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Gender Ambiguity in Medieval Iceland

Legal Framework and Saga Dynamics

WILLIAM SAYERS

ABSTRACT: Intentional or unintentional cross-dressing or participation in homosexual acts, failure to meet gender criteria or gross transgression of their limits, and other sexually marked aberrant behavior are reviewed under the rubric of gender ambiguity. In the judgmental genre of the Icelandic family saga, gender transgression is always central to plot dynamics and this is its only rationale for inclusion. Women may be forced by circumstance to assume male roles when men prove inadequate to the tasks of honor, but this serves to reinforce the values of a viricentric society, and is not true female empowerment. Similarly, charges against men of effeminacy are often prompted by motives of honor and political advantage, but need have no counterpart in actual conduct. The purportedly "realistic" family sagas both idealize and masculinize Icelandic national history.

RÉSUMÉ: Le travestissement ou les actes homosexuels intentionnels ou non intentionnels, le manquement aux critères relatifs à l'identité sexuelle ou une transgression grossière des limites de ceux-ci, ainsi que d'autres comportements aberrants marqués sexuellement sont examinés sous la rubrique de l'ambiguïté sexuelle. Dans la saga familiale islandaise, genre moralisant, la transgression sexuelle est toujours centrale à la dynamique de l'action et c'est là la seule raison de l'inclure. Les femmes peuvent être forcées par les circonstances d'assumer des rôles masculins quand les hommes se montrent insuffisants aux tâches de l'honneur, mais cela sert à renforcer les valeurs d'une société phallocrate. Il ne s'agit pas d'une vraie autonomisation des femmes. De même, les accusations de caractère efféminé portées contre les hommes sont souvent provoquées par des motifs d'honneur ou d'avantage politique et ne sont pas forcément reliées à un comportement réel. Les sagas familiales dites «réalistes» idéalisent et masculinisent, en effet, l'histoire nationale islandaise.

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One winter evening in 990 in western Iceland, seventeen-year-old Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir asked a male friend, Þórðr Ingunnarson, how she should repay her husband after he slapped her in response to her demand for finery. Þórðr smiled and said, “Hér kan ek gott ráð til. Gerðu honum skyrtu ok brautgangs höfuðsmátt ok seg skilit við hann fyrir þessar sakar” (“I know just the thing. Make him a shirt with the neck so low-cut that it will give you grounds for divorcing him” [*Laxdæla saga* 1934, *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 1997, ch. 34]). By spring Guðrún was divorced and soon thereafter asked Þórðr “Hvart er þat satt, Þórðr, at Auðr, konu þín, er jafnan í brókum, ok setgeiri í, en vafit spjörrum mjök í skúa niðr?” (“whether the rumor is true[, Þórðr], that your wife Auð is often dressed in breeches, with a codpiece and long leggings?” [ch. 35]). Þórðr said he hadn’t noticed, but one summer day at the general assembly he asked Guðrún what the penalty was for a woman who always wore breeches like a man’s. Guðrún replied with legalistic precision, “Slíkt víti á konum at skapa fyrir þat á sitt hóf sem karlmanni, ef hann hefir höfuðsmátt svá mikla, at sjái geirvörtur hans berar, brautgangssök hvárttvegja.” (“If women go about dressed as men, they invite the same treatment as do men who wear shirts cut so low that the nipples of their breasts can be seen—both are grounds for divorce”).¹

These instances of cross-dressing in *Laxdæla saga* can be associated with a reflection by Gunnarr Hamundarson, the embodiment of early Icelandic virtues in *Njáls saga*. Well along in a feud that has escalated from insult, to petty theft and arson, and finally to killings, Gunnarr, after expressing his satisfaction at finally having avenged himself for the public insult of being ridden down by a short-sighted man on horseback, continues, “Hvat ek veit hvart ek mun því óvaskari maðr en aðrir menn sem mér þykkir meira fyrir en öðrum mönnum at vega menn” (“What I don’t know is whether I am less manly than other men because killing troubles me more than it does them” [*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, *Njals saga* 1997, ch. 54]).

These quotations, in rather different ways, strike notes that are rarely heard in medieval European literature: the voice of woman as an able and empowered player in the marital game; the interiority of self-doubt despite the hero’s full exterior realization; and the issue of gender ambiguity.² For Icelanders there was an operative distinction between “gender” and “sex,” although ambiguity attended both social *persona* and biological person. This created tension-filled interstices in the dichotomies of male and female, public and private, reputation, rumour and true personal fact—categories in which positive value normally lay with the first of each pair or set. The

effort to manage this tension took different forms in law, literature, and everyday life, yielding fresh tensions on another level of abstraction. An equally fundamental opposition in early Iceland was between what may be termed normative and non-normative behaviour.

ICELAND WAS SETTLED between 870 and 930 by Norwegians and a mixed population of Norsemen who had been born or been resident in Ireland and western Scotland. They brought customary law, which would evolve according to specific Icelandic geographical and social conditions, and a pagan mythology that must also have been modified in ways difficult to assess, as preferences in tutelary divinities changed, as mythological character and event became an important part of the poetic palette, as Christianity succeeded paganism, and, finally, as the written medium joined oral tradition as a means of organization, preservation, and redeployment. But in the poetic *Edda* and the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, as in all mythologies, are events and relationships that are at a far remove from the norm: theft, deception, betrayal, homicide. Set in the distant and imprecise past, much of myth seems a retrojection of human desires and fears, and offers a charter for human action only indirectly, through gross exceptions to the rule.

The events of the decades of colonization are recorded in *Landnámabók*, but also figure in programmatic fashion to establish theme in the introductory chapters of the family sagas that recount the personal and family histories of the first generations that succeeded the settlers up to about 1050. The family sagas, committed to written form in the thirteenth century, display a greater thematic concern for normative behaviour than such contemporary works as *Sturlunga saga*, written in an era that was undergoing fundamental changes in economy, politics, and society. Despite the move downward on the normative scale, the contemporary sagas record a great volume of historically verifiable detail, while being dominated by factional fighting. At the far extreme from myth one could situate the legal code *Grágás*. It ranks high in normativity, since, while cataloguing various kinds of infractions, it also provides recourse, so as to contain the social effects.

Various realizations of gender may be considered within these formal literary and textual categories. Unrealized gender is exemplified by the unmarried female virgin, or the woman who fails to live up to female standards, and by the *kolbíttr* [coal-biter], the lazy, apparently developmentally retarded youth who lies at home next to the fire. Over-realized male gender, hypertrophy, in medieval Icelandic terms, is the lecher, the

rapist, and especially the extortionate, societally destabilizing berserk, a menace in the community, whatever his utility on the battlefield. Over-realized female gender can be represented by the intriguing, extra-legal, sexually insatiable, sorceress figure of Queen Gunnhildr of Norway, a characterization that also illustrates one face of the Icelandic ambivalence toward things Norwegian.³ Lastly, as the discussion between Guðrún and Þórðr illustrates, there is gender neither under-, over-, nor normatively realized, but realized transgressively—by trespassing across the socially drawn sex line to assume the external expressions of what was normative for the other side.

SAGA AND LAW are the main concerns of this article and only some principal reference points in myth will be mentioned. It is significant for the thesis here advanced—that maintenance of gender distinctions was viewed as fundamental to Norse and Icelandic societal well-being—that Loki, the promoter of discord, is the one who most markedly crosses not only the gender but also the species boundary, turning himself into a mare in heat on one occasion and elsewhere giving birth to female monsters.⁴ His frequent companion, Óðinn, is said to have learned from the goddess Freyja a form of magic, *seiðr*, that was judged unmanly for men to practise (Snorri, *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 7, in *Heimskringla*); it is thought to have featured men dressing as women and sexual activity. In *Brymsqviða* (*Edda*), a comic poem whose story might with another tonality have expressed a more serious problematic, Þórr, the embodiment of masculinity, disguises himself as a bride in order to enter Giantland and regain his stolen hammer. Yet, significantly, when Loki confronts his fellow-gods in the banquet hall of Ægir, sea-ruler among the giants, and satirically exposes their shortcomings, the infidelities and promiscuities of which he accuses them (Óðinn excepted) are all vigorously heterosexual (*Locasenna*, in *Edda*; Sørensen 1988b)—hypertrophic, perhaps, in the case of Freyja, goddess of love, but respectful of gender boundaries. In the main, sexual behaviour in *Ásgarðr* respects human norms; homosexuality is neither a contributing factor nor an antecedent to the societal collapse of *ragnarök*.

It is rather from the vantage point of the giants, the existential enemies of the gods, that an approach can be made to human cross-dressing and -functioning. The giants are the embodiment of alterity, the “others” beyond the tribal frontier. Their daughters nonetheless sufficiently resemble the gods to appear seductive and permit casual exogamy and miscegenation;

they may also appear as epitomes of monstrousness, over-dimensional size, strength, and ugliness (Motz 1987). These two aspects coalesce in the visit of Þórr to Geirrþóðr and his two daughters (Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* and Eilífr Guðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa*), during which one giantess tries to sweep the god away with the flood of her urine in a mountain stream; later, the god dominates the two women in a conflict clearly marked by sexual imagery (Ross 1981, Frank 1988; cf. Berg 1998, Larrington 1995, Linke 1992). In mastering the less discretionary, more inclusive, but contingent, potentially chaotic, natural world, nature as enemy, Þórr acts out a sexual metaphor, woman as nature, sex as power.

Other giantesses more explicitly bear weapons as male gods and men would, and this breach of gender convention underscores their otherness and their menace. The giantess Skaði comes armed and aggressive to the gods to claim compensation for her father Þjazi, whom they have killed (*Gylfaginning*). Significantly, in terms of containment of giant forces, it is through a marriage settlement involving the god Njörðr that Skaði is placated and disempowered (Ross 1989). The lead that this tale throws forward to later law and life is that Skaði appears to be acting in the absence of male offspring of the giant Þjazi. She is what Carole Clover has explored under the title "Maiden Warriors and Other Sons" (1986), woman as a male descendant and legal actor by proxy and default. Brynhildr is perhaps the best-known figure here, a youthful blank that could be stamped with a male psychosexual and behavioural imprint.

Before leaving the world of myth one should note that the martial-appearing valkyries do not themselves engage in the eternal battle of Óðinn's *einherjar*, but have the discriminating function of choosing for it the best (men) among the dead (men). The heroic recruit must pass female muster. Not only is masculine identity realized in distinction to feminine identity, it is also confirmed by women's judgment—or that confirmation can be withheld or withdrawn, in a public denial of manliness. The Icelandic romances cannot be reviewed here, but this fantasy literature is nonetheless revealing. Various agonistic dialogues between the male hero and female figures armed with weapons or knowledge—giantesses, amazons, fairy mistresses, and the like—explore basic issues of male identity and the heroic.⁵ Principal among these is that such identity is not a given, but must be achieved.

IT WAS EARLIER suggested that the family sagas be ranked high on a scale of normativity, not because their major characters are paragons of early Icelandic virtue, but because of their thematic concern for ethics and their strong judgmental thrust, despite the storytellers' low profile and apparently impartial third-party narration. With this preoccupation with the normative in mind, one is struck by the degree to which the feuds that provide motor force to so many sagas have their origins in what might be called contractual irregularities. Landholding and human sexuality are frequent arenas of action, the two not so dissimilar when the latter is seen as the arena of trespass and wife/woman-taking. In one saga, two friends from the settler generation share a field or woods on a basis of exploitation according to need, but the friendship is not maintained by their heirs, and outright ownership becomes a matter of contention. In another, a young man's marriage suit is turned down, or his informal courting results in an extramarital pregnancy. In medieval Iceland, virginity and chastity seem not to have derived an inflated worth from religious doctrine, and adolescent sexuality was accepted, however reluctantly, as a fact of life. Similarly, adult males might have sexual relations with slaves or freeborn women of lower economic status in the same farming household. The problem area for the medieval Icelanders, who had fairly fully claimed and exploited all the arable land on the volcanic northern island in the first generations after settlement, lay in the inheritance claims that could arise from such unsanctioned unions. Fornication suits were not normally matters that led to feud; they were expected to be settled by mutual agreement or arbitration of peers, at most by a court decision, which, in this commonwealth of freemen without a central executive power, had to be enforced by the successful plaintiff. What was in jeopardy in seductions, elopements, and coercive or casual sexual relations was the right of the woman's male kin to determine her reproductive future and the inter-familial responsibilities that would attend her marriage. Dowries featured in Icelandic marriage, but what legitimized a union was the transfer of the *mundr*, or groom's bridal endowment, under the auspices and with the approval of other males, in this paralleling the father's right to recognize children as legitimate. Divorce, too, could lead to dispute when, for instance, the couple's estate had to be divided or a dowry reclaimed.

Icelandic feud and the sagas that it structures can be seen to display a human-like ontogeny: a distant origin with monumental figures like Mother and Father, an adolescence driven by sexual desire, adulthood stamped by the struggle for power, offences to male honour repaid in blood; then, in

maturity, the mediating influence of public opinion, faction-building, advocacy, and the law courts; finally, settlement, and possibly reconciliation, as the feud peters out in the wisdom of old age.⁶

A NUMBER OF activities in medieval Iceland seem to have been judged as lying equidistant from the norm and posing a comparable threat to ordered life in a society characterized as hyperlegalized (Miller 1990: 233). Their status is explicit in the law texts (*Grágás* 1980: 39, Ia 23, Ib 28, 84) and they are associated in the sagas through the intertwining of character and plot. These are 1) maleficent magic, a survival of paganism; 2) erotic poetry, since it threatened the authority of family males to determine their women's future, and was also a kind of word magic; and 3) behind-the-scenes satire and defamation, since they posed hard-to-counter threats to personal honour and social stability.⁷ *Kormáks saga* provides an compact example, adding to the above the related (though not formally proscribed) element of sexual dysfunction, if we may so anachronistically label the love poet's unwillingness/inability to consummate his love (Sayers 1992). Some of these activities are practised by both men and women (Jochens 1991b), seemingly breaking down gender differentiation, but all seem to have carried for the practitioner some association with less than full manliness and a degree of social marginalization. When observance of the law is equated with normative male behaviour, disregard of the law (even in the service of courting) becomes unmanly, and unmanliness in this ethical zero sum game must be effeminacy.

The most serious charge of unmanliness, however, was levied against those who failed to seek retribution or revenge in matters of personal honour, contended land claims, kinsmen's deaths, or full-scale, multi-media feud. In the saga world, when the requirements of linear narrative create their own imperative to action—overriding extra-literary norms as it were—the functional complementarity of male and female is modified. When the volume of men's role shrinks, that of women expands, while usually staying within certain conventions. In scenic terms these are the interior of the household and its usual properties, such as food and clothes. Very rarely does female action move beyond these limits. Following the scenes with which this article began, the divorced wife Auðr, whom the sagaman characterizes as not having many womanly charms, finds her brothers slow to act on her behalf and does indeed pull on breeches, ride to Þórðr's house by night, and stab him in his sleep—a symbolic male rape.

She not only permanently disables his arm but also leaves a gash across his chest that can only be equated with the neckline of the low-cut blouse that he had proposed for Guðrún's husband (Miller 1990: 354). Guðrún and Þórðr's manipulation of the law in the tricking of her husband does not go unpunished. Their marriage is happy but brief, for when Þórðr tries to bring a family of sorcerers to trial, a magically raised storm capsizes his boat and he is drowned, his manipulation of human law repaid through manipulation of the laws of nature.

The law-texts do indirectly bear out Guðrún's statement on cross-dressing. They were written in the post-conversion era, when the church had made divorce less readily available, which may have offered women some greater security at the cost of freedom of action, but certainly gave the church its desired control over yet another aspect of human life (Jochens 1980, 1986a). Cross-dressing is not listed among the grounds for divorce, but a woman dressing as a man, cutting her hair as a man's, or bearing weapons is liable to lesser outlawry, as is a man dressing as a woman (*Grágás* 1b: 203f.). Women were also liable for wounding and killing, again proof that such acts could be conceived of. From this it must be assumed that what would be regarded as a criminal offence in thirteenth-century Iceland would have been sufficient reason for divorce in an earlier period. Although Auðr's motives and actions are quite unambiguous in this most explicit example of cross-dressing, and in other women's occasional threats to take up arms or call supporters to arms, they blurred the gender boundary, creating for men a quicksand-like social middle ground and an existential unease that is subjacent to both law and story (Mastrelli 1990).

Far more common than women taking armed action in the face of male reluctance to act are the scenes of women's incitation to vengeance that saga-writers and publics clearly recognized as a native type scene. The Icelandic term for such verbal incitation was *hvöt*, cognate with English "whet," the sharpening of a weapon or tool for action. The legendary Guðrún Gjúkadóttir of the poetic *Edda* is the archetype here and Hildigunnr of *Njáls saga* her best-known (and best-studied) descendant (Clover 1988a). The most coercive and efficacious of these "whettings" seem to have been as carefully staged by their female practitioners as by the authors who work the strings of narrative and dialogue. Silence, cold scorn, and hot tears variously accompany the deployment of an unavenged man's bloodied and unwashed clothes, a ragged table napkin, or huge, ill-cooked cuts of meat.⁸ As women were not empowered by law to sue, or appear as witnesses, jurors, or judges, and even when mistresses of large manors were not socially

positioned to command kinsmen or clients to armed action (Jochens 1993), such enlisting of the support of males is understandable, but it is striking to what degree it is effected through a conventional feminine behavioural palette (Sayers 1990). Instances in which women's action impinges on the male sphere are limited to domestic, almost ephemeral speech acts. Their lasting effect is that, although they are words exchanged between kin, they are never wholly private; others (kinsmen, neighbours, servants) are always present to witness and remember.

