.*

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was an intense excitement about cinema. Originating in Europe through the new productions that appeared after the ravishes of the war, this excitement found a ready home within the United States and Canada. Film societies were flourishing, and 'art house' cinemas began to spring up in most major cities—cinemas that were dedicated to showing the best 'artistic' films from France, Italy, Sweden and Japan and, bit by bit, from all the other film-producing countries of the world.

Within this burgeoning situation, no filmmakers were more celebrated than Federico Fellini and Ingmar Bergman. Indeed, the Bergman phenomenon was exceptional. By the time *Smiles of a Summer Night* (*Sommarnattens leende*, 1955) gained acclaim at the Cannes film festival in 1956 and then, two years later, *The Seventh Seal* (*Det sjunde inseglet*, 1957) and *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*, 1957) were heralded in New York, Bergman had already accumulated a back-log of

at least six highly accomplished films, and there were half a dozen more for the more specialized venues of the official cinémathèques. For one or two years in the early 1960s, there seemed to be two or three new Bergman films each year. Bergmania had begun.

At the same time, the vitality of the film society movement was also beginning to generate film courses in colleges and universities; and once again, at this time, there was no single film director that more encouraged the university community to recognize cinema as worthy of academic study than Ingmar Bergman. His films were literate and literary. Their Nordic characteristics allowed them to be related to the dramas of Strindberg and Ibsen. The films of Ingmar Bergman obviously provided a suitable subject for serious academic debate.

I offer this mini–history of the development of film studies for one simple reason: if Bergman was highly ‘fashionable’ some thirty years ago, he is highly ‘unfashionable’ today. As Paisley Livingston (1982:16) has put it: “Although his ‘classics’ serve as standard fare in cinema society programs and in courses on film, they receive less and less critical attention.” Possibly because his films so leant themselves to the humanist academic discourses of the 1960s, they seem ill–suited to the post–structuralist academic discourses of the present day. In spite of some substantial studies of his work in the 1980s,<sup>1</sup> Bergman has not really been recuperated in terms compatible with contemporary theory.

What follows is less an attempt at full recuperation than a presentation of some of the critical strategies that such a recuperation might entail. But I must begin with a caution: while I shall be dealing largely with one early, ‘humanist’ film followed by a later, more ‘modernist’ one, I do not mean to imply a simple chronological development. If over the years Bergman’s work has moved from apparent theological preoccupations through more humanist concerns on to a nihilist refusal of the possibilities of meaningful human interaction (as I shall be arguing), this movement has not progressed in a simple, linear fashion. Just as throughout his career Bergman has alternated filmic with theatrical production, so too he has alternated comedies with tragedies. If the film comedies become rarer in the later years, nevertheless he can still follow his difficult yet compassionate examination of married life, *Scenes from a Marriage* (*Scener ur ett äktenskap*, 1973) with the immensely popular *The Magic Flute* (*Trollflöten*, 1975); and he can recover from what is arguably the most nihilistic film he has ever made, *From the Life of the Marionettes* (*Aus dem Leben der Marionetten*, 1980), a film made in Germany, to achieve for his faithful followers the

most lavish film production that Bergman has ever designed for the film theatres, his ultimately 'humanist' farewell to feature filmmaking—*Fanny and Alexander* (*Fanny och Alexander*, 1982).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, while Bergman was able to show us in his later years that he could still achieve the old magic, the fact that, like Shakespeare's Prospero in *The Tempest*, he chose to renounce it may be at least in part the result of a loss of faith in its value.

In the pages that follow, then, I mean less to define a simple, step-by-step movement from the humanism of *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*, 1957) to the modernism of *A Passion* (*En Passion*, 1969) than to suggest an awkward trajectory that involves increasingly both a sense of a mistrust of the magical properties of his own art that is an element of modernism plus an increasing disbelief in the possibility of meaningful human exchange which is a characteristic of nihilism. This difficult itinerary represents what I have chosen to call Ingmar Bergman's journey into silence.

\*

The people in my films are exactly like myself — creatures of instinct, of rather poor intellectual capacity, who at best only think when they're talking. Mostly they're body, with a little hollow for the soul. My films draw on my own experience; however inadequately based logically and intellectually.

(Ingmar Bergman 1969)<sup>3</sup>

There is a scene in *Wild Strawberries* that might be said to encapsulate the humanistic optimism of the early films of Ingmar Bergman. As many readers will know, *Wild Strawberries* tells the story of Professor Isak Borg, a 76-year old medical practitioner, who, on a given day, journeys from Stockholm to Lund to receive an honourable recognition of fifty years of active service in his profession.

Readers familiar with the films of Federico Fellini might recognize that, as in the early films of Ingmar Bergman, Fellini's characters are often engaged in some sort of quest. Yet there are differences. Fellini's journeys are always circular. In *La Strada* (1954), while the tiny circus troupe travels about the length and breadth of Italy, the opening and closing images are both of the Adriatic Sea; and in *8 1/2* (1963), the film culminates with all the characters in the film, as if standing in for all the people in Fellini's life, holding hands and dancing round and round a circus ring.

In the early films of Ingmar Bergman, his characters are also travellers. With few exceptions, however, their journeys are more linear. They move from specific place to specific place within what is generally

also a specific period of time. Furthermore, through their repeated occurrence in film after film, these journeys assume an allegorical dimension. In the films of Ingmar Bergman, if his journeys are all journeys through the specifics of a physical world, they are also journeys into a spiritual world as well.

From *Three Strange Loves* (*Törst*, 1949) through *Sawdust and Tinsel* (*Gycklarnas Afton*, 1953) and *A Lesson in Love* (*En lektion i kärlek*, 1954) to *The Seventh Seal* (*Det sjunde inseglet*, 1956) and *Wild Strawberries* (1957), the restless journeying across a geographical landscape has also involved an inner journey into the self. *Wild Strawberries*, however, is the most securely achieved success of all these early films. Let me try to convey at least something of its quality.

At the opening of the film, it is only after a particularly disturbing nightmare that Professor Borg decides to drive to Lund in a large black car that looks like a hearse. Leaving at the break of day with Marianne, his daughter-in-law, Borg soon picks up some hitch-hikers—Sara and her two boy-friends. Like young Erhart, at the end of Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), with Mrs. Wilton on one side of him and young Frida on the other, Sara and her two boyfriends, Anders and Viktor, a Christian and an atheist, are off to sunny Italy. Again as many readers will know, through a series of encounters and dreams, Borg comes to grips with aspects of his past life—as if for the first time.

About a third of the way into the film, Borg and his three guests stop for lunch at the Golden Otter, an old inn with an open terrace that overlooks Lake Vättern.<sup>4</sup> It is this luncheon scene that I wish to examine.

As he does throughout the film, Borg begins by narrating this scene in the first person: "Our lunch was a success," he says. "I became very lively, I must admit, and I told the youngsters about my years as a country doctor. I told them humorous anecdotes which had a great deal of human interest. These were a great success ... and I had wine with the food ... and cognac with my coffee."<sup>5</sup>

Overcome by all this warmth and beauty, Anders (the theology student) suddenly leaps up and begins to recite a well-known Swedish hymn.<sup>6</sup>

When Nature shows such beauty  
How radiant must be its source.

This outburst initiates a quarrel between the two boys who had agreed that they wouldn't discuss either theology or science on this trip. Whenever each lad speaks, Sara agrees with him, as if it is really about

her that they are arguing. "Aren't they fantastically sweet? I always agree with the one who's spoken last. Isn't this all extremely interesting?"

When they appeal to Professor Borg, he at first demurs; but then joins in with a continuation of the same hymn.

	Where is the friend I seek everywhere? Dawn is the time of loneliness and care. When twilight comes ...
Marianne:	I am still yearning.
Anders:	Though my heart is burning, burning ...

When Borg's memory fails him, Marianne helps him out. And then Anders comes in and continues with the poem. At the end, even Viktor has to concede that "as a love poem, it isn't too bad."

Thus, this traditional Swedish hymn,<sup>7</sup> as it is passed around the table from one person to the next as a few moments earlier the food and wine had been, becomes, in both a real and symbolic sense, a kind of holy communion. It also represents (to use contemporary terms) a moment of cultural communication and exchange. The collective knowledge of this hymn allows the characters to share their emotions with one another, to feel something in common with one another, whether from a divine or a merely secular point-of-view.

*Wild Strawberries* represents the acme of Bergman's work as a humanist, and this scene provides a key moment within it. This film also represents the supreme achievement of Bergman's work as a 'realist', devising on the screen images of lived life that seem directly related to the incidents of lived life that we might have encountered in our daily experience. The film is thoughtful, hopeful, loving and holy. It should not have been dropped from discourse, as I have said. But it has.<sup>8</sup>

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After *Wild Strawberries*, passing by way of *So Close to Life* (*Nära Livet*, 1957) and *The Virgin Spring* (*Jungfrukällan*, 1959), Bergman entered the most difficult period of his life as a filmmaker—his journey into silence.

*Through a Glass Darkly* (*Såsom i en Spegel*, 1961), *Winter Light* (*Nattvardsgästerna*, 1962), and *The Silence* (*Tystnaden*, 1963) represent an increasingly severe series of *kammerspiel* films involving fewer and fewer people in more and more desperate situations. These films in turn are followed by *Persona* (1966). If *Persona* represents Bergman's most thoroughly uncompromising 'modernist' text, *A Passion* (1969) combines some of the modernist attitudes of *Persona* with at least the vestiges of the old humanism of *Wild Strawberries*. This is its great

value; and it is because of its aesthetic achievement that *A Passion* is the second film that I wish to consider.

In these Baltic films, as I have called them (Harcourt 1974:171), since most are set on the island of Fårö, gone is the sense of a journey from specific place to specific place. Even in *The Silence*—which does involve a journey to and a journey from the fictitious nightmare city of Timoka (Timoka = executioner, Björkman et al 1973:183)—there is more a sense of a closed circle, of a space that entraps, than of any sense of a journey.

But again, as with *Wild Strawberries*, when discussing *A Passion*, I really want to deal with only one scene. This particular scene is difficult to evoke, partly because the published screenplay alludes to it only briefly (Bergman 1977:137)—and Bergman's published scripts are always pre- and not post-production scripts, strange little stories that are interesting in their own right but often quite different from the finished film; and partly because the scene entails less a human exchange than an inhuman display of egotistic verbal virtuosity amongst people who still know how to speak but who can no longer listen to one another. At this moment in this film, there is no holy communion and little cultural sharing. There are four people speaking out across the space of the dining room, partly about each other but largely simply to fill the space. By the time he made *A Passion*, for Ingmar Bergman words had largely lost their meaning, their particular human significance.

The scene I am referring to is, of course, the dinner scene that occurs early on in the film. Andreas Winkelman has been asked to dinner by Elis and Eva Vergéus, and Anna Fromm is there. Yes, there are dialogic spurts as in their scattered and fragmented way, they are talking about the meaning of art and life as in earlier films by Ingmar Bergman. Elis, an architect, has received a huge commission to build something in Rome, an activity that, in his cynical way, he considers meaningless. Anna thinks there must be meaning, as there had to have been meaning in her recent marriage; while Eva (echoing the role of Sara that Bibi Andersson had played ten years previously in *Wild Strawberries*) believes that there probably is meaning in any case in everything. At least, that is what she likes to believe, in the same way that she likes to believe in God.

The great difference between this dinner scene in *A Passion* and the luncheon scene in *Wild Strawberries* is that all the voices are in competition with one another. They all speak against and across one another, a fact that Bergman emphasizes by the equally fragmented way

he cuts back and forth between the four of them, establishing a visual counterpoint to the verbal competition among his characters.<sup>9</sup> As Philip Mosley (1981:141) has put it: "A *Passion* crystallizes Bergman's study of isolated individuals, confirming their failure to live with each other and their inevitable exposure to private and public suffering."

Nevertheless, however much pain may be involved, *A Passion* represents virtuosic filmmaking—not the slow, quietly observant style that characterized Bergman's early work but a virtuosity that serves less the simple humanely life-affirming project of the production of meaning through verisimilitude than the destruction of any single meaning through the competitive clash of a variety of verisimilitudes.

Instead of a varied group of pilgrims that in *Wild Strawberries* could enjoy the shared hymn each in their own way, in *A Passion*, we have a frightened group of exiles each of whom is trying to create meaning through an individual articulation of experience, each of which relates to nothing that the others really share; and furthermore, each of which might also be a lie. There are still phonemes in the air; but semantically, humanistically, in terms of life-affirming values, there is silence.

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From now on, I don't think I'm going to deal with people of this sort. I regard them as belonging definitely to the past.

(Ingmar Bergman 1970) <sup>10</sup>

If the early films of Ingmar Bergman were (somewhat sophomorically) troubled by the death of God, the later films are (quite disturbingly) troubled by the death of meaning within the language of human exchange. This death of meaning refers both to the loss of a shared cultural experience that can contain and focus the meaning of words; but it also refers to the fact that individual human beings, unable to bear the implications of their own acts or to endure their own pain, may lie—both to themselves and to others. In terms of Bergman's films, we have experienced this before, both in *Through a Glass Darkly* and in *Persona*. Words become weapons—useful in staving off the outsider and, when necessary, for inflicting pain. These late films might seem to depict an increasingly nihilistic world.

Within Scandinavian culture, however, this epistemological uncertainty concerning the reliability of language is nothing new. The idea of the 'life lie' is central to the complete works of Henrik Ibsen. Certainly, in *A Passion*, in her combination of high ideals and intense self-deception, Anna would seem to be a very Ibsenian character.

Nevertheless, what I want to claim for Bergman is that the stylistic strategies that he has adopted in his later films give to them a more contemporary feeling.

In his challenge to humanism, in his concern to disrupt the classical assurances of the 'well-made' film, in his invitation to his actors to find their own lines and even, at other moments in the film, to step outside their performances and comment on the characters they are playing: in all these strategies Bergman has both espoused the modernist project in art and, through the fragmentation, through the grainy colour of the film, through the total disintegration of the image at the end,<sup>11</sup> he has somewhat gone beyond it.

Philip Mosley (1981:74) has underlined the tensions that exist in Bergman's work between the intellect and the emotions; and many years ago, John Russell Taylor (1964:168–169) commented on the uneasy balance that exists within Bergman between the writer and the director. Indeed, Frank Gado has recently suggested that it wasn't until the early 1950s when Bergman finally abandoned his desire to be a great writer that he truly found his own directorial style, both in theatre and in film.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever way we wish to analyse it, part of the interest in Bergman as an artist has to do with the tensions that are inscribed within his films. In his earlier, more 'humanist' films like *Summer Interlude* (*Sommarlek*, 1951), *A Lesson in Love* (1954) and *Wild Strawberries* (1957), a large part of the charm of these films is that the tensions are held in a classical balance—the tensions between the intellect and the emotions, between the writer and the director—or in Bergman's own terms, between body and soul. In his later works, however, it is almost as if, as Bergman developed and matured, it was the intellectual part of himself, the writer in himself, that he came to mistrust and which he wished to abandon. But as I said at the outset, this process did not take place in a simple linear fashion. Bergman inflicted austerity upon himself and upon his audiences, and then relaxed a little and turned to other things, as he has always been able to return to the theatre where Bergman the director can reign supreme while Bergman the writer can, with impunity, remain silent.

The films of Ingmar Bergman need to be returned to their rightful place within academic discourse. His work needs to be re-situated within contemporary post-structuralist theoretical concerns in the way that Frank Burke has situated the films of Federico Fellini.<sup>13</sup> In this paper, however, my ambition has been more modest. By examining only two moments in only two films by Ingmar Bergman, I have tried simply to



suggest that his films are more complex in their organization and more contemporary in their formal construction than has recently been acknowledged.

By way of conclusion, I should like to repeat my suggestion that it is time that especially the late films of Ingmar Bergman be re-claimed for what they are: significantly 'modernist' achievements that contest the ontological and epistemological certainties of a more classical age.

### NOTES

1. For sheer intelligence and originality, see Paisley Livingston. *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art* (1982). But for breadth of extra-filmic scholarship, see also Frank Gado. *The Passion of Ingmar Bergman* (1986).

2. And yet, curiously enough *Fanny & Alexander* was also shot with a longer version intended for television—an irony rarely dwelt upon!

3. In Stig Björkman et al. (1973), p. 190

4. All the factual references concerning this scene are derived from Gado (1986), pp. 215–216 and pp. 225–226.

5. The dialogue for this scene can be found in Ingmar Bergman. *Four Screenplays* (1960), pp. 202–204.

6. Gado (1986: 216) calls it the Wallin hymn and tells us that it is derived from the *Swedish Hymnal* from the section marked "The Last Judgment" under the heading "The Christian Hope Before Death."

7. The extent of its cultural reach might be confirmed by the fact that the same hymn, this time appearing as an inter-title, occurs in *Gösta Berling's Saga* (1924), a silent film directed by Mauritz Stiller from the novel by Selma Lagerlöf.

8. As additional confirmation of this assertion, it may be of interest to note that Paisley Livingston, whose approach to Bergman's work is more concerned with anthropological rituals than with critical evaluations, never even mentions this film!

9. The scene was, in fact, largely improvised towards the end of the shoot. "The evening before, we met and went through what each of them should talk about. I explained the scene plan and the situation. They were to sit round a table, such and such food was to be served, such and such a red wine. Each actor had a clear idea of where he or she stood in the film. Then the camera was turned, first on one, then on the second, then on the third, then on the fourth, and the conversation was allowed to take whatever course it liked." Björkman et al, p. 258.

10. Speaking about the characters in *A Passion*. In Björkman et al, p. 261.

11. For an examination of the details of this last shot, see Harcourt (1974), p. 182.

12. See "Playwright Bergman" in Gado (1986), pp. 93–136.

13. Various, but see especially Burke (1989), pp. 36–48.

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## Nora as Antigone: the feminist tragedienne and social legality

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RÉSUMÉ: *Ibsen appelait Maison de Poupée “la tragédie de nos temps modernes,” et plusieurs savants ont remarqué une certaine affinité entre Nora et l’Antigone de Sophocle. Les deux femmes défient l’autorité du mâle et opposent leur sens séditieux du juste aux lois de l’état, entraînant ainsi des conséquences tragiques. Mais la pièce d’Ibsen qui défend la nature remédiable de l’expérience de Nora, ou qui regarde l’héroïne comme une Antigone manquée échappant aux extrêmes de la tragédie a aussi été perçue comme un document central dans une variété de contextes féministes: “bourgeois”, “radical”, “existentiel”, “socialiste”. Qu’advient-il de la dimension tragique de Maison de Poupée lorsqu’on la soumet aux méthodologies féministes? La critique féministe peut-elle inclure “l’effroi et la terreur”, “le désespoir”, “la résistance”, “la défaite” que Ibsen a notés chez l’héroïne? Cet article examine les liens entre Nora et Antigone et explore le paradoxe de Nora en tant qu’héroïne féministe et tragique.*

I take my cue for this paper from three recent feminist approaches to *A Doll’s House* all published in the 1980s, and perhaps the first and most radical reading of the play by a woman, Eleanor Marx’s, which dates back to the 1880s. The theme that all four critics pursue, despite their manifestly divergent ‘feminisms’, is the clash between woman’s sensibility and the social system—what Eleanor Marx called the “woman question” (Marx and Aveling 1886) as a secular and political dilemma demanding resolution. The other common feature, at least among the feminist critics of the 1980s, is a comparative linking of Ibsen’s Nora with Sophocles’ Antigone that tacitly endorses Ibsen’s designation of the play as ‘the tragedy of modern times’.<sup>1</sup> But, as George Steiner (1961:291) insists, “tragedy speaks not of secular dilemmas that may be resolved by rational innovation, but of the unaltering bias towards inhumanity and

destruction in the drift of the world." Is *A Doll's House*, then, a problem play masquerading as a tragedy? Or a tragedy pressed by feminism into the service of a *drame à thèse*? Or is it possible to elevate the "problem of women"<sup>2</sup> to a high mythic level and reconcile the feminist and tragic readings of this play about a Norwegian housewife's seditious morality? These are some of the critical issues I would like to explore.

## I

Sandra Saari's argument in "Female Become Human: Nora Transformed" (1988) posits an essentially non-tragic bias in feminist criticism of *A Doll's House*. She begins (Saari 1988:41) by quoting one of Ibsen's notes for his modern 'tragedy':

There are two kinds of moral law, two kinds of conscience, one in the man and a completely other one in the woman. They do not understand one another; but the woman is judged in practical life according to the man's law, as if she were not a woman but a man.

"This idea might have led to a modern-day Antigone," she continues, "one in whom the sense of duty was grounded in a specifically feminine conscience." But, she argues, Ibsen disqualifies Nora from tragic status because she lacks the "requisite purposive vision to be a heroic figure;" and, by way of corroboration, Sandra Saari (1988:41) quotes another of Ibsen's revealing notes:

The wife in the play finally doesn't know which way to turn in regard to what is right or wrong; innate feelings on the one hand and belief in authority on the other bring about complete confusion.

Her thesis is that Ibsen abandoned his idea about a feminine soul destroyed by a masculine world, rejected the vision of two disparate forms of conscience separated by gender, and finally produced "a play based on the premise that ... males and females demonstrate no essential difference in their spiritual make up." (Saari 1988:42) Women are essentially no different from men. It is a perfectly feasible argument; and, like all of Sandra Saari's papers on Ibsen's women, it engages a woman's sensibility in its approach without overtly espousing a feminist critique. Nonetheless it falls very conveniently into one of Michelene Wandor's (1986) categories—bourgeois feminism, which argues for sex-equality and regards the successful woman as one who achieves political, economic, and social parity with men.

It is for this reason that a more radical feminist, like Joan Templeton, pours torrential scorn on the flattening-out propensities of those who seek common sexual denominators and (like Sandra Saari)

deny the special and peculiarly feminine selfhood of Nora. In "The *Doll House* Backlash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen", Joan Templeton (1989:36) uses another of Ibsen's notes to assert her position:

A woman cannot be herself in the society of today, which is exclusively a masculine society, with laws written by men, and with accusers and judges who judge feminine conduct from the masculine standpoint.

"*A Doll House*," she insists, "is not about Everybody's struggle to find him— or herself but, according to its author, about Everywoman's struggle against Everyman." (Templeton 1989:36) The old battle—lines of the 1970s are faintly visible in this argument—those drawn up by Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* where she defines man as the enemy, interpreting Ibsen's play as a blow against the patriarchy with Nora as "the true insurrectionary of the sexual revolution ... battling the sexual politic openly and rationally ... [with her] band of revolutionaries." (Millett 1970: 115, 152, 156) Joan Templeton's radicalism may be less aggressive, but, in her reading of *A Doll's House*, the centre of the play is still located in its conflict between the masculine and feminine forces. Again, the argument carries great conviction—especially in her invocation of the dialectical opposition between Man's law and Woman's love in Sophocles' *Antigone*: "A good case could be made," she claims, "for Nora as a bourgeois Antigone in her stalwart defiance of the world." (Templeton 1989:33) And she quotes Nora's great justification of her criminal but life—affirming delinquency—"Jeg gjorde det jo av kjærlighet" [I did it out of love]—which reads like a direct quotation from the *Antigone*. In the 1980s, radical feminism's central argument lies primarily in Antigone's rebellion against the Creon—dominated world.

This is why the existential feminist regards the radical sisterhood with some considerable misgiving. Elaine Hoffman Baruch, in "Ibsen's *Doll House*: A Myth for our Time" (1980), dissociates herself from the feminism that defines man as the villain and Nora as the victim of male arrogance and domination. Such a reading, she argues, reduces the play to melodrama. But she also denies the basic premises of bourgeois feminism; for to see Nora seeking a parity of autonomy with men is to see her eternally duped by appearances. As she points out, there are no men worth emulating in the play, no man more 'free' than the unemancipated woman, no authenticity behind the masks of masculinity. "Man's freedom," she argues, "is tied up with that of women" (Baruch 1980:377); and a woman so disillusioned with man's subservience to the social norm, as Nora is with Torvald's, is hardly likely to want to be like him.

Nora's solution, Elaine Hoffman Baruch argues, embraces "the existential variety of feminism, which seeks personal fulfilment ... [and] posits the good of the individual over that of the social order." (1980:382) This is what allies her most firmly with Antigone: "Like Antigone, Nora is willing to give up all the appeals of love and marriage and state in the name of a higher 'law'. But, like Antigone, she cannot be considered totally in the right. The tragic import of Ibsen's play lies in what Hegel in his analysis of Antigone conceived of as a clash between two rights. In Ibsen, the claims of marriage and motherhood on the one hand and those of the self, on the other, provide an irreconcilable conflict which feminist readers today are prone to resolve in favor of Nora's decision." (1980:383)

But Elaine Hoffman Baruch is distinctly uncomfortable in endorsing Nora's claim of a higher, more sacred duty than that of wife and mother—"my duty towards myself"; and at this point she sees Nora's affinity with Antigone finally crumbling. For whereas Antigone's civil disobedience derives validity from the great absolutes of Divine law and the injunctions of kinship, Nora's rejection of state and family is sanctioned only by a private and esoteric drive towards selfhood. "Nora," writes Elaine Hoffman Baruch, "has replaced Sophocles' law of the gods with the law of the self." (1980:384) Alter the angle of vision just slightly, and what the radical feminist celebrates as triumphant individualism may turn out to be the ugly narcissism of the 'Me' generation.<sup>3</sup>

## II

It would seem that Ibsen's text, like Sophocles', is sufficiently ambivalent to sustain a number of variant readings all consistent with moments abstracted from the text. The bourgeois Nora, the radical Nora, and the existential Nora are all manifestly *there*—sporadically if not simultaneously. What all three feminist critiques share, however, is a tendency to read Nora as an Antigone *manquée* a more—or—less admirable survivor of a Scribean *drame à thèse*, whose solution to the woman's problem lies well within her grasp. There is, after all, nothing irremediably tragic in Nora's predicament for the bourgeois feminist. She merely needs to become more like a man to resolve her problem. Does she not, after all, hanker after Torvald's condition? Was it not a source of tremendous satisfaction for her to earn some money independently? "It was almost like being a man," she admits. (*A Doll's House*, 1961:216) Men, moreover, are privileged to blaspheme in the family parlour, and Nora longs to exercise her prerogative: "I would simply love to say:

'Damn'." (*A Doll's House*, 1961:220) What bourgeois feminism fails to account for, however, is that men's words have a significantly different semantic meaning in the woman's mouth. *Død og pine* [death and pain] may be a casual oath for Torvald. For Nora it is the lived-through experience of the doll's house, the torment of the spirit that she reveals to purblind male eyes through the anguish of the tarantella. The 'miracle' in *A Doll's House* has very little to do with Nora's changing into a man, if that were either possible or desirable. "The most wonderful thing of all," as Nora envisions it in the closing lines of the dialogue, would be a transformation of masculine-feminine dynamics so profound as to change the very basis of social and sexual existence. In Hegelian terms, her 'miracle' looks towards an *Aufhebung*, a blending of transformed male and female principles into a new amalgam—that which Ibsen designated as the Third Empire attained (if ever) through tragic aspiration towards this elusive cultural ideal.<sup>4</sup>

Radical feminism, similarly, prefers not to contemplate the tragic. Kate Millett's insurrectionist Nora, battling the patriarchy with her revolutionary band like some latter-day Dulle Gret, ignores the fact that there is *no* supportive sisterhood in the play, nor any militant invocation to slam the door on marriage. And Joan Templeton conspicuously ignores the presence of Kristine Linde, Nora's *vertimod*, who enters the doll's house to escape the appalling loneliness and insecurity of the displaced woman. Nora's impulse towards freedom is simultaneously a kind of dying, just as every other emancipatory gesture in Ibsen's plays—Mrs. Alving's, Hedda Gabler's, Rebekka West's—is inseparable from the tragic implications of its achievement.<sup>5</sup> What 'dies' is not only the doll, so secure in her macaroon-filled Paradise, but every role that gives the woman definition and defines her world of emotional needs. The freedom she embraces is synonymous with the landscape into which she steps: the ice-bound, frozen waste of a Northern winter, which she must now call home. Like Antigone in her Pyrrhic victory, she pays a dreadful price for her principles.

For the existential feminist, all is ambivalent. In their terms, Nora abandons one romantic notion, based on illusion and fantasy, for another based upon the primacy of selfhood. So the troubling questions remain: How realistic is her choice in the long run? Is it not another illusion to imagine that she will 'make it' in a world which is impervious to change? Can she create a new order in history by abandoning her responsibilities to the family? Would it not be more seemly for the new Eve to take her children with her?<sup>6</sup> One way of resolving ambivalence would clearly be to

moderate the demands of selfhood in the very act of asserting it—as Nora does in Ibsen’s untragic alternative ending to the German version of *A Doll’s House*. Sinking to her knees at the door of the nursery where her children sweetly sleep, this Nora commits herself to domestic love and responsibility at the cost of the ‘self’: “Oh,” she cries, “this is a sin against myself, but I cannot leave them.”<sup>7</sup>

Ibsen called this a ‘barbaric outrage’, as it would have been if the absence of copyright law had forced Sophocles to anticipate a similar travesty by marrying Antigone off to Haemon and allowing them to live happily ever after. This may have been the mystic heroine whom Sophocles inherited. But what he created can best be summarized in Ibsen’s preliminary jottings for his modern heroine: a woman who challenges “male society”, “laws drafted by men”, the “husband, with his conventional views of honour [who] stands on the side of the law and looks at the affair with male eyes,” “faith in authority”, and the entire “male point of view”. (*A Doll’s House*, 1961: 436–37) The significant difference between these two heroines is not that one follows the laws of the gods and the other the laws of the self, but that Antigone’s subversion proceeds with the utter certainty of a saint who never doubts, never has to endure the hideous collapse of the world of comfortable illusions, and never has to suffer the recasting of the contents of mind and spirit. Trapped in the contradiction between woman’s “natural instincts” and “faith in authority”, Nora confronts what Ibsen describes not merely as confusion, but “dread and terror”, “despair, resistance, and defeat” (*A Doll’s House*, 1961:437). One might even go so far as to describe Antigone as a Nora *manquée*.

### III

Hegel asks us to regard the dialectics of *Antigone* as a conflict of ethical substance—the sanctity of family law in collision with the legality of the State—in which each side in the debate is essentially *right* but *incomplete*. But as an embodiment of individual human rights, or ‘natural justice’, or the law of the gods, Hegel’s Antigone remains a curiously abstract and disembodied principle. What we need to see is that at the centre of her experience is the horror of a brother’s unburied corpse, left to rot in the sun as meat for stray dogs and scavengers. What possesses Antigone is outrage at the indecency heaped upon the human body, the desecration of someone known and loved by the promulgation of a legal ordinance. Her motives in opposing Creon’s decree are overwhelmingly personal and instinctive, driven by love, and guided by a sense of the



dignity which is man's right even in death. It is her whole emotional and pre-rational being that rises in revolt against Creon's written law.

And Hegel asks us to sympathize with Creon and concede to the principles for which he stands: law and order, the stability of the State, and the authority of government. But his moral right to issue the law against the burial of Polynices slowly drains away as we hear his rhetoric slide from a specious defence of democratic systems to the hysteria of a tyrant who manipulates the system by a ruthless exertion of unjustifiable authority. Hegel clings tenaciously to the unassailable legality of the State and the written codes of government without probing the point where the enactment of law compromises itself in private motives and dirty politics. Creon stands for legality, twisted and bent to his own purposes. Antigone cares nothing for codified systems that violate her sense of decency and the primal sanctity of human connections; and the great choral odes on 'Man' and 'Love' define the life-affirming values for which she is prepared to die.

It is virtually impossible to read the play as a conflict of ethical substance when Creon, in his appalling spiritual shallowness, dismisses the impulses of Antigone's humanity as a woman's folly, a girl's disobedience, and female lawlessness. For Antigone, an innate sense of justice precedes the documents that codify it into State legislation. It is not imposed upon men by systems, but is organic and rooted in moral insight, in her pre-legal intimation of basic human decency. As such it grows and develops; and unless the male-governed State can evolve in some correlated manner with the woman's subversion-through-love, the law will continue to punish people who, in Antigone's final lines, "[honour] / Those things to which honour truly belongs." (*Antigone*, 1964:151) The threat to Creon is peculiarly feminine. The law is broken by a "girl's proud spirit" (*Antigone*, 1964:139), by crazed female obstinacy, and by a love which he scorns as merely the "lust and wiles of a woman." (*Antigone*, 1964:143) "We'll have no woman's law here," he asserts; and he orders his guards to remove her to "the proper place for women" (*Antigone*, 1964:140, 142)—out of the public forum, one assumes, and into the doll's house.

The dialectics of the *Antigone* are everywhere apparent in *A Doll's House*—from Torvald's condescending dismissal of Nora's feather-brained sense of how the law operates, to the great final confrontation where his constellation of male 'duties' confronts her mode of moral conscience. But if I were confined to a single instance of man's law challenged by woman's subversive logic, I would turn to the scene in

which two victims of social legality—Krogstad and Nora—respond to the State's view of their criminal activity. Both have forged documents: he with deliberate intention to defraud, she with casual insouciance:

KROGSTAD: Mrs. Helmer, it's quite clear you still haven't the faintest idea what it is you've committed. But let me tell you, my own offence was no more and no worse than that, and it ruined my entire reputation.

NORA: You? Are you trying to tell me that you once risked everything to save your wife's life?

KROGSTAD: The law takes no account of motives.

NORA: Then they must be very bad laws.

KROGSTAD: Bad or not, if I produce this document in court, you'll be condemned according to them.

NORA: I don't believe it. Isn't a daughter entitled to try and save her father from worry and anxiety on his deathbed? Isn't a wife entitled to save her husband's life? I might not know very much about the law, but I feel sure of one thing: it must say somewhere that things like this are allowed. You mean to say you don't know that—you, when it's your job? You must be a rotten lawyer, Mr. Krogstad.

KROGSTAD: That may be. But when it comes to business transactions—like the sort between us two—perhaps you'll admit I know something about *them*?

(*A Doll's House*, 1961:229)

There is a nice opposition here between the private motive of the woman, and the law which is sublimely indifferent to it; between her sense of moral justice which precedes utterance, and his written documents and codes that condemn whatever they cannot accommodate; between *bevæggrunde* and *forretninger*, [motives] and [legal transactions], humane value and business value. The natural justice of the loving heart is an axiom in Nora's vision of the law, one of those self-evident truths subjected to scornful dismissal by rotten and decent lawyers alike. "Just like a woman!" says Torvald of his wife's naiveté about a widow's testamentary obligations. (*A Doll's House*, 1961:203) And his response to what she believes the law must allow spills over into a litany of abuse even more contemptuous than Creon's: "Hypocrite ... liar ... criminal! ... I'm done for, a miserable failure, and it's all the fault of a feather-brained woman!" (*A Doll's House*, 1961:277-78) In the *Antigone*, we are left in no doubt that the heroine acts in accordance with God's law. But in Ibsen's demythologized and secular universe there are no Gods to sanction Nora's value-system, no absolutes to grace the woman's 'criminal naiveté' and affirm decency and love as pre-legal imperatives for human conduct. Nora continues to be judged by man's law, even by her existential feminist sisterhood.

In modern dramatizations of the myth, from Jean Anouilh to Athol Fugard, Antigone is presented to us a resistance heroine and a political subversive who undermines the authority of the State. In *A Doll's House* Nora challenges an entire system of thought, the Creon mentality itself that supports the cruel discrepancy between private motive and social legality. Krogstad may be a victim of the law, but instead of opposing its injustice he exploits it to his own advantage and supports the operation of a system that has already engulfed him. Armed with his documents and the codes of mercantile law, he rides roughshod over Nora's principle of motive and, like the Creons of the world, compels legality into the service of blackmail. He survives by working within the system and deploying it against society, whereas Nora's morality subverts that system by postulating a radical alternative that cannot coexist with the law of the State except in some Third Empire of the political life. Her mode of thought, like Antigone's, may indeed seem feather-brained and criminal and "just like a woman" to the modern Creon—but it also constitutes a danger to conventional ways of regarding legality, a form of lateral thinking that calls into question the sufficiency of male-dominated systems that take no account of the woman's perspective. 'Natural instinct', to use Ibsen's terminology in the *Notes*, vies for equality with 'authority'; and the woman's argument that "I did it for love, didn't I?" challenges the man's blinkered reliance upon codes of masculine honour and law. (*A Doll's House*, 1961:437)

Ibsen's image of the "exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view" (*A Doll's House*, 1961:436) is particularly evident in the scene where Nora pleads Krogstad's case before the unremitting judgment of her husband. Can she persuade this nineteenth-century Creon to acknowledge the necessity of Antigone's principle? Can Krogstad be condemned, she argues, if he acted out of need? But *nød* [destitution, desperation] belongs to the woman's realm of motive, and Torvald dismisses Nora's argument for mercy in favour of the unrelenting stringency of the law. Pleading what is in effect her own cause, she asks him to acknowledge that dire circumstances often deprive us of choice. And as if echoing one of Creon's speciously liberal concessions, Torvald admits that men cannot be condemned for a single delinquency—but that the system, nevertheless, demands retribution and punishment. "I am not heartless," he says. But there can be no exceptions. And we hear his rhetoric slowly disintegrate into the clichés of moral puritanism that finally reveal a deep-rooted personal animosity against a man who makes

him sick to the pit of his stomach. His actions against Krogstad are viciously unfair; but the law allows it; and as long as private motive can be accommodated within social legality, the system will continue to flourish without fear of feather-brained opposition. Nora's great subversive challenge to the man's world is the genuinely revolutionary impulse, with all its tragic implications, at the heart of the play.

#### IV

The conflict in the play leaves Nora initially "depressed and confused by her faith in authority," writes Ibsen; and the outcome may be "despair, resistance, defeat." (*A Doll's House*, 1961:437) But what Sandra Saari calls the heroine's "purposive vision" is never in question. It is morally clear-sighted in the miracle it foresees through a radical change in attitudes and thought; and it is painfully realistic in acknowledging that such change depends on a cultural revolution more profound than legal reform, and that society may not yet be ready for Antigone. In 1886, Eleanor Marx was captivated by the visionary element in *A Doll's House*, by its profound subversion of convention, and by what she believed to be Ibsen's optimistic (perhaps Marxist?) philosophy of social change. By way of postscript, I want to discuss very briefly the views of that most tragic of socialist feminists, and try to recreate the terms in which she read Ibsen's play as a miraculous triumph of a Marxist Antigone over Creon's capitalist oppression.

Eleanor Marx did not publish her thoughts on the play, but she read Nora's speeches at Socialist gatherings, quoted from *A Doll's House* in her articles, and played host to the first legitimate reading in England of Ibsen's play on January 15, 1886. Bernard Shaw was invited to read Krogstad; and Eleanor and her common-law husband, Edward Aveling, played Nora and Torvald with the utter conviction that, in their house in Great Russell Street, Ibsen's 'miracle of miracles' had already occurred. In that same month they had jointly published an article in *The Westminster Review* entitled "The Woman Question: From a Socialist Point of View", a revolutionary document in the history of socialist feminism in which they argue that, without the larger social revolution, women never will be free.

For Eleanor Marx, the 'miracle' was Marxist change with its promise of economic and intellectual emancipation for women and the labour-classes alike. She had just reviewed August Bebel's book on *Woman in the Past, Present, and Future* for *Commonweal*, the official journal of the Socialist League (Marx 1885); and it is fascinating to watch

a sensibility shaped by the major socialist publications of the time incorporating Ibsen into an alliance. Bebel's book must have read like a gloss on the problems of the Helmers. She learned from him that "the emancipation of man and that of woman are equal necessities, and that we cannot have the one without the other. Men and women must both, in a word, become 'human beings'." (Marx 1885:63) Ibsen would surely have concurred. But then Eleanor Marx makes the leap that firmly allies her feminism with her socialism: because the status of women in society is directly analogous to that of the proletariat, the social situation must transcend middle-class sectarian interests to resolve itself in greater revolutionary action. For the struggle is primarily class-based, not gender-based—an argument that remains the basic premise of modern-day socialist feminists like Caryl Churchill.

Eleanor Marx's article on 'The Woman Question' makes Nora's domestic predicament a metaphor for the exploitation and oppression of the working-classes, where "women are the creatures of an organized tyranny of men, as the workers are the creatures of an organized tyranny of idlers". (Marx and Aveling 1886:211) Bourgeois marriage is at best a business transaction, at worst a form of serfdom sanctioned by law. But come the revolution—and *A Doll's House* seemed to be its herald—men and women would be joined in free contract, mind to mind, as a whole and harmonious entity. Then "there will no longer be one law for the woman and one for the man;" then "husband and wife will be able to do that which but few can do now—look clean through one another's eyes into one another's heart." (Marx and Aveling 1886:222) This is the miracle that Nora envisions, and that Eleanor Marx claimed to be a living reality in the Eden of her Great Russell Street doll's house.

But the miracle did not last. Aveling proved infinitely more irresponsible and careless in his husbanding than Torvald, infinitely more cruel in his exploitation of men's prerogatives than Creon. He was an emotionally apathetic liar, sexually promiscuous, a bigamist, and an embezzler of party funds. His conduct made a mockery of her Ibsenism to the point where she claimed "even Ibsen has failed us" (see Florence 1975:58). If, like a good socialist feminist, she had gone to *A Doll's House* to corroborate the Marxist hope that cultural change and self-transformation were the happy consequences of subverting the social system, then Ibsen might indeed have betrayed her. In *A Doll's House* spiritual revolution is prior to social change, and there is only a tenuous hope for miracle in a world where evil may be endemic to human nature—as it was to the wretched Edward Aveling's. Eleanor Marx's

career as a socialist feminist began as Nora and ended as Rebekka West, that other emancipated tragedienne. In March 1898, unable to tolerate the doll's house world of emotional cruelty and infidelity any longer, she went to her room and robed herself in a white garment. Then she swallowed a quantity of Prussic acid that she had ordered as 'rat-poison' from the druggist, and probably signed for in the very presence of Edward Aveling. (see Tsuzuki 1967:318)

If I am correct in suggesting that feminism seeks a variety of solutions to gender-based inequities, and that Tragedy contemplates the irremediable in human experience, then to call Nora a 'feminist tragedienne' is to play with oxymoron and paradox. For the time being, however, I want to stay with this designation—at any rate until State Law is made synonymous with God's Law, until the Creons and Edward Avelings of the world transform themselves by miracle into decent and caring men, and until there is some other solution than death for the slighted love of the Antigones and Noras and Eleanors among us.

#### NOTES

1. "A *Doll's House*, Commentary," *The Oxford Ibsen*, Vol.V, edited and translated by James Walter McFarlane (Oxford, 1961), p. 436. All quotations are from this edition. Ibsen's preliminary notes for *A Doll's House* are a clear indication of the ideas that precede the play, although they are clearly modulated in their transformation into drama.

2. Cf. Ibsen's statement to the Norwegian Society for Women's Rights: "Of course it is incidentally desirable to solve the problem of women; but that has not been my sole object ..." Michael Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 807.

3. This extreme negation of the supremacy of the individual is the central thesis of Carol Strongin Tufts in "Recasting *A Doll House*: Narcissism as Character motivation in Ibsen's Play," *Comparative Drama*, 20.2. (1986), pp. 140-59.

4. I have dealt at some length with this idea in *A Doll's House: Ibsen's Myth of Transformation* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

5. I have argued this point in "Ibsen's Liberated Heroines and the Fear of Freedom," *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen*, Vol. V, ed. Daniel Haakonsen (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1985), pp. 11-23.

6. Cf. Elaine Hoffman Baruch, p. 379, where she discusses the views of Elizabeth Hardwick and John Weightman, and outlines the 19th century woman's rights to custody and child-support.