Women do not cross the gender boundary into the male domain, nor do they discredit the male value system. In fact, they reinforce it by showing how male inaction, through fear of physical or legal consequences, or of loss of honour as a result of inconsequential actions, has failed to meet the stringent criteria inherent in this value system.⁹ Although male characters may say "Cold are the counsels of women" (*Njáls saga*, ch. 116), there is no suggestion that such women are unwomanly.¹⁰ What these women do is repose the old heroic question of conflict of interest, which can be over loyalty to leader and kin, to blood relations and in-laws, or between any of these and personal and economic advantage. In a society moving from simplistic heroics, the male ideal had become *hof*, or moderation, a measured, relativist response to events, as epitomized in Gunnarr of *Njáls saga*, whose moderation is nonetheless the object of self-scrutiny (Sayers 1997a). But, whether their motivation may have been thought ultimately to lie in concepts of honour shared with men, even more primitive emotion, or female physiology, women recalled men to principle, and judged them according to an absolute, if old-fashioned, pre-Christian standard.¹¹ Whatever weaknesses Icelanders might ascribe to women, such as emotional volatility, ostentation, and a penchant for gossip that was anything but idle, there was no question of their intellectual ability to make trenchant judgments. While the sagaman may judge women favourably or unfavourably according to the circumstances, these are critically informed judgments, devoid of special treatment or superficial misogyny. In recalling men to their duty, the function of the "incitress" (Heller's *Hetzerin*) was then not too different from that of the maiden warriors, sons by proxy.

When scorn was the chosen tonality the accusation would be that one was unmanly, not a fit member of viricentric society. Such charges were made by mothers to sons, wives to husbands, or women to other blood kin or affines. In one of the subtlest preludes to such goading, Þórarinn in *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhögg*s remarks to his son Þorsteinn that he is up early that morning. Seen in hindsight from subsequent developments, the father is openly faulting

the son for tardiness in seeking vengeance for a blow by referring to the early morning hour—at which only oldsters and women are up, seeing to their menial, gender-specific household chores (Miller 1990: 61ff.). This as well as anything shows the pervasiveness of gender differentiation and its importance as a reference point in other judgments of character.

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, in a general context of rivalry between two female practitioners of the dark arts, some horses of Þorbjörn *digri* “the Stout” go missing and Þórarinn *svarti* “the Black” of Mávahlíð is suspected. Þórarinn’s mother faults him for his tolerance of the legal action that Þorbjörn launches on the doorstep of the farmhouse: “Ofsatt er þat, er mælt er, at meir hefir þú, Þórarinn, kvenna skap en karla, er þú skalt þola Þorbirni digra hverja skömm, ok eigi veit ek, hví ek á slíkan son” (“That judgment is all too true that you, Thorarin, have as much a woman’s disposition as a man’s, when you tolerate every disgrace from Thorbjorn the Stout. I don’t understand why I have such a son” [*Eyrbyggja saga* 1935, *The Saga of the People of Eyri* 1997, ch. 18]).¹² In the ensuing armed scuffle Auðr, Þórarinn’s wife, loses a hand. Her reticence in the face of others’ questioning her husband’s manliness is matched by her “virile” silence about the injury. A more serious clash now ensues and the description adds to the issue of adequate manliness other motifs of non-normative behaviour and socially marginalized station such as battlefield panic (associated with a Hebridean), misinterpretation of ocular evidence, and self-destructive slave behaviour (Sayers 1994). Þórarinn has the upper hand and his success leads to a number of impromptu, crowing verses. If we accept the fiction of their authenticity, we must conclude that Þórarinn is now paying back others who had defamed him in the same oral medium, albeit at perhaps immoderate length.¹³

In the more public arena beyond the farmhouse it is not women who levy the charge of inadequate masculinity, but other men, in a public shaming ritual.¹⁴ The charge is consistently that of being the passive partner in, or victim of, male homosexual activity. The motif is not an incidental one in the sagas; such charges come at critical moments in the evolution of feuds and always signal a move to armed action, since the insult could be repaid only in blood. The law texts themselves authorize this reaction by stating that there are three words, *ragr*, *stroðinn*, and *sorðinn*, the one meaning “cowardly, effeminate” and the other two past participles of verbs for the male sexual act, that entitle the object of such accusation to have the offender condemned to outlawry, a condition in which he could be killed with legal impunity.¹⁵ More subtly, slurs and insinuations could take the

form of a mocking reference to the absence of facial hair, the gift of too fancy a cloak (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, chs 44 and 123; Dronke 1980), versified reference to a defeated opponent's body position in a ball game (*Gísla saga*, ch. 15), the claim that the opponent had the heart of a mare or a goat (*Fóstbræðra saga*, ch. 24, *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. 33; *Valla-Ljóts saga*, ch. 4; Andersson and Miller 1989: 268 n243), a publicly erected pole of defamation with the head or transfixed body of a mare (*Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, ch. 57, *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. 34), or a carving of two men engaged in a homosexual act (*Gísla saga Súrsonnar*, ch. 2, *Bjarnar saga Hítadælakappa*, ch. 17). But charges such as that one man had been violated by the stallion that mounted the mare he was riding, or that another had been the sexual partner of the troll from Svínafell (*Ölkofra þáttr*), show that an important licence operated in such cases: the stylized accusations need have no basis in reality to be effective. They are performative utterances, combining ritual formalism and contentual baseness, bringing the alterial "abject" into the near social sphere (Swenson 1991: 73, after Kristeva; cf. Sørensen 1993). Such politically motivated accusations against Guðmundr *dýri*, "the Powerful," for example, surface repeatedly in several sagas (*Njáls saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Ölkofra þáttr*). However deep-seated the male concern lest female potency make inroads into man's world, in these instances sexual orientation, behaviour, or victimization is exploited as a metaphor, the absence of masculine virtues made the more apparent by closing the gap with female attributions. It is reputation rather than private acts that is at issue.¹⁶

Many deployments of the gender motif stop well short of these extremes. A short scene from *Hallfreðar saga* will be illustrative. It is incidental to the main action and is thought to have been borrowed from *Vatnsdæla saga*, where it has greater relevance to the surrounding narrative (Cook 1989: 81ff.). Perhaps some of the neat economy of the exchange made it an attractive loan. Galti Óttarsson, the brother of the protagonist, Hallfreðr, has been killed by Brandr Ávaldson at the Húnavatnsþing and the killer has taken refuge in the booth (a temporary shelter at the assembly) of Gríss Sæmingsson, the husband of Hallfreðr's former lover, Kolfinna. Hallfreðr goes to his rival's booth accompanied by his uncle, Þorkell *krafla*.

Hallfreðr sagði Þorkatli vigit. Þorkell geck með honum til buðar Gris ok bað hann framm selia manninn. ella munu ver briota vpp buðina. þa hliop Hilldr moðir Brandz i dyrnar ok spyR huat Þorkell villdi. hann segir eyrindit. Hilldr mælti. eigi mundu þer þat i hug at drepa son minn þa er ek skaut þer vndan

skickiu skauti minu ok firða þik bana eptir vig Glæðis þa er þeir Þorgils ok Þorvalldr villdu drepa þik. Þorkell mælti. liðit er nu þat. gangi konur vt ór buðinni ok vilium ver leita manzins. Brandr var falldinn ok komz hann sua t ok hittiz hann eigi. Þorkell q(uað) hann farinn mundu til buðar Hunrøðar. (97)

[Hallfreðr told Þorkell of the killing. Þorkell accompanied him to Gríss's booth, and asked him to hand the man over—"otherwise we shall break the booth down." Then Hiltr, Brandr's mother, ran into the doorway and asked what Þorkell wanted. He stated his business. Hiltr said, "It would not have occurred to you to kill my son when I hid you under the lap of my cloak and saved you from death after the slaying of Glæðir when Þorgils and Þorvaldr were seeking to kill you". Þorkell said, "That's ancient history now. Let the women leave the booth, and we'll look for the man." Brandr had on a woman's head-gear, and that's how he got out and was not found. Þorkell said he must have gone to Húnrøðr's booth.] (Cook 1989: 81)

Here, an earlier scene is brought up almost like an icon. Hiltr proceeds by indirection; she recalls the debt, and its rather demeaning circumstances, artfully reinforced by the alliteration of *skickiu skauti minu* (the lap of my cloak), and Þorkell's hypothetical earlier frame of mind ("occurred to you not kill my son"), and thereby suggests a comparable solution now available in the present dilemma. Þorkell can call it ancient history, because he must dissociate himself from her remarks, and, having instantly absorbed the complex of references, also plans to settle the debt. The matched scenes offer the variants of one man hidden and other walking out, one concealed under a woman's clothes, the other bearing a woman's distinctive head-dress. The goad to action is a fairly deft one, more in the nature of light steering, since outnumbered men on the run (Gísli, Grettir) seem to have availed themselves of women's and other disguises and expedients without losing honour, and Hiltr needs Þorkell's help. Later in the story Þorkell will mediate between the contending parties.

IN THE FAMILY sagas women are empowered. They do have severe limitations on participation in the legal mechanism—they may own but not exercise a chieftainship, for instance—but their agreement is sought in those marriages that turn out well (women's consent is the icing on the Icelandic wedding cake), they actively exploit their capacity to divorce or threaten

denial of sexual access, they and their kinsmen pursue post-divorce economic claims, and propertied widows and divorcees enjoy considerable freedom of choice and action. Typically, when a woman is described as preeminent in her district, she is a propertied widow with grown sons, again a judgment made against male criteria. The matriarch Auðr inn djúpauðga, “the Wealthy” or “Deep-minded,” one of the charter settlers of Iceland, both land-taker and land-granter, is a prominent example in this respect (despite the death in Scotland of her son Þorsteinn), figuring not only in *Landnáma-bók* but also in the thematically significant prefatory chapters to *Laxdæla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Eiríks saga rauða*. Woman’s participation in male affairs seems to have occupied the author of *Fóstbræðra saga*, who creates the active and decisive figures of Þorbjörg “the Stout,” Sigrfljóð, and Gríma, all of whom save men from their fate (Sayers 1996).

If one turns to the contemporary sagas dealing with the events of thirteenth-century Iceland with a view to checking for advances in the status of women or as a measure of the accuracy of the historical novels that are the family sagas, one finds a very different picture and a significant diminution in the willed, active participation of women, a respect in which these sagas mirror the law code. All the motifs earlier discussed, malevolent magic, erotic and satiric verse, incitation, men less than men and women more than women, are to be found in the contemporary sagas, but their incidence and especially their lasting effect are significantly reduced. The single example of the priest Pál’s wife, Þorbjörg, attacking her husband’s opponent Sturla in public and slashing his cheek with a knife becomes a public embarrassment for all concerned. This impropriety even seems to have required a topping-up of the monetary compensation, and “requires” a dismissive remark by Sturla: “ok þurfu menn eigi hér at lýsa vanstilli fyrir þessa sök, því at konur kunnu með ýmsu móti at leita eftir ástum” (“There’s no need to lose our tempers in this case just because women have different ways of showing their devotion” [*Sturlu saga*, ch. 31, in *Sturlunga saga* 1948, *The Saga of Hvamm-Sturla*, in *Sturlunga saga* 1970-74]).¹⁷ Other non-normative realities, not absent but downplayed in the family sagas, also surface in the contemporary sagas: widespread concubinage, with or without the woman’s or her family’s agreement; illegitimate children, some recognized by fathers, some not; little mention of women’s consent in marriage; much less frequent divorce (Bragason 1989, Karras 1990, 1992). And there is good reason to think that preferential female infanticide, the exposure of newborn girls, continued to be practised as it had been in earlier centuries (Clover 1988b). Some of the foregoing, like the restrictions on divorce, represent historical development

resulting from the accommodation, quite flexible at times, of Christian canon law to traditional Icelandic law. Other elements are consequences of specific storytelling conventions and criteria of historiographical relevance that are observed by authors of the contemporary sagas. Yet one cannot escape the conclusion that historical realism is greater here than in the family sagas, and that the importance of the average individual has decreased as the scale of economic coercion and political violence has risen. Individual morality and heroism no longer count for much, because they cannot be effective. The occasional strong and forceful woman, like Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir, does stand out, but she speaks and acts not only from strength of character but also as the chief administrator of a large manor house (Sørensen 1988a). She threatens her husband Hálfðan with the unnatural:

“Hefi ek hann ok sjaldan eggjat at ganga í stórmæli, en nú mun ek þat bert gera, at lítit mun verða okkart samþykki, ef þú veitir eigi Þórði, bróður mínum. Mun þá svá fara, sem minnr et at sköpuðu, at ek mun taka vápni ok vita, ef nökkurir menn vill fylgja mér, en ek mun fá þér af hendi búrluklana.”
(*Þórðar saga kakala*, ch. 2, in *Sturlunga saga*)

[“I have seldom urged him to concern himself in dangerous matters; but now I want to make it plain that our happiness with each other will not continue, Hálfðan, if you do not help my brother Þórð. Otherwise, it might be that though it is against my nature I would take up weapons myself and see if men would follow me, and then I would hand over to you the key to the pantry.”] (*The Saga of Þórð kakali*, in *Sturlunga saga* 1970–74)

But here incitation does *not* have the desired effect and no act of retaliation ensues.

Other charges of unmanliness are also made, but in this politicized world even the public use of *razragr* (approximately “sodomite,” *Íslendinga saga*, ch. 39, in *Sturlunga saga*) is just one more factor of violence at work, and in modern eyes seems trivialized by the frequent reference to burning of homes, mutilations (significantly including castration), killings, and extortion of political support. Yet even in this non-representation of women other than as sexual partners, the mortar in family alliances, and the matrices of legitimate heirs, the traditional simile is continued: deficient manhood is womanhood, a base condition.

To move toward conclusions, the gender ambiguity of this article’s title is itself ambiguous and largely a fiction—rather, two enabling fictions,

which operate almost independently of whatever may have been the reality of non-conventional sexual orientation or practice. Women in the family sagas pushed by circumstance to the periphery of normal gender behaviour—inciting men to recall them to manliness in many cases, undertaking male action when no men were to be found in a very few others—are like the legal fiction of proxy heirs, daughters who inherited before the law in the absence of legitimate sons. At no point do masculinized women interact with other women. On the male side, the public charge of homosexual activity, willed or unwilled, is a political fiction, no less goading than women's incitation. It challenges the accused to move to higher stakes where lives would be at risk, or back down and lose face, and the all-important political lever of prestige and honour.

Some over-simplifications will sharpen the focus. Woman's effort as self-defining subject results in her being punished as object; man said to be used as female object loses his right to self-definition. Natural woman offends culture by appearing as a man; cultural man offends nature by acting as a woman. For women in society, men are necessary agents; for men in the life cycle, women are necessary agenda. *Persona* is more important than person, and is more important than actions. Law makes women punishable for appearing as men, men punishable for claiming other men acted as women. The check on women's appearance seems intended to preclude the more socially disruptive move to action. The check on men's words seems equally superficial, but in truth recognizes the enormous power of public oral judgment. Women's acts could be contained through trivialization, excised from causality and time. Men's acts are superseded by public report, which determines future causality. In the sagas men are figures, women, part of the ground—but a ground that gives the figures their fundamental relief. Yet these bald statements do not encapsulate the entire truth, for while women must look to men for action, men hear from women the exteriorization of their inner situation and, more significantly, look to them for judgment of their acts (Frank 1990). Heterosexual acts affect family alliances, succession, property-holding, and power. Homosexual acts affect reputation—and power.

TWO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS remain: why did medieval Icelandic men take their conception of women as a touchstone, in their highly competitive social interaction in a rather precarious existence on an over-exploited sub-Arctic island? Clearly the question must be posed within a larger frame of

reference than the medieval Icelandic context. Secondly, why do the family sagas differ so markedly, in the respects here reviewed, from the other kinds of literate evidence: myth, law, and contemporary account? To give greater point to the question by citing an authoritative modern critic, Jenny Jochens (1980) has claimed that the largely monogamous unions of the family sagas were intended by their clerical authors as *exempla* for a later age troubled by its deficiencies in the ecclesiastically important areas of clerical celibacy and marital fidelity. Are the strong and, in relative terms, active women of the sagas to be attributed to a similar ecclesiastical desire to enhance the status of thirteenth-century Icelandic women, as some might claim for the new legal requirement of their consent in marriage? I think not, and consider that Jochens has presented only one of several right answers to a too narrowly posed question. One further reason why concubines, with a few prominent exceptions, are absent from the family sagas is the legal limbo they occupied after leaving their families without a contractual alliance; their legal impotence made them inconsequential for the main themes of the sagas. Divorce is more common in the family sagas than in the contemporary sagas not only because of the change in legal conditions but also because the family saga is a judgmental genre; no matter which party initiated the divorce, it reflected on male action that the public was invited to evaluate.¹⁸

Thirteenth-century Iceland defined its collective past at a time when it was beginning to question the old heroic, honour-driven ethos of feud, and was becoming more acutely aware of irreversible changes in its social, political, and intellectual fabric, not only what we view as the negative trends—the concentration of economic power in a few families, the shift of political power from individuals to factions, bringing the country close to civil war, then the seizure of power by the Norwegian crown—but also the increasing role of the church and, not least, the ties with continental Europe.

On the model of the “noble heathen,” the man who exercised Christian virtues and revered the single maker of all things but had not the benefit of knowing Christ (Lönnroth 1969), the authors of the family sagas created Old Testament-like antecedents and precedents and put them under the signs of personal worth and of Law as man’s, not woman’s, creation. The arable land of the island had been *legally* claimed in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, and landholding had continued in *legal* succession since then. Concern for the legitimacy of those claims underlies the unique document that is *Landnámabók*.¹⁹ Tracing lineage through both the male and female line (bilateral descent) allowed Icelanders to optimize genealogies,

running them back to pre-eminent figures of the settler generation while sidestepping legally unconfirmed unions and their offspring. Thus, to assure legitimacy for lineage and successive ownership, men were obliged to accord women an irrefutable worth. But, as Guðrún states in *Atlamál in grænlensko*: “kostum drepr kvenna karla ofríki” (“woman’s choice is killed by the greater power of men” [*Edda* 1983, *Edda* 1969, st. 70]). For thematic purposes this worth is enhanced in the family sagas. We find strong women in the sagas, but their exercise of strength is generally in support of, and always contained by, a viricentric system of values.²⁰ We find male virtues but only seldom male behaviour.²¹ Firm male control is maintained over the discourse of the family sagas by the exclusion of many of the other checks and balances, not least within the household, in the everyday life of women and men.