7. See "The Alternative 'German' Ending," *Oxford Ibsen*, V, pp. 287-88.

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## À la rencontre de Dionysos: Edith Södergran entre Nietzsche et Bataille

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*SUMMARY: The Finn Edith Södergran (1892-1923) who is known as a key figure in the introduction of Modernism in Scandinavian poetry also deserves a place in the history of ideas in Europe for articulating with singular precision throughout her work an experience of primordial excess, symbolized by Dionysos, which has played an increasingly important role in Western consciousness since it was defined and proposed as an ideal by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Södergran openly saw herself as his heir, yet she also anticipated further developments of the Dionysian 'ideal' after her death in the writings of Georges Bataille (1897-1962), whose poetics also help illuminate her own approach to poetry, inspired by related aspirations. Similarities and differences between Södergran's perspectives on the Dionysian side of life and those of Nietzsche and Bataille are explored here so as to discern her distinctive contribution to this theme, with particular reference to the existentialist tradition.*

En invoquant Dionysos du même souffle qu'il proclamait la mort de Dieu, Friedrich Nietzsche posait au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle les termes dans lesquels viendrait à se poser pour plusieurs l'aventure spirituelle du XX<sup>e</sup>; d'abord dans l'art et la littérature d'avant-garde, avant de trouver une formulation décisive dans l'oeuvre de Georges Bataille, à l'origine de toute une philosophie du désir éclairant pour une part la culture occidentale de cette fin de millénaire. Privilégiant à maints égards tout ce qui se rapporte à l'Autre comme tel, la marginalité, l'excès, la démesure, la fête, le désir sous toutes ses formes et le côté sauvage de l'être humain, elle trouve une sorte de paradigme dans la figure de Dionysos, cette divinité grecque représentant précisément tout ce qui déborde le cadre de la raison hellénique dans lequel s'est édifié l'Occident. C'est ainsi que Dionysos a pu être pris pour type d'une expérience extatique de la réalité sensuelle

qui, bien que par définition confuse et protéiforme, n'en présente pas moins assez de traits reconnaissables pour être repérable quand elle fait surface dans l'histoire de la littérature. C'est un tel inventaire qu'a tenté récemment R.D. Stock dans *The Flutes of Dionysus*, en mettant toutefois surtout l'accent sur la tradition anglo-saxonne.

Pour le domaine scandinave, dans le contexte de l'évolution de la notion du dionysiaque depuis deux siècles, il existe une précieuse étude sur *Ewald og Bellman som dionysikere* par Elisabeth Kjærbye de l'Université McGill, qui a bien voulu m'en faire voir le manuscrit inédit aux fins du présent article. Celui-ci porte quant à lui sur la poétesse finlandaise d'expression suédoise Edith Södergran (1892-1923), figure-clé dans cette perspective. En effet, son oeuvre se situe à l'origine de l'avant-garde poétique en Scandinavie, mais se présente d'abord comme l'expression d'une approche personnelle de Dionysos, le témoignage d'une expérience de ce dieu à laquelle Södergran attribuait une portée prophétique comme annonce d'un âge nouveau. Si un Yeats a pu à l'occasion—ainsi dans "The Second Coming"—exprimer semblable pressentiment apocalyptique de la venue d'une Bête au regard morne et sans pitié comme le soleil, se traînant vers Bethléem pour y naître (Stock 1987:348-9), c'est la conscience vertigineuse de ce tournant qui sous-tend presque tout l'oeuvre d'Edith Södergran. Se situant consciemment dans le droit fil de Nietzsche, elle préfigure aussi à maints égards les apports de Bataille à l'élucidation du sens qu'a pour les modernes l'expérience signifiée par Dionysos, ainsi que la poétique qu'il en a tirée. Par-delà son rôle dans la littérature scandinave, la place de Södergran dans l'histoire des idées en Europe ne devrait donc pas être négligée, dans la mesure où elle représente à sa manière un stade intermédiaire de l'émergence de Dionysos, et peut-être une autre réponse possible à son énigme.

"Sur la tombe de Nietzsche", Edith Södergran (Boyer 1973:110) se désigne comme son premier enfant. Ayant pour plus grand souhait de le suivre sur la voie du dionysiaque (Olsson 1955:64), elle sera toujours fidèle à la définition que celui-ci en donne:

Mit dem Wort 'dionysisch' ist ausgedrückt: ein Drang zur Einheit, ein Hinausgreifen über Person, Alltag, Gesellschaft, Realität, über den Abgrund des Vergehens; das leidenschaftlich-schmerzliche Überschwellen in dunklere, vollere, schwebendere Zustände; ein verzücktes Jasagen zum Gesamt-Charakter des Lebens, als dem in allem Wechsel Gleichen, Gleich-Mächtigen, Gleich-Seligen; die grosse pantheistische Mitfreudigkeit und Mitleidigkeit, welche auch die furchtbarsten und fragwürdigsten Eigenschaften des Lebens guttheißt und heiligt; der ewige Wille zur

Zeugung, zur Fruchtbarkeit, zur Wiederkehr; das Einheitsgefühl der Notwendigkeit des Schaffens und Vernichtens. (Nietzsche III, 556)

Sous un rapport plus clinique, E. Kjørbye (1989:22–3) a pu parler du transport dionysiaque comme d’“en bestemt indre tilstand, der kendetegnes ved en radikal ændring af bevidstheds- følelses- krops- eller organistilstanden”, “uafhængigt af årsagerne dertil”; or ces causes sont du même ordre chez Södergran que chez Nietzsche, soit une maladie chronique suscitant des états exceptionnels d’acuité perceptuelle, fouettant le désir de vivre. C’est ainsi que l’art pour Nietzsche s’associe à la maladie, qu’il devient paradoxalement grâce à elle la plus haute expression de la vie. “Trotz, oder vielleicht wegen der eigenen Degenereszenz besteht die Sehnsucht nach Stärke und Gesundheit als letzte Wünschbarkeit” (Pütz 1963:10; cf 19, 22, 41). La même exigence traverse la poésie de la tuberculeuse condamnée qu’était Edith Södergran. La ruine progressive du siège de son individualité lui fit remonter à la source de cette force vive qui se dépensait si nonchalamment en elle, exacerbant ses sensations comme elle ravageait son organisme. Elle semblait lui ouvrir l’accès à un moi plus profond, l’“Urwesen” auquel elle pourrait s’unir dans l’“unermeßliche Urlust am Dasein” dont l’éternité invulnérable se laissait deviner pour Nietzsche dans l’extase dionysiaque au milieu du tourment et du conflit. Aussi peut-on comprendre Södergran si l’on consent à apercevoir à travers elle ce que Nietzsche voyait en Archiloque, l’archétype du poète lyrique qu’il opposait à Homère dans *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (I:40) comme le médium d’un dieu, la voix de Dionysos résonnant dans l’artiste hors de l’abîme de l’être comme son véritable sujet—en fait le seul sujet qui soit vraiment.

Hagar Olsson ne s’y était pas trompée en prenant la défense d’Edith Södergran, devenue la cible d’accusations de folie mégalomane à cause de ses interventions intempestives dans la presse suédoise de Helsinki à propos de son second recueil *Septemberlyran* (1918); elle s’y autorisait de Nietzsche pour se désigner individu d’une espèce nouvelle (Olsson 1955:39). Celle qui deviendrait sa seule amie avait alors pu la voir comme l’instrument et le médium de puissances qui la dépassaient, du dieu au cœur de chaque être humain (Olsson 1955:44), Södergran lui ayant confié sa certitude qu’une main plus forte s’était saisie de sa plume durant les jours de septembre 1918 où elle s’était sentie renaître (Olsson 1955:32). Le recueil qui en est sorti débute cependant avec un poème de 1916, proclamation du “Triomphe d’exister” comme “en del av alltets stora kraft”, mais dès l’abord effort de conjurer la peur de s’y résorber (*Triumpf*

*att finnas till*, Södergran 1950:161). Celle-ci cède déjà le pas à la fascination dans les *Dikter* de la même époque, quand il s'agit de choisir entre "smärtan med djupet i ögonen" (Södergran 1950:93) et un bonheur lâche, loin duquel "växa röda rosor kring bottenlösa brunnar" ("Den speglande brunnen", Södergran 1950:105). Peu à peu, Södergran se laisse entraîner aux abords crépusculaires de cet abîme de l'être, transposé dans la dimension temporelle des origines de l'homme: "Violetta skymningar bär jag i mig ur min urtid" (Södergran 1950:54). Des amazones jouent avec des centaures dans ce lieu intérieur secret de réminiscences primordiales, où comme dans l'extase dionysiaque les distinctions s'estompent entre l'humain, l'animal et le divin, le masculin et le féminin (Lévesque 1988:143). "Jag är ingen kvinna. Jag är ett neutrum", proclame juste après la 'Vierge moderne' en levant sa coupe à l'honneur de toutes les femmes (Södergran 1950: 57); mais n'est-ce pas que, comme le rappelle Jean-Pierre Vernant (1965:80), "le dionysisme est d'abord et par prédilection affaire de femmes?"

"Jag är ett steg mot slumpen och fördärvet, / jag är ett språng i friheten och självet ..." (Södergran 1950:57), dit encore cette 'Vierge moderne', usant de termes très proches de ceux qu'emploierait une vingtaine d'années plus tard Georges Bataille en développant l'idée nietzschéenne du dionysiaque dans la direction d'une "expérience intérieure" de soi sans objet, se perdant dans la folie, le sexe et la mort, dans des états extrêmes où l'individualité cohérente est sciemment, joyeusement ruinée. Le principal modèle historique de l'expérience dionysiaque poursuivie par Bataille, mises à part les sanglantes orgies du culte hellénique, était la pratique aztèque du sacrifice humain de masse, où le coeur des victimes était arraché de leur poitrine pour être offert au soleil. Il est étonnant de constater que l'on retrouve la même imagerie sacrificielle à travers la poésie d'Edith Södergran, évoquant dans maint passage de façon assez frappante—compte tenu de ce qu'elle n'en avait pas conscience, pour autant qu'on sache—les splendeurs sanglantes de la civilisation mexicaine qui stimulèrent tant l'imagination de Georges Bataille à partir des années 20. Il semble bien que le tour spontanément dionysiaque de celle de Södergran l'ait parfois entraînée dans le même territoire qu'allait explorer Bataille après sa mort. On peut ainsi déceler dans l'imagerie qu'elle emploie ce qu'il serait certes tentant d'appeler un 'motif aztèque', empruntant l'expression de Francis Marmande à propos de l'oeuvre de Bataille.

Déjà dans les deux poèmes qu viennent d'être examinés, on peut rapprocher la déclaration de la 'Vierge moderne': "jag är en skrattande strimma av en scharlakanssol" (Södergran 1950:57); et celle de la fille du soleil dans "Violetta skymningar ...": "vi äro de minst väntade ock de djupast röda, / tiger-fläckar, [...]" (Södergran 1950:55), évoquant tant les tigres et panthères marchant avec Dionysos chez Nietzsche (I:24), que ceux auxquels se joint un puma sur les pas d'Orphée dans le poème que Södergran lui consacre (1950:218), ou même les toisons de félins dont se revêtaient les prêtres aztèques. Sang et soleil sont ici associés dans un climat dionysiaque de danger et de sauvage étrangeté, dans l'appréhension fugitive de ce qui se dérobe à toute attente. Leur rouge est si profond parce que c'est celui du sang de la 'Vierge moderne' qui dit: "Jag är blodets viskning i mannens öra" (Södergran 1950:57), le battement de coeur entendu par l'amant dont la tête repose sur son sein. Cette image rappelle ainsi le passage de *Die Geburt der Tragödie* où Nietzsche cite l'effet du troisième acte de *Tristan und Isolde* comme parfait exemple d'une expérience dionysiaque dont le choc devrait causer l'éclatement extatique de l'être humain,

der wie hier das Ohr gleichsam an die Herzkammer des Weltwillens gelegt hat, der das rasende Begehren zum Dasein als donnernden Strom oder als zartesten zerstäubten Bach von hier aus alle Adern der Welt sich ergiessen fühlt. (Nietzsche I:116).

Edith Södergran conclut son poème: "jag är eld och vatten i ärligt sammanhang på fria vilkor ..." (Södergran 1950:57)—du sang chaud, conjoint au soleil dans le coeur. Cette union paradoxale des contraires dans le sang, lieu tant de son indomptable passion pour la vie que de la fièvre qui la rongerait, est littéralement au coeur de la poésie d'Edith Södergran, telle un défi au destin qui dans "Den speglande brunnen" lui dit: "vit skall du leva eller röd skall du dö! / Men mitt hjärta beslött: röd skall jag leva" (Södergran 1950:104). Jaillissant au point de friction de douloureuses contradictions, la flamme rouge de la vie se consume mais c'est justement cette dépense de soi qui est la vie, le feu sans fin dont elle procède. "Vi Eros lekkamrater," dira Södergran dans *Framtidens skugga* (1920), "vi vilja endast ett: / bli eld utav din eld och brinna upp" (Södergran 1950:328).—En d'autres mots, ne faire plus qu'un avec le soleil qui lui semble brûler dans sa poitrine malade du désir de s'épancher sans mesure sur le monde: "Unga bröst ... varför är det så ljust uti dig?" ("En gammal härskare", Södergran 1950:314)—"Solen fyller upp mitt bröst med ljuvlig honung upp till randen", là est le "Triumf att finnas till"

(Södergran 1950:162), et “Fen vill att envar skall vara säll som hon ...” (“Feens slott”, Södergran 1950:189). C’est d’un tel mouvement que découle Zarathoustra pour Bataille, selon la définition nietzschéenne du mystique: “celui qui a assez et trop de son propre bonheur, et qui cherche un langage pour son propre bonheur parce qu’il voudrait en donner”. Tel est le “nouveau sentiment de la puissance: l’état mystique” (Bataille VI:190) auquel fait écho Edith Södergran: “Finnes det ingen som läser hänförelsens kraft i mina ögen?” C’est en ce ravissement extatique que réside la souveraineté pour elle comme pour Bataille: “Jag följer ingen lag. Jag är lag i mig själv” (*Makt*, Södergran 1950:312). Mais comme la souveraineté de la dépense sans mesure doit selon ce dernier faire expier la velléité humaine de n’y point disparaître, l’individu qui s’en prévaut s’offre de lui-même en sacrifice, ainsi que le fait Edith Södergran de son cœur “saint” à un “dieu inconnu”: “Guden högst uppe i molnen—” “den skönaste guden” qui donne son titre à ce poème, “in för vilken allt är stoft” (Södergran 1950:202). “Hur talar jar till eder ur mitt djupaste hjärta?” se demande Södergran:

Jag vill tala att jag öppnar mitt hela bröst för eder  
och att min vilja fattar eder med harda tänger  
såsom en smärta, fruktan, sjukdom, kärlek ...

[...]

Jag ville att I reven sönder edra hjärtan  
och att demonerna fattade säte i edra lemmar  
vilda, omänskliga, sprängande sönder allt liv.

Demoner,

med hela mitt allvar vill jag se eder i ögonen,  
hela mitt väsen tager jag med i min blick.[...]

I tjocka strömmar rinner oavtagligt mitt blod.

Kommen I en gång till mig, I djupens vampirer?

(“Besvärjelsen”, Södergran 1950: 245–6)

“Så stiger smärtans stora hymn ur lyckligt bröst”, conclut Södergran (1950:279) dans le dernier vers du même recueil de 1919, *Rosenaltaret*. “Ingen lättfärdig träder i ringen” (Södergran 1950:253), dans “La ronde” à laquelle les dieux la convient, y dit-elle ailleurs: “När stunden kommer, / da ger du hjärtat ur ditt bröst—” pour le tendre au soleil sans doute, tandis que le sacrificateur revêt la peau de la victime, prend possession de ses membres, ne faisant plus qu’un avec des dieux que des yeux chrétiens ne sauraient voir autrement que comme des “démons, / sauvages, inhumains”, eux qui “font éclater toute vie”. En étonnante conformité d’imagerie avec le ‘motif aztèque’ tel qu’il apparaît chez Bataille dès son article “L’Amérique disparue” de 1929, où il modèle dans ses grands

traits la thématique qui l'occupera désormais, c'est une conception de la poésie comme acte sacrificiel qui se fait jour ici, coïncidant avec celle qu'en aurait Bataille. Pour lui, non seulement le héros tragique, Oreste est-il la figure de la poésie, lui étant ce que la victime est au sacrifice (Cels 1989:107), mais la vie étant une plaie, le poète en est le "sujet hémophile" (Cels 1989:103) dont il entre dans le vif en s'immolant lui-même. Ainsi "la poésie où se perdrait le plus de sang serait la plus forte" (Bataille V:554). De fait, "Besvärjelsen" semble déboucher dans des flots de sang.

Si Georges Bataille fut fasciné par une civilisation mexicaine qui se consuma avec insouciance dans les ruisseaux de sang de sacrifices de masse, à l'aise autant avec la mort et l'horreur qu'avec la vie et sa splendeur, Edith Södergran quant à elle s'exalta en imagination des bains de sang de la Révolution russe et de la guerre civile finlandaise dont les vagues meurtrières passèrent et repassèrent sur sa patrie carélienne. Sa poitrine se soulève à leur rythme, avoue-t-elle en septembre 1918 dans "Le génie de l'Apocalypse" (Södergran 1950:194);—"Brand, rök, lukten av brant kött:" telle était la guerre pour elle, un sacrifice dont elle était un témoin privilégié et l'interprète élue, puisqu'elle lui semblait refléter à l'échelle cosmique le tumulte de son âme et de son corps. Certes, "Världen badar i blod ..." (Södergran 1950:179); mais c'est "för att Gud måtte leva. / Att hans härlighet fortbestår, skall all annan förgås. / Vad veta vi människor hur den evige smäktar / och vad gudarna dricka för att nära sin kraft." Comme les dieux aztèques, celui-ci a besoin de sang pour renouveler la Création. Il est bien "Le génie de l'Apocalypse", maître silencieux des millions d'hommes des armées, qui joue nonchalamment avec eux dans la mort comme plus tard l'Eros de *Framtidens skugga* (1920) le ferait de jeunes corps amoureux. Les vampires de "Besvärjelsen" (*Rosenaltaret*, 1919) lèvent déjà la tête; "Djupen gapa. Outsägliga ting ske bakom ödets förlåt" (Södergran 1950:194). Le voile du destin protège le mystère de la vie ("Livets mystär", Södergran 1950:195), comme un rideau cache la vraie nature du monde: "Ingen har ännu sett världen. / I höljden den bak förhängen." ("Var bo gudarna ...", Södergran 1950:240) Leur secret est la seule richesse qui donne la souveraineté [konungamakt], "[...] en skönhet / den människoögon ej sett" ("Samlen icke guld och ädelstenar", Södergran 1950:204).

L'unique objet du désir sans limite qui semble animer Södergran est ce qui se trouve "derrière le voile de Maya", selon la formule de Nietzsche, reprise de Schopenhauer, qui est un leitmotiv de *Die Geburt*

der Tragödie, et qui trouve souvent un écho dans sa poésie. Suppliante, dans *Septemberlyran* elle prie Dieu ainsi: “giv oss inlåt till den tysta kammare, där du tänker över tingen” (“Bön”, Södergran 1950:176). Elle n’aspire qu’à passer au-delà des apparences au coeur de leur libre jeu, où seul compte le génie de l’espèce et de la Nature et non plus l’individu (Nietzsche I:28)—même celui nommé Edith Södergran, s’il faut l’en croire. “På Himalayas trappor” [“Sur les marches de l’Himalaya”] elle implore Vichnou: “Allsmåktige, / tag mitt liv / för ett ögonblick av dina drömmar ... / Jag vill se vad du vill—och förgås ...” (*Rosenaltaret*, 1919, Södergran 1950:247). “Människor,” proclame-t-elle dans le “Fragment” de *Septemberlyran*, “vi skola glömma oss själva / och bli förenta med Kosmos igen. / Vi skola höra skaparens stämma / tona metalliskt ur tingens bröst” (Södergran 1950:217)—comme la voix de Dionysos derrière les masques des acteurs à la naissance de la tragédie. En accord avec le texte de Nietzsche, elle connaît seulement “einen Künstler–Sinn und –Hintersinn hinter allem Geschehen”. Suivant une expression qui y revient souvent, pour elle le monde ne peut être justifié que comme phénomène esthétique. Son Dieu comme celui de Nietzsche dans son “Versuch einer Selbstkritik”, préface à la réédition de *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, doit être vu comme

einen gänzlich unbedenklichen und unmoralischen Künstler–Gott, der im Bauen wie im Zerstören, im Guten wie im Schlimmen, seiner gleichen Lust und Selbsterherrlichkeit innewerden will, der sich, Welten schaffend, von der Not der Fülle und Überfülle, vom Leiden der in ihm gedrängten Gegensätze löst.  
(Nietzsche I:14)

Södergran suit à la lettre les préceptes amoraux de son maître dans sa quête de l’art ‘cosmique’ de l’avenir: “Det högsta för oss synliga ligger på andra sidan om ont och gott, fult och skönt, där blir det högsta människoanden skapat litet, trångt och alltför mänskligt, [...]” (*Brokiga Iakttagelser*, Södergran 1950:299). Ceci se rapproche de ce que Nietzsche appelle à la fin de sa vie consciente, se référant sans doute à *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, sa “première solution: plaisir tragique de voir sombrer ce qu’il y a de plus haut et de meilleur (parce qu’on le considère comme trop limité par rapport au Tout); mais ce n’est là qu’une façon mystique de pressentir un ‘bien’ supérieur.” C’est donc sans doute vers sa ‘dernière solution’ que penche Bataille en le citant: “le bien suprême et le mal suprême sont identiques.” (Bataille VI:190) Södergran en reste quant à elle à la solution mystique, comme le confirmera son évolution ultérieure. Mais pour elle comme pour Nietzsche, seule raison d’être, la beauté est



“varje överflöd, varje glöd, varje överfyllnad och varje stort armod” (“Skönhet” dans *Dikter*, 1916; Södergran 1950:112).