Suppression of the female voice is characteristic of much medieval literature.²² What is striking in the Icelandic saga is the extent and type of concessions sagamen and publics were prepared to make in the area of female voice, both to heighten the effect of realism and historical accuracy, and to bring the gender issue more squarely to bear on the definition of maleness and masculine morality, even though medieval Icelandic woman is often the spokesperson of traditional values, voicing the imperative of revenge, or casual, malicious, rural gossip and its inherent judgments. Latitude and containment are also seen at work in the saga treatment of magic, erotic or defamatory verse, phallic aggression; they are portrayed, without being condoned, as unmanly foibles and are generally not instrumental in securing for the practitioner a successful civic life. Even traditional male virtues could be hazardous when carried to extremes. In *Njáls saga* heroism has its price and self-scrutiny no lasting reward. Gunnarr’s ability to best his enemies attracts even more to test him. Finally, he crosses a psychological threshold, programmatically established in the saga by Njáll’s counsel not to kill twice in the same family (or break settlements established by other men of good will), which leads to the fatalism that will make him disregard the sentence of outlawry and return to his farm.

Saga prose is characterized by a dispassionate documentation of the observable, with succinct ethical character portraits ascribed to the Icelandic collectivity and projected against a canvas of the normative. Fidelity to the dictates of genre was as important as fidelity to the dictates of gender. The saga author, while authoritative, is reticent and does not invite interrogation. In a bare and intentionally superficial narrative that leaves the understanding of economic and legal process and the identification and

judgment of the motives of human action to the public, the writers of sagas created a literary medium in accord with their conception of the ordered functioning of human society: honour and heroism in balance with law and a moderated, generous response to the dynamics of life.²³ Ideally, much of human life should have its centre of gravity in the public forum (the same locus as saga discourse) and in behavioural patterns that reflected the comprehensive law. Even personal appearance was a social act, supporting or undermining the social structure. But the purported transparency of the saga medium does not assure, or even seek, purity or even full clarity in character. Typically, many of the darker dealings in the sagas, those that contribute to the thrust of plot, are out of sight or hearing of the self-created narrator, although their effects always come to light.

Despite the many features of the family sagas that modern literary criteria would identify as “realistic,” we must conclude that in putting comprehensive legal process front and centre, and in restricting the role of women to what impinged most meaningfully on feud and law, writers of the thirteenth century both idealized and masculinized their national history, disambiguating the gender of the past.

NOTES

¹On cross-dressing, see Wolf 1997.

²In medieval Scandinavia and Iceland, verse was the preferred medium for descriptions of the inner life; see Macrae-Gibson 1989. With the exceptions of the prophecy and the curse, which dealt with the world exterior to the speaker, there seems to have been no comparable vehicle for woman’s voice (Parks 1990: 24).

³Gunnhildr’s portrait is established in *Laxdæla saga* and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. See Sayers 1995 and Sørensen 1987. Another example of female personality at an extreme is Freyðís Eiríksdóttir in the Vinland sagas. In *Eiríks saga rauða*, despite her advanced pregnancy she slaps her bared breast with a sword and is prepared to fight the natives; in *Grœnlendinga saga* she has the men of a rival faction in the settlement executed and even kills the women herself. Perhaps the situation in the New World, without the restraining structure of law, is to be thought responsible for both these developments—gender reversal and female rancour pushed to inhumanity. For additional “images of women,” see Jochens 1996a, Jesch 1994, and Anderson and Swenson 2002.

⁴Loki is accused of having eaten the half-cooked heart of a woman; see *Locasenna*, st. 23, 33, *Grimnismál*, *Hyndluljóð* st. 41, in *Edda* 1983.

⁵See Bibire 1986 on the exchange between Skirnir and Gerðr with its threat of sexual debasement. See, too, Martínez-Pizarro 1990, Swenson 1991: 57–79. Other female figures of authority and knowledge are fetches, dream women, and, as noted above, prophetesses.

⁶From the male perspective, the saga life of women might be said to begin in courting and seduction, mature in contention with other women over precedence and in opinion-making gossip, and conclude in driving men to take vengeance. See Clover's stimulating statement on the relations of sex and power (1993).

⁷Although the hero of Icelandic romance may profit by magic, it is generally of the positive variety. Sorcerers in the sagas are negatively characterized in the main, and saga heroes never use magic for personal profit. Saga authors are highly critical of magical practices, but none is presented in detail or identified as part of pagan religious practice. The concrete, malign effects of such magic set in the pre-Christian period (weather-working, cognitive disorientation, even death) can be reconciled with medieval Christian conceptions of demonology, in the sense that the demons perform the magic desired by the sorcerers in order to entrap their souls more thoroughly. On aspects of courting and/or defamatory verse, see Gade 1989, Sayers 1999 and 1997b, respectively.

⁸The scenes of incitation have attracted considerable critical attention: Clover 1988a, Heller 1958, Jesch 1991: 189f., Jochens 1987, Miller 1984, Sørensen 1988a.

⁹*Egils saga Skallagrímsson* has the amusing scene of Egill's sometime aid Björn, whose wife has no illusions concerning her husband's abilities as a fighter. But Björn does his limited best and Egill does give him full credit, thereby enhancing his domestic status.

¹⁰The proverb is also used by Níðuðr to his wife in *Völundarqviða*, st. 31, and in *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, ch. 19. The phrase "cold counsel" has also been taken to epitomize a number of female portraits in Anderson and Swenson 2002.

¹¹See Nichols 1991 for an exploration of medieval churchmen's view of female discourse as the expression of libido. Since the question of ethics in *Hrafnkells saga* has occasioned considerable discussion (Andersson 1970, Pálsson 1971, Thompson 1977), it is of interest to scrutinize the single role allowed woman in the saga, namely, the old washer-woman who calls Eyvindr's passing to Hrafnkell's attention. Hrafnkell recognizes that her intentions are not good, but nonetheless acts on her information and criticism. She may variously be seen as the exteriorization of Hrafnkell's long-term intentions, the mouthpiece of casually malicious ongoing public opinion, and woman as fomenter of strife.

¹²A variant on this judgment by the parent on offspring is the feigned popular ignorance whether a man who had been killed and not avenged had any sons or only daughters; *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, ch. 28.

¹³Kristjánsson (1988: 110) considers the verses genuine; more detailed consideration in Ólason 1989.

¹⁴Andersson and Miller 1989: 190 n121; see also Almqvist 1965, Gade 1986, Markey 1972, Miller 1990, Sørensen 1983, Ström 1974. The important matter of flyting, formalized verbal abuse, will not be addressed in this article, despite its close ties to other acts of defamation; see, in addition to the works cited above, Harris 1979, Martínez-Pizarro 1990, Parks 1990, Ross 1973, Sayers 1991, Swenson 1991.

¹⁵*Grágás* II.391f.; see Sørensen 1983: 14ff., and Andersson and Miller 1989: 165 n76.

¹⁶The sagas make explicit that blame is attached to the sexual aggressor, as well as to his victim. The condemnation seems not so much to have been of unnatural sexual acts as of the public humiliation of a peer. See Gade 1986, Jacobsen 1982, Jochens 1996b.

¹⁷The scene is in telling distinction to that in *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, where Gísli's faithful wife Auðr strikes the face of her husband's pursuer with a bag of money, well aware of the combination of insults that are topped off by the sagaman's concession to her of the use of direct discourse (ch. 32).

¹⁸Representative of the extensive work on marriage and divorce are Andersson and Miller 1989, Benediktsson 1970, Byock 1988, Clover 1988b, Frank 1973, Jacobsen 1982, Lönnroth 1977.

¹⁹*Landnámabók* is almost devoid of many of the non-normative motifs reviewed here, although typical slave behaviour is one exception. Personalities and interpersonal relations such as contention and killings become more complex in the generation after the settlers. On the larger objectives of the work, see Rafnsson 1974.

²⁰For the women of *Fljótsdæla saga*, for example, see Sayers 1996. For a somewhat different view, as her tag "pre-patriarchal" suggests, see Heinrichs 1988; see too Jochens 1986b. On the conception of the heroine matched in scale to an entire saga, see Conroy and Langen 1988 and Livesay 1988; for a discussion of the interaction of Germanic and Judeo-Christian conceptions of the heroine in the Old English context, see Swanton 1988; cf. Frantzen 1993.

²¹On Christian women aspiring to male virtues, consider the transvestite saints in early Christian tradition; on the European use of theme of sexual duality, see Curtius 113–117.

²²On the absence of the female body in Old Norse literature, see Jochens 1991a.

²³Saga personalities are sufficiently complex to generate continuing speculation as to the deeper motives of various actions, as exemplified by Guðrún in *Laxdæla saga* and Skarpheðinn in *Njáls saga*, but the incidents of the family sagas are not polysemous in the same intentional way as, for example, continental romance, where authors explore issues more ethical than psychological and from a somewhat more abstract perspective.

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“Who is Solveig? What is she?”

Four *dénouements* at Vinstra

ERROL DURBACH

ABSTRACT: This article addresses the practical problems of staging the final scene of *Peer Gynt*, especially the now discredited role of Solveig as an image of sentimentalized Nineteenth Century womanhood. It provides a description of the four productions staged at the Peer Gynt Festival in Vinstra in 2000, and the sort of solutions dramatized in production. The Canadian contribution to the Vinstra Festival is described in some detail, with a rationale for the rewritten finale in a new translation and adaptation of *Peer Gynt* by the author of this paper.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article aborde les problèmes pratiques entourant la production de la scène finale de *Peer Gynt*, surtout le rôle maintenant discrédité de Solveig comme image de la féminité sentimentale du dix-neuvième siècle. On décrit les quatre productions du Festival Peer Gynt de Vinstra en 2000, et les sortes de solutions dramatisées dans les productions. La contribution canadienne au Festival de Vinstra est décrite en détail et on donne la raison d'être du finale réécrit qui figure dans une nouvelle traduction et adaptation de *Peer Gynt* faite par l'auteur de cet article.

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Gålåvatnet, an extraordinarily lovely lake on Frons fjellet, about an hour's drive northwest of Lillehammer, is the natural setting of an annual production of *Peer Gynt* in the Vinstra district of Gudbrandsdal, the region of Norway where the "real" Peer once lived and where the myth of the great hero-fantast of Ibsen's play flourished. Six distinguished professional actors join about one hundred local performers from the Vinstra district and, accompanied by a choir and full orchestra, a three-hour version of the play is performed in the dialect of the region. It is, in every sense of the word, a national event: a celebration of *Nasjonalromantikken*, with character-national wedding dances, the romantic beauty of the lake and mountain setting, a permanent scenic background of peasant huts with sod roofs, and Grieg's music suffusing the action, from the slow procession of wedding guests rowing across the lake in the twilight to Solveig's lyrical *Voggesang*. Unembarrassed by Ibsen's ironies, and unabashed in its celebration of *Peer Gynt* as a communal event that has been attended by tens of thousands of spectators since its location at Gålå Lake in 1989, the Vinstra performance is an enchanting and crowd-pleasing spectacle that compels acquiescence even among the most sceptical and anti-sentimental of Ibsenites.

Older than the Gålå Lake production, moreover, is the Vinstra *Peer Gynt* Festival, initiated in the centenary year of 1928, and presented consistently ever since 1967 as one of eastern Norway's largest cultural events. In 2000 it was decided to incorporate an international element into an essentially national event and, under the auspices of the local *Peer Gynt*-Stemmet and the Ibsen Centre in Oslo, three theatre companies—from China, Argentina, and Canada—were invited to present the *dénouements* of their respective productions of *Peer Gynt* at a performance venue near Vinstra. This event was followed by a symposium, with speakers from the University of Oslo, the director of Det Nye Teater in Oslo, and representatives of the three performing companies.¹ One of these post-performance talks, by Ellen Hartmann of the University of Oslo's Psychology Department, chose to focus exclusively on the role of Solveig and her intervention in the *dénouement*; and because the problems of performance in all four Vinstra productions—together with their four different solutions—are epitomized in the function of Solveig, I want to open up familiar territory by reviewing the practical difficulties of staging the text in the last episode of *Peer Gynt*.

In one sense, like Shakespeare's *Silvia*, Solveig is only too familiar as a paragon of femininity in the Romantic/Petrarchan tradition:

Holy, fair and wise is she;
 The heaven such grace did lend her,
 That she might admired be.
 Is she kind as she is fair?
 For beauty lives with kindness.
 Love doth to her eyes repair,
 To help him of his blindness,
 And, being help'd, inhabits there.²

This image of the perfect woman, who “excels each mortal thing” and transcends dull earth-bound humanity, is perfectly consistent with *Nasjonalromantikken*—if this, indeed, is what Ibsen intended to convey in the patient and loving woman, whose hope and faith and love become the ideal repository for the hero’s essential Self. In Shakespeare’s conceit, Cupid, the blind God of Love, appropriates (or shares) Silvia’s compassionate glance, and is aided in seeing the experience of love through her eyes. In Ibsen’s play, Solveig is herself a blind woman when she finally reappears, and we are left to infer the author’s intentions without a great deal of textual corroboration. Is Solveig a symbol of the truism that love is blind? Is she the universal hope that the lover will be blind to our imperfections? Or is her blindness an ironic comment on the deteriorating processes of age, a reminder that this woman has been kept waiting for fifty years for her roving mate to return? How, finally, is the part to be played?

Ellen Hartmann’s reading of the *dénouement*—like the Gålå Lake production—chose to discount the heroine’s blindness. Solveig, she argues, is a real presence in the play for the first three acts, which confine the action to a single region, retain some sense of time’s unity, and explore Peer’s relationship with a woman of flesh and blood. At some unspecified moment in the second half of the play, however, she dies and becomes a disembodied memory of possibility for Peer. So the Solveig who welcomes back the wanderer and consoles him with her love, who sings the cradle-song in the composite role of wife and mother, is a mere figment of the hero’s wish-dreaming imagination—a possibility of redemption now glimpsed at, but no longer physically attainable. The Gålå Lake Solveig, ravishingly sung by Linda Øvrebø, was a real presence only fleetingly. Her participation in the action was almost exclusively operatic: a voice, flooded by moonlight, articulating a lyric mood, but significantly distanced from engagement. Her final appearance made concessions neither to process nor to contact with Peer. Unwithered by age, as blond and beautiful and clear-sighted as the girl

with the prayer book in Act One, this Solveig sang Grieg’s *Voggesang* in a pool of light that isolated her as a visionary presence, while an elderly Peer huddled in a foetal position on a large rock. A chorus of voices, liturgically underscoring Solveig’s song, reinforced the general sense of Peer’s death at the end of the play—consoled only by an audile vision of a world of lost values, now at last fully recognized and acknowledged.

Dramatic criticism, on the whole, would endorse many aspects of this reading. Dr. Hartmann made specific reference to Joan Templeton’s recent book on *Ibsen’s Women*, which reads Solveig as just such a Peer-created fantasy—although invented in desperation as a sort of *dea ex machina* to rescue him from mediocrity and his fate in the Button Moulder’s ladle. “[I]n Solveig’s assurance that his self has remained intact in her safekeeping,” writes Templeton, “Peer is able to avoid the truth and to take, as usual, what could have been for what is. A last-minute Maryologist, Peer creates a Solveig whose intercession with the Father allows him to dispense with self-examination and save him from the Lean One.” It takes the Button Moulder, as she points out, to make this irony clear: that a final confrontation at the crossroads still awaits him, and that his transformation is yet to be tested. None of this played out in the compassionate and sentimental vision of Gålå Lake, where the Button Moulder stood in discreet silence while a radiant Solveig took the light. The production retained Peer’s fantastic vision, while carefully avoiding Joan Templeton’s scepticism about Peer’s transformation—and possibly even her scepticism about Ibsen’s resolution that rounds the evasatory hero’s life “with a sleep in the all-forgiving lap of a fantasy woman” (107).

Ever since James McFarlane’s *Oxford Ibsen* version of the play in 1972, the rejection of an idealized Romantic/Petrarchan Solveig has been vehement and decisive in modern criticism. McFarlane makes no mention in his Introduction of feminism’s legitimate objection to Peer’s exploitation of woman’s function as passive redeemer of errant men; but his scorn now even more clearly underscores the twenty-first century’s discomfort with nineteenth-century sexist attitudes and its cliché of the Redemptive Woman:

The way [Solveig] receives Peer after a lifetime’s absence seems to suggest that her values are wholly contrary to Peer’s: that the great wrong he believes he has done her is in reality a great right, and that the transformation has been achieved by her faith, her love, her hope. This, it is suggested, makes her representative of Woman, of ‘das Ewig-Weibliche’, an archetypal wife and mother figure finding her fulfillment as the patient custodian of man’s real

essence, preserving, protecting, enfolding: the ultimate refuge where man at last finds his proper dominion, his redemption, his salvation. To expect, however, that a character so sentimentalized, so bloodless, so stylized in her flaxen-haired doll-like unreality, so *absent* as Solveig is—to expect that she should carry all this ponderous significance is merely grotesque. Nor does the ‘message’ of her life, positive though it is in the *manner* of its dramatic formulation, carry particularly deep conviction: that Woman’s redemptive role (if such is her role) is adequately performed by sitting and dreaming and hoping a whole life long, by living on her memories, by cherishing the images of the past. (28–29)

Solveig, it follows, is an auto-toxic delusion that Peer conjures up in a regressive reversion to the maternal womb, a flight from the existential demands of the bogeyman/Button Moulder into an escapist fantasy conjured up for his own consolation.

McFarlane’s critical objections go to the heart of the Gålå Lake production and its endorsement of an easy nineteenth-century sentimental resolution. But, nevertheless, this great Ibsen critic may be protesting too vehemently against the gap between Ibsen’s positive intention and his flaccid dramatization of Solveig’s value-system. True enough, as he points out, the Button Moulder’s scepticism cuts across Solveig’s lyricism, disrupts Peer’s sense of facile redemptive closure, and reminds him that the journey to the final crossroad has yet to be negotiated. But Ibsen conceals this ominous presence behind Solveig’s house, and irradiates the final tableau with a sunrise that suffuses the stage with the familiar stage-semiotics of spiritual benediction. It takes an act of willful cynicism to resist the Romantic implications, underscored by Grieg’s music, of Solveig’s presence in the *dénouement*, or to reject the sort of profoundly human solution that she offers to Peer *in extremis*: the rediscovery of Self in its vital relationship to the Other. I am not convinced that, in the theatre, the *manner* of this formulation is absolutely inconsistent with its dramatization, or that an audience should be manipulated to reject the idea of an enduring and continuous Selfhood in the love of another. As in so many of Ibsen’s *dénouements*, there is a subtle interplay of contradictory elements—a form of enacted *tvertimod*—that holds resolutions in suspension and qualifies any easy endorsement (or any easy *rejection*) of the alternatives implicit in the action of the play. Just as the rising sun in *Ghosts* concludes the play in a burst of warmth and light, which simultaneously reveals a landscape of glacial ice and freezing indifference to human anguish, so Solveig and the

Button Moulder surely embody the ironic contradictions that both affirm and deny the vision of recovered existential wholeness in *Peer Gynt*. Ibsen’s stagecraft, like Brecht’s, depends upon a careful avoidance of closure. End the play, by all means. But leave the issues open. Ask questions. But provide no answers. Suggest alternative solutions to the central dramatic inquiry. But offer no unequivocal endorsement of any.

The problem of staging Solveig, then, is how to retain the positive impulse in the Romantic vision—the human need for the valorization of Self in the love of the Other—while qualifying the discredited nineteenth-century stereotype of the Eternal Feminine: the flaxen-haired doll, the angel in the house, the patient Griselda. Again, like Brecht, Ibsen was surely aware of the need to “defamiliarize” the habitual and cliché-ridden images of a moribund dispensation. But unless the “familiar” is given full dramatic value, what point is achieved in *verfremdung*? It was soon apparent at the Vinstra Symposium, however, that “problematizing” Solveig in this way was not a pervasive international concern, nor were the reservations of critics like Joan Templeton and James McFarlane necessarily culturally transferable. The first presentation of the *Peer Gynt dénouement* fell to the Drama Society of Beijing: a fascinating translation of Ibsen into the highly stylized choreography of Chinese theatre, where movement was ritualized, and where the conflict between Peer and the Button Moulder assumed the athleticism of a Kung-Fu combat. Solveig, when she made her appearance, was clearly the Chinese equivalent of the stereotypes dismissed by McFarlane as too sentimentalized, bloodless, or stylized in her unreality—although, in the context of the Beijing production style, there was nothing untoward in her presence. Unlike her Gålå Lake counterpart, however, there was nothing remote or abstracted in this Solveig—a *real* woman, albeit unchanged by time or age, and untroubled by blindness. She wore the headkerchief of a young student, cradled her lover in a delicate embrace, and spoke the last lines of the play over a gentle piano version of Grieg’s *Solveig’s Song*. Despite the Button Moulder’s shaking his ladle at the couple from beneath and behind the stage, the final tableau still affirmed a Peer Romantically redeemed by a woman of heavenly grace, kind beauty, and the various other attributes of Shakespeare’s Silvia. When challenged in the subsequent discussion to defend the incredulity of such a *dénouement*, Oscar Jiang (equally incredulous at the question) explained that Solveig’s forbearance, fidelity, and altruism were culturally encoded attributes of Chinese womanhood, practised virtues, impervious to the amazement of the West. To the question “Who is Solveig? Where is she?” the Beijing response

was unequivocal: a living presence, a solution to Peer's existential predicament offered without irony—and contemporary in her attitudes.

The only professional company in the Symposium was the Buenos Aires group, which presented the final scene as a monologue performance, by Claudio Ciaffone. This production of *Peer Gynt* had been running in Argentina for five years in various transformations, starting as a full-scale spectacle and now experimentally reduced to a single actor incarnating all the figures in Peer's phantasmagoric experience as psychic manifestations of the unconscious. It creates not only the wish-dream of Solveig, but all the fears that haunt this Peer—the trollishness that defines his Self-sufficiency, the apathetic negative-Self that the Devil scorns as too mediocre for damnation, and the incomplete half-Self that the Button Moulder will melt down into a formless compound with all other partly lived lives. This *dénouement* as psychic event is an ingenious solution to the problem of Solveig, an internalization of the *tvertimod*, and a raising to consciousness of the systolic-diastolic impulses that render Peer simultaneously saved and damned. This is not the Brechtian Ibsen, but a Beckettian concentration of Ibsen's massive epic into an endgame of the mind—brilliant, if somewhat attenuated and, like Beckett's later monologues, trailing off into silence and stasis.

The Canadian contribution to the Vinstra Symposium was the University of British Columbia's production of *Peer Gynt*, staged in Vancouver in November 1999, a new version of the play that I had translated as a verse-paraphrase and adapted from Ibsen's "dramatic poem," and that John Wright had directed. I do not lay claim to any definitive answers to the problems in the title of this paper. But, on the assumption that performative decisions constitute a critical response to the text, I offer a rationale for our presentation of Solveig within the context of a substantially reconceived final episode. (I should preface what follows with a comment of Kjetil Bang Hansen, Director of the Oslo Nye Teater, in the discussion that followed the presentation. "It is a simple solution to the problems of the play," he remarked, "by rewriting it.")

Peer Gynt, in my reading of the play, is essentially a comedy: not only in the sense that it is funny, with a wittily conceived rhyming-verse style, but also a *commedia*, in the Dantesque sense, of a redemptive process, whereby a fallible soul is called to judgment and rediscovers the possibility of salvation. Only the *possibility*, however. Time alone will tell, at the last crossroads, whether Peer Gynt's consciousness of authentic selfhood can save him from the casting-ladle. In avoiding any sense of closure, we decided against the hero's death (the Gålå Lake solution), but also against

projecting Solveig as a passive “message” of redemption stripped of any active conviction. We may not have chosen to concede the Romantic *dénouement*, but—as always in Ibsen—such solutions are emotionally and rhetorically compelling, even as half-truths in combat with their contradictions. In shifting the “dramatic poem” into the form of a “poetic drama,” moreover, the Button Moulder demanded greater presence as an antagonist in open conflict with any attempt to claim Peer as an undamaged button, “som han sprang i Guds tanke frem” (314). (I have in mind the analogous confrontation in the *Mystery Cycles*, of Mary Mother of Mercy in open debate with the Devil over Man’s fallen soul, but without necessarily embracing the Christian solution.) In other words, we opted for an equally weighted dramaturgy in a fully dramatized *vertimod*.

In this version of the play, Peer himself was radically reconceived as an Old and a Young Self—played not in sequence, but concurrently, with both Peers present throughout the action. I intended, in this dramatic image of divided consciousness, to allow for a deliberate ambiguity of viewpoint: an Old Peer reconsidering the implications of his wildly imaginative Romantic dream, and their tendency to spill over into self-deception and evasion; a Young Peer, dreaming himself forward in time and acknowledging the existential dangers of becoming a superior kind of troll—egotistic, self-serving, inauthentic; and, finally, a dramatic image of cause and consequence in Peer’s journey toward a modified form of Self-consciousness. In other words, there were *two* Peers to be redeemed—which at one level compounded the problems of the *dénouement*, and at another freed my conclusion from the discredited conflation of Solveig into the mother-lover figure of *das Ewig-Weibliche*. If there are two Peers, why not create two “Others”? Like McFarlane, I have always been disconcerted by Peer’s “mother fixation” and the Freudian symbolism of Solveig/Åse’s cradling the darling boy in the all-forgiving lap. The choice, then, was to reconcile the *Old* Peer with a Solveig whose lifetime of waiting had changed her into a blind and physically frail shadow of her former self—and to reconcile the *Young* Peer with an Åse, archetype of the loving mother, in whose consciousness the wild and romantic youth remained perpetually “himself.” (Our Åse, undeterred by her own death at the end of the first half of the play, remained a constant dramatic presence in Peer’s consciousness, and her reappearance in the *dénouement* was not entirely inconsistent with Ibsen’s intention: he brings back Åse’s ghost—or Peer’s memory of her—in the thread-balls scene, in which she reprimands him for an abortive ride to Soria Moria Castle.) The presence of the two women in the finale,

moreover, reinforced what I take to be the positive existential implication in the “Romantic” solution: the crucial definition of Self within the dynamic of human relationships, which is one possible response to the play’s overarching quest for the authentic element in identity. Both Peers pose the familiar question, and *two* women now answer his query:

Old Peer. So—tell me now, at Pentecost,
 Where was my “Self” when I was lost
Young Peer. Where was the Essential Peer?
Solveig. In Solveig’s love.
Åse. In Åse’s care.³

(The more traditional response, of course, is Solveig’s “in my faith, in my hope, and in my love”—which became a leitmotif in our production, rephrased in verse and set to Grieg’s “Arietta,” from the *Lyric Pieces*. The answer to Peer’s query is *always* available to him. He is haunted by the refrain, and has only to consciously acknowledge its reassurance.) The other dramatic advantage of separating the Solveig/Åse figure lies in the final image of women’s solidarity at the end of the play. In the confrontation with the Button Moulder, the alliance of lover and mother reinforces the Boyg’s baleful acknowledgement (not without its ironies) “Der stod kvinder bag ham” (214)—that Peer has always depended upon his womenfolk for salvation.

The major problem with *Peer Gynt*, as play rather than poem, is that Solveig—so crucial to its structure and resolution—is an underwritten role and, in the last two acts, a very sketchily dramatized idea. How can her final intervention carry conviction if, by the time she makes her reappearance, the forceful and courageous woman of the first few acts, with her clear-sighted vision and her life-affirming values, has disappeared from view and been all but forgotten? It is not quite enough for Ibsen to reinvoke her briefly in Acts Four and Five, once in ironic response to Peer’s contemptuous dismissal of women (“og kvinderne,—det er en skrøbelig slægt!” [262]), and again, although more crucially, as a Whitsuntide reminder to Peer of her eternal presence. In this latter scene, she is a disembodied voice singing in the hut that Peer had built as their home, but never shared with her; and he hears her song as a saving grace, now (he believes) forfeited by his own indifference and the ruinous passage of time. At last he recognizes that in his futile search for a Gyntian Kingdom he has ignored the hut in the woods, his proper domain—“Her var mit kejsersdom!” (294)—but (he believes) too

late to redeem his vain and squandered life. At the end of the play Solveig will emerge from the hut, and the lyrical moment with its reminder of significance will merge with reality and, it seems to me, assert the Kingdom of Gyntiania as a recovered possibility in a vital human relationship. To build to this final moment, Peer's memory of Solveig and the intensity of his need for her require more stage-space and more stage-time, and this is what our version of the play tried to inject into its structure: a constantly available Solveig, not a passive *Ewig-Weibliche* but a living antidote to the waste and futility of the unexamined life—the Other whose love is Peer's own love's sphere. As he descends deeper and deeper into the dark night of the soul that the Button Moulder drives him to confront, so Solveig's *tvertimod*—the counterpointing promise that challenges him to acknowledge her and save himself from waste and futility—grows increasingly more intense in Peer's Self-illuminating consciousness. The final temptation is the craven evasion of this challenge to face the light—the catastrophic moment when, in Ibsen's text, Peer almost yields to his subconscious Boyg in his paralytic inability to act. In our version, we gave the Boyg his own booming voice and forced Peer, for the first momentous occasion in his life, to *choose*:

Boyg. GO ROUNDABOUT. IT'S NOT TOO LATE.

EVADE ALL CHOICE. PREVARICATE!

Old Peer. No.—I must take the path that's straight!

The best of "me" is all forgotten ...

Conceived in dreams, of dreams begotten.

Selfhood blurs ... I disappear ...

For God's sake! [*To the unseen Solveig*] Please, remember "Peer"!

"The meaning of myself is you ... "

Dream me whole! Dream me true!

Here is the kingdom where I reign ...

Young Peer. The circle's closed. We're home again!

He rises, finally, to the challenge; and, as if in response to Peer's urgent need for her as the final solution to his desperate bid for authentic Self-assertion, Solveig enters the action—old, blind, and a living presence in the play. In Peer's utterance, I have added dramatic emphasis to what I believe to be a moment of crucial recognition—the awareness, hovering just below consciousness, of Solveig's key role in his preservation of Self. And when she speaks to him, her lines deny his horrible misgivings about unredeemable time and the futility of life:

The river flows, but time is kind—
 You were never absent from my mind:
 Eternal presence, glancing light,
 Does not depend on touch or sight.

In her blindness, Solveig is the “seer” of the play, her physical limitations enabling her—like the other blind seers of drama—to cultivate the ability to see feelingly and so transcend the despair of reality.

In Ibsen’s text, the Button Moulder’s intimidating presence has now disappeared; and apart from his dire echoes about the encounter at the third and last crossroad, his dramatic function is as reduced as Solveig’s had been in the last act. My adaptation departs, radically, from the letter of Ibsen’s text at this point. The Button Moulder, who has presided over the action since the beginning of my version of the play, now vehemently rebuts the comforting Romantic resolution, in the anti-sentimental stance of much modern criticism:

A nice reprieve when faith is broken!
 The woman claims she’s not forsaken ...
 Mothers love delinquent youth,
 And platitudes parade as truths!
 God’s image remains obscured in you.
 I claim your remnant. It’s my due!
 The ladle waits ... The bond is broken.

Instead of the dying fall, the *Voggesang*, and the potentially sentimental cradling of the anti-hero in the lap of the mother/wife, the charge of *talemåder*—of cliché-ridden rhetoric—initiates the central struggle between the Button Moulder and the women for Peer’s soul. For the Button Moulder, it is imperative that he claim this “remnant” for his ladle—a broken, wear-worn button, its pattern rubbed so smooth that nothing remains to identify it. He has no truck with serviceable buttons. His mission is to melt down the fragments of partly lived lives, and his objective is to frustrate any rhetorical claim regarding Peer Gynt’s wholeness or Self-completion. Now Solveig confronts him with unassailable evidence: the silver button that Peer had entrusted to her sister at the end of Act Two, a talisman against being forgotten: “bed, at hun ikke glemmer mig!” (214). This seemed too good a symbolic moment to leave untapped, as the poem does. The silver button is the dramatic correlative of the whole man, safe in the repository of the

women’s image of lover and son, and a cogent argument for his authentic existence in the consciousness of the Other. Solveig produces it in triumph:

I’ve kept Peer’s button as a token.
Look—God’s stamp is sharp and clear,
Etched in my memory of Peer.
This we know—as wife and mother—
We live intensely in each other.

Confronted with this evidence, the Button Moulder is obliged to concede a (temporary) defeat of his mission:

Women have always been Peer Gynt’s protection!
But we’ll meet again, Peer, at the last intersection.
I wish you the wisdom that comes with old age,
And remind you that I will be waiting—backstage!

The emphatic spirit of *vertimod* brings this version of the play to its conclusion; and the action ends with a Brechtian direct address to the audience, each character offering an alternative and sometimes contradictory resolution to the central inquiry of the action, culled from the polyphonic perspective of the play. Old Peer asks whether human frailty can be amended: “Are we judged by choice, or by intention? / Can we be changed through intervention?” Young Peer puts the Kierkegaardian questions: “Is ‘Self’ an essence—or an action? / Is it substance—or abstraction?” The Troll King counsels the self-sufficient response to life’s complexity, and the Boyg warns against any strenuous examination of the life we lead. Solveig, finally, rejoices in the very qualities that have endeared Peer to her and asks for the audience’s endorsement of his positive, poetic joyfulness:

Let your imaginations range
Through worlds of wonder, wild and strange.
And when you take *your* Gjendin ride,
Let Ibsen’s hero be your guide.

And the final invocation to the audience—the *real* hero of the play, like the crowd witnessing their own fate in the Mystery Cycles—is left to Old Peer and the Button Moulder:

Old Peer. And if your world-view's slightly squint —
 Acknowledge kinship with Peer Gynt!
Button Maker. Now—answer me, if you are able:
 Any buttons for my ladle?

One final point. Absorbing Solveig into a more complex dramatic dialectic, and reducing her importance by depriving her of the *Voggesang* and the final maternal tableau, is clearly to tamper with the most celebrated—and the most reviled—*Piéta* in modern drama. Ibsen had the rest of his long career in the theatre to “correct” this cliché of nineteenth-century attitudes, as he does for example in *Lady From the Sea* and, implicitly, in all the heroic women who refuse *das Ewig-Weibliche* as their destiny in a male-dominated world. But those who remain faithful to the letter of the text are stuck with the tableau and its sentimental tonalities. Peter Stein’s famous Berlin production in 1971, for example, contextualized the image of the *Piéta* by having stage-hands physically remove Solveig and Peer offstage, where they would presumably be relegated to a museum of *petit bourgeois* kitsch exhibiting such outmoded attitudes as past errors. Our solution was not to discredit the image, but to contextualize it in an alternative dramatic strategy. Kjetil Bang Hansen’s comment that rewriting the play was an easy solution to the problems of the *dénouement* takes too little account of the fact that every critical reading of the play is essentially a form of rewriting, and that dramatization—the subsequent performance of a play, under an inspired director—is essentially an act of criticism in itself. If the spirit of the piece resides in the *tvertimod* that characterizes Ibsen’s entire dramatic oeuvre, then the form of this adaptation, which seems the most radical approach of all the Vinstra readings, may indeed be the most conventional in articulating the multiple possibilities of Self-definition in *Peer Gynt*.