Cette vision tragique du beau lui fit très tôt envisager l’avenir sous des traits dionysiaques, comme ceux d’une jeune femme belle et hardie qui s’avançait déjà à grands pas à travers une terre baignée de sang dans un poème qu’elle écrivit en 1907 en allemand (la meilleure langue de cette élève de la Petrischule, lycée de jeunes filles de sa ville natale de Saint-Petersbourg qu’avait fréquenté avant elle Lou Salomé, le grand amour de Nietzsche). “Evidently,” commente George Schoolfield (1984:31), “the apostle-to-be of Nietzsche was ready to accept, and approve, the sacrifices, and even the injustices, which revolution would entail.” Il attire aussi l’attention sur un poème de la même époque où elle interpelle Enjolras, l’agitateur étudiant des *Misérables* de Victor Hugo, comme le beau prêtre de la Révolution, au visage pur et féminin et à l’allure virile (Schoolfield, 1984:30). Les traits androgynes de son chef archétypique autant que sa fonction religieuse révèlent l’essence clairement dionysiaque de la Révolution pour Edith Södergran, qui lui permet de chanter l’Avenir comme la Révélation de Dionysos. C’en est un en effet où “Himmelen själv vill stiga ned på jorden. / Älsken ingenting annat än oändligheten! är hans första bud” (“Fragment”, Södergran 1950: 213). Sa parole suscite une nouvelle création au delà de toute compréhension, qui se meut “som en bävan / över halvvakna sinnen. Det är som en svindel inför avgrunders blick. / Innan jublande körer brista ut i en lovsång / är det tyst som i skogen förrän solen går upp” (Södergran 1950:180).

Dans cette mise en scène cosmique d’une célébration dionysiaque, les Bacchantes, ayant couru toute la nuit à travers la forêt, sont saisies d’une terreur sacrée en entrevoyant dans leur ivresse leur dieu fugace, et sont sur le point de chanter un péan à sa gloire, réalisant que “Världen badar i blod för att Gud måtte leva” (Södergran 1950:179). Parmi cette troupe, les ménades—dévotes qui dans leur identification frénétique avec Dionysos déchiraient à mains nues la chair de victimes animales et humaines, auraient sans doute le mieux compris “la Stipulation” [“Villkoret”] posée par Edith Södergran en septembre 1918: “Den som icke med blodiga naglar / bryter sin bräcka i vardagens mur / —må förgås därutanför— / han ej är värd att skåda solen” (Södergran 1950:193). Comme “solens förfärande boll” est arraché, le globe du soleil énucléolé comme souvent l’oeil chez Bataille qui l’y identifie (II:14), “Våra gamla

ögon se intet mer. / Vi kunna ej knota.[...] Undergående välsigna vi dig, obegripliga stjärnenatt” (“Fragment”, Södergran 1950: 216).

Ces paroles rappellent le mépris qu’exprimerait Bataille, dans l’essai où il développe son phantasme d’un troisième oeil pinéal au sommet du crâne, pour les foules bureaucratisées n’osant jamais lever la tête pour regarder le soleil qui ne peut être vu en face (Bataille II:42, cf Nietzsche II:55), puisque son éclat est aveuglant et donc symboliquement fatal. Voir ce qui ne peut être vu—l’Impossible, c’est en être aveuglé, car c’est ce qui se dérobe à tout regard objectivant, et la négation même du sujet qu’il excède. C’est bien pourquoi on pourrait être avide de ce regard qui entraîne au-delà de l’individualité vers une impossible réalisation de soi. Quand on fixe le soleil, “l’acte de regarder en face équivaut à l’identification” (Bataille II:15), réalisant mystiquement l’“envie irrésistible de devenir soi-même soleil (soleil aveuglé ou soleil aveuglant, peu importe)” (Bataille II:14). C’est ce qui explique “Besvärjelsen” [“La conjuration”] par laquelle Södergran désirait si ardemment regarder ses démons dans les yeux, prenant tout son être dans ce regard, et s’identifiant avec ses victimes sacrificielles, telle un prêtre au sommet d’une pyramide aztèque: “debout sur la montagne sous le soleil”, elle peut dire dans le “Triomphe d’exister” (Boyer 1973:89): “Jag går på sol, jag står på sol, / jag vet av ingenting annat än sol.” (“Triumf att finnas till ...”, Södergran 1950:161). C’est sa seule réponse à l’unique question de sa philosophie: “Hur kan det vara så sällt i ett bröst?” Elle sait qu’elle sera “avsvimmad i solen”, ni morte ni victorieuse, “en sol som icke uthärdar sin egen uppgång” (Södergran 1950:359). Et pour cause: “Jag vet så visst, som att solen går upp, / att jag aldrig skall skåda det ändlösa ögonblick, da hon står i zenit” (*Framtidens skugga*, Södergran 1950:321). Non seulement le soleil défie-t-il toute vision, il la détruit par sa nature même, comme chez Bataille l’homme entier est consumé par l’ouverture de l’oeil pinéal (Bataille II:11-47).

Ce paradoxe des approches de l’Impossible, auquel tend le désir sans limites aux dépens de la vie qui prétend durer, était devenu terriblement familier à Edith Södergran au moment où elle écrit ce poème qui donna son titre à son dernier recueil publié, *L’ombre de l’avenir* (*Framtidens skugga*, 1920). Sa santé déclinante lui rendait de plus en plus sensible la condition qui fait qu’être en vie, c’est être en train de mourir. Mais pour Bataille, “l’homme poétique ne vit intensément que de savoir qu’il meurt à chaque instant” (Cels 1989:125). Or justement, l’expansion spontanée de la vie vers le futur devenait ainsi du même coup

pour Södergran l'avancée palpable de la mort, et en était pourtant stimulée. Aussi les deux réalités se mêlaient-elles dans son inspiration, si bien que, sentant "l'ombre de la mort" [Jag anar dödens skugga], elle pouvait dire du même souffle: "Framtiden kastar på mig sin saliga skugga; / den är ingenting annat än flödande sol: / genomborrad av ljus skall jag dö," (Södergran 1950:321-2) comme Icare. Menée par le Dieu qui lui a donné l'"Insouciance" ("Sorglöshet", Södergran 1950:198) "ur dimman till solens strålande disk", dans "L'ombre de l'avenir" elle en vient à réaliser qu'elle ne peut survivre au baiser du soleil:

Solen har kysst mig. Så kysser ingenting på jorden.  
 Är det att leva evigt som vittne av detta ögonblick,  
 ack nej, att stiga upp för de lodräta strålarna  
 närmare henne.  
 En gång  
 skall jag spinna mig i solen som en fluga i bärnsten,  
 för eftervärlden blir det ingen klenod,  
 men jag har varit i sällhetens glödande ugn.  
 [...] (Solen, Södergran 1950:329)

Dans sa version du mythe d'Icare, Södergran, comme la mouche de son poème, n'est pas abattue par le soleil, mais plutôt incorporée dans la fluide substance de sa flamme, transformée pour ainsi dire alchimiquement dans le four ardent de la félicité, et préservée là dans une éternité d'ambre. Ceci met en lumière ce qui distingue son imaginaire de celui de Bataille. En effet, dans la perspective purement 'cthonique' où se plaçait ce dernier, le ciel ne pouvait devenir fascinant qu'une fois retourné comme un gant, devenu puits béant au fond duquel le soleil pourrissait comme un cadavre, figure obscène de la mort (Bataille I:27). Aussi pour lui le vrai sens du sort d'Icare ne réside que dans sa chute fatale, si bien que, n'hésitant pas à englober même Nietzsche dans sa critique pour avoir sacrifié à un honteux romantisme, il pouvait dénoncer l'aspiration aux hauteurs s'exprimant dans l'imagerie de ce mythe comme un désir déguisé et hypocrite de la mort. "Mais les individus ne veulent arracher le feu du ciel que pour s'anéantir, agissant comme des mites en présence de flammes d'acétylène", dit Bataille (II:100) dans une version significativement plus grossière de la métaphore entomologique employée par Södergran. Au contraire de lui, celle-ci correspond au "type même du poète vertical, du poète des sommets, du poète ascensionnel" que Gaston Bachelard (1943:147) a pu reconnaître en Nietzsche, dont Södergran partage le psychisme.

Si elle suit donc son maître dans son élan mystique vers des hauteurs éthérées, plutôt que de s'abandonner sans réserve avec Bataille au sombre grouillement pulsionnel révélé par Dionysos, Södergran n'en ressent pas moins avec une certaine clarté les exigences que Bataille posera à la poésie. Il est vrai que ce sont en grande partie les mêmes que celles du Nietzsche de *La généalogie de la morale*, avec qui Bataille voyait dans les poètes "l'espèce des onanistes moraux qui se satisfont d'eux-mêmes", "avortons menteurs qui veulent représenter les 'belles âmes' et lancer sur le marché, drapée dans de la poésie et autres fioritures, leur sensualité estropiée, décorée du nom de 'pureté du coeur'!" (trad. Henri Albert, cité dans Cels 1989:57). De même pour Södergran, "skönhet är icke den tunna såsen i vilken diktare servera sig själva, / schönhet är att föra krig och söka lycka, / schönhet är att tjäna högre makter" (Södergran 1950:113). — Sans doute sont-ce les "voix de la félicité" qu'elle perçoit dans son "Extase" mais qu'un monde réprouvé ne peut entendre parce qu'il dort "dans le sein de sa mère" (Boyer 1973:190). Proclamant dans *Apokalypsens genius* que "Sångens anda är kriget", Södergran (1950:195) répond d'avance à la critique de Bataille selon Cels (1989:122):

Quand on s'appelle Icare, on se laisse aveugler par ce soleil où, certes, les contradictions ont l'apparent bonheur de fonder pour autoriser l'espoir de la terre promise. Mais le problème est là: le désir de retrouver la merveilleuse harmonie perdue (qui fait songer à celui de retrouver la paix maternelle d'avant la naissance) laisse rigoureusement intact le monde en guerre qui l'a suscité. De cette façon, rien ne change. La poésie est une fausse sortie.

D'où cette proposition de Bataille: "Comment échapper/ à la poésie/ en remontant à la source/ qui est l'Impossible" (Bataille III:514). Elle devient ainsi pour lui "la simple évocation par les mots de possibilités inaccessibles" (cité dans Cels 1989:70), en quoi elle s'oppose à la philosophie (Cels, 1989:123). Södergran le sait bien, qui se détourne du bonheur qu'elle devine "i filosofens hus", préférant à ce joli coquillage "Mina sagoslott" "på sköra pelare obeskrivliga"; elle les aime trop, leur commande de mourir, de s'abattre "i gyllne grus", pour les reconstruire frissonnante, et les tuer à nouveau "—alltför sköna" (Södergran 1950:237–8).

Är detta dikter? Nej, det är trasor, smulor,  
vardagens papperslappar.  
Tantalus, fyll din bägare.  
Omöjlighet, omöjlighet,  
döende kastar jag en gång kransen från mina locker i din eviga tomhet.  
(Södergran 1950:326)

La poésie de Södergran est celle de l'inaccessible, se révélant comme telle dès le premier vers de son premier recueil, dans l'image de "Jag såg en träd" des pommes de pin hors de portée sur un arbre plus grand que tous; c'est celle de ses approches fatales, où la poésie ne peut que se nier d'une manière ou d'une autre selon Bataille (III:532-3): soit en se dépassant dans un impossible accomplissement, soit en refluant vers la zone de ce qui peut être dit. Södergran en est bien consciente, qui cherche les mots "som aldrig suttit på människotunga" ("Lidandets kalk", Södergran 1950:235) tout en sachant qu'ils ne doivent ni ne peuvent l'être. D'où sa "Beslut" ["Résolution"], une fois pesée la domesticité [tamheten] dans ses serres d'aigles: "Du skall aldrig dikta mer. / Varje dikt skall vara sönderrivandet utav en dikt, / icke dikt, men klömarken" (Södergran 1950:364). Elle renchérit dans "Blixtens trängtan": "Jag är örn. / Det är min bekännelse. / Icke diktare, / aldrig något annat" (Södergran 1950:365). Car elle méprise tout ce qui n'est pas l'Eternel Retour qui faisait la force de Nietzsche (*Brokiga Iakttagelser*, Södergran 1950:300) et qu'elle voit dans le vol de l'aigle, quand soudain: "En blixt skjuter ner på himlen i ändlös begärlighet" (Södergran 1950:365)—un peu comme l'aigle "précipité du haut des cieux" par l' "envie absurde" de "contempler le soleil face à face" que, se réclamant des Anciens, lui a attribué Bataille en rêvant de 'L'oeil pinéal' (I:14-15).

C'est déjà là un exemple de l'expiation dont doit se payer selon Bataille la souveraineté de qui suit le mouvement de la poésie du connu à l'inconnu, ne pouvant déboucher que sur la folie. Si le poète s'y abandonne, il perd l'esprit ou la vie, se met au ban de la société, coupable devant elle, et s'il s'y dérobe, prétendant vivre de ce qui lui est fatal en disant l'indicible, c'est la poésie qu'il trahit au profit de la société, et lui-même qu'il tue. Södergran a une conscience aiguë de ce dilemme insoluble où Bataille voit enfermée la poésie: "Är jag en brottsling, är min synd omätlig ... / Är jag en gycklare, är jag det med heliga ting ... / Är jag en lögnare, må jag störta från himlen / krossad på Edra torg" (Södergran 1950:205). Mouche dans un soleil d'ambre, elle ne veut pas que celui—ce devienne un joyau pour la postérité ("Solen", cité plus haut), et enjoint aux humains: "samlen icke guld och ädelstenar: / fyllen edra hjärtan med längtan, / som bränner likt glödande kol." (Södergran 1950:204). Tel est pour Bataille le résidu de la poésie qui fait sa valeur en même temps qu'elle-même lui fait obstacle dans la mesure où elle le récupère (Perniola 1982:40) pour le fixer aussitôt dans les images qu'elle ramène de l'inconnu: "Même les images profondément ruinées sont

domaine de possession" (Bataille V:387). En font foi les "décombres d'or" que tire Södergran des "Châteaux fabuleux" (Boyer 1973:134) qu'elle s'obstine à rebâtir. Ils ont encore cette valeur d'échange à laquelle Bataille voudra soustraire la poésie.

Mais plus grave encore à ses yeux eût été la prétention d'Edith Södergran à "consacrer l'humanité tout entière à l'avenir" (Boyer 1973:169), qui lui fait dire: "Mina flammande råder skall varje barn läsa. / Jag skall omvända alla till en heligare gud" (Södergran 1950:310). Edith Södergran tombe ici sous le coup des critiques sévères adressées par Bataille aux surréalistes et à travers eux au projet des avant-gardes artistiques de se substituer à la société qu'elles condamnent dans un futur âge d'or poétique, ce qui est pour lui le dernier stade de la mégalomanie du poète: "imaginer qu'un jour tous sauront sa royauté et, s'étant reconnus en lui, le confondront avec eux-mêmes (un peu de naïveté abandonne sans retour à ce charme facile: goûter la possession de l'avenir.)" (Bataille V:179). Or on sait à quel point Södergran eut cette naïveté, elle qui plaça une si grande part de son oeuvre dans "l'ombre de l'avenir" dont elle se croyait la maîtresse, alors que pour Bataille "rien n'est souverain qu'à une condition: ne pas avoir l'efficacité du pouvoir, qui est action, primat de l'avenir sur le moment présent, primat de la terre promise" (Citée dans Perniola 1982:31). Il n'en demeure pas moins qu'on ne saurait peut-être trouver de témoignage plus exact de la problématique de l'impossible qui est celle de la poésie pour Bataille que ce poème de Södergran, saisissant le moment précis du reflux prenant le dessus à la limite où elle tend, le "Tourbillon de la folie":

Akta din båt för övermänskliga strömdrag,  
vanvettets virvelstup—  
akta din båt för fallets jublande vågor,  
de slå sönder.  
Akta dig—här gäller icke mera du—  
liv och död äro ett för kraftens frenetiska fröjd,  
här finnes intet 'langsamt', 'försiktigt', 'försök'.  
Starkare händer fatta i flykten din åra.  
Där står du själv, en hjälte med omfött blod.  
Hänryckt i lugnet, ett fröjdebal på speglade is,  
som vore dödens bud icke skrivet för dig:  
saliga vågor föra din köl framåt.

(Södergran 1950:185)

Dans la barque qui est ici soustraite *in extremis* au maelstrom du délire dionysiaque où elle allait s'engouffrer sans retour, il n'est pas difficile de reconnaître le *principio individuationis*, esquif voguant sur

l'océan tourmenté de l'existence, dont Nietzsche (I:23) reprend l'image à Schopenhauer dans *Die Geburt der Tragödie* pour introduire le lecteur au principe de l'ordre apollinien faisant contrepoids à la force sauvage de Dionysos. Quant aux "mains plus fortes" qui "saisissent au vol la rame", on les retrouvera dans le *Retour à la maison* de Södergran à la fin de sa vie, quand "en väldig beskyddare räcker mig nådigt sin hand." (*Hemkomst*, Södergran 1950:386). Et les "vagues heureuses" qui la poussent hors de danger ne sont-elles pas déjà celles du désir qui viennent mourir sur la rive de l'éternité dans les ultimes vers où elle pressent son "Ankomst till Hades" ["Arrivée en Hadès"]? Mais Héraclite ne prétend-il pas que Hadès et Dionysos ne font qu'un? (*Fragment 15*, cité dans Eliade 1978:363)

Chez Bataille, une telle identité est pressentie dans ce qu'il appelle la "chance", quand "une sorte de rupture—dans l'angoisse—nous laisse à la limite des larmes: alors nous nous perdons, nous oublions nous-mêmes et communiquons avec un au-delà insaisissable" (V:23). Telle est aussi l'"Extase" dionysiaque pour Södergran: "Lust, som blir smärta, / sällhet man blott skådar med tårar i ögonon och dör bort." Si Bataille pourra intituler un de ses livres *Les larmes d'Eros*, "ve, sällhet" (Södergran 1950:353) ainsi entremêlés reviennent constamment dans *Framtidens skugga* (1920) et les lettres contemporaines où Södergran décrit l'Eros cosmique qu'elle en était venue à identifier avec le Wille zur Macht nietzschéen (Olsson 1955:92), et donc avec Dionysos.

Car le poète finnois Aale Tynni avait raison de dire que l'Eros d'Edith Södergran surgit du sein de son Dionysos (cité dans Schoolfield 1984:107). Il prend alors la forme d'une "infernalsk electricitet" qui lui arrache dans une lettre à son amie ce cri de ménade: "Sara mig du, Hagar!" (Olsson 1955:91). Ailleurs, "det är som om flammor sloge ur mig, jag längtar efter storm lidande och havandeskap" (Olsson 1955:64). Cet "intense and self-engendered eroticism" aux propriétés électriques (Schoolfield 1984:109) est au coeur des "Mystères de la chair" célébrés dans un recueil qui devait d'abord porter ce titre. Dans *L'ombre de l'avenir* (comme celui-ci fut intitulé finalement), il se répand en étincelles de "lueur bleue" [blaa sken] ("Aning", Södergran 1950:349) et d' "éclair bleu" [blaa blix] ("Blixten", Södergran 1950:344), en une étrange anticipation de l'énergie érotique universelle de couleur bleue—l'"orgone"—qui obsèdera un jour Wilhelm Reich.

Mais cette force se laisse aussi comparer au '*pouvoir électrique des pointes*' qui consume la tête dans la '*métamorphose érotique*' dont surgit

l'oeil pinéal de Bataille, transformant le corps en un superconducteur pour l'énergie du soleil (Bataille II:25). De même dans l'extase de l'"Animalisk Hymn" de Södergran, "Ny lyser solen in i vara hjärtans innersta vrå / fyllande allt med tanklöshet / stark som skogen, vintern och havet" (Södergran 1950:362). Ceci n'est d'ailleurs pas sans rappeler les états tant apolliniens que dionysiaques décrits par Nietzsche (III: 636-7), "in denen die Kunst selbst wie eine Naturgewalt im Menschen auftritt, über ihn verfügend, ob er will oder nicht."

Cependant, si le mythe de Bataille (II:25) "s'identifie non seulement avec la vie mais avec la perte de la vie—avec la déchéance et la mort", l'Eros de Södergran lui fait miroiter la promesse de les surmonter dans une réintégration—certes impersonnelle—dans le cycle éternel de la Nature toute—puissante, selon l'interprétation de la sagesse de Goethe que lui avait fournie l'anthroposophie de Rudolf Steiner, devenu rival de Nietzsche en son esprit. Ce "secret d'Eros" le révèle aussi ambigu, amoral et violent que Dionysos: "du är icke man ock kvinna, / du är den kraft, / som sitter nedhukad i templet" (Södergran 1950:342); "vad drömmer hans vilda håg?"—dans son regard brûlant [... ser han med brinnande blick].(Södergran 1950:343) s'agit la puissance qui, "vildare än ett skrån, / häftigare än en slungad sten" ("Eros hemlighet", Södergran 1950:342), crée le monde à nouveau ["Eros skapar världen ny"]. Ce triomphe d'Eros a pour instrument le corps rompu de Södergran, qui exténuée gît "lik en trasa / för att en gång, fattad av elektriska händer, / fastare än all jordens malm, / sända blixten." ("Blixten", Södergran 1950:344). Par le mystère de son corps, la puissance sans limite d'Eros va frapper le monde et le sauver, prétend-elle encore dans "Instinkt": "det är makten, för vilken ej avgrund finns, som står framför eder." (Södergran 1950:346). Son cœur se tient "över avgrunder och triumferar" "som livet självt" ("Fyra små dikter", Södergran 1950:360), conformément à l'intuition capitale de Nietzsche (I:47), "daß das Leben im Grunde der Dinge, trotz allem Wechsel der Erscheinungen unzerstörbar mächtig und lustvoll sei."

Aussi tard qu'octobre 1921, "well on her way from Nietzscheanism to Steinerism, and Christianity" (Schoolfield 1984:98), Edith Södergran pouvait encore rapporter à Hagar Olsson (1955:172) "svara dionysiska anfall med behov att fysiskt kasta mig i luften och dansa, dansa. Vore jag frisk, skulle jag springa i skogarna och dans tiotals kilometer", suivant à la lettre la pratique de l'oreibasia caractérisant les fêtes dionysiaques de la Grèce antique (Eliade 1978:477). Edith Södergran était donc dans un état voisin de celui des Bacchantes tel que décrit par Nietzsche (I:25),



comme elles “auf dem Wege, tanzend in die Lüfte emporzufliegen.” Ainsi a-t-elle pu écrire: “Sällheten rörde vid detta ännu som nämner sig dödligt, / genom mina läppar strömar hettan av en gud, / alla mina atomer äro atskilda och stå i brand ...” (Södergran 1950:354). Cette “Extase” s’avérait vite fatale à l’épave physique que Södergran était devenue, et l’immortalité qu’elle croyait y trouver lui apparaissait de plus en plus problématique, ce qui l’amena à en reconnaître les antinomies dans “Materialism”: “För att icke dö måste jag vara viljan till makt. För att undgå atomernas kamp under upplösning. / Jag är en kemisk massa” (Södergran 1950:352), devait-elle admettre, ne voyant plus l’âme que comme une illusion merveilleuse, un jeu futile auquel elle se prêtait sans y croire un instant. Car l’explosion de vie dont elle avait fait un dieu, espérant participer de son éternité, n’était en même temps pas autre chose que sa propre mort.

Ce voyant, Edith Södergran n’en pouvait pas pour autant se résoudre à accepter la réalité nue de la mort en tant que désintégration matérielle comme fondement de sa religion, ainsi que le ferait Bataille. Au lieu de cela, une fois qu’elle commença à considérer son corps non plus comme le réceptacle d’une puissance infinie qui lui faisait partager son invulnérabilité, mais comme poussière retombant inexorablement en poussière, elle essaya d’accepter humblement son petit rôle dans le cycle de la Nature, et d’adopter la sérénité que montre celle-ci dans la vie et la mort, également compris dans son cours. “Till intet vill mit stoft sjunka, da jag anar dig bakom dessa skuggor”, déclare-t-elle au Puissant en toutes choses (“I trädet och i mig”) dans un poème fragmentaire envoyé à Hagar Olsson à la fin de 1919 (1955:103), quand elle tentait de gagner cette chrétienne à son nouveau mysticisme de la Nature. “Men jag vill icke det, som icke är, utan det som är” (Olsson 1955:101), avait-elle alors affirmé, encore fidèle au mépris de Nietzsche pour les *Hinterweltler* (I:571–574).

Pourtant, après deux ans sur le chemin de la Nature vers Dieu, qu’elle considérait “direct, éternel et objectif” (“Naturens väg till Gud är den direkta, eviga och objektiva, utan yttre tillfällighet.”—*Tankar om Naturen*, septembre 1922), menant le coeur humain vers son vrai foyer “bortom subjektiviteten” (Södergran 1950:373), elle en vint à voir l’Evangile sous un autre jour, néanmoins très personnel: car elle se voyait elle-même maintenant comme une fille prodigue retournant à Dieu dans le sein de la nature, telle qu’elle l’avait instinctivement, innocemment connue quand elle était petite. Dans cet état d’enfance retrouvée, plus

sacré que la sainteté (d’après “O himmelska klarhet” dans *Landet som icke är*, Södergran 1950:383), elle pouvait avouer désirer “le pays qui n’est pas”: “Jag längtar till landet som icke är, / ty allting som är, är jag trött att begära.” (Södergran 1950:392). Se détournant de l’éclat aveuglant du soleil et de toute frénétique affirmation de soi-même, elle en arrivait à se voir dans un rêve obscur comme un petit ver dont l’être est coupé en deux moitiés par la faux de la lune: “den ena var intet, / den andra var allting och Gud själv.” (Södergran 1950:391). Déjà le Dieu de *Dikter* (1916) avait été défini comme “en tom gunga mellan intet och alltet” (Södergran 1950:53) et dans “La Tempête” de *Rosenaltaret* (1919), le monde sous la coupe d’un sauvage dieu dansant se défait en deux parts: “Det ena skall / störta som ett brinnande hus, som ett murket träd, / det andra står kvar förskonat av okända händer.” (Södergran 1950:230).

Le Dieu de Södergran a changé de nom et d’aspect au cours de sa vie: d’un Dionysos dément, cruel, impersonnel au Père sage et compatissant du “Hemkomst” [“Retour à la maison”], dont les mains l’avaient déjà effleurée plus d’une fois comme pour empêcher l’autre d’assurer son emprise. De même Södergran réduisit-elle peu à peu l’échelle de sa condition existentielle des proportions cosmiques d’une prophétie apocalyptique à celles très humbles d’un ver. Pourtant le désir s’exprimant en sa poésie est resté au fond le même au cours de sa vie brève mais intense: défier les limites de son corps frêle et les liens d’une individualité condamnée, pour s’attacher à une réalité ineffable les excédant, englobant l’être et le non-être, et débordant sa vie dans la Vie même telle qu’elle ne pourrait être rencontrée que dans la mort. Cette expérience exacerbée de la vie dans la ruine même du système qui l’entretient n’a jamais perdu chez elle toutes ses connotations dionysiaques, bien qu’elle ait fini par se dépouiller de son caractère de subjectivité volontariste et agressive, pour se sublimer en un retour mystique à l’innocence enfantine. Mais celle-ci n’était-elle pas aussi à l’issue des “trois métamorphoses” prévues par Zarathoustra; du chameau au lion à l’enfant? (Nietzsche II:293–5). Certes, c’est à une source bien différente que semble puiser l’esprit d’enfance dont elle se réclame quand elle écrit:

Guds rike kan man taga endast som ett barn, men en filosof grundar blott ett människorike. Det blir ett falskt paradys, en konstprodukt, något som ser ut som levande och dock är dödt. (Olsson 1955:171)

En effet, pour elle: “Man frågar icke om Gud finnes eller icke finnes, man lägger helt enkelt sitt lilla förstånd asido.” (*Brokiga*

*Iakttagelser*, Södergran 1950:305). Par de tels propos, Södergran fait un écho aussi fidèle qu'inconscient à un grand précurseur de l'existentialisme, le Kierkegaard russe que fut Léon Chestov (1966–1938), auprès de qui, dans les années suivant la mort d'Edith Södergran en 1923, Georges Bataille fit l'apprentissage de la philosophie, en même temps que du refus de ses vérités éternelles et de la nécessité divinisée où elles enferment l'homme (Surya, 1987:67–74). Pour échapper au sommeil de la raison hellénique, Bataille aura recours au 'dieu étranger' Dionysos qui seul la contestait dans la Cité antique, quand Chestov opposait Athènes et Jérusalem, s'en remettant au 'Tout est possible' biblique au creux de l'Impossible où se déchire Bataille. Du fond de l'abîme où celui-ci se jette pour se perdre en l'Autre figuré par Dionysos, c'est vers le Tout Autre que crie Chestov. Il n'en pouvait pas moins conclure en ces mots un livre dont la traduction co-signée par Bataille fut la première publication parisienne de ce dernier: "Nietzsche a ouvert le chemin. Il faut chercher ce qui est a u – d e s s u s de la compassion, a u – d e s s u s du bien. Il faut chercher Dieu." (Chestov 1950:254). C'est manifestement cette voie qu'a suivie Södergran, elle qui vécut avec autant d'intensité les exigences de l'appel de Dieu et de la fidélité à Nietzsche, dans des affres dont témoignent ses lettres, mais qui ne croyait pas pour autant qu'elles dussent nécessairement s'exclure, pouvant écrire à Olsson (1955:108) en janvier 1920: "Vi böra komma med G u d och N i e t z s c h e."

Södergran avait longtemps tenté de résoudre ce paradoxe en se faisant la prophétesse d'un Dionysos aux prétentions bibliques, le 'Génie de l'Apocalypse' se révélant dans les bouleversements contemporains. A son insu toujours, un autre penseur russe était en train de développer cette intuition au même moment: Vassily Rozanov dans *L'Apocalypse de notre temps*, l'ouvrage où il livra avant de mourir en janvier 1919 ses vues originales sur la revanche sur un Christ hostile à la vie d'un Dieu de l'Ancien Testament identifié à l'Eros cosmique, à la Chair féconde et à ses désirs. Si Nietzsche semble parfois entrouvrir la porte à pareille récupération dionysiaque du Dieu biblique (Stock 1989:66), c'est le mouvement inverse exprimé par Chestov qui finira par l'emporter dans le douloureux débat intérieur d'Edith Södergran, la table rase nietzschéenne y laissant toute la place à Dieu. Celui de la Bible ne se rapproche-t-il pas de Dionysos dans les aspects terribles qu'il revêt parfois, comme le rappelle R.D. Stock (1989:66)? Edith Södergran a été familière de cette face sombre de Dieu dans des circonstances et un siècle qui s'y prêtaient bien. À la frontière de l'Europe dont elle vivait de la pensée et de la

Russie dont elle avait imbibé l'esprit, Södergran fait le pont dans l'histoire des idées entre Nietzsche et Bataille, écartelée en son temps entre les positions de Rozanov et de Chestov, prise entre deux feux—entre Dionysos et Dieu—dans le no man's land de l'âme où erre l'humanité occidentale, ce périlleux terrain qu'a reconnu sa poésie.

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## Aleksis Kivi and the Finnish Georgics

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RÉSUMÉ: *Le romancier, dramaturge et poète finlandais Aleksis Kivi (1834-1872) a non seulement marqué grandement l'expression littéraire de son pays mais sa production peut aussi être considérée comme l'héritière des premiers chefs-d'oeuvre grecs et latins dont elle reflète les influences et dont elle se fait l'écho. Sans suggérer que c'était l'intention de l'auteur, j'essayerai de démontrer que certains aspects de l'influence de Virgile sur l'écriture de Kivi me permettent de les considérer comme éléments des Géorgiques Finlandaises.*

*Même si mon étude est entièrement textuelle, une comparaison de leurs biographies montre d'intéressants parallélismes entre Virgile et Kivi dans le contexte de leurs temps ainsi que des milieux littéraires et politiques dans lesquels ils vivaient. Sans suggérer que ces parallélismes fonctionnent comme agents de choix créateurs il faut noter qu'ils établissent une toile de fond pour la notion d'idéal que les deux auteurs ont en commun. Dans les poésies de Kivi, comme dans les *Eclogues* de Virgile, le bucolique, le patriotique et l'héroïque, par exemple, se rejoignent par le contraste entre le simple et le complexe. La juxtaposition de l'imaginatif et du réel, de la politesse du sujet et de l'élévation du ton, amène le lecteur à réexaminer le triomphe de l'harmonie morale de ce qui est poétiquement étiquette 'vie rustique' chez Virgile et chez Kivi.*

The general principle involved is that there is really no such thing as self-expression in literature.

(Northrop Frye 1963: 29)

Northrop Frye's adage derives from his discussion of the wonder of poetic magic. Taking Wordsworth as an example, he allows that the human mind is, to be sure, the individual mind of Wordsworth at first, but as soon as he writes a poem, its linguistic presence becomes ours as well. "There is no self-expression in Wordsworth's poem, because once the poem is there the individual Wordsworth has disappeared" (Frye 1963:29). The phenomenon of the literary expression of a single pen becoming the 'self-expression' of an entire nation rarely finds a more

easily identifiable example than the writing of the Finnish novelist, playwright, and poet Aleksis Kivi (1834–1872). It is Kivi's novel *Seven Brothers* (1870) which not only earns Kivi the title "the first classic Finnish novelist" (Laitinen 1984:65), but together with Kivi's plays, the novel becomes a permanent source of literary quotes, references, and echoes in the speech and writing of a still growing number of Finnish writers. I shall attempt to examine the somewhat lesser known part of Kivi's oeuvre: his poetry, or to be more specific, I shall look at Frye's notion, that is the absence of self-expression in literature from its obverse side in Kivi's case. Just as Kivi's works are the source of explicit and implicit 'borrowings' and literary echoes, they are also the inheritors of a rich world of textual influences. The central texts in Western literature to which Kivi first gained access during his years of formal schooling, the Greek and Roman classics and the Bible, have their representative echoes in Kivi's works. My focus, however, is on the elements of the georgic, hence on what—within a larger frame of reference—might be termed the Finnish georgic.

The fact that Virgil's *Georgics* was used as a model for works by eighteenth century English poets as varied as Alexander Pope, John Gay, James Thomson, and Christopher Smart is well known. Among their inspired poems we can find ones observably didactic in intent as well as ones far removed from any practical purpose. The richly variant forms of what is known as English georgic poetry are indebted to the Virgilian inspiration and influence partly because Virgil's poem and its form enabled English poets to arrive at an interpretation of notably varied experience (Chalker 1969:1–2).

The claim that the influence of the *Georgics* can be placed in the area of a poet's response to experience (Chalker 1969:4) is also applicable to Kivi. There is no doubt that his spiritual and literary masters, especially Homer, Virgil, and Dante, left their marks on Kivi's work (Tarkiainen 1923:122). His authorial progress assumed the mode common to young writers in general, or in Koskimies' words: "first one is groping in the shadow of past masters, more or less a dependant, then one finds one's own direction and means of execution, and one walks full of purpose in accordance with the dictates of one's own spirit" (Koskimies 1934:184).

Although my focus in this paper is entirely text-specific, a brief, digressive foray into the realm of the biographical uncovers interesting parallels between the lives of Kivi and Virgil. The crises in Virgil's fifty-one year life (70–19 B.C.), the twenty-nine years of war and



famine and the devastation resulting from both, were not phenomena unfamiliar to Kivi. For example, not only did the 1867–1868 famine in Finland have a lasting impact on the nation's and specifically Kivi's memory, but Kivi, the son of an impoverished village tailor, lived most of his life, and died, in utter poverty. One can argue, of course, that drawing such parallels and viewing them as agents of creative choices, whether the choices concern the subject, structure, tone, mood, or diction in poetry, is wholly reductive and as impossible to validate as author intentionality, and I quite agree. I suggest, however, that the parallel serves to establish a setting (a poet's response to experience), or a framework for the sense of fundamental longing which simultaneously looks back to simpler and calmer times and forward to a future of peace and well-being.

Jasper Griffin in his study titled *Virgil* tells us that Virgil believed the poet's task to be the articulation of the feelings of his people (Griffin 1986:3). If one leaves aside the enormously problematic claim of a poet knowing 'the feelings of his (or her) people', the notion nevertheless carries another, less abstract problem and I'm referring to the familiar fact that at the time Virgil began to write, the poetic style developed in Latin was refined to a degree which had virtually no contact with contemporary life. The style could be compared with the splendours of Greek verse, but it seemed to accommodate only mythological poems. Significantly, the Romans, although conquerors of the world, found themselves undeniably inferior to the culturally superior Greeks. After all, less than a mere two hundred years prior to Virgil's birth, the Romans had possessed no literature at all, with the exception of simple songs and incantations (Griffin 1986:6). The history of the emergent Finnish culture in the shadow of its Swedish counterpart, in turn, is familiar enough not to require further commentary. To writers such as Kivi and Virgil, then, the need for a repertoire of literary patterns, the significance of familiarity with cultural forerunners, and the problems caused by their lack, are matters which understandably and inseparably form a part of the critical study of their writing.

While Virgil goes far back into Greek literature to find a model for the *Georgics* in the works of Hesiod (Griffin 1986:11), the notion of borrowing actual specific models from ancient sources is not characteristic of Kivi's writing (Koskimies 1974:187). Rather, in Kivi's poetry traces of 'the foreign' can be seen as matters of form, subtle influences of ideas, literary coincidences, conscious or unconscious parallelisms with what (in this case) is understood by elements of the

georgic. In the poem *Maamme* [Our Land]<sup>1</sup> which I would like to look at first, aspects of the georgic are evident in a variety of ways.

There's a land of beauty in the North  
 The one in the womb of woods,  
 Winter's snowy spruces there  
 Hum on its hills.  
 While summer in that land again  
 Is cherished as a bride.  
 Never would I forget  
 The gentle sky of yours.  
 Not the fire of your shining sun,  
 Not the moon bright in thickets of pines  
 Nor smoke rising up to clouds  
 Where woods are cleared for land.  
 [On pohjoisessa kaunis maa  
 Tuo metsän kohdussa.  
 Siel talven kuuset lumiset  
 Sen tuntureilla humisee,  
 Kuin morsian niin armas taas  
 On kesä tässä maas.  
 En milloinkaan mä unohtas  
 Sun lempeet taivastas,  
 En tulta heljän auringos,  
 En kirkast kuuta hongistos,  
 En kaskiesi sauvua  
 Päin pilviin nousevaa].  
 (Kivi 1977:9, lines 1–12)

In the poem the complex interaction of style and content, which is characteristic of the *Georgics*, makes a naturally generous use of poetic archaisms. By that I mean that while Kivi had to invent new poetic expressions in a language which was living its literary infancy, paradoxically, Kivi's language now, in its contemporary context, is rich in poetic archaisms, hence the stylistic aspects of the *Georgics* have become more pronounced over time. In the stylistic matters of form, however, the fact that Kivi appeared to have applied Greek and Roman examples to his writing was not considered appropriate for his 'modern' poetry by his earlier critics (Launonen 1984:43–44). Kivi's rejection of a strict pattern of end-rhymes, the employment of which would have affirmed a commitment to order and conventionality he was not prepared to make, suggests that however rich the aesthetic pleasure in such order, and whatever the intellectual rewards in the well-honed practice of language adhering to a controlled pattern, the commitment speaks also of a controlled sensibility with which, in Launonen's terms, Kivi's

particular creative spontaneity was at odds (Launonen 1984:45). When Lauri Viljanen's research refers to Kivi's use of not the hexameter, but meter "directed by the ear" (Launonen 1984:45), that is the Homeric and varying beat, Kivi's practice would appear to be in tune with Virgil's emphasis that his poems should be comfortable to recite (Wilkinson 1982:45), or the current critical findings that "the Romans read their poetry with the stress accent of their normal speech, the quantitative metre being heard as a counterpoint or undercurrent" (Wilkinson 1982:55). More specifically, I suggest, Kivi's rhyme can frequently also be termed 'slant rhyme', or what is sometimes called 'near rhyme' because it employs similar, but not exact sounds. In the Finnish text quoted above, we can see the phenomenon for example in lines ending with "lumiset, humisee" (Kivi 1977:9, lines 3&4) and "järviissä, kimmeltää" (Kivi 1977:9, lines 7&8).

It has been pointed out that Kivi's vivid, rhythmical and alliterative prose presents extraordinary challenges to translators (Barrett 1989:38), and it is true even to a greater degree of Kivi's poetry. Therefore, I am aware of my translations' vulnerability to criticism. Nevertheless, I would argue, it is possible to establish parallels between Kivi's and Virgil's lines in translation. Kivi shares Virgil's expressiveness, or the accommodation of sounds and rhythms to sense. One comes upon lines which employ alliterative stress such as: "(Split wood with wedges), and last the various arts." [(nam primi cuneis scindebant fissile lignum), tum variae venere artes.] (*Georgics*, Book I, lines 144–145)<sup>2</sup>, or sound to emphasize movement in the line: "The current sweeps it headlong down the rapids" [atque illum in praeceps prono rapit alveus amni] (Book I, line 203). In Kivi's poem fairly simple examples such as *metsän kohdussa* [in the womb of the woods], and *tuntureilla humisee* [hum on its hills] in the first stanza, work to match the emotive sense of the words with the texture of the sounds. As well, the representation of the incantatory sense of the poem by its form is particularly expressive in the repetitive "not/nor" in the second stanza, which not only works to emphasize the vow, but the eulogy in praise of the land.

Faithful to the conventions of the georgic, the poem depicts the countryside, "the womb of the woods" where the bright moon shines in the thicket of pines, or where in the clearing of trees for future farming smoke rises up to the clouds, as an abode of innocence, nurturing, and health. Yet it also alludes to memories of war.

True, many a horror has been seen  
In these valleys, because

War brought slaying and death  
 And the ground drank the blood of men.  
 But the glorious honour of heroes  
 Finland befell.

[Tok monta näissä laaksoissa  
 On nähty kauhua:  
 Kosk sota surman, kuolon toi  
 Ja tanner miesten verta joi,  
 Mut sankarien kunnian  
 Sai Suomi loistavan].

(Kivi 1977:9–10, lines 19–24)

The poem combines sentiments of the pastoral, the patriotic, and the heroic, but the poetic attitudes and emotions suggested by the words differ from straight forward moralizing or unreflective patriotism. War is the source of both death and horror, not a testing ground for endurance and martial skills, and the glory of heroism enfolds the country rather than individual men. The absence of the notion that heroism in war ought to be glorified for its own sake finds its parallel in Virgil's lines where shedding of blood is seen as the primal curse on the Roman nation and a hope is expressed that enough blood has already been spilt:

Gods of our fathers, Heroes of our land,  
 And Romulus, and mother Vesta, guardian  
 of Tuscan Tiber and Roman Palatine,  
 Do not prevent at least this youthful prince  
 From saving a world in ruins: long ago  
 Our blood has paid enough for the perjury  
 of Troy's Laomedon. The courts of heaven,  
 Caesar, have long begrudged your presence here,  
 Complaining that you care for mortal triumphs;  
 For right and wrong change places; everywhere  
 So many wars, so many shapes of crime  
 Confront us; no due honour attends the plough.

[di patrii, Indigetes, et Romule Vestaque mater,  
 quae Tuscum Tiberim et Romana Palatia servas,  
 hunc saltem everso invenem succurrere saeclo  
 ne prohibete, satis iam pridem sanguine nostro  
 Laomedontae luimus periuria Troiae;  
 iam pridem nobis caeli te regia, Caesar,  
 invidet atque hominum queritur curare triumphos,  
 quippe ubi fas versum atque nefas: tot bella per orbem,  
 tam multae scelerum facies, non ullus aratro  
 dignus honos, squalent abductis arva colonis,  
 et curvae rigidum falces conflantur in ense].

(*Georgics*, Book I, lines 498–508)

In addition to the themes the poetry of both writers have in common, significantly, along with Virgil, Kivi employs a sense of what Wilkinson terms 'kaleidoscopic', that is, stress on variety as the cardinal element in the success of a poem (Wilkinson 1982:35). Virgil inserts passages about ploughing in the context of rhetoric about empirical matters while the devotional and heroic is shown to have another side of the coin, the cost in terms of human suffering. Similarly, Kivi moves from the ideal of the rustic piety afforded the land, from the implied simplicity and hardiness of life, to a deep craving for peace after tumults of history and finally in the last two stanzas, the poem opens up to a markedly greater poetic landscape. In an epic sense, the poem shifts into reverence for the land as the present and future threshold to a region beyond worldly ambitions.

What blessing there is in listening  
To echoes of those solemn woods  
As the dawn of day awakens us  
And the sounds of shepherds' horns ring,  
As a blue-eyed maiden singing  
Walks in the dales.

What bliss it is to sleep in your arms,  
You land of our dreams.  
You are our cradle and our grave,  
O, the ever new hope of ours.  
O, Finland-isle, the beautiful,  
O, eternally the one!