NOTES

¹Helge Rønning, Department of Communications, UO; Ellen Hartmann, Department of Psychology, UO; Kjetil Bang Hansen, Nye Teater; Oscar Jiang, Beijing; Raoul Alurralde, Buenos Aires; and Errol Durbach, UBC, Vancouver.

²Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, IV. i. 39 ff.

³All translations are from my own adaptation of the play.

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The Echo in the Mountains

J.S. Welhaven's Metaphor for Poetry

JOHN LINGARD

ABSTRACT: J.S. Welhaven (1807–1873) is an important Norwegian late romantic whose work is too little known in the English-speaking world. This paper draws attention to the strengths of his prose writing as well as those of his poetry by tracing a persistent metaphor, “Gjenlyden mellem Fjeldene” [the echo in the mountains], through a fascinating travelogue, *Vasdrag og Skovmarker* [Water Courses and Forest Tracts], and a selection of lyric poems. The metaphor helps us to understand how Welhaven refined the impressions of wilderness nature with the aid of folk literature, folk music, landscape painting, and a mixture of personal and national remembered landscapes.

RÉSUMÉ: J.S. Welhaven (1807–1873) est un important écrivain norvégien de la fin de l'ère romantique qui est très peu connu chez les Anglophones. Cette communication examine ses meilleurs textes en prose et en poésie en soulignant la métaphore omni-présente “Gjenlyden mellem Fjeldene” [l'écho dans les montagnes], au moyen d'une conférence sur un voyage, *Vasdrag og Skovmarker* [les cours d'eau et les parcelles de forêt], et d'une sélection de poèmes lyriques. La métaphore nous aide à comprendre comment Welhaven a raffiné les impressions de nature sauvage grâce à la littérature folklorique, à la musique folklorique, à la peinture de paysages et au mélange de souvenirs de paysages personnels et nationaux.

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Johan Sebastian Welhaven was born in Bergen in 1807 and died in Kristiania in 1873. His best nature poetry captures both “the solemnity and nobility” of his native landscape and “the hills and forests of Eastern Norway” (Beyer 1956: 146). A major force in Norwegian national romanticism (Aarnes 1996: 219–232), Welhaven also had a profound influence on the first generation of modern writers in Norway, notably Henrik Ibsen, whose tragicomic masterpiece *Vildanden* [The Wild Duck] owes its haunting central imagery to two of Welhaven’s lyrics: “Søfuglen” (1: 151)¹ [The Sea-Bird]; and “Den Sunkne Stad” (2: 140–141) [the Drowned City], which gives Hedvig Ekdal her sense of the attic as “havsens bund” (Ibsen 1968: 246) [the depths of the sea] (Hauge 1990: 1: 349; 2: 443).² Even Bjørnsterne Bjørnson—who is closer in spirit to Henrik Wergeland (Aarnes 1996: 227–228)—reveals his debt to Welhaven, as well as a sympathetic understanding of his nature poetry, in a eulogy of 1868:

Smiler du ikke ved målet,
du, som i vintren har vugget
forårets tekst?
alt var ditt mot har bestrålet,
alt var ditt mismot har dugget,
nå har det vekst (1995: 1. 348; quoted in Aarseth 1994: 301–302)

[Do you not smile at your achievement, you who in winter have cradled the text of spring? All that your courage has illumined, all that your sadness has watered with dew, now it has grown]

Welhaven is much less well known than Ibsen or Bjørnson in the English-speaking world. In 1942, Charles Wharton Stork translated twelve of Welhaven’s shorter poems for his *Anthology of Norwegian Lyrics* (3–22). In *A History of Norwegian Literature*, Harald Beyer stresses Welhaven’s importance to national romanticism, but places him somewhat in Wergeland’s shadow (1956: 146–150), a view taken to its extreme in Ronald G. Popperwell’s comment that Welhaven’s “work is well turned out but rather narrow in scope, and suffers by comparison with his great contemporary Wergeland” (1969). Writing shortly after Popperwell, Michael Meyer is more positive in describing Welhaven as “a scholarly, elegant and dignified versifier in the Matthew Arnold mould” (1971: 70), and goes on to speak of Ibsen’s “considerable admiration for his old professor J.S. Welhaven both as a poet and as a man”

(1971: 465). More recently, Jan Sjøvik has provided a detailed analysis of “Den Salige” (2.214–15) [The Blessed One], one of Welhaven’s finest lyrics, but the most valuable English-language introduction to the poet comes from Harald Naess:

Welhaven was remembered by his contemporaries as a literary critic of note and a gifted writer of nature poetry. It is in this latter capacity that he has gained a name for himself in the consciousness of later generations. In that outburst of creative energy referred to as the National Breakthrough, which culminated in the 1840s but had a long-lasting effect among people of conservative taste, Welhaven was the preeminent poet, as Halfdan Kjerulf was the composer and Hans Gude and Adolf Tidemand the painters. His poetry, in musical settings by Kjerulf, has been preserved in the repertory of the Oslo Student Chorus (founded by Kjerulf) and received added significance as the verbal expression of Norway’s romantic landscape painting. (1993: 87–88).

In what follows, I have attempted to follow Naess’s appreciation of Welhaven by placing his work in the context of Norwegian folklore, folk music, and romantic landscape painting. I have used a specific metaphor from Welhaven’s *Vasdrag og Skovmarker* [Watercourses and Forest Tracts] to demonstrate the unity and strength of his best poetry and prose.

Published in 1851, *Vasdrag og Skovmarker* is the account of a tour through Ringerike taken by Welhaven the previous July. In the third section, the poet and his companions are travelling by boat northward along the western shore of Sperilen, a long mountain lake. An old man’s suggestion that a bird they have just seen flying against the aftersunset is “Gasten,” which Welhaven defines as “et slags Harpy” (4.242) [a kind of harpy], leads to other tales of “Skrømt og underligt Væsen paa disse Kanter” (4.246) [uncanny things and strange creatures in these parts]; these include two “Hougarle” [hill-goblins] that disappeared into the side of a mountain, and “Huldren” (4.246–48) [the *hulder*], a seductive female nature-spirit. Inspired by these anecdotes and by the “usikker Lysning” [uncertain lighting] of twilight and moonlight, Welhaven comes to think of “Folkedigtning” [folk narrative] as a source of mediation between nature and human life:

Denne alvorlige Scene betegnede for mig en vigtig Side af vor Folkedigtningens
Spiregrund. I en streng, mægtig udformet Natur staaer Mennesket overalt

Fare for at henfalde i Sløvhed og Raahed, naar det ei med sit indre Liv kan beaande de haarde Omgivelser; men som Gjenlyden mellem Fjeldene, der i stedse mildere Gjætagelser besvarer et menneskelig Stemme, saaledes kommer ogsaa det Tankebillede, som Sindstemningen, under Naturmagtens Paavirkning, uvilkaarlig har betroet det strenge Stof, mildere udpræget og ligesom fortroligt tilbage; men da er Fjeldødetts verste Tryk hævet, og da begynder Aanden at udbrede sit Rige. Man tør derfor, uden at ville begunstige en mørk begrebsforvirrende Overtro, ønske hine Digtninger, der staae som Midlere mellem Naturen og Menneskelivet, bevarede hos Folket; thi det er vanskeligt at finde deres Erstatning, hvor de ere tabte. (4.248)

[This sombre scene signified for me an important part of our folk narrative's seed ground. In a strong, powerfully formed natural setting, humanity is everywhere in danger of falling into a dull, crude way of life when it cannot with its inner life give spirit to its hard surroundings; but like the echo in the mountains that answers a human voice with always softer repetitions, so does that mental picture, which a state of feeling, affected by the power of nature, has spontaneously supplied her stern material, return in a milder and as it were more intimate form; but then the worst impressions of the mountain wilderness are removed, and then the spirit can begin to enlarge its kingdom. Therefore one dares to wish, without wanting to favour a dark obscurantist superstition, those narratives preserved among the people that act as mediators between nature and human life, because it is difficult to find their replacement when they are lost.]

In the light of this passage, I have identified in *Vasdrag og Skovmarker* what can be called an “echo-system,” which is shaped by Welhaven’s response to wilderness nature, folklore, folk music, and landscape art, and by his personal remembered landscapes, which correspond to “the landscape of memory” identified by Christopher Salvesen in the poetry of William Wordsworth. My discussion continues with three poems—“Et Barndomsminde” [A Childhood Memory], “Olafskilden” [Olav’s Spring], and “Lokkende Toner” [Luring Notes]—which translate the various echoes in the system into lyric form. I conclude with “Sangens Gjenlyd” [The Song’s Echo], in which Welhaven looks forward to an ideal creative reader for his poetry.

Though Welhaven is in many ways a Wordsworthian nature poet, his writings are often marked by a strong sense of alienation between mankind and nature, an alienation his echo-system is designed to redress. Whereas William Wordsworth writes to show how exquisitely “The external World

is fitted to the Mind" (1977: 2.39), and describes himself as "in Nature still / Glorifying" (1972: 467), Welhaven sees wilderness nature as bleak and alien (Løchen 1900: 434–435):

Dybt i den trange Dal, blandt steile, vilde Klipper,
hvor Vangen ligger gold, hvor Orekrattet slipper,

der er det sorte Kjern med døde, kolde Vande,
med evigt Skyggekast fra gruelige Strande. (2.167)

[Deep in the narrow valley, among steep wild cliffs, where the field lies barren, where the alder thicket gives up, there is the black tarn with dead, cold waters, with eternal shadows cast from horrible shores.]

Hvor vid og vældig og hvor mørk
udstrakte her sig Fjeldets Ørk!

...

Med længsel søgte Blikket her
et venligt Billed, fjernt og nær;
men overalt laae Ørknen gold
som et uhyre søndret Skjold,
til Minde om den Urtidsdyst
da Fjelde tørned' Bryst mod Bryst. (2.124)

[How wide and overwhelming and how dark the mountain wilderness stretched itself out here! ... Here one's glance sought with longing for a friendly image, far and near; but everywhere the desert lay barren like a huge broken shield, as a memorial to the primeval struggle when the mountains jostled breast against breast.]

Wordsworth, it is true, has his "moorland waste, and naked pool" (1972: 481), but in the last analysis his mountains and lakes are home. By the same token, Welhaven does have a gentler pastoral mode, in, for example, "Sang i Dalen" (2.165) [Song in the Valley], but I would argue that his finest nature poetry involves a tension between wilderness and spirit. The man who penned the patriotic line "I Fjeldet boer vor Kunst og Poesi" (1.231) [In the mountains dwell our art and poetry] also believed that for the poet and the artist, nature is "et dødt Stof, der maa indgydes en levende Sjæl, hvis det skal kunne gaae over i den reen menneskelige Sphære og

afgive et virkeligt skjønt Værk” (3.154) [dead matter that must be infused with a living soul if it is to admit transference to the purely human sphere and the production of a really beautiful work]. His echo in the mountains is a strong and complex metaphor that helps us understand how this transference takes place.

Welhaven’s first mountain-echo is *folkedigtning* [folk narrative]: the tales, legends, and ballads whose *spiregrund* [seed ground] is the Norwegian landscape. These stories “act as mediators between nature and human life.” The echo answers our voice with softer repetitions, and Welhaven favours those folk tales, especially *huldreeventyr* [fairy tales about the *huldrefolk*] that have a subtle, indirect quality, or, in his own words, “en tilsløret Inderlighed” (4.280) [a veiled inwardness]. The *huldrefolk*, which translates as “the hidden people” (Christiansen 1964: xxxiii) or “invisible folk” (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988: 203), are “spirits of forest and mountain” (Christiansen 1964: 79–134); like deer, they are most typically glimpsed in the act of disappearing:

Naar man rigtig vil stirre paa dem, vige de tilbage i Naturgrunden; men det svævende og flygtende i deres Aabenbarelse er just det, der giver dem Magt og Liv i Folket. Huldren, det mest udprægede af disse Billeder, har i sin eiendommelige Form, det samme undvigende Væsen. Trods hendes rige Udstyr med Kostbarheder og Kvæghjorder, er hun endnu, som i Oldtiden, den Tilhyllede, den Forborgne. I et pludselig Solstreif, der bringer Lien til at glimre, i en Lurtone, der klinger hen mellem fjeldene, giver hun hyppigst sin Nærværelse tilkjende (4.249)

[When one really stares at them, they retreat into the background of nature; but the floating and evasive quality of their manifestations is just what gives them power and life among the people. The *hulder*, the most distinctive of these images, has, in her special form, the same elusive character. Despite her rich appointments of precious things and herds of cattle, she is still, as in the old days, the veiled one, the secret one. She most often makes her presence known in a sudden shaft of sunlight that brings a glitter to the hillside, or the note of a *lur* that rings through the mountains]

With this secretive, evanescent quality, the *hulder* is an ideal mediator in Welhaven’s sense. Her cultural refinement—she is “Dronningen i denne Fabelverden” (4.248) [the queen in this world of fable]—serves to dematerialize as well as romanticize her forest and mountain kingdom.³

Equally essential to this dematerialization are the next two mountain-echoes, folk music and landscape art. It is hard to give one precedence over the other; the *hulder* makes her presence known visually, in a shaft of sunlight, and aurally, through the notes of her *lur*. However, Arne Kjell Haugen has suggested that Welhaven anticipated the French symbolist poets in placing music as the link between poetry and visual art (1990: 109–111). This is evident in Welhaven’s reply to a reviewer of *En Digtsamling* [A Collection of Poems], who complained that his nature poetry was too reflective:

Det er indlysende, at Landskabsmaleriets Opsving i vor Tid staar i nøieste forbindelse med Tidens eiendommelige Naturdigtning, og det fordi de begge er udgaaede fra den samme Grund, fra det samme Vendepunkt i Livsanskuel- sen; hint “Musikalske,” en Betonning af Aandens uendelige Inderlighed, bevæger dem begge. (4.424)

[It is clear that the rise of landscape painting in our time stands in the closest relationship to the time’s characteristic nature poetry, and that is because they both start from the same premise, the same turning point in the way we look at the world; the “element of music,” a sense of the everlasting inwardness of the spirit, inspires them both.]

Two passages in *Vasdrag og Skovmarker* embody this idea. Welhaven’s party, having just passed through “Ruinerne efter en Skovbrand” (4.260) [the ruins left by a forest fire], have been refused lodging by a farmer’s wife, whose husband appears to be a kind of angry troll: “Han er i Skoven og han er grum at træffe” (4.262) [He’s in the forest and he’s a cruel man to meet]. Then their fortunes change:

Med Et blev Stien bredere og Skoven mere ryddig, og i det samme lød der Lurklang fra den nærmest Høide. Det var en Velkomst! Aldrig før havde jeg hørt saadanne Toner. Klangfylden gik vældigt over den hele Skov, skingrende, men tillige klar og sikker; den gjenlød fra alle Aaser, og først naar det sidste Svar var kommet, begyndte Luren igjen. Ingen anden Toneleg kan ligned med dette stormægtige Vexelspil. Og just nu susede Skoven, der før havde staaet tyst og stille; thi nu gik Solnedgangens Vindpust gennem dens Kroner. Vi satte vore Heste i skarpt trav, og i jagende Fart kom vi op paa Sætervangen. Paa Høiden der tegnede sig Huse og Folkegruppet mørkt mod den glandsfulde Himmel, men fjernt over Vangens Holding og over de mørke

Skovbælter hævede de udstrakte Fjeldvidder sine lange Bølgelinier. Paa Jevnlifjeldets Kam stod det yderste Solglimt som en gnistrende Stjerne... . I dette Øieblik var al Træthed borte, og jeg følte mig gjennemstrømmet af en usigelig Livsglæde. (4.263)

[Suddenly the path became broader and the forest clearer, and at that very moment the sound of a *lur* rang out from the nearest hill. It was a welcoming! I had never heard such notes before. The fullness of sound went powerfully over the whole forest, bright, but also clear and firm; it echoed from all the mountain ridges, and just when the last answer came, the *lur* began again. No other music can be compared with this masterful antiphony. And just then there was a sougling in the forest, which had been quiet and still before; for now the sunset wind passed through its tops. We put our horses into a sharp trot, and came at top speed up into the meadow of a *seter*. On the hill the houses and groups of people showed dark against the gleam of the sky, but far beyond the slope of the meadow and over the dark stretches of forest, the long ranges of mountain plateaux raised their lines in waves. The last gleam of sunlight touched the peak of Jevnlifjeldet like a glittering star... . At that moment all tiredness fell away, and I felt full of an inexpressible joy.]

The sequence epitomizes Welhaven's aesthetic response to nature. He has just passed through the wilderness at its worst: a stretch of charred tree-trunks left by a forest fire, where he felt "ligesom indespærret i disse infernalske Irgange" (4.258) [as if imprisoned in these infernal mazes]; on top of this the local inhabitants have evidently slipped into "a dull, crude way of life." Then music from an unseen source creates the effect of a transformation scene in romantic theatre. The forest whispers, the evening light gives form to an idyllic mountain landscape, and the people and buildings have obligingly "drawn themselves"—the literal translation of "tegnede sig"—in silhouette against the sky.