[Tuon tumman metsän kaikunaa  
Mi autuus kuultella  
Kosk herättää meit päivän koi  
Ja paimenien torvet soi,  
Kosk impi sinisilmäinen  
Käy laaksois laulellen.  
Mi autuus helmaas nukkua  
Sä uniemme maa,  
Sä kehtomme sä hautamme!  
Oi aina uusi toivomme!  
Oi Suomensaari kaunoinen,  
Oi ijankaikkinen].

(Kivi 1977:10, lines 31–42)

The lines of the last stanza, allusive of a kind of patriotic mysticism, I suggest, need not be taken literally as much as symbolically suggestive of numinous feelings about aspects of the universal, the yet to come. Thus the poem embraces and sustains apparently incompatible

subjects, the innocence and ideal of the pastoral life and landscape, and the limitations of the human condition which lead to war and death.

The close relationship between the words 'culture' and 'cultivation', then, (or in Finnish the notion of 'kulttuurin viljely' as a commonplace expression) has its roots in the view of "farming as a way of life that is reflective, ordered, active, and rational" (Miles 1980:64-65). Or, to put it in other words, agriculture in a wider frame of things can be seen as a continual re-enactment of the origins of civilization, our cultural beginnings and in turn, elements of the georgic in writing, the continued retracing or recovering the history of its expression. Hence the farmer's work can be seen as a link between what is unique and ephemeral in human experience on the one hand, and what is universal and eternal, on the other (Miles 1980:72). In Virgil's words:

The farmer cleaves the earth with his curved plough.  
This is his yearlong work, thus he sustains  
His homeland, thus his little grandchildren,  
His herdsmen and trusty bullocks.

... This life was led on earth by golden Saturn,  
when none had ever heard the trumpets blown  
Or heard the sword-blade clanking on the anvil

[ agricola incurvo terram dimovit aratro:  
hinc anni labor, hinc patriam parvosque nepotes  
sustinet, hinc armenta boum meritosque iuvenco.  
... aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat;  
necdum etiam audierant inflari classica, necdum  
impositos duris crepitare incudibus ensis].

(*Georgics*, Book II, lines 513-541)

Kivi's long poem, titled *Mies* [Man] (Kivi 1977:99-107) can be viewed as reflective of the fundamental tenets of moral life and the rhythms of the seasons as they're mirrored in human existence. In the poem the twin notions of the cultivation of the inner being and the cultivation of land sustain their provisional connection. Like Book II of the *Georgics* which deals with trees both on literal and symbolic levels, Kivi's poem begins with a reference to a spruce tree.

"Upon a hill yonder a tall spruce,  
The steady male of centuries;  
May it always be the symbol of my days.  
Like you, I want to stand here  
When in the midst of eternity's vast sea  
Storms sweep the isle of life.

Like the star now shining  
At your crown, bearded hero, calm,

So may the view expand within my sight  
 Pure, gleaming brightness,  
 Because the spirits of destruction, temptation  
 Begin to besiege my heart”.

[“Korkee kuusi kunnahalla tuolla,  
 Uros vakaa vuosisatojen,  
 Ollos kuva elämäni aina!  
 Kuni sä ma seistä tahdon täällä,  
 Koska myrskyt käyvät elon saarel  
 Keskel ijäisyyden aavaa merta.  
 Niinkuin nyt tuo tähti kiireelläsi  
 Kiiltää, sankar tyyni, partanen,  
 Niinpä alat katseestani käyköön  
 Puhdas, säteilevä kirkkaus,  
 Koska tuhon, kiusauksen henget  
 Sydäntäni piirittämään käyvät”].

(Kivi 1977:99, lines 1–12)

In the first two stanzas there’s a meditative interplay between nature and the human, necessitating two kinds of geography, one of landscape, another of the mind. Their interdependency is inscribed in the structure of Kivi’s language. The tree as a model for man’s idealized steadfastness conversely receives, as nature does in the *Georgics*, anthropomorphic treatment. The poem goes on to say:

So is the thought of the man whose imposing  
 House stands on grey rock,  
 And he, himself on its steps looking  
 Out at hills bedecked by spruces,  
 Breathing in the gentle summer’s evening  
 While the sky’s army of stars shines.

[Niin on aatos miehen, jonka huone  
 Komee seisoo harmaal kalliol,  
 Ja hän itse portaal, katsahdellen  
 Kunahille, kuusten kranssaamat,  
 Hengittäes lempeen kesä-illan,  
 Taivaan tähtijoukon loistaessa].

(Kivi 1977:99, lines 13–18)

The georgic stresses on the dimension of the contemplative is inseparably part of the idealized view of nature, the eulogy of country life, particularly emphasized in the stanza:

He steps out from his house  
 As the bells of cattle jingle,  
 Walks along the fields of grain  
 Waving in the temperate wind.

The golden grain is ripe  
Promising a harvest many-fold.

[Ulos astuuvi hän huoneestansa,  
Koska karjankellot kilisee,  
Käyskeleevi viljavainiolla,  
Joka hienos tuules lainehtii.  
Valmis onpi sähköväinen vilja,  
Sadon lupaavi se monin kerroin].

(Kivi 1977:100, lines 37–42)

The poetic images which are at first suggestive of divine bounty, soon shift and reflect a variety of moods as does the human life the poem portrays. After tragedies befall the man when lightning strikes and burns his house, and his beloved, Diana of the manor house, betrays him and haughtily tells him “also to find another one” [“Hae itselles myös toinen sä”] (Kivi 1977:103), there follows a time of fruitful renewal, and obstacles give way to new beginnings. Implicitly, the writing becomes instructive in a sense; the human character in the poem and the fundamental conditions of his action share their origins with the universal laws of nature. “Man lives in a world of limited possibilities” (Miles 1980:71), but should not be defeated by the fact. Importantly, throughout the *Georgics* as well as much of Kivi’s poetry, along with qualities of healing, hard work on the land offers satisfaction beyond mere survival. In Kivi’s words:

I shall plough and sow my land again,  
Work the plot in the flutter of birds’ wings.  
May the grain be my sustenance,  
My drink the clear water from a well.  
Here shall I build a cottage small,  
Here is my home, my work out in the fields.

[Peltoni mä kynnän taas ja kylvän,  
Sara! loiskiessa lintusten;  
Vilja sieltä elantoni olkoon,  
Juomain kirkas vesi lähteestä.  
Tähän majan pienen rakennan,  
Täs on asuntoni, työni pellol].

(Kivi 1977:105, lines 157–162)

The spiritual and physical toughness that characterizes the farmer in Virgil’s *Georgics* (Miles 1980:77) finds its counterpart in Kivi’s poem. The man has both the philosopher’s comprehension of nature and its workings, as well as the determination and inner resourcefulness of a heroic warrior. Life, however, provides the contrasts against which he tests his ambitions, the basis for a strong moralizing element in the poem.



The despair of Kivi's man at first when he reflects on his losses: "The joy of my life has been buried ... For what do I wait, when do I build?" ["Ilo elämäin on hautaan pantu ... Mitä vartoon, koska rakentelen?"] (Kivi 1977:105, lines 145–149) undergoes a fundamental change in the subsequent expression: "But on the other edge of this field / Hope's land of morning dawns again" ["Mutta tämän pellon toisel partaal / Alkaa taasen toivon aamumaa"] (Kivi 1977:105, lines 151–152). In Book II of the *Georgics*, the same thematic conflict is constructed around the notions of worldly ambition and innocent country pursuits:

How lucky, if they know their happiness,  
 Are farmers, more than lucky, they for whom,  
 Far from the clash of arms, the earth herself,  
 Most fair in dealing, freely lavishes  
 An easy livelihood. What if no palace  
 With arrogant portal out of every cranny  
 Belches a mighty tide of morning callers  
 And no one gapes at doors inlaid so proudly  
 With varied tortoiseshell, cloth tricked with gold  
 And rare Corinthian bronzes? What if wool  
 Is white, not tainted with Assyrian poison,  
 And honest olive oil not spoilt with cassia?  
 Yet peace they have and life of innocence  
 Rich in variety; they have for leisure  
 Their ample acres, caverns, living lakes,  
 Cool Tempés; cattle low, and sleep is soft  
 Under a tree.

[O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint,  
 agricolas! quibus ipsa procul discordibus armis  
 fundit humo facilem victum iustissima tellus.  
 Si non ingentem foribus domus alta superbis  
 mane salutantum totis vomit aedibus undam,  
 nec varios inhiant pulchra testudine postis  
 inlusasque auro vestis Ephyreiaque aera,  
 alba neque Assyrio fucatur lana veneno,  
 nec casia liquidi corrumpitur usus olivi;  
 at secura quies et nescia fallere vita,  
 dives opum variarum, at latis otia fundis,  
 speluncae vivique lacus, at frigida Tempe  
 mugitusque boum mollesque sub arbore somni  
 non absunt; illic saltus ac lustra ferarum,  
 et patiens operum exiguoque adsueta iuventus,  
 sacra deum sanctique patres; extrema per illos  
 lustitia excedens terris vestigia fecit].

(*Georgics*, Book II, lines 458–471)

In Virgil's poetry, as expressly also in Kivi's, one detects something numinous about rivers and trees. Further, the somewhat incompatible notions of the earth and nature generally lavishing their gifts on the countryman on the one hand, and the didactic emphasis on hard work on the other, underlie much of the *Georgics* and Kivi's poetry. It is interesting to note that Hesiod, Virgil's role model, had said "the father of gods and men laughed aloud" as he devised labour as the disaster for mankind. For Virgil, however, work carries, and is, a positive value (Griffin 1986:45). Similarly, Kivi in the implicitly didactic poem *Uudistalon-perhe* [The Homesteading Family], but particularly in his novel *Seven Brothers*, reverses the Biblical notion of Genesis whereby man's curse for falling from grace is to toil 'by the sweat of his brow' in order to sustain himself. Labour in Kivi's, as in Virgil's writing, empowers humans with optimism, it propels them both morally and spiritually as well as materially to a higher plane of existence while idleness means degeneration. More specifically perhaps, to toil is to be blessed and to be in harmony with nature whose every aspect has a functioning purpose. Thus, nature's example dignifies the severity of the rustic life.

The practical atmosphere of rational action in pursuit of a higher plane of existence is complemented by a poetic vision of life abundant in natural beauty and aesthetic pleasure. In Virgil's writing the emphasis is on the emotional quality of everything in nature, summer is sweet, dew delicious, and so on (Griffin 1986:44). Similarly in Kivi's poetry the sky is gentle, the field of grain gleams golden, the woods carry a melody, the trees are examples of loyalty, and in the end the earth provides a welcomed place of rest (Kivi 1977:107). Another outstanding contrast to mere rational action in the *Georgics*, as well as in Kivi's poetry, is the rhapsodic description of the blessedness of Italy and Finland.

Book II of the *Georgics* contains the famous 'praises of Italy' ending with an idyllic picture of the farmer's life and its rewards (Williams 1979:xi). Specifically it refers to "So many noble (cities) raised by our labours, / So many towns we've piled on precipices, / And rivers gliding under ancient walls" [adde tot egregias urbes operumque laborem, / tot congesta manu praeurptis oppida saxis / fluminaque antiquos subter labentia muros] (*Georgics* Book II, lines 156-158), or to a land which "has bred a vigorous race of men" ["haec genus acre virum"] (*Georgics* Book II, line 167), and so forth. Virgil's elevated diction finds its parallel in Kivi's writing which is rich in ecstatic and idyllic sentiments about the country of his birth and which invites 'a

visual reading' of his lines. Aside from the explicitly nationalistic poem *Maamme* [Our Land], for example, Kivi's poetry appears permeated with poetic glances at remembered or imagined particulars, and the sense of profound veneration approaching awe towards the natural beauty of his *kotimaa* [homeland]. Only the land beyond, on the other side of the Tuonela river, the abode of the life to come, deserves more eloquent praise. The deep attachment to the lands of their birth in both Virgil's and Kivi's writing, however, is inseparably part of their profound attachment to the quiet values of country life, and should not be confused with patriotic fervour or political commitment of a kind. Quite to the contrary, Virgil's feelings of supreme indifference towards the life of politics and power (Griffin 1986:48) is a matter of record in Kivi's life as well.

The sustained interplay between nature and humans can also be seen to recount the less than ideal. In Book IV of the *Georgics*, bees are central to the poem lending themselves admirably to poetic purposes and providing opportunities for anthropomorphic sympathy, humorous irony, and social and moral nuances (Wilkinson 1982:119). The epic battles between armies of rival leaders serve as apt reminders of the futility of human aspirations for power. In Virgil's words: "These ardent passions and these prodigious contests / A little handful of dust will lay to rest" [hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta / pulveris exigui iactu compressa quiescunt] (*Georgics* Book II, lines 86–87). In Kivi's writing, in turn, fundamental longing for a less marred and less troubled world, one of deliverance from pain and longing, finds its expression in many 'dream-poems' and imaginary, idyllic landscapes. Thus a poem titled *Lintukoto* [The Home of Birds] (Kivi 1977: 27) depicts an island where the rocky shores are eternal barriers to storms, where in an edenic landscape immortal birds and bees busily carry on their work.

Here the home of birds, the tiny masters of song,  
 Here the cuckoo-bird, jay, the thrush  
 Make their voices ring among trees  
 Fearless of the eagles soaring in the air,  
 Eagles and the nasty owls of night.  
 Life of friendship!—  
 Lively boys of the harvest  
 Plow the fields, cut the thriving meadows.

[Tässä linnut asuu, lauluniekat pienet,  
 Tässä käki, ilolintu, kyntörastas  
 Lehdistössä äänens ympäröikuu antaa  
 Pelkäämättä ilmas sinkoilevii haukkoi,

Kotkia ja öitten ilkeit huhkaimia.  
 Elo ystävyuden! —  
 Vilkkaat keripojat  
 Pellot kyntää, kukostavat niityt niittää].  
 (Kivi 1977:27, lines 21–28)

I would like to end this examination of a vast subject, one which deserves and invites more comprehensive scrutiny, by drawing attention to yet another affinity between Kivi's poetry and the *Georgics*. Virgil's achievement in the external qualities of rhythm and word-music of the poem has been universally acclaimed (Williams 1979:xii). Wilkinson's study mentions that several critics have likened the *Georgics* to a musical composition in the sense that the long poem can be viewed as a composition of many tones and themes. Kivi's poetic oeuvre, although not based on the formal cohesiveness of the *Georgics*, bears a close resemblance to music in another sense. In addition to the fact that Kivi emphasizes the musical qualities of words (Laitinen 1984:114), a number of Kivi's poems are, in fact, also songs. In Viljanen's terms, much of Kivi's work can be viewed as 'songpoetry'.

Kivi's eulogies of the natural beauty of the country, his celebration of the rustic country life and his idealization of the hardiness and simplicity of the people challenge us to reexamine our valorization of contemporary thought and the models it produces for our future. Kivi's poetry can be seen to constitute a plea for the contemplation and understanding of values which inevitably determine the quality of our lives.

## NOTES

\* I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Professors Kai Laitinen and Maria-Liisa Nevala of Helsinki University who made Finnish critical texts available to me.

1. The source text for all the references to Kivi's poetry in this paper is: Aleksis Kivi. 1977. *Kootut runot*. Porvoo, Helsinki & Juva: WSOY.

2. The source text for all quoted lines of Virgil's poetry in English translation is: Virgil. 1982. *The Georgics*. Trans. by L. P. Wilkinson. London: Penguin Books, and the source text for all quoted lines of Virgil's poetry in the original Latin is: R. D. Williams. 1979. *Virgil. The Eclogues and Georgics*. London: MacMillan Education Limited.

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## Delblanc's *Kanaans land* and Moberg's Emigrant Tetralogy: intertextuality and transformation

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RÉSUMÉ: Le roman de Sven Delblanc *Kanaans land* [Le pays de Canaan] (1984), basé sur les dix ans que la famille de l'auteur passa au Manitoba dans les années vingt et trente, présente un discours intertextuel profond avec la tétralogie épique sur l'émigration de Vilhelm Moberg, publiée plusieurs décennies auparavant, tétralogie décrivant la vie des pionniers suédois dans le territoire de Minnesota dans les années 1850: *Utvandrarna* [Les émigrants] (1949), *Invandrarna* [Les immigrants] (1952), *Nybyggarna* [Les nouveaux bâtisseurs] (1956), *Sista brevet till Sverige* [La dernière lettre pour la Suède] (1959). Qu'il s'agisse des raisons ayant poussé à l'émigration ou des réactions à la vie dans le Nouveau Monde, les récits contiennent un grand nombre de situations et de motifs parallèles. L'aboutissement pour les pionniers est pourtant complètement différent. Dans ses vieux jours, Karl Oskar Nilsson, dans le roman de Moberg, lègue à ses fils une ferme florissante, alors que Fredrik Weber, dans l'oeuvre de Delblanc, à la merci d'un climat capricieux et d'une dépression économique à caractère mondial, se voit contraint d'admettre l'échec en rentrant en Suède. Kristina, chez Moberg, conquiert son désir de revoir la Suède en plaçant sa confiance en Dieu. Chez Delblanc, par contre, le mal du pays de Maria Weber devient une métaphore de son aliénation spirituelle. Les mémoires, récemment publiées de Delblanc *Livets ax* [Les épis de la vie] (1991), révèlent que l'expérience antérieure qu'a vécue l'auteur, le fait d'être transporté dans un domaine transcendantal et visionnaire et le sentiment d'être banni lorsque l'accès à ce domaine n'est plus possible, est à l'origine de la métaphore associant la géographie à l'état d'esprit.

Any Swedish novel in which emigration to North America plays a significant role invites comparison to Vilhelm Moberg's epic tetralogy, *Utvandrarna* (1949; *The Emigrants*, 1951), *Invandrarna* (1952; *Unto a Good Land*, 1954), *Nybyggarna* (1956; *The Settlers*, 1978), and *Sista brevet till Sverige* (1959; *Last Letter Home*, 1978).<sup>1</sup> Though Moberg

(1898–1973) overstated his case when he claimed that the greatest folk migration in modern times had been almost entirely unrepresented in Swedish history writing as well as *belles lettres* before his own work was published,<sup>2</sup> his treatment of the subject, based on extensive research on both sides of the Atlantic, is both exhaustive and artistically successful. Moberg's attraction to this subject matter was a natural one. The essay "Romanen om Utvandrarromanen" [The Novel of the Emigrant Novel] in *Berättelser ur min levnad* [Stories from My Life] (1968) provides extensive information about the social and economic consequences of emigration for Moberg's home province of Småland and its emotional impact on earlier generations of his family, and about America as a constant imagined presence in his own childhood; the autobiographical novel *Soldat med brutet gevär* (1944; *When I Was a Child*, 1956)<sup>3</sup> reveals the psychological effect of departure for the New World on those who were left behind. Moberg's repeated assertion that he did not consciously choose to write about America and emigration, but rather that the topic chose him may be hyperbole, but its basis in fact is clear. In the emigrant tetralogy itself, however, Moberg did not focus on the wave of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century emigration he was familiar with from personal experience or family oral tradition, but on the true pioneers—those who were the first to leave Sweden and who settled in the Upper Midwest of what is today the United States when that area was mostly an uninhabited wilderness.

As was the case with Moberg, Sven Delblanc's family history and early childhood experiences provided a direct, personal connection to the phenomenon of emigration, but his point of departure in *Kanaans land* [The Land of Canaan] (1984) is more directly autobiographical than Moberg's in his *Utvandrarroman*. *Kanaans land*, the third book of a tetralogy about the author's maternal grandfather and his descendants—the other volumes are *Samuels bok* [Samuel's Book] (1981), *Samuels döttrar* [Samuel's Daughters] (1982), and *Maria ensam* [Maria Alone] (1985)—concerns the ten years his parents spent in Manitoba from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s; Delblanc himself was born there in 1931 (he died in December 1992, as this article was in press). Whereas Moberg's main characters are entirely fictional, Delblanc's are thus based on members of his own family, here called Fredrik and Maria Weber. It is noteworthy that Moberg nevertheless achieved a verisimilitude that has prompted tourists to search old cemeteries in the Chisago Lakes area for the grave of the fictional character Kristina, while Delblanc's distinctly 'literary' treatment of his characters would not, in all likelihood, have led



readers to suspect the existence of real-life counterparts had not the author himself called attention to the fact. Both Moberg and Delblanc drew on interviews and on authentic documents for their respective novel series, and both authors travelled to the New World to glean first-hand information preparatory to writing. Moberg recorded his impressions of the United States in a series of newspaper articles, subsequently recast in 1950 in the collection *Den okända släkten* (*The Unknown Swedes*, 1988) and in the aforementioned "Romanen om Utvandrarromanen." Delblanc summarized his experiences in Manitoba in the essay "Minnen från Kanada" [Memories from Canada], published separately in 1984 and distributed to subscribers when *Kanaans land* was chosen "Månadens bok" [Book of the Month] by Bonniers bokklubb. More recently, in *Livets ax* [Gleanings from Life] (1991), a harrowing personal memoir of his childhood that focuses on his violent-tempered, tyrannical, and deeply unhappy father, Delblanc tells the story of the family's years in Canada from another, more impressionistic point of view.

In his epic chronicle, Moberg deliberately created representative fictional characters to illustrate various historical reasons for emigration and attitudes toward and reactions to America. Outlined schematically, the first half of *Utvandrarna* concerns conditions in Sweden, while the second half of that novel and first portion of *Invandrarna* describe the journey itself. Until this point, when the group from Ljuder parish arrives in Minnesota Territory, the focus of the novels is collective, with roughly equal attention given to Karl Oskar Nilsson and his wife Kristina; Karl Oskar's younger brother Robert; the would-be prophet Danjel Andreasson and his wife Inga-Lena, who dies during the ocean crossing; and the former parish whore, Ulrika, with Jonas Petter an important secondary character. In the second half of *Invandrarna*, devoted to the first year in the New World, and in the remainder of the series, which ends with Karl Oskar's death some forty years later, the perspective narrows as the narrative concentrates increasingly on daily life on Karl Oskar and Kristina's farm. The dominant emphasis is on how the couple endures and overcomes a series of hardships in order to make a new and better life for themselves, and more importantly, for their children. At the same time, Moberg does not underestimate the psychological cost, for Kristina in particular, of transplantation to another land; likewise, the disillusionment and death of Karl Oskar's brother Robert, an important narrative strand in *Nybyggarna*, serves as a negative counterbalance to the main story line. Nevertheless, for the practical, earth-bound farmer and settler, if not for the freedom-loving dreamer and idealist, the classic

struggle of man against nature ends with man the victor, and the new land bears fruit.