The *lur*-player is Mærit, who tends the cattle on this *seter*, or mountain-farm. Welhaven means us to associate her with the *hulder*: she is introduced as an invisible presence in the forest, and her *lur* is almost a substitute for speech, as she is "ordknap" [of few words], while her companion, Antonette, is "meddelsom" [talkative] (4.264), and regales the author with local *huldreeventyr*.

Mærit's playing the next morning is even more transformative:

Det syntes mig at hendes Toner nu ei faldt ganske som igaar, da Spillet
Vendinger havde Lighed med de korte, men smeltende Stropher, man kan
høre i Maaltrøstens Sang. Nu var der i hendes Foredrag en egen Lyst og
Freidighed, der svarede til den friske Sommermorgen; hun blæste Fanfarer,
og mellem hver af dem føiede hun til Skovens og Fjeldets Gjenlyd et fint,
dæmpet Efterspil. Det var atter som om disse Toner gennemtrængte alle
Omgivelser, som om alt fik Liv og Rørelse ved dem; og ligesom ved
Solnedgangen igaar, indtraadte ogsaa nu, samtidigt med Lurspillet, en
forandring i Naturscenen. Taagerne svandt, og Morgenglandsen faldt
tindrende paa den lavere Strækning af Sætermarken og paa de nærmeste
Skovlinier. Det var et Trylleri. (4.266)

[It seemed to me that her notes now sounded not quite the same as yesterday, when the phrases of her playing were like the short, melting strophes one can hear in the thrush's song. There was now in her delivery a special pleasure and cheerfulness, which answered to the fresh summer morning; she blew fanfares, and between each of them she added to the echo from forest and mountain a fine, muted response. It was again as if these notes permeated all our surroundings, as if everything took life and movement from them; and as with yesterday's sunset, there happened now, in time with the *lur*-playing, a change in the natural scene. The mists vanished, and the morning light fell glittering on the lower slopes of the *seter*-field and on the nearest lines of the forest. It was magic.]

This is the third and most sophisticated echo-passage in *Vasdrag og Skovmarker*. Here it is as if Welhaven is tuning his echo-system, creating his own "fine, muted response" to this musical mediation between nature and human life. Mærit's morning dialogue with forest and mountain is orphic, bringing life, movement, and light to the landscape: it is truly a moment when "the spirit can begin to enlarge its kingdom." We can understand why Welhaven looked back on Mærit's *seter* as "Eventyrets lukkede Land" (4.282) [the secret land of fairy tale].

The third mountain-echo is implicit in these two Mærit episodes. The transfigured landscapes are as it were framed like paintings of the new Norwegian school, which Welhaven has already established as his aesthetic norm for Ringerike. The tour began at Hønenfossen (now Hønefoss), where the seasonally reduced flow of water was still "stor nok til at vedligeholde den maleriske Virkning af de mange særskilte Fald" (4.216) [big enough to preserve the picturesque effect of the many separate falls]. While his guides

investigate the falls' capacity as timberchutes, Welhaven recognizes motifs from national romantic landscape art:

Blandt de mange Fald i denne vide Fjeldaabning, gjenkendte jeg flere fra Malerier, hvori de som skjønne Motiver vare indbragte i andre Naturomgivelser; disse Billeder fremstillede sig for Tanken samtidigt med Virkelighedens Indtryk. Jeg kunde gjenkalde mig det høie Fossefald mellem øde Klippevæge af Morgenstern, det lavere Elvedrag i Birkelien af Dahl, og Skovstrømmen af Fearnley. (4.217)

[Among the many falls in this wide opening into the mountains, I recognized several from paintings, where they had been introduced as fine motifs in other natural surroundings; these images presented themselves to me simultaneously with the impressions of reality. I could recall the high waterfall between bare mountain walls, by Morgenstern, the lower river valley in Birkelien, by Dahl, and the forest stream, by Fearnley.]

Welhaven writes of another part of the falls: “Det hele Billede venter paa Landskabsmaleren; han vil finde alle Linier og Former her saa smukt givne og ordnede, at der Intet kan være at tilføie og Intet at borttage” (4.220) [The whole picture awaits the landscape painter; he will find all the lines and forms here so beautifully present and arranged that there can be nothing to add and nothing to take away].

Ingard Hauge and Sigurd Willoch have shown how often Welhaven's writing reveals its debt to landscape artists, especially J.C. Dahl, Thomas Fearnley, and Hans Gude.⁴ According to Gunnar Danbolt, Dahl's artistic goal was to provide “ei inntrengjande tolking av det norske landskapet, ei tolking som kunne vekke landsmennene hans opp frå den vrangforestillinga at ville fjell og aude vidder berre var verdiløus utmark, og la dei oppdage det sublimе i denne naturen” (1997: 155) [a penetrating interpretation of the Norwegian landscape, an interpretation that could wake his countrymen from the misguided idea that wild mountains and bleak plateaux were only worthless wilderness, and let them discover the sublime in this aspect of nature]. With the already mentioned proviso that Welhaven did at times experience the mountains as “verdiløus utmark” [worthless wilderness], this could also be a manifesto for his own nature poetry. To Welhaven the work of Dahl and his disciples has the same transformative effect on nature as Mærit's *lur*. In “En Tribut til Kunstforeningen” (1.230–235) [A Tribute to the Society of Art], he claimed that “Kunstneren har med sin egen

Haand/udfriet Aanden af de haarde Stene” (1.231) [the artist has with his own hand freed the spirit from the hard stones]. In Dahl’s landscapes, “Nordens Vemod hvisker der / forklaret og formildet” (2.92) [the sadness of the North whispers there / transfigured and softened]. Importantly, Dahl has found unity in nature. He saw “i Fjeld og Skov og Strand / en dybere Forening” (2.93) [in mountain and forest and shore a deeper unity]. Welhaven feared fragmentation—“det spredte” (2.211) [the scattered]—in nature and in art (Løchen 1900: 446–447). The mountain plateau in “Eivind Bolt” lies like a huge broken shield; a burned forest is like ruins or a maze. Welhaven’s negative response to the paintings of August Cappelen—he thought the young artist had “lost his wits” (Gunnarsson 1998: 109)—may have been rooted in the same kind of fear. Torsten Gunnarsson says of Cappelen’s forest landscapes, “In some cases the spatial composition verges on the claustrophobic, the foreground often revealing a confused mass of vegetative forms” (1998: 108–109); in *Dying Forest*, for example, “nature appears to be controlled by mysterious forces, spreading chaos and destruction” (Gunnarsson 1998: 110). Confronted with Cappelen’s powerful *Waterfall in Lower Telemark*, “even a northerner perceives this wilderness as almost a foreign country, occupied by an alien and mysterious presence” (Gunnarsson 1998: 110). It is as if Cappelen had touched a nerve in Welhaven by showing the wilderness without softening or unity.

An analogous search for personal continuity informs Welhaven’s next mountain-echo, the landscape of memory. Arne Løchen notes that in Welhaven’s nature writings,

Han flytter landskabet tilbage, idet han forbinder det med minder fra sit tidligere liv. Disse minder med det sterke personlige præg kaster vemodens eiendommelige lys over landskabet og lader det fra nutiden blaane hen i fortiden. (1900: 457)

[He moves the landscape back, as he connects it with memories from his earlier life. These memories with their strong personal stamp cast the peculiar light of sadness over the landscape and let what is present fade into the blue of the past.]

Løchen illustrates this tendency with a passage from *Vasdrag og Skovmarker*. As the Sperilen boat moves “fra Nes til Nes” (4.241) [from headland to headland], Welhaven remembers “de Fjordbugter og steile Havkyster” [the fjord inlets and steep sea-cliffs] of his childhood home; the result is a

layering of past and present landscapes:

Saa mægtigt virkede dette Vandspeil i den stortformede Indfatning paa min Tanke, og dog kunde jeg henflytte det hele i min vaagne Drøms Egn og holde det engang fjernt og nærværende; saaledes var jeg med denne strenge aftendunkle Natur i en stille Forstaaelse. (4.242)

[This mirror of water in its imposing setting worked so powerfully on my mind, and yet I was able to move the whole scene away in the field of my waking dream and keep it at once distant and near at hand; in this way I came to a quiet understanding with this strong, dark, evening world of nature.]

In a later episode, Welhaven allows a daydream about Sigurd Hjort, the legendary king of Ringerike (Hauge 1992: 4.570), to “erase” the present landscape:

Ja her i den dybe Skumring mellem de forældede Graner, udslettedes af Sindet denne Tids Forestillinger, og isteden kom den fjerne Forgangenheds Billeder, et efter andet. Skovens enkelte Partier vakte ei længere min Opmærksomhed; thi den hele Vildmark var for mig nu som en forladt Scene, der ei har Virkningen i sig selv, men i Efterklngen af svundne Optrin. (4.274)

[Yes here in the deep twilight among the ancient fir trees, the impressions of this present moment were erased from my mind, and images of the remote past came instead, one after another. The individual forest views no longer attracted my attention, because the whole wilderness was to me now like an empty stage that has no effect in itself, but in the echo of vanished performances.]

Løchen feels that such passages reveal Welhaven’s writing as “den vemodige erindrings Kunst” (1900: 456) [the art of sad memory], and Reidar Andersen-Næss calls him “denne ensomhetens og erindringens dikter” (Andersen-Næss 1959: 160) [this poet of loneliness and memory]. It is fair to note, however, that Welhaven is also writing in a tradition derived from the eighteenth-century picturesque. In his study of the background to Wordsworth’s landscape of memory, Salvesen records William Gilpin’s response to “the grey obscurity of a summer-evening,” which almost exactly matches the sensibility of these episodes from *Vasdrag og Skovmarker*:

A light of this kind, though not so favourable to landscape, is very favourable to the imagination. This active power embodies half-formed images; and gives existence to the most illusive scenes. These it rapidly combines; and often composes landscapes, perhaps more beautiful, than any, that exist in nature. They are formed indeed from nature—from the most beautiful of her scenes; and having been treasured up in the memory, are called into these imaginary creations by some distant resemblances, which strike the eye in the multiplicity of evanid surfaces, that float before it. (Gilpin 1991: 45; quoted in Salvesen 1965: 55)

Salvesen goes on to note “the close Eighteenth-century connection between melancholy and memory,” and “a growing feeling for identification with some known landscape by way of remembered experience,” which “was certainly encouraged by Picturesque sensibility” (1965: 56). I stress this connection with a European tradition, since the Sperilen memory incident is more useful as a kind of gateway to the poetry if we see its imaginative strategy as artistic technique—as composition, to borrow Gilpin’s term—rather than as another symptom of “en innadvendt, psykologisk tendens” (Andersen-Næss 1959: 168) [an introverted, psychological tendency].

As his fifth echo in the mountains, Welhaven’s strongest lyric poems form a kind of virtual echo-system of their own, which absorbs and transfigures the earlier echoes. The dematerialization inherent in this process has been well defined by Hauge:

Emnet er some regel konkret: et naturintrykk, et minnerikt sted, et sagn eller en myte eller en fortelling av et eller annet slag, en situasjon, en person. Denne konkrete virkelighet blir gjort transparent. Diktet blir “et slør” for et dypere eller høyere åndsinnhold, eller et spill for noe menneskelig. (1990: 1.20)

[The subject is as a rule concrete: an impression from nature, a place rich in memories, a legend or a myth or a story of one kind or another, a situation, a person. This concrete reality is made transparent. The poem becomes “a veil” for a deeper or higher spiritual content, or a mirror for something human.]

In “Et Barndomsminde” (2.181–183) [A Childhood Memory], the concrete reality is a childhood journey made by Welhaven with his father, who, as parish priest, had been “med Ilbud og med Taarer hentet” [sent for by a hasty messenger and tears], presumably to perform the last rites.⁵ The first

stanza of “Et Barndomsminde” establishes a number of interrelated oppositions that will shape the poem’s conflict-structure:

Jeg var lykkelig paa min Barndoms Kyst—
 Jeg sendte Snekker ud i Bølgers Dyst,
 og plukked Roser mellem mørke Fjelde,
 og efter Dagens legende Bedrift
 jeg læste Kroniker og hellig Skrift
 og hørte Eventyr om Jetters Vælde.

[I was happy on my childhood’s coast—I sent my sailboat out to joust with the waves, and picked roses among dark mountains; and after the playful business of the day I read romances and sacred scripture and heard fairy tales about the might of giants.]

The explicit and implicit oppositions here are between innocence and experience; nature and human life; organic and inorganic nature; a bright red colour and darkness; day and night; reading Christian literature and listening to folk narrative. The poem’s narrative will echo these oppositions “with always softer repetitions,” until it closes with a sense of reconciliation.

Near the end of the poem, the boy looks back on his experience as “det dunkle Ridt” [the dark ride], and Welhaven takes care to suggest that fear comes to his younger self through *sounds*, and a *sense* of what lies below and around him in the darkness:

De løse Stene i den vilde Klev,
 hvorover Vinden Taageskyen drev,
 gled ud mod Dybet over Fjeldets Skulder;
 i Lyngen bragede det bratte Fald,
 og fjernt i Dalen lød fra Bjergets Hal
 med tifold Efterklang det dumpe Bulder.

[The loose stones in the wild pass slid out into the depths over the shoulder of the mountain; the sudden waterfall crashed through the heather, and far off in the valley the hollow rumbling from the mountain’s hall sounded with tenfold echo.]

It goes without saying that this is a bleak landscape. The farmer’s cottage lies behind “det øde Fjeld” [the desolate mountain]. Apart from the heather,

the only organic vegetation is “den sorte Lund” [the black grove] below the path, an allusion, surely, to those groves associated with the cult of Odin.

These echoes from the wilderness and a dark, sacrificial past grow softer as the journey nears its goal. The sounds themselves become less menacing—“Til sidst det hvasket kun fra Ur og Krat” [Finally, there was only a whisper from scree and bush]—to be overcome by the drumming of the horse’s hooves on the bridge: “Det var for mig som om hver Nattens Røst/ved denne pludselige Klang forstummed” [It seemed to me that all the voices of the night were silenced by this sudden sound]. When the boy has reached the safety of the cottage, one voice of the night returns, but it is now in harmony with the human voice:

Fra Dalens Bund jeg hørte Elvens Gang,
og til dens Brusen lød der Psalmesang
og Messetoner fra den Syges Kammer.

[I heard the passage of the river from the bottom of the valley, and to its rushing sound were added hymn-singing and the notes of the mass from the sick man’s chamber.]

It is, above all, folk narrative that softens the impressions of the wilderness. Remembering those stories “about the might of giants,” the boy is able to turn the night into “et Eventyr/hvis Tryllesti jeg turde selv before” [a fairy tale whose magic path I dared to travel myself]. The central folk belief in “Et Barndomsminde” is that a missing person has been “bergtatt” [taken into the mountain] by trolls:

The expression “taken into the mountain” could refer to any sudden psychological change in a person. The change is usually associated with a traumatic experience such as getting lost on a mountain or in a forest. The ringing of church bells was believed to force the invisible folk to release their captives. (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988: 212)

In “Et Barndomsminde,” the boy imagines “det snævre Pas” [the narrow pass] they have just ridden through to be “Fjeldportalet” [the mountain portal] and “et Borgeled” [a castle gate]. To extend the fantasy, one can see the bridge across the river as a drawbridge over which the boy and his father escape in the nick of time:

Hvor sælsomt drønned det, da Hestens Sko
slog Gnister paa den hellelagte Bro,
hvorunder Elven mod en Afgrund skummed.

...

Som Troides Værn, hvis Styrke er forbi,
naar Helligdommen drager ind deri,
veg nu med Et hver Klippemur tilside.
Paa Bakken Hytten mellem Birke laae,
og Ilden flammed fra dens Arnevraa
og lyste paa den Vei, vi skulde ride.

[What a strange drumming sound the horse's hooves made as they struck sparks from the flagstoned bridge. ... Like the stronghold of trolls, which loses its power when some sacred object is brought into it, each mountain wall now suddenly moved aside. The cottage lay behind the hill among birches, and the fire glowed from its corner hearth and illuminated the way we should ride.]

The church bells mentioned by Kvideland and Sehmsdorf are missing, but they have been replaced metonymically by “Helligdommen,” which must be “Sakramentet,” his father's sacrament, and by the hymn-singing in the next stanza. Note too the substitution of the friendly stand of white birches for “the black grove.”

There is no direct allusion to landscape art in “Et Barndomsminde.” The obvious reason for this is that the story takes place at night. Welhaven does, however, make symbolic use of a special chiaroscuro—small areas of light against the darkness—which betrays “det øvede Øje” (4.216) [the practised eye] of the artist and art-connoisseur. We begin with “et Stjerneskjær” [the glint of a star] reflected in a tarn below the path; then “et Glimt of Maanen” [a gleam of moonlight] reveals “Fjeldportalet.” The horse's hooves strike sparks from the flagstones on the bridge, and the cottage firelight acts as a beacon for the travellers. Finally, the boy sits gazing at “de røde Flammer” [the red flames] in the hearth, rather like Askeladden, as he remembers his dark ride. There is a balance here between darkness and light, just as there is between natural and human sounds.

We have already seen in *Vasdrag og Skovmarker* that Welhaven's landscape of memory is intimately bound up with folk narrative. In the eleventh stanza of “Et Barndomsminde” the boy looks back at his experience

of being protected from the night, not only by his father, but by remembered *eventyr*. Then, in the last stanza, the poet looks back at his earlier adult self looking back at the boy looking back at the darkness. In *The Prelude*, there is an illuminating analogy to this connection between fairy tale, memory, and individual continuity. In Book 5, subtitled “Books,” Wordsworth describes a potentially traumatic childhood experience, the sight of a drowned man being dragged up from Esthwaite Water:

At last, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
Rose, with his ghastly face, a spectre shape
Of terror. ...

However, the boy is protected from this gothic scene by his memories of fairy tales:

yet no soul-debasing fear,
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before, among the shining streams
Of faery land, the forest of romance.
Their spirit hallowed the sad spectacle
With decoration of ideal grace. (1972: 195)

In the context of the whole poem, this is one of those “spots of time,” later described by Wordsworth, “that with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue” (1972: 479). The adult can gain inner strength from the boy’s ability to translate terror into fairy tale and romance:

So feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us, if but once we have been strong. (1972: 483)

This is exactly what the last stanza of “Et Barndomsminde” is about:

Men denne Nat jeg skued tidt igjen,
naar livets Vei gik over Klipper hen,
og Blikket svæved raadvildt over Ødet.
Ved dette minde glemte jeg min Frygt,

som da jeg sad ved Faderhjertet trygt
og drog tilfjelds med Kalken og med Brødet.

[But I often looked back at this night, when the road of my life went over rocks, and my glance strayed desperately over the desolate land. With this memory I forgot my fear, as then when I sat safely by my father's heart and set off into the mountains with the chalice and the bread.]

Memory enables the poet to forget his fear, as a child and as an adult, just as Wordsworth feels “no soul-debasing fear” at the sight of the drowned man. For both poets, a deep sense of personal continuity heals the fragmentation and desolation of adult experience. In Welhaven's case, this process is enhanced by an equally deep national landscape of memory: the battlefield where “sacred scripture” fought “the might of giants” (the conflict referred to in the first stanza), which we can rationalize as the meeting of a centripetal Christianity with a centrifugal Viking paganism. In the last line, with its suggestion of the grail and a quest “into the mountains,” history and romance strengthen personal memory.

“Olafskilden” (2.216–17) [Olav's Spring] opens dramatically with Welhaven's familiar opposition between nature and spirit:

Sankt Olaf har med Troens Styrke
lagt Haand paa mangt et nøgent Fjeld,
og kaldet frem af Dybets Mørke
de hemmelige Kildevæld.

Hvor ingen Blomster spire vilde,
hvor Alt var toneløst og dødt,
der risler nu en Olafskilde,
og ved dens Bred blev Sagnet født.

[Saint Olav has with the strength of faith laid his hand on many a bare mountain, and called forth from the dark abyss the secret fountains. Where no flower would spring, where everything was silent and dead, an Olav's spring now murmurs, and by its banks the legend was born.]

These verses are a locus classicus for the idea of Norway's bleaker landscapes as the seed ground of folk narrative. The eighth line undercuts the medievalism of what has gone before by its suggestion that the people's

need and imagination created the legend. In other words, the legend is the miracle. The tone is almost that of a skilful guide, who wants to give his tourists the spirit of a vanished world without appealing to superstition; and from the fourth stanza, the reader, who is given precise instructions on how to get most value from the spring, does become a tourist:

I Klippevraa, hvor Sten har Mæle,
 hvor Dalen aabnes for dit Blik,
 der byder Sagnet dig at dvæle
 og bringer dig den klare Drik.

[In the corner of the cliff, where stones have a voice, where the valley opens up to your glance, there the legend begs you to stay and brings you the clear drink.]

While sacred springs traditionally promise healing to the pilgrim, Olav's spring gives us a vision of Norway a thousand years ago:

Naar da dit Blik paa Dalen falder,
 hvor Valens Bautestene staae,
 vil Billeder af Kraftens Alder
 som Solglimt over Egnen gaae.

Fra Lien Lurens Toner gjalde,
 Fra Skoven suser Pileregn,
 Og du ser Olaf og hans Skjalde
 henride under Graners Hegn.

Og mens det store, fjerne Minde
 gaaer op for Aandens Syn paany,
 du hører Olafskilden rinde
 med sagte Klang i Sagnets Ly.

[Then when your glance falls on the valley, where the stone monuments stand, images from the heroic age will move across the scene like gleams of sunlight. The notes of the *lur* will ring from the hillside, a shower of arrows will whistle from the forest, and you will see Olav and his scalds riding out under the wall of fir trees. And when the great, distant memory appears to the eye of the spirit again, you can hear Olav's spring rippling with a gentle sound in the shelter of the legend.]

Always wary of a literal, archaeological reverence for the past,⁶ Welhaven here provides that “aandigt Billede, tifold renere og sandere end det, Sagaoldet har kunnet efterlade” (4.91) [spiritual image, ten times purer and truer than any that the age of the sagas has been able to bequeath us], which he defines in a speech of 1846. Taking his or her inspiration from the pure waters of the spring, the modern tourist creates a vivid but fleeting film clip, complete with a soundtrack of ringing *lur*, whistling arrows, and rippling water, and projected onto the distant wall of fir trees. Distance miniaturizes Olav and his scalds. The effect is similar to the moment in T.S. Eliot’s “East Coker” when the poet’s Elizabethan ancestors appear as “little people.” Welhaven would have understood Eliot’s warning to his reader-tourist:

In that open field
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,
On a summer midnight, you can hear the music
Of the weak pipe and the little drum
And see them dancing around the bonfire. (1969: 177)

We recall Welhaven’s advice not to stare at the *huldrefolk* in case they “retreat into the background of nature.”

With only a slight change of sequence, “Olafskilden” is faithful to the echo-system we have defined. There is a harsh and barren landscape that comes to life through folk legend and the sound of the *lur*, and there are strong echoes of landscape art. Olav’s faith has just the effect on a “toneløst og dødt” [soundless and dead] nature that Welhaven attributed to Dahl and his contemporaries. The spring gives a voice to the stones, just as the artist gives “Toner” [sounds] and “Ord” [words] to a hitherto “Sprogløs” [tongueless] nature (1.232). The tourist is invited to view the valley through a natural frame created by the cliffs, and “Valens Bautastene” [the stone monuments of the battlefield] recall Dahl’s use of the Bautastein in *Vinter ved Sognefjorden* (1827; Alnæs 1998: 217). Karsten Alnæs says of this motif, “den maler fjellene i bakgrunnen og gir bildet dybde. Samtidig anslår steinen stemningen og innholdet i bildet” (1998: 214) [it provides a scale for the mountains in the background and gives the picture depth. At the same time the stone adds atmosphere and substance to the picture].⁷ This is just how Welhaven’s “Bautastene” work in “Olafskilden.” Finally, the tourist indulges in that imposition of a

national landscape of memory on the present one that we have seen in *Vasdrag og Skovmarker*.

“Lokkende Toner” (2.369–70) is one of Welhaven’s most haunting and subtle poems. It is the purest lyrical embodiment of his echo-system, a symbolist distillation of Norwegian nature, legend, folk music, landscape art, and an intensely personal landscape of memory.

The first two lines of “Lokkende Toner” set up a contrast between past and present: “Der fløj en Fugl over Granehei, / som synger forglemte Sange” [There was a bird flew over the pine heath that sings forgotten songs]. Apart from that second line, the rest of the narrative in the first two stanzas is in the past tense, telling us how the bird’s song lured the poet into the forest: “den lokked mig bort fra slagen Vei/og ind paa skyggede Gange” [it lured me away from the beaten track and onto shadowy paths]. Then there is an abrupt change to the present tense at the top of the last stanza: “Der fører en Sti saa langt af Led/til Lien hvor Fuglen bygger” [There is a path that leads so far away to the hillside where the bird builds its nest]. This has the effect of a confession: the poet’s enchantment by the bird is no longer safely in the past, it is a permanent state of mind. There is also a suggestion that he is now too old to take the forest paths, yet remains in thrall to the bird’s song—unlike Keats, whose nightingale’s song moves out of earshot at the end of his famous ode—for Welhaven can now get no further than “Vangen” (the lawn or meadow attached to a manor or farmhouse), whereas the bird nests on a remote hillside:

Men om jeg aldrig kan vinde did,
jeg kjender dog Lokkesangen,
hvor sødt den kalder ved Sommertid
naar Kvelden har dugget Vangen:
Tirilil Tove,
langt, langt bort i Skove!

[But if I can never make my way there, I still know the luring song, how sweetly it calls in summertime when the evening dew is on the meadow.
Tirilil Tove, far far away in the forest!]

The last use of the refrain is an incantation to absence, distance, and longing: the symbolist essence of the poem.

“Lokkende Toner” is the purest example of Welhaven’s poetry as “a fine, muted response” (the phrase from *Vasdrag og Skovmarker* [4.266] quoted

earlier) to folk narrative. The refrain comes from a folk legend about a *seter*-girl abducted by robbers and taken to their stronghold in Ringerike, which is only accessible by a steep mountain path (Faye 1948: 220–224). To call for help, the girl improvises a song, and plays it on her *lur*:

Tirrelil Tove

Tolv Mand i Skove,

...

Mei vil dem voldtae

Langt op under Fjeldet i Skove. (Faye 1948: 221)

[Tirrelil Tove, twelve men in the forest ... they mean to rape me far up under the mountain in the forest.]

This device fails, and the girl is doomed to marry one of the robbers. Pretending willingness, she persuades them to let her go down to the farm and steal the bridal silver, for which their condition is that she does not speak to anyone. She gets round this by talking to the chimney, knowing that the farmer is awake. She says that she will leave a trail of “smaa Stykker” (Faye 1948: 222) [small bits] of leather and of red and white cloth when she returns to the stronghold. The farmer and his neighbours follow this trail to the mountain, where they rescue the girl and drive the robbers over a cliff to their deaths.

At first sight, Welhaven takes little or nothing from this legend other than the refrain, which he uses “for a vekke den drømmende, lengselsfulle skogstemningen som diktet gir så fint uttrykk for” (Østby 1993: 132) [to awake the dreaming, yearning forest mood which the poem expresses so beautifully].⁸ On repeated readings, however, the poem, with its shadowy forest paths, remote hillside, and distant song, seems to lead us back toward the legend with minute traces or clues that correspond to the small bits of material left by the girl, and to the coded message of her song. In Hauge’s words, “Welhaven har kunnet regne med at lokken var kjent, og at det omkvedet han valte, ledet tanken hen til den fangne piken langt inne i skogen” (1955: 58) [Welhaven could count on the fact that the song was known, and that the refrain he chose led one’s thoughts to the captured girl deep in the forest]. The effect is that of a displaced myth. The herd-girl has been changed into a bird, a possible reference to the tale of Philomela and Procne. The landscape of the Norwegian legend is preserved, but the threat of sexual violence has been muted into erotic promise (Hauge 1955: 91).

“Lokkende Toner” is the most musical of all Welhaven’s lyrics.⁹ Løchen reports that some “lokkeviser” [luring ballads] were Welhaven’s original inspiration: “W. fikk øie for disse vakre melodier” (quoted in Hauge 1900: 2.490) [W. was struck by these beautiful melodies]. Just as the herd-girl tries to convey a verbal message through the notes of her *lur*, so Welhaven has written a symbolist poem in which sense is conveyed as much by sound and rhythm as by the order of words: “Klangrikdommen gir diktet en syngende tone” (Hauge 1955: 57) [the richness of sound gives the poem a singing tone]. In Halvdan Kjerulf’s lovely setting, the refrain is like “a fine, muted response” to the piano’s imitation of the bird’s song.¹⁰

In terms of visual art, “Lokkende Toner” looks back to Dahl, Gude, and Fearnley, and is strongly prophetic of late nineteenth-century symbolist art. According to Saugstad, the poem’s atmosphere is that of the “det østlandske skoglandskap med dets trolldomsfulle, stille dragning” (1967: 23) [the forest landscape of southeastern Norway with its bewitching, quiet attraction]. This landscape extends of course into Sweden. Inspired by “the ancient Nordic folk-songs” (Gunnarsson 1998: 233), Prince Eugen’s *The Forest* from 1892 (Gunnarsson 1998: 235) gives us Welhaven’s “shadowy paths” in the pine woods of Södermanland (Gunnarsson 1998: 233; Nasgaard 1984: 66). It is, however, Theodor Kittelsen who best captures the “bewitching” quality of “Lokkende Toner” in his *Tirilil-Tove* series completed in 1900 (Østby 1993: 133–144). Welhaven would have seen in “Der fløi en Fugl over Granehei” and “Langt, langt borte i Skove” an accurate echo of the sense of depth and longing in “Lokkende Toner.”

“Lokkende Toner” is one of three Welhaven poems that Camilla Collett claimed as hers “med Gud og Rette” (quoted in Hauge 1990: 2.482) [by God and by right]. Hauge sees the poem’s landscape of memory as a direct reflection of Welhaven’s relationship with Collett and of her youth in the Eidsvoll region. The novelist describes herself as “et Echo of denne Natur” (quoted in Hauge 1955: 97) [an echo of this part of nature], and according to Hauge it is no surprise that she “kunne finne seg selv igjen i et dikt om den gåtefulle, ubestemmelige naturånd” (1955: 97) [could recognize herself in a poem about the mysterious, elusive spirit of nature]. Welhaven’s letter to Collett dated 22 June 1859 is a poignant epigraph to his own poem: “Forunderlig mægtigt, som til et gaadefuldt Fjerne, har jeg følt mig hendraget til Dem, og de var jo fjern altid, fraværende, paa Flugt i selve Nærheden og trods vore Sjeles Samklang” (1992: 5.345; quoted in Hauge 1955: 96–97) [I have felt myself drawn to you by a strange force, as if to a mysterious object in the distance, and you were indeed always distant,

distracted, in flight even when close and in spite of our souls' communion].

In "Olafskilden," the valley "opens up" for the tourist, and "Lokkende Toner"—along with many of Welhaven's best poems—"blir ikke avrundet og ferdig; det klinger utover seg selv" (Hauge 1955: 57) [is not rounded off and complete; it rings out beyond itself]. The last verse of "Sangens Gjenlyd" (2. 184–185) is a paradoxically self-effacing clue to this quality in his poetry:

O, sagte Gjenlyd af min Sang
 som selv jeg hører kun,
 ved Harpen tolker dig engang
 en bedre Sangers mund.

[O, gentle echo of my song, which I alone can hear, one day a better singer's mouth will interpret you to the harp.]

Who is the "better singer"? Though Welhaven may have meant a saint or an angel, the poem's characteristic open-endedness also suggests a writer, musician, or any creative artist who will be inspired by his poetry. We have already seen how Kjerulf and Kittelsen responded to the echo of his song, and an anecdote about another Kjerulf composition offers a freeze-frame of Norwegian culture's lasting debt to Welhaven's poetry and echo-system. Set to music by Kjerulf in 1849, "Paa Fjeldet" (2. 28–29) [In the Mountains] is a ballad about a *hulder* who passes on her musical gifts to a young man:

Naar Huldren spiller i Lien
 sin gamle Vise en Sommerkveld,
 da gjenklinger Melodien
 langt borte i Bygden, fra Fjeld til Fjeld.

[When the *hulder* plays on the hillside her old song in a summer evening, then the melody echoes far away in the parish, from mountain to mountain.]

Hauge believes that the same *hulder* features in an anecdote about the poet and the composer. One day Welhaven heard Kjerulf playing something and asked him what it was. "Det er til Deres Hulder" [It's for your *hulder*] was the composer's reply (Hauge 1990: 2.424).

Meyer calls Welhaven "a scholarly, elegant and dignified versifier in the Matthew Arnold mould." While this may fit Welhaven's obviously "Victo-

rian” poems, I hope that this discussion has succeeded in finding something more truly romantic, more Wordsworthian, in Welhaven’s finest nature poetry and prose. Samuel Taylor Coleridge greeted *The Prelude* as “An Orphic song” (1957: 103), and I would like to think of Welhaven at his best as another orphic poet, who gave nature, as she appears in the harsher Norwegian landscape, unity, spirit, and voice.

NOTES

¹All quotations from Welhaven’s works are from Ingard Hauge’s five-volume edition. References to this edition are given parenthetically by volume and page number in the text. All translations from the Norwegian are my own.

²References to Hauge’s introduction and notes include the year of publication in addition to the volume and page number.

³Welhaven continues, “Ingensteds hørte jeg dog saa meget som en Hentydning til Kohalen og den hule Ryg, som hist og her gives hende” (4.248) [Nowhere did I hear so much as a hint of the cow’s tail and hollow back that are attributed to her in some places].

⁴For Welhaven’s connections with Norwegian artists, see Hauge 1990: 1.366; 2.436, 441, 445–446; and Willoch 1990: 112–150.

⁵Hauge notes that the poem’s stanzaic form has associations with death (1990: 2.454).

⁶For Welhaven’s criticism of archaeology, see *Norske Musæer* [Norwegian Museums] (3.181–192) and “Tomme Kæmpehøie” [Empty Burial Mounds] (3.101–103).

⁷For Welhaven’s debt to Dahl’s use of the *bautastein* motif, see Hauge 1990: 2.441.

⁸This passage is omitted in Christopher Norman’s parallel translation of Østby’s text.

⁹“Et framtrendende trekk ved Welhavens lyriske tekster er den viktige rollen som musikk, toner, lydbilder og i det hele en musikalsk språkbehandling spiller” (Aarnes 1996: 226) [A striking feature of Welhaven’s lyrics is the important role played by music, sounds, aural imagery, and a musical approach to language as a whole].

¹⁰Kjerulf’s setting of “Lokkende Toner” has been recorded by Ann Kristin Sørvalg (soprano) and Audun Kayser (piano) on a 1999 compact disk: VNP 00099–0054.

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Women's Reproductive Rights and Sexual Enlightenment in Signe Hasso's *Momo*¹

FREDERICK HALE

ABSTRACT: In her debut novel, *Momo*, the actress-turned-author Signe Hasso straddles autobiography and fiction in probing the maturation of her protagonist, Cecilia Dalberg, in Stockholm during the 1930s. Born out of wedlock to a young woman who is a victim of shame, she struggles to come to grips with her emerging sexuality and, poorly prepared for it, becomes the victim of a rape and an exploitative abortionist. *Momo* is a retrospective period piece rich in insights into the challenges facing an adolescent during a period of rapid social transformation in Sweden immediately before sexual mores and public sexual policy changed dramatically. The plot unfolds before the legalization of abortion, before sex education became a standard component of the curricula of Swedish schools, and before popular attitudes toward birth out of wedlock underwent a profound transition. Though artistically *Momo* flies at a relatively low altitude and lacks narratological innovativeness, as a fictional reconstruction of intimate social history it is a meaningful contribution to modern Swedish literature.