The reader of Moberg finds a number of parallel situations and recognizes certain motifs in Delblanc's *Kanaans land*. These similarities should not be construed as direct borrowings. Rather, Delblanc's awareness of the Moberg series, and his implicit assumption that the reader shares his familiarity, enriches his narrative through intertextual discourse. Patterns established by Moberg become a frame of reference that allows Delblanc to expand on or invert the older writer's motifs and themes while simultaneously transforming them through placement in an overall context of alienation and fragmentation that is utterly foreign to Moberg's world view.

Fredrik and Maria Weber are not intended to be representative characters, but their rationale for emigrating and responses to life in the New World are nevertheless in some measure typical of actual immigrant experience in ways that recall Moberg.<sup>4</sup> Fredrik, like Karl Oskar, leaves Sweden for economic reasons, attracted by the prospect of inexpensive land, and like Karl Oskar, he wants the freedom and scope to determine his own fate. Both men find a sense of personal liberation in the more democratic social interactions of the New World and are respected by their fellow settlers for their innate ability and their capacity for hard work. Neither for a moment regrets the decision to emigrate. In contrast, the main female characters in the respective series, Kristina and Maria, agree to leave their homeland only after considerable hesitation; unable to make the emotional adjustment to life in a new country, they continually long for the Sweden they have left behind.

Though Delblanc ignores the ocean journey entirely and (in *Samuels döttrar*) describes the train trip across Canada as an impressionistic blur of unfamiliar names, like Moberg he focuses on the immigrants' first year in the new land, while later events are telescoped or summarized. Three quarters of a century separate Moberg's fictional emigrants to Minnesota from Delblanc's Manitoba settlers, but in the 1920s this part of Canada was still, to a pronounced degree, a frontier society where conditions were comparable to those in the Upper Midwest in the 1850s. Consequently both Moberg and Delblanc place considerable emphasis on the relentless physical labor necessary to wrest a living from the soil, but also on the attendant sense of psychological victory the tiller experiences when new land is cleared. In both works, the unexpectedly harsh climate in the New World, with bitterly cold winters and sweltering summers, not only causes discomfort, but is actually life-threatening, especially during the first

winter, and in both *Nybyggarna* and *Kanaans land* the settlers endure a plague of grasshoppers. Economic hardship is likewise a common motif: both Moberg's settlers and Delblanc's are perennially short of cash, though unlike the Scottish Mr. Abbot in the Moberg series, the kind-hearted Jewish shop-keeper Mr. Rubin of Delblanc's novel readily extends credit. Both authors illustrate how, when money is lacking, the concern of the wife and mother for security in the domestic sphere, her anxiety for the welfare of the children and insistence that the family acquire a cow to provide milk, is in conflict with the husband's urge to make purchases that will enable him to plow more land and expand his outdoor domain. The effect of a relatively egalitarian society in the New World on customs and expectations deriving from a more rigid and stratified social structure; interactions with neighbors; and the various ways settlers extend a helping hand to each other while resenting interference from outside authority—all receive considerable attention in both works. Both Moberg and Delblanc present the difficulties of learning a new language as being especially frustrating for immigrant women, who also view themselves as the guardians of linguistic purity within the home. Like Kristina, Maria recognizes that as her children acquire new customs and a new language, they inevitably will grow apart from the older generation, and both women react with anger and pain to this realization.

Despite the many parallels between the Moberg novels and *Kanaans land* with regard to specific aspects of the immigrant experience, the ultimate outcome for the respective settlers is nonetheless completely divergent. While *Nybyggarna* and *Sista brevet till Sverige* mark a slow but steady progress toward economic prosperity, in Delblanc's narrative the settlers' fortunes begin a gradual downward slide immediately following the 1928 bumper crop. Each year concludes with Karl Oskar having more land under the plow and more animals in the barn, but Fredrik Weber is at the mercy of a capricious climate as well as economic conditions that are beyond his control: the world-wide depression following the 1929 stock market collapse. In old age Karl Oskar leaves a thriving Minnesota farm to his sons; only ten years after coming to Canada, Fredrik is forced to admit defeat by returning to Sweden.

The main character in *Kanaans land* is not, however, Fredrik Weber, but Maria, and her struggle is not the attempted conquest of the new land, but rather the effort to retain faith in God despite interpersonal and metaphysical alienation, a struggle that likewise ends in defeat. Maria's sense of separation from others, and ultimately from God,

predates her emigration to Canada and is in part a function of her disharmonious marriage. Though both Moberg and Delblanc portray marriages in which the partners are temperamentally dissimilar, the love between Karl Oskar and Kristina is a bond that strengthens them in adversity and enables them to bridge their differences through open communication. In contrast, the hardships experienced in the New World drive Fredrik and Maria farther apart, which in turn intensifies her perception of lacking a psychological or spiritual anchor.

In both narratives, female characters are the embodiment of religious feeling—the men rely on their own efforts rather than on God and have little taste for metaphysical speculation—with the important distinction that Kristina's faith, unlike Maria's, never wavers. In fact, it is by turning to God that Kristina eventually transcends her homesickness; she accepts the fact that a higher power has determined her fate, and as her longing for Sweden recedes, it becomes projected toward the life to come instead. On her deathbed, when she tastes an apple from the tree she planted from Swedish seeds, she murmurs, "Jag ä hemma" [I'm home] (*Sista brevet till Sverige*, 1968:162). Home to Kristina is both Sweden and eternity; she does not find the Promised Land in America, but in death.

Earlier in the narrative, too, imagery connected with the life cycle of the natural world is associated with Kristina in ways that parallel her own situation in the New World. Thus when she musters the courage to use her rudimentary English to try to purchase flower seeds but ends up with clover instead, Kristina experiences this as a humiliating personal defeat and a measure of her own inability to withstand being planted in different soil. Karl Oskar sends for seeds from the apple tree at her parental home in an effort to facilitate the transition and to make the physical separation from Sweden more endurable, but the effort is in some sense stillborn: a late frost nips the buds of the young sapling in Minnesota during the same spring that Kristina suffers a miscarriage. Her death while tasting the first fruit of the tree she identifies with her dream image of Sweden is an indication that she has found peace, but at the same time suggests the physical and psychological cost of her transplanting.

Just as the apple tree serves as a metaphor for Kristina's fate and her trust in God, in *Kanaans land* and the preceding volume, *Samuels döttrar*, Maria's search for faith, for emotional security, and for a sense of geographical rootedness is conveyed through imagery connected with cherry trees. In the earlier novel, when Maria is at a crossroads in her life, trying to decide whether to marry Fredrik Weber or pursue an independent career as a schoolteacher, she goes to a wild cherry tree she

associates with “[ett] återsken av guds härlighet” [a reflection of the glory of God] (1982:8),<sup>5</sup> with her father’s memory, and with herself: “I känslan fäste hon sig vid detta väsen som vid en anförvant, en syster, som årligen stod brud i vita kläder och lika regelbundet tyngdes av sin fruktsamhet” [She was emotionally connected to this presence as if to a relation, a sister who each year was decked in white bridal attire and just as regularly was weighted down when bearing fruit] (1982:8). Since the tree becomes “en bild av släktens liv på gott och ont” [an image of the life of the family, for better or worse] (1982:8), her decision must inevitably be to marry Fredrik and let the life force determine her future.

Religious imagery and Biblical cadences permeate the Delblanc narrative, and it is this symbolic language, by Maria called (in *Samuels bok*) “detta gemensamma bibelspråk” [this common Biblical language] (1981:195), that lends internal cohesiveness to the story. When Maria subsequently finds herself imprisoned in a loveless marriage, separated from her family and home province, she views the Värmland she has left behind as the land of Canaan and couches her yearning in Biblical terms: “... jag har levat fördriven från fromhetens rika örtagård! Så länge jag har försmäktat i vantrons öken ...” [I have lived in exile from the fertile garden of faith! Long have I languished in the desert of misbelief ... ] (1982:124). Returning to Värmland after fleeing her husband, she nevertheless finds she cannot rediscover the lost paradise of her childhood, a realization that prefigures her response many years later when she returns from Canada. The true reason for Maria’s sense of homelessness, however, is not a geographic remove, but the guilt she feels in connection with a brief extramarital affair and her perception that this experience forever separates her from the pious world of other women in the family, and ultimately from God. Her emotional and spiritual dilemma is that she cannot regain the lost paradise of faith.

It is in an attempt to do so that Maria acquiesces in Fredrik’s request that she give the marriage another chance by joining him when he emigrates to Canada. Wandering to the cherry tree again, she observes that “Nu står [det] grönt och ödmjukt och dignande av omogna bär, så fjärran den bild hon minns av vårens vita blomprakt ...” [Now it stands green and humble, bowed with ripening fruit—how far removed from the image she remembers of the beautiful, white blossoms of spring ... ] (1982: 317). The tree makes Maria once more recall the family tradition of female piety and servitude. Others before her, including her grandmother Anna–Lisa, had emigrated to America, trusting in God to provide. Maria imagines she hears her father’s voice telling her to go and

sin no more; when she opens the Bible at random to the passage in the Book of Ruth that begins "Dit du går, dit vill ock jag wara ..." [Whither thou goest, there will I go, too]—a passage that figures in *Utvandrarna* in connection with Danjel's wife Inga-Lena—her choice seems clear.

Although Maria retrospectively acknowledges that for many settlers, including her husband, Canada was a land of milk and honey—at least during the good years—for her the physical separation from her loved ones in Sweden means that she is still, more than ever, in exile. Like Kristina, she is unable to put down roots in the new land, incapable of transposing the concepts 'home' and 'away'. In Värmland, Maria identified her own fate with the life cycle of the cherry tree. In Manitoba, everything encompassed in her longing for home becomes crystalized in the image of the cherry blossom.

On her first visit to the town of Minitonas, Maria finds a refuge in the little café of Mr. Lee, where she sees a Chinese vase decorated with a white cherry blossom motif. To her it represents beauty and culture, but simultaneously induces a sense of melancholy by awakening the memory of something that has been lost—her homeland, her family left behind there, the security of her childhood. Still, for the first time since arriving in Canada, Maria feels "frid i sitt hjärta ... detta var den saliga vilan i Gud" [peace in her heart ... this was the blissful repose of God's embrace] (1984:57).

The next spring, when Maria sees a Canadian wild cherry tree in bloom for the first time, she wonders, "Finns det även i detta land en bild av förnyelse och hopp?... Var detta ett tecken att hon kommit fram och var hemma?" [Is there even in this country an image of renewal and hope?... Was this a sign that she had arrived and was at home?] (1984:139-40). That she nevertheless cannot adjust to life in Manitoba becomes another cause for guilt—it must be her own fault that she does not appreciate what the new land has to offer.

As Maria gradually realizes that she will never feel at home in Canada, while at the same time her feeling of separation from the world she has left behind in Sweden increases, the sight of the vase no longer gives her peace, but rather overwhelms her with self-pity and grief:

I detta nya land var hon dömd att leva och dö, det visste hon nu. Minnet av hembygden skulle bevaras i hennes hjärta, lika förstenat och orörligt som bilden av vita körsbärsblom under glasyren på krukans porslin. När hennes hjärta brast en gång, som kukan där var dömd att brista, då skulle det minnet för evigt vara borta. Inte den levande och doftande blommans närvaro, bara en blek avbild, ett stelnat minne—och sen skärvor och dött stoft.

[In this new land she was condemned to live and die, she knew that now. The memory of her homeland would remain in her heart, just as rigid and immobile as the image of white cherry blossoms under the glaze of the ceramic vase. When her heart stopped beating, just as the vase over there was doomed to break, then the memory would forever be gone. No living, fragrant presence of the blossom, merely a pale reflection, a frozen memory—and then shards and lifeless dust.] (1984:167)

In this and other passages, the frozen image of the cherry blossom is linked to memories frozen in time. But what has been lost is not just a sense of continuity with the past, but also a living faith:

Men även min tro på ett hinsides har bleknat bort och förvandlats: så är även min gudstro förstenad och inte längre en levande blomma. Så bleknar bilden av min gud, som om också han hörde hemma i barndomens värld och inte kunde följa mig hit till Kanaans land. Så längtar jag hem till min gud, som jag längtar efter mitt fosterland och mina kära.

[But even my faith in the hereafter has faded away and been transformed: even my faith in God has turned to stone and is no longer a living blossom. Thus my image of God grows faint, as if He, too, belonged to the world of childhood and was unable to follow me hither to the land of Canaan. I am homesick for my God, just as I long for my native land and my loved ones.] (1984:231)

The final blow to Maria's belief in a benevolent God comes when she is desperately ill with typhus and must listen helplessly for three days and three nights as her newborn daughter cries herself to death. In terms of the imagery of the novel, Maria has literally not borne fruit, but rather given birth to death and despair: her loss of faith is now described as "en fosterfördrivning som länge pågått" [an induced abortion that had been in progress for a long time] (1984:276). This metaphor does not imply that Maria's loss of faith is self-induced. The Swedish word *fosterfördrivning* [abortion] literally means to expel or drive out the fetus, and Maria, like the fetus, has unwillingly been expelled from the kingdom of faith and cannot, in spiritual terms, survive. *Foster*, however, in its other meaning of 'native,' occurs frequently in the narrative in the compound *fosterland* [native land], so *fosterfördrivning* may allude to the sense of banishment connected to the emigration experience when the comfort and protection of the native or 'mother' country are left behind. The multiple associations of the word also suggest the connection between Maria's perception of spiritual banishment and the geographic remove that likewise causes her pain.

Events in the external world parallel Maria's devastating personal suffering: the depression has come to Canada, and "Detta Kanaans land blev... ett förbannat Egyptien, med torra och missväxt och gräshoppor och hemsökelse över allt mänskligt förstånd" [This land of Canaan

became... a cursed Egypt, with drought and poor harvests and grasshoppers and afflictions beyond human comprehension] (1984:275). The perception that both she and the land lie under a curse strengthens Maria's resolve to return to Sweden, and a timely inheritance from a rich uncle in California enables her to act accordingly. Delblanc inverts the motivation and sequence of events of *Utvandrarna*, where the death of a child causes Kristina to place her trust in God and agree to emigrate. In *Kanaans land*, a similar circumstance brings about Maria's loss of faith and decision to leave Canada.

On Maria's last visit to Mr. Lee's café, the vase with the cherry blossom motif is gone and Mr. Lee himself is preparing to depart for Vancouver. Even the comfort of a memory, a frozen image, a pale shadow of life, hope, and faith, is now denied her—a suggestion that even after returning to Sweden, the land of security, happiness will be elusive. And indeed, at the end of *Kanaans land* and in the concluding novel of the series, *Maria ensam*, she discovers, like Albert Carlson in Moberg's *Din stund på jorden* (1963; *A Time on Earth*, 1965), that in a very real sense, you can't go home again. Fredrik experiences repatriation to Sweden as a return to Egyptian bondage, and Maria finds that her homeland is no longer the paradise she had imagined, if in fact it ever was.

Moberg's settlers react in varying ways to specific aspects of life in America, but even those for whom psychological adjustment is difficult or impossible are comforted by their belief in a life beyond. In Delblanc's novels, Maria's inability to find an earthly paradise either in Sweden or in Canada ultimately has little to do with geography, but is a metaphor for her inability either to embrace religious faith wholeheartedly or to put the memory of it conclusively behind her. The reader may deduce historical reasons for this difference in emphasis between the two epic series, for the years between 1850 and the Great Depression saw a gradual secularization of society on both sides of the Atlantic. That this process could be a painful one for individuals torn between conflicting world views as well as between the Old World and the New is the true theme of *Kanaans land*.

In a broader philosophical sense, then, Moberg's tetralogy is about continuity and stability, while Delblanc's novel is about mutability and change. Metaphysical or psychological rootlessness is a unifying theme running through much of Delblanc's production, in works as diverse as the picaresque historical novel *Prästkappan* [The Cassock] (1963) and the partly autobiographical Hedeby series.<sup>6</sup> Maria is likewise not the only Delblanc character for whom a geographic remove brings about this sense



of separation. In fact, emigration, repatriation, and the psychological cost of the transplanting play a significant role in the first volume of the tetralogy. Maria's father Samuel, the protagonist of *Samuels bok*, had emigrated to America as a child and received his education there. When he returns to Sweden, his credentials are considered next to worthless; he becomes an outsider and an outcast, unwelcome in his homeland, a circumstance that deepens his sense of isolation and contributes to his eventual insanity.

The most telling metaphoric association of geography with state of mind, however, recurs in several works, notably in the Hedeby novels and in *Maria ensam*, where the authorial alter ego escapes a painful reality by allowing himself to be transported to a transcendent, visionary realm referred to as "land som är avlägset land" [land beyond land]. In the memoir *Livets ax*, Delblanc confirms that these passages are based on his own experience. He describes his inability, as an adult, to gain access to this mystical kingdom of paradise as exile or banishment: "Jag bor i ett främmande land, jag talar med möda ett främmande språk. Jag är förvisad från mitt hem, det land som är avlägset land" [I dwell in a foreign land; with effort, I speak a foreign tongue. I am banished from my home, the land beyond land] (1991:209). He goes on to explain that reality itself, the here-and-now, presents a tragic choice between the imprisonment of absolute order, and an absolute freedom that leads to disintegration of the ego, a theme that is explored in *Eremikräftan* [The Hermit Crab] (1962), his first novel. In this connection Delblanc's revelation in *Livets ax* that he began writing fiction only after the gates of his true home were permanently closed takes on a retrospective significance that illuminates his entire career. Writing, though it cannot open the gates again, serves as a surrogate; one experience of imaginative flight replaces another, more complete one. The longing for a lost mystical unity beyond everyday reality, governed by silence and utter peace, nevertheless remains.

Delblanc's characterization of himself in the memoir as a permanently displaced person wandering in a metaphysical desert reveals that Maria's psychological isolation and spiritual alienation in *Kanaan's land*, and the geographic manifestation of her separation and her longing for wholeness, are in part projections of the author's private dilemma. Moberg's work helps provide a framework that allows Delblanc to recast the personal in a context that demonstrates its universal relevance, to incorporate a profoundly intimate experience into the symbolic structure of a complex fictional narrative that explores one of the central, quintessential themes of modern literature, alienation and fragmentation

of the ego. In *Kanaans land*, emigration from Sweden to Canada and the situation of the immigrant, though described in compelling detail that draws on specific motifs in Moberg's emigrant tetralogy, ultimately function as a metaphor for existential homelessness. The title is doubly ironic: not only does Manitoba prove to be no land of Canaan, but Maria's search for faith and a spiritual anchor ends in perpetual exile.

## NOTES

1. Gustaf Lannestock's English translations of the novels were first published as a trilogy (New York: Simon & Schuster); the third volume, *The Last Letter Home* (1961), was a highly compressed version of the last two volumes of Moberg's tetralogy. All four novels have subsequently appeared in their entirety under the titles indicated (New York: Popular Library, 1978).

2. See, for instance, Alan Swanson's "Där ute: Moberg's Predecessors," in *Perspectives on Swedish Immigration*, pp. 279-90.

3. Gustaf Lannestock's translation contains the first two (of four) sections of the novel.

4. In the article "Emigranten och fosterlandet. Svensk-amerikanernas bild av Sverige," in *Att vara svensk: Föredrag vid Vitterhetsakademiens symposium 12-13 april 1984*, pp. 131-147, historian Harald Runblom discusses Moberg's emigrant novels, Delblanc's *Kanaans land*, and Norwegian-American writer Ole Rølvaag's *I De Dage* (1924) and *Riket Grundlægges* (1925; published together in English as *Giants in the Earth*, 1928) as well as various works by Swedish-American writers in an analysis of the ways in which literature reflects actual attitudes among immigrant groups.

5. This and all subsequent translations from Delblanc's novels are my own.

6. The tetralogy, set in Sörmland, where Delblanc's family lived after returning from Canada, comprises *Äminne* [Memory] (1970); *Stenfågel* [Stone Bird] (1973); *Vinteride* [Winter Lair] (1974); and *Stadsporten* [Town Gate] (1976).

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## REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

**Errol Durbach.** *A Doll's House: Ibsen's Myth of Transformation.* Boston: Twayne, 1991. xv + 147 pages.

Reviewed by CHARLES LELAND,  
*St. Michael's College, University of Toronto*

Errol Durbach's book is a contribution to the Twayne Masterworks series. Each volume of this series focuses on one particular text, providing general comments on its context and giving it a careful reading. The format, which might have been constraining to some, provided a liberating structure for Durbach. Before he proceeds with his own reading of *A Doll's House*, he concerns himself with context: literary, philosophical and historical. He cannot, for example, avoid the fact that the play appeared at the time of the spiritual, moral and political revolutions which occurred in the last half of the 19th century. This came as a result of "a belief in man's extraordinary capacity to free himself from static and determined systems, to participate in his own self-transformation, and to impel a revolution from within" (p. 7).

The volume is, quite simply, the best monograph on an Ibsen play I know—its only possible rivals being the two great monographs by Else Høst (*Hedda Gabler*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 1958 and *Vildanden av Henrik Ibsen*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 1967). Durbach begins with a "Chronology: Henrik Ibsen's Life and Work". This, of course, is standard procedure, but Durbach makes his 'chronology' a 'critical chronology'. It is noted, for example, that 1879 is not only the year of *A Doll's House* but also "the year of the light bulb" (p. xiii)—a very interesting fact in terms of the visual imagery of the play. The contexts of the play are then succinctly discussed. Four pages are devoted to "The Importance of the Work," "the deep structure" of which is "a modern myth of self-transformation, ..." —"a work which honors the vitality of the human spirit in women and men" (pp. 11&12). Finally, it is noted in this section on the importance of the work that "the miracles of *A Doll's House* belong to a new and extraordinary form of secular faith" (p. 12). This part of the book ends with an interesting study of the critical reception of Ibsen's play: 1879–1900 in Scandinavia and Germany, 1880–1889 in England, and 1882–1906 in America.

Most of the book consists in a splendid 'Reading' of the play. Problems of translation are noted: should it be *A Doll's House*, *A Dolls' House*, or *A Doll House*? *Lykkelig* and *lystig*—how are they to be translated? This leads to a brief discussion of a remarkable peculiarity of Ibsen's language, moving, as it sometimes does, from the everyday to the sublime, from *det vidunderlige* to the superlative *det vidunderligste* and all the weight of connotation it bears. Visual metaphors (light, setting, costume, the dancing doll, the Christmas tree) are all intelligently discussed.

In the central chapter of the book Durbach gives us his reading of *A Doll's House* as "the tragedy of modern times" (p. 56). The play "is intended to reshape both the sensibility of the modern mind and the form of modern drama" (p. 56). "I focus," Durbach writes (p. 58), "on certain elements of the tragic form as they relate to the central theme of this analysis—the myth of transformation, the existential reshaping of the self from a composite of socially fashioned roles into an autonomous human being on the threshold of redefinition" (p. 58). Nora is tragic because she has to redefine herself painfully. She must become another: "at blevet en anden", as Mrs. Linde says to a desperate Krogstad. Torvald uses the same words as he pleads to the wife he at last realizes he is losing: "Jeg har kraft til at blevet en anden".

The greatest miracle of all—*det vidunderligste*—is the possibility of becoming another, better person. Ibsen is talking about moral miracles, which involve conversion, true change of heart. The secular faith turns out to be not secular at all. It has to do ultimately with something suggesting "an older tradition of faith in which 'miracle' connotes the impossible made possible by divine intervention" (pp. 133&134). The movement from *sparagmos* to *peripeteia*, from deconstruction to construction, also becomes possible through the individual dynamism of the heroically brave who have opened themselves to grace. "The miraculous," Durbach concludes (p. 134), "is incorporated into the world of ordinary human endeavor: the stage set is transformed, both physically and in the mind of the protagonist, from a secure domestic Eden to a prison world of devastated value [symbolized by the denuded Christmas tree] ... and the fated natural universe is transformed into a world of creative and dynamic change by the protagonist's commitment to difficult choice and painful life decisions."

From now on no study of *A Doll's House* can fail to take Durbach's 'Reading' and its insights into account.

**Henning Bender and Birgit Flemming Larsen, eds.** *Danish Emigration to Canada*. Published by the Danes Worldwide Archives in collaboration with the Danish Society for Emigration History. Udvandrerarkivets skriftserie: Udvandrerhistoriske studier nr. 3. Viborg: Special-Trykkeriet. 1991, 212 pages.

Reviewed by KIRSTEN WOLF,  
*University of Manitoba*

Published on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada, *Danish Emigration to Canada* brings together twelve articles on various aspects of life among Danes in Canada and includes surveys of Danish emigration to Canada, descriptions of individual Danish settlements, discussions of the assimilation of Danes and Danish influence on and contribution to the shaping of a Canadian culture. This is, however, excluding the first article, Helge Ingstad's "The Norse Discovery of America" (pp. 12–21), which presents an account of the voyages to and explorations of North America in the Middle Ages by Greenlanders of Icelandic extraction (as documented in the Vinland sagas) and of Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad's excavations and finds at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, in the 1960s. While interesting in itself, the article has nothing whatsoever to do with Danish emigration to Canada. Somewhat more pertinent but nonetheless peripheral to the topic of Danish emigration are two biographical articles, Jørn Carlsen's engaging account of "Jens Munk's Search for the Northwest Passage. The Winter of 1619–20 at *Nova Dania*, Manitoba" (pp. 22–35) and Jette E. Ashlee's insightful and vivid portrayal of the life of "[Christian] Klengenber[gh] [Jørgensen]: A Danish Adventurer in Arctic Canada" (pp. 36–48).

The articles that form the core of the volume are Palle Bo Bojesen's informative contribution, "New Denmark—The Oldest Danish Colony in Canada" (pp. 49–70), which tells the story of New Denmark in the province of New Brunswick and the initial difficulties and successes of the pioneers, and "A History of Dickson, Alberta, Canada" (pp. 71–90) on many aspects of life in the Dickson colony written by Margarethe Nissen, Esther Thesberg, and Andy Kjeersgaard, all locals in the area; although this particular article falls well below the standards set by the other articles in the volume—it is ill-structured and marred by ethnic pride (e.g., "They came—they saw—they conquered. . . . What they saw was most discouraging—in fact a lesser people would have folded their tents and left" [p. 81])—it nevertheless offers a glimpse of rural life on the Canadian prairies. Of much value is also Poul Erik Olsen's

"Emigration from Denmark to Canada in the 1920s" (pp. 125–145), which details the second phase of emigration and analyzes how this was viewed in Denmark; like Bojesen's article, it is replete with useful statistical information and reveals a sound handling of primary sources.

Other articles are more focused and include Henrik Bredmose Simonsen's detailed history of the two Danish Churches in Canada, the Danish Church and the United Church, in "The Early Life of the Danish Churches in Canada" (pp. 91–105) and Erik Helmer Pedersen's account of the differences between Danish and Canadian farming and the many problems faced by the Danish farmers as they had to adapt to new farming techniques in "Danish Farmers in Canada" (pp. 162–176). The folk (high) schools, based on the prototype Danish *folkehøjskole* form the topic of Rolf Buschardt Christensen's fine contribution ("Danish Folk Schools in Canada" [pp. 106–124]), in which he gives an account of the six folk schools established by Danish immigrants in Canada. Christopher Hale's article, "Aksel Sandemose and Canada" (pp. 146–161), must be read in connection with Olsen's contribution; in 1927, the Canadian Pacific Railway paid the Danish author Aksel Sandemose's travel expenses to come to Canada to report on the conditions for immigration in the prairie provinces, a trip that gave rise to numerous newspaper articles and three novels based on Sandemose's experiences in Canada. In his fine article, Hale gives an account of Sandemose's trip and demonstrates how individual experiences and encounters yielded material for the three novels, *Ross Dane*, *En Sømand Går i Land*, and *September*. Finally, in his article "The Influence of Danish on Canadian English" (pp. 177–202), Howard B. Woods lists Canadian–English words and phrases that in his view are influenced by Danish. This confused and confusing piece will frustrate etymologists and historical linguists alike. Wood never makes clear how Viking Age Danish bears on Canadian English (!) or how modern Danish of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave rise to particular idiomatic expressions and loan translations in North American and Canadian English. Cognates in other Scandinavian languages and the influence of the Norman Conquest are wholly ignored. The word *baggage*, for example, is linked to Danish *bagage* without any recognition of Old French *bague* > Medieval French *bagage*, akin to Old Norse *baggi* via Middle English *bagge*; *candy* is linked to Danish *kandis* while bypassing French *candi* (Medieval French *sucre candi*), which ultimately looks to Arabic *qandī* and Sanskrit *khaṇḍa* (broken sugar). While a few points in Wood's article are valid, the reader will strain to make sense of this weak piece.



The volume concludes with an account of the establishment of the Federation of Danish Associations in Canada, its 10-year history, its aims, and its members (pp. 203–211) by Rolf Buschardt Christensen, president of the Federation. A list of contributors to the volume (excluding Bojesen, who seems to have been accidentally omitted) is found on p. 212 along with a list of members of the board of directors of the Danish Society for Emigration History. The book is prefaced by greetings from Uffe Elleman-Jensen, Minister for Foreign Affairs (p. 7), and a brief introduction by the editors of the volume (pp. 9–11). Useful maps (including a map indicating the sites of all Danish colonies and settlements in Canada on p. 8) and black-and-white photographs are found throughout the volume.

*Danish Emigration to Canada* is a valuable contribution to Danish-Canadian history and contains much that is of interest, but, as often happens in compilations of this sort, the articles are uneven, and there is too much lacking from this fragmented, multicontributor volume for it to be a comprehensive history. While the order in which the articles appear does provide the reader with a sense of a chronology, the more focused articles disrupt that continuity, resulting in noticeable gaps in the discussion. Moreover, a sense of balance is wanting (the settlement in Dickson, for example, is given disproportionate attention), which could have been remedied if the preface had been devoted not to a summary of the individual contributions but to a sketch of the emigration of Danes to Canada and the history of the Danish settlements in Canada.

**Janet Garton and Henning Sehmsdorf, eds.** *New Norwegian Plays*. Norwich: Norvik Press, 1989. 293 pages.

Reviewed by JOHN LINGARD,  
*Nipissing University College, North Bay, Ontario*

*New Norwegian Plays* is an anthology of four plays recently written for stage and radio in Norway: Bjørg Vik's *Daughters* (1979), Peder W. Cappelen's *Whittensand* (1981), Edvard Hoem's *Good Night, Europe* (1982), and Cecile Løveid's *Seagull Eaters* (1983). It provides a kind of sequel to Eiliv Eide's collection of mid-twentieth century drama (*Modern Nordic Plays: Norway*. New York: Twayne. 1974). Eide's selection is conservative, reflecting a tradition of Ibsenite naturalism. The new book might be called a post-Ibsen anthology devoted to rather more experimental plays. As its editors point out, the Ibsen tradition was one fact inhibiting the development of strong experimental drama in

Norway; the other was the lack of theatres willing to risk the new. Even now "it is still not easy to get a play put on in a little country like Norway" (p. 16), and the one consistently innovative alternative 'theatre' remains radio (p. 10).

In his introduction Eide was frank about the secondary position of twentieth-century Norwegian drama: "In Ibsen's native land, the great values of post-war literature must be sought outside the drama" (p. 8). Janet Garton and Henning Sehmsdorf make larger claims for their selected plays: "All are sufficiently universal in their message and their form to attract a much wider audience than they have so far been able to reach" (p. 18). It may be my own preference for the Ibsen tradition, but I can find very little universal appeal in any of the plays except Vik's *Daughters*, which was written for radio and transferred successfully to the Oslo Nye Teater. It is a beautifully written piece about three women—Mother, her daughter Miriam, and Miriam's daughter Siv—whose speech and attitudes accurately reflect the gaps between three generations in Norway—and indeed anywhere in the West. Garton's fluid translation is a great help here. Unusually for a contemporary play, *Daughters* earns its relatively optimistic ending; in the last scene Miriam and Siv seem to have broken through to a mutual respect and understanding. It is like Michel Tremblay and David French only better, and can be strongly recommended to Canadian directors—not to mention actresses—in search of new plays.

The same cannot be said for the other pieces in the anthology. *Whittenland* is an astonishingly awful symbolist melodrama about the struggle between nature (represented by such 'characters' as Rainbow, Southwind, and Butterfly) and technology (represented by an evil magician who is trying to computerize the world). This is the play that Chekhov's Konstantin Treplev would have written had he not shot himself in time. Cappelen tries to give depth to his allegory by a system of references to Nordic mythology, but nothing can disguise the embarrassing thinness of the dialogue. Only the bravest of actors would don a butterfly costume to announce that "the world must be pollinated!" (p. 94); and most audiences would find unintentionally self-referential irony in Gudbrand's complaint: "I'm sick and tired of all that clucking here at Mastermaid's, and all those confounded fairies jabbering and gabbling and dreaming and talking and falling in love all day long, and generally behaving like idiots. It's all going to end in disaster" (p. 149). One can only wonder how this piece reached the stage of Oslo's prestigious Nationaltheatret.

Hoem's *Good Night, Europe* is a political drama with techniques borrowed from both epic and expressionist theatre. It is strongly reminiscent of Howard Brenton's near contemporary *Weapons of Happiness*. Both plays juxtapose realistic scenes with dream sequences and both have as protagonist a guilty but still idealistic survivor of political tyranny. Brenton is, however, more successful in creating human relationships. Hoem's play takes place too relentlessly 'in the mind of the dreamer' (to use Strindberg's phrase) and his attempt to evoke pathos from the hero's relationship with his daughter Irene does not work.

Harry Lind, the survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, leaves his retreat in the Norwegian mountains on a quest for peace and the key to a united Europe. His pilgrimage is dramatized in a series of nightmare sequences which reveal his own guilt—though not a Quisling, he had once argued for "a peaceful settlement with Germany" (p. 186)—and a vision of nuclear war. Hoem writes with a passionate sincerity which too often results in straight, political messages couched in a kind of pseudo-poetical language:

We strive for the sky  
we wrestle creation from the hands of the god,  
we want this beautiful world to survive,  
we want this continent to rouse itself  
in furious protest against annihilation. (p. 260)

A similar portentousness mars the final image of Irene sitting Solveig-like by her dead father as "the European elegy with the incomprehensible words rings out at full volume around her" (p. 261). According to the introduction, Hoem was playwright in residence at Det Norske Teatret and has said that he felt "'spiritually raped' when actors poked fun at his dialogue or the stage director cut the text as he saw fit" (p. 25). It is not hard to read between the lines here to discover a political idealist in the John Arden tradition unwilling to compromise with what Ben Jonson called 'that strumpet the stage.'

*Seagull Eaters*, another radio play, makes effective use of the medium to juxtapose dialogue, quotation, monologue and sound effects in a distinctly modernist collage. Magda Blanc's performance of Mrs. Alving comments ironically on the heroine's attempts to succeed as an actress in war-time Bergen, while another voice reads passages from Henriette Schønberg Erken's cookbook urging "young women to cultivate homemaking and modest economic expectations" (p. 274). I

can understand how Løveid won the Prix Italia for this clever play, while preferring Vik's less experimental but more substantial work.

Although *New Norwegian Plays* contains only one play worthy of note, it is an attractively presented volume, with an informative, if rosy-tinted, introduction and a useful bibliography. It must be welcomed as the first anthology of contemporary Norwegian drama in English translation.

**Phyllis Moen.** *Working Parents: Transformations in Gender Roles and Public Policies in Sweden.* Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989. xvi + 181 pages.

Reviewed by CAROL AGÓCS,  
*The University of Western Ontario*

*Working Parents* examines change and continuity in the management of work and child care responsibilities by parents of preschool children in Sweden, the country that is considered the world's model for progressive policies. The author, Phyllis Moen, is Professor of Human Development and Family Studies and of Sociology at Cornell University, and director of the Sociology Program at the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Moen analyzes data extracted from the Level of Living Survey of a representative national sample of approximately 1,400 Swedish adults in 1968, 1974 and 1981, focussing on respondents who had at least one child under seven at the time they were interviewed. The analysis examines complex relationships over time between work and family circumstances, and individual well-being, for women and men who were parents of young children.

The period covered by the study was a time when important family-oriented legislative reforms were introduced in Sweden, including a year of paid parental leave, the option of working part-time with pro-rated benefits, public day care that is widely accessible, and the Swedish Marriage Act (1986) which states that "spouses shall jointly care for the home and the children and promote the well-being of the family on the basis of joint consultation" (p. 22). Also in the 80s, legislation was introduced to enlarge gender equality and employee influence on decision-making in the work place, and to protect employee health and well-being. These developments reflected a consensus of employers, unions and government in support of the social values of gender equality in the workplace and in life, full employment, and

assistance to families. They also reflect the realities of a society in which 86% of mothers of young children were in the labour force in 1986, and women's labour force participation rate equalled men's—conditions that Canada now approximates. But Canada is far from equalling Sweden in providing supportive policies for working families.

Moen's study reports important findings that deserve to be known to those who are concerned about how working parents of young children balance their work and family roles, the toll this takes on individual parents, and how social policy can moderate the inevitable stresses. *Working Parents* reports evidence that Sweden's policy framework has indeed reduced negative effects on individual well-being of the multiple demands of work and family, especially for mothers. Instead of leaving the labour force, and giving up their seniority and benefits, mothers of young children were reducing their working hours by taking advantage of paid leave and part-time work arrangements.

However, even though Sweden is the world's leader in developing and implementing policies to attain gender equality, Swedish women still carry a heavier burden and suffer more than men from the conflicting demands of work and family, as shown in a far higher incidence of fatigue and psychological strain among women, as well as in the segregation of women in lower-ranking and lower paid job ghettos. Among parents in Sweden, as elsewhere, those most disadvantaged by fatigue and psychological distress are women parenting alone—a group that accounts for almost a fifth of Swedish households. In two-parent families, Moen reports, Swedish women still do most of the domestic work, and the “in-principle man” who supports gender equality in words but not deeds is still the norm. In the mid-80s, only 27% of fathers were taking advantage of the paid parental leave policy, while about two thirds of mothers of pre-schoolers had opted for part-time work in addition to the paid leave.

Moen's findings demonstrate that supportive employment policies and practices contribute significantly to the well-being of employees who are parents of young children. This observation should be carefully noted in all post-industrial societies where both mothers and fathers are working, and where gender and parental roles are changing, and individual women and men are faced with resulting stresses. Moen's study shows that work and family are not separable in societies such as ours—they are part of the same whole. The implication is that the social organization of work can no longer be based on the assumption that the

“typical” employee is a man with no family responsibilities beyond bringing home a pay cheque.

*Working Parents* should be read by researchers, policy-makers, teachers and graduate students in the fields of family studies, gender studies, and women in the work place. It would be instructive for employers who need to address issues involving employees having family responsibilities.

**Poul Houe, ed.** *The Nordic Roundtable Papers*. Minneapolis: The Center for Nordic Studies, University of Minnesota, Volume 1 (May 1989) – Volume 11 (August 1992).

Reviewed by WOLFGANG AHRENS,  
*York University, Toronto*

The *Nordic Roundtable Papers* is a series of small booklets with an average length of about 40 pages each—the shortest being 23 pages and the longest 57. Authors are mainly European academics and, according to the policy statement included on the inside front cover of each booklet, papers are for the most part revised versions of oral presentations delivered in the context of Roundtable Seminars (presumably at the University of Minnesota). At least seven of the eleven volumes are translated papers written originally in a Scandinavian language, and in one case in Dutch. The topics are mainly literary, with the remainder also being related to literary themes. Among the latter group of papers are the following: Finn Hauberg Mortensen. *Søren Kierkegaards Either–/Or: Its Composition and Appropriation of Folk Literature*; Lars Furuland. *Literacy in Sweden: Two Essays*; Anders Hallengren, *Deciphering Reality: Swedenborg, Emerson, Whitman and the Search for the Language of Nature*; and Poul Houe, *Carl Theodor Dreyer's Cinematic Humanism*.

In glancing at the entire group of booklets, one notices that there has been a gradual improvement in the quality of editing. There were problems with formatting and proof reading in the earlier publications (but even in Volume 10 an extra page listing errata has been inserted). The reader is immediately aware of an experimenting with a variety of fonts and bibliographical and footnote formats from booklet to booklet, until the editor settled on a specific font and on a more or less similar format for the last three volumes.

This series is not designed for the publication of restricted specific research topics, of exclusive interest to literary specialists; instead, most

volumes is given a broad overview of a topic. Again, the policy statement on the inside front cover states that the audience for the *Papers* includes beginning college students as well as more informed readers and scholars of Scandinavian Studies and of studies of culture at large. One sees that with a professed audience such as this, some papers may fall short of satisfying fully at least one group of intended readership. For instance, Finn Hauberg Mortensen's two-volume publication, *A Tale of Tales: Hans Christian Andersen and Danish Children's Literature*, includes about thirty pages of discussion on the upbringing of children from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. While reading this excursus, one begins to wonder how this will eventually tie in with H.C. Andersen, the professed subject of these two volumes. A similar rather wide historical concept is found in the essays, *Literacy in Sweden*. Going by the title one might expect to find a status report on contemporary literacy. Instead, the topic is treated much more broadly, with a great deal of emphasis being placed on the introduction of electricity and its influence on reading habits. Although overall these papers are all very informative one will probably find that those papers which restrict their subject matter are more satisfying. For instance, Henrik Wivel's *Selma Lagerlöf: Her Works on Life* and Annelies van Hees' *The Ambivalent Venus: Women in Isak Dinesen's Tales* are perhaps the strongest volumes in the series.

This series fills a gap for the publishing scholar, for the studies presented here are too long to be normally accepted as journal articles and are obviously too short to be published as a book. The series serves as a very readable quick introduction to a variety of topics and as such can be highly recommended to the general reader. It is hoped that in the future the editor might consider expanding the focus of the series by soliciting and accepting studies beyond those presented as talks at the University of Minnesota, by including papers from other countries besides Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and by accepting contributions authored by scholars outside of the Scandinavian countries.

VOLUME 1, 1983 **Mauri A. Ialava**, The Scandinavians as a Source of Settlers for the Dominion of Canada. The First Generation, 1867–1897; **Jørgen Dahlie**, The Ethnic Press as a Cultural Resource: *Canada Skandinavien* and the Norwegian–Swedish Community in B.C., 1910–1930; **Christopher S. Hale**, Aksel Sandemose and *Ross Dane*: A Scandinavian's Perception of Western Canada; **J. David Martin**, Folk Technology Retention: Finnish Folk Tools and Procedures in Mid-Canada and Central Finland; **H. Roe**, The Origins and Spread of Literacy in Early Scandinavia; **Bernadine McCreech**, Ghosts and Pagans in the Family Sagas; **William Sayers**, The Irish Bóand–Nechtan Myth in the Light of Scandinavian Evidence; **Deborah J. McGinnis**, The Vikings in the East: *Ingvars saga víðförla*; **Anthony B. Chan**, Scandinavian Arms Traders in Warlord China; **M. N. Matson**, The Theatre's Approach to Strindberg: Four Productions in the Strindberg Festival, Stockholm, May 1981—*Brott och brott*; *Fadern*; *Fadren, en opera*; *Il padre*; **Dieter Riegel**, Society and Crime in the Novels of Hans Scherfig; **Peter Ohlin**, The Ideology of the Martin Beck Novels; **Charles Leland**, Daniel Haakonsen's View of Ibsen, with Special Reference to His Last Book; **W.S.W. Nowak**, A Contribution to the Understanding of the Biogeography of a Sub-Arctic Lake: The Case of Mývatn, Iceland; **Ingunn Norderval**, The Norwegian Prime Minister; **Elin Elgaard**, No Time for Timelessness? A brief look at the trio: Tove Ditlevsen (1918–76), Frank Jaeger (1926–77), Ole Sarvig (1921–1981) who all died of their own hand.

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