RÉSUMÉ: Dans son premier roman, *Momo*, l'actrice devenue écrivaine Signe Hasso mêle autobiographie et fiction en explorant la maturation de sa protagoniste, Cecilia Dalberg, à Stockholm pendant les années 30. Fille illégitime d'une femme victime de la honte, elle se trouve aux prises avec sa sexualité naissante, à laquelle elle est peu préparée, et devient la victime d'un viol et d'un avorteur exploiteur. *Momo* est une oeuvre rétrospective riche en aperçus des défis auxquels faisait face une adolescente pendant une période de transformation sociale rapide en Suède juste avant le changement dramatique des moeurs et des politiques sexuelles. L'action se déroule avant la légalisation de l'avortement, avant l'introduction de l'éducation sexuelle dans les programmes scolaires, avant la transition profonde des attitudes à l'égard de la naissance hors des liens du mariage. Si *Momo* vole plutôt bas du point de vue artistique, et si le roman manque d'innovation narratologique, il n'en reste pas moins que cette reconstruction romanesque de l'histoire sociale intime fait une importante contribution à la littérature suédoise moderne.

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The intertwined campaigns for women's rights and sexual enlightenment in Sweden frequently found literary expression in the twentieth century, with authors of both genders using nearly every possible genre to bring their causes to the public.

One can thus find in the annals of Swedish literature a wealth of tendentious treatments by writers seeking to call attention to the need for social reform of such topics as women's suffrage, equality of remuneration in employment, the formation of women's trade unions, the ordination of women in the Church of Sweden, and the need for improved day care facilities. Retrospective fictional reconstructions of these themes, however, have tended to play second fiddle in the orchestra of literary history. In the present article it is my intention to highlight one such overlooked work, namely *Momo* [Mother's Sister], a novel by Signe Hasso (1915–2002), who is better known for her decades on the stage and the silver screen than for her endeavours with the pen, although her literary career, which yielded very little until she was in her sixties, is also noteworthy. This sensitive and quasi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, which launched that phase of Hasso's life when it was published in 1977 after being selected from hundreds of entries in a competition announced by Bra Böckers Förlag two years earlier, provides fresh insights into the travail of a girl who struggles to come to grips with her emerging sexuality during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Had Hasso written it at that time, it surely would have been heralded in progressive quarters as a daring and very thinly veiled contribution to the campaign for sexual education and the relaxation of abortion legislation. As a retrospective piece written by a woman who had spent part of her childhood in Stockholm in poverty after her father died, leaving her mother with three children to support, and who herself married and became a mother while a teenager, *Momo* opens a rare, intimate window upon the feelings of guilt and shame of a vulnerable adolescent and her equally shamed mother, who were born too early to benefit from those eventual reforms. It is thus a valuable work of social history.

Momo was not fully appreciated as such when published. Some critics found praiseworthy elements in the text while simultaneously calling attention to its artistic shortcomings. Writing in *Svenska Dagbladet*, for example, Margareta Sjögren lauded Hasso's "fin känsla för nyanser och intima vardagsdetaljer" [fine feeling for nuances and intimate details of everyday life] and also averred that her prose "har musikalisk rytm och en naturlig samtalsston som inte är självklar hos varje debutant" [has musical rhythm and a natural conversational tone which is not apparent in every neophyte].

To tell her quick-paced story of fewer than 200 short pages, Hasso uses a conventional omniscient third-person narrator, who reins in the cantering account at key points in the early life of the protagonist in order to probe her reactions to events and her relations with other people. Born in 1917, Cecilia Dalberg grows up in a working class area of Södermalm, where Eva Dalberg, her unmarried “moster” [mother’s sister]—who, we learn in the final chapter, is actually her mother—ekes out a living as a self-employed seamstress. Cecilia calls this supposed aunt, twenty years older than herself, “Momo,” an infantile distortion of “Moster” to which she has clung. Curiously enough, Eva, who has moved to Stockholm from Umeå, does not seem to have any other relatives, and her only friends are Ester and Tage Bergström, an erstwhile classmate and her husband, a childless couple in Sundbyberg who bestow gifts and sorely needed affection on Cecilia as her surrogate *tant* [aunt] and *farbror* [uncle]. Apparently having lacked playmates hitherto, the girl is socially disadvantaged when she begins to attend Katarina Folkskola, but she gains the friendship of two classmates, Kajsa and Kalle Jonsson, the twin children of a policeman and his wife, whose three-roomed flat is considerably larger than the Spartan, bathless quarters that Cecilia and her mother inhabit. The predictably shy and introverted Cecilia, who does well at school, develops a love of books and evinces a talent for writing poetry. Her teacher urges Eva to encourage Cecilia to interact more with other children, but this overly protective mother, refusing to heed this advice, turns a deaf ear to her daughter’s plea to be allowed to attend a summer camp, on the grounds that she might encounter immoral children there. When at the age of fourteen Cecilia completes primary school, she desires to continue her education, but Eva insists that they simply cannot afford for her to do so, and she refuses to accept enabling financial assistance from the Bergströms. Cecilia dreams of acquiring stenographic and typing skills as a path toward a secretarial career and liberation from her confining environment.

Her childhood is complicated by her awakening sexuality and her mother’s inhibitions against providing guidance during this normal part of her development. Cecilia is poorly prepared for the onset of menstruation, and the embarrassed Eva’s explanation of this phenomenon is not made in the context of sexual education. Consequently, Cecilia’s belated enlightenment about her sexuality comes casually, largely through her friend Kajsa Jonsson. After leaving school, Cecilia finds employment as a sales assistant at a dairy products shop in the neighbourhood, where she executes her duties assiduously, overcomes her shyness to some degree, and meets

Gustav, an engineering student five years her senior, with whom she develops an innocent romantic relationship, which her mother, initially alarmed, eventually accepts and encourages. Indeed, Eva relaxes her grip on her employed and increasingly socially active daughter somewhat, and on Midsummer Eve in 1932 allows her to wander alone in Södermalm. Cecilia uses this opportunity to visit Silverlings Hage, not far from their home, and there she is raped by a gang of youths. Suspecting that she is pregnant, she visits a gynaecologist, who confirms her suspicion and refers her to a colleague who performs illegal abortions. Cecilia accepts this referral, knowing that she is acting outside the law, but leaves the latter physician's office when he tries to exploit her sexually. Shortly thereafter, in an attempt to commit suicide, she dashes into the path of an oncoming tram. Cecilia survives the incident, but it causes an abortion. At her hospital bedside Eva confesses that she is her biological mother.

As a historical novel, *Momo* must be appreciated against the backdrop of the state of Swedish sexual education and abortion legislation during the 1920s and 1930s. A detailed assessment of this theme in Hasso's first novel obviously lies outside the parameters of the present article. It should be noted, however, that at the time the plot of *Momo* unfolds Sweden was in some respects a country in which public sexual education was still in its infancy, and access to means of birth control was legally limited. Symptomatic of the state of affairs which then obtained, a law enacted in 1910 restricting the sale of condoms through the post was not abrogated until 1938. In the meantime, the monthly periodical *Populär tidskrift för sexuell upplysning* [Popular Journal of Sexual Education] began to appear in 1932; this pan-Scandinavian endeavour was published by young liberals in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark under the editorship of Nils Nielsen and, subsequently, Gunnar Inghe. In the words of one of the principal participants, it was "saklig, pedagogisk och med stark betoning av problemens sociala aspekter" [objective, pedagogical and with a strong emphasis on the social aspects of the issues]. Furthermore, the Norwegian dentist Elise Ottesen-Jensen (1886–1973) and others had succeeded in 1933 in establishing the *Riksförbund för Sexuell Upplysning* [National Association for Sexual Education] which—despite strong resistance in some quarters—propagated knowledge about birth control and venereal diseases. One of its early conduits for doing so was its quarterly journal *Sexualfrågan* [Sexual Issues], which appeared from 1936 until 1949. The RFSU's nationwide agitation was one factor that led Sweden to become in the 1950s the first country to make sexual education a mandatory component

of its schools' curricula. That development, however, occurred in an era quite different from the one in which Cecilia Dalberg struggles to comprehend her unfolding sexuality. The RFSU did not open its first information office until 1939.

Furthermore, abortions were generally illegal during the time that *Momo* takes place. Swedish legislation concerning *abortus provocatus* can be traced to the thirteenth-century *västgöotalag* that prohibited it. Stiff punishments were introduced some 200 years later, and during the seventeenth century the death penalty was prescribed for artificially inducing the expulsion of viable foetuses. In 1864 this was reduced to a mere six years' hard labour. Strictures were marginally relaxed in statutes of 1890 and 1921, and during the 1920s and 1930s abortions existed in a grey zone: in effect they were allowed to take place when medical indications were present. The law of 1921, which disallowed provoked termination of pregnancies, made no provisions for such circumstances as rape or incest, however. Nevertheless, large numbers of abortions clearly took place, far more than would be explained by the mere presence of life-threatening circumstances to the expectant mother. Indeed, the number is believed to have increased notably during the interwar period to perhaps well over 10,000 a year by the 1930s, many of them performed under unsanitary conditions that reportedly cost approximately seventy women their lives annually. Ottesen-Jensen, who began her life's work of propagating knowledge of birth control and related matters in Sweden in 1919, recalled that of 1,709 women who were admitted to a hospital in Stockholm between 1913 and 1924 because of complications as a result of illegal abortions, 52 died and 175 suffered damage to their reproductive systems. The increase in the number of fatalities resulting from illegal abortions prompted the city authorities to establish an abortion clinic in the late 1920s, but this move neither solved the fundamental problem nor reduced the number of pregnancies that were terminated, many of them under unhygienic conditions. This butchery on the murky periphery of medical practice prompted Maja Björkman (1885–1946) to write pseudonymously her controversial novel *Gula Kliniken* [The Yellow Clinic], which was published in 1937, and five years later provided the basis for a film.

As a contribution to the debate concerning the possibility of relaxing the general ban on abortions, this book was particularly timely. By the early 1930s many Swedish politicians and public health officials were convinced that the legalization of abortions under certain conditions would reduce the carnage. In 1931 a proposal was put forth in the *Riksdag* [Parliament] to

that effect, but it was not acted upon. Two years later Minister of Justice Karl Schlyter (1879–1959), a reform-minded Social Democrat who deserves much of the credit for the modernization of the national prison system and penal code, appointed a commission to investigate this issue. Its proposals for a liberalization of the law restricting abortions received the *imprimatur* of the RFSU and various women's organizations, but because, among other reasons, the government was giving priority to dealing with the threat of a decline in the national population, to which Alva and Gunnar Myrdal had called public attention in their work of 1934, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* [Crisis in Population Issues], the *Riksdag* again did not act on the matter at that time. Not until 1938 did the *Riksdag* enact legislation that allowed the termination of pregnancies for medical, humanitarian, and eugenic reasons. Allowable humanitarian indications included rape and cases in which the female had become pregnant before reaching the age of fifteen. This law went into effect in January 1939. That, of course, was after the fictional Cecilia Dalberg had elected to undergo an illegal abortion, which would have been sanctioned had she been raped seven years later.

Hasso takes a two-pronged approach as she traces the interlocking psychological difficulties that both mother and daughter suffer as the result of popular attitudes toward parenthood outside marriage and the state of reproductive politics and sexual instruction in the Sweden of her childhood years, the 1920s and most of the 1930s. Eva Dalberg suffers from her status as an unwed mother, and Hasso suggests that this woman's plight has been brought on both by social stigma and by her inability to struggle against fellow Swedes' attitudes. Precisely how and where she became pregnant and gave birth to Cecilia remains a mystery to the reader; her story is clouded by the detailed fabrications she uses as she attempts to protect her daughter from shame and, in turn, to preserve the solidity of their relationship. That she, like her friend Ester, hails from Umeå seems reliable, although Hasso does not mention whether Eva fled that northern city in favour of Stockholm because of her unplanned pregnancy or became pregnant only after settling in the Swedish capital. In any case, Eva has concocted for Cecilia's benefit an apparently far-fetched tale that she had an older sister, Maria, who married an Italian named Luigi de Angelis and followed him to Italy, where she converted to his Roman Catholicism, and where she gave birth only a few months before dying with her husband in a railway accident, after which Eva adopted Cecilia and brought her back to Sweden (15ff.). Eva explains this at length to her ostensibly adopted daughter but is reluctant to discuss the details of the birth. Instead, she explicitly tells

Cecilia that she is not her natural mother (17, 36, 45), which is a lie. It seems conceivable, if only marginally, that in Eva's family there was a marriage to an Italian that ended in the death of the couple; in any case, Eva keeps a double portrait of such a couple in her flat, although this may be nothing more than part of the general face-saving ruse. She becomes visibly very disturbed when she notices in her Swedish newspaper the obituary of the man who sired Cecilia, but refuses to tell the girl why she is so shaken (100–101).

In her discussion of Eva's shame, Hasso broaches a semantic concern that Swedish feminists had shared for decades, and that was proving particularly burdensome for unwed mothers. As Ester Lindin wrote with qualified gratitude in her novel of 1940, *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* [Imagine, If I Had Married the Pastor!], "Samhället har i dessa yttersta dagar byggt upp några få smala broar att balansera fram på för de ogifta mödrarna. De broarna heter barnavårdsnämnder och mödrahjälp, spädbarnshem och förlossningshem" [Society has recently built a few small bridges to ease the plight of unwed mothers. They are child welfare agencies, assistance to mothers, creches, and maternity homes]. But the line of demarcation between the titles "fru" [Mrs.] and "fröken" [Miss] kept the latter in their place on the lower rungs of the social and attitudinal hierarchy: "Men så länge det finns två titlar som anger kvinnans förhållande till mannen, så länge är det en viktig bro som saknas" [But as long as there are two titles describing the woman's relationship to the man, an important bridge will be missing] (202). In accordance with convention, the young seamstress uses the "fröken" title, despite the fact that she has a child. This distinguishes her from the mothers of all the other children in the school her daughter attends. "Cecilia blev alltid lite generad när Momo kallades för fröken. Alla andra kallades naturligtvis för fru" [Cecilia was always a little embarrassed when Momo was called Miss. All the others were naturally called Mrs.] (44).

Eva's general shame severely constricts her social life, which does not extend beyond going to church and occasionally getting together with the Bergströms. When on the final day of the spring term Eva goes to Cecilia's school, she alone does not socialize: "Mammorna pratade med varandra men Momo höll sig för sig själv" [The mothers chatted with each other, but Momo kept to herself] (44). Ester Bergström remains her only friend. If Eva has any relatives other than Cecilia, they continue to be strangely absent from her life. Although Hasso does not develop this theme to any great degree, her novel nevertheless remains a significant treatment of the

dire social and psychological consequences of maternity outside marriage.

One ramification of this shame-induced quasi-isolation is the inhibitions that Eva imposes on Cecilia, the consequences of which we shall discuss shortly. Hasso describes Eva as an excessively protective parent whose zeal to shield her daughter from the tribulations that she herself has experienced as the result of sexual impropriety have unfortunate consequences for the girl. Cecilia knows that Eva has repeatedly instructed her to strike back and scream if anyone touches her against her will (34). This is, of course, advice that many other parents presumably give their children. Yet Eva's protectiveness extends much further. She holds a tight rein on Cecilia and is irritated when Cecilia does not return to their flat quite early after visiting the Jonsson children (35). Even after Cecilia begins to work in the dairy shop, Eva continues to peer anxiously out the window of their flat, much to her daughter's consternation: "Cecilia hade sagt till Momo att hon tickte det var genant att hon fortfarande hängde i fönstret så där—och att det inte var bra för hennes prestige som expedit. Det var ju så många av kunderna som bodde på gatan—och dom kunde ju tro att Cecilia var efterbliven på något sätt" [Cecilia had told Momo that she thought it was embarrassing that she still hung out the window there—and that it was not good for her image as a sales assistant. So many of the customers lived on the street—and they might believe that Cecilia was in some way retarded] (92).

Eva's shame also determines the course of her daughter's education and, consequently, of her career. Cecilia's teacher repeatedly recommends that this gifted pupil continue to secondary school, but Eva insists that the means for underwriting further education simply do not exist. When Ester and Tage Bergström learn of this predicament they offer to assist financially, but apparently the chagrined Eva already feels too indebted to their largesse through the years to accept. "Aldrig i livet—hade hon sagt. Ni två har verkligen varit mina enda vänner och hjälpt mig mer än jag förtjänar" [Never, she had said. You two have really been my only friends and helped me more than I deserve] (70). Consequently, the possibility of Eva's continuing her education is at least temporarily sacrificed on the altar of shame.

It is in this constricted environment of maternal shame that Cecilia slowly graduates from childhood to sexual maturity. On at least three occasions Hasso emphasises that by the time she is fourteen her body is fully developed and that she is readily believed to be two years older than her actual age. This stress on physical maturation in the portrayal of the central character makes the state of her sexual awareness seem all the more anomalous. In one chapter after another Hasso underscores Cecilia's

gradually developing awareness of her own sexuality and, ultimately, the general phenomenon of sexual relations, but it remains murky how this understanding and her normal development are impeded, or at least retarded, by Eva's shame and the consequent inhibitions that prevent her from educating her daughter in this aspect of life.

One of the first hints of this overarching difficulty occurs in the second chapter, in which the narrator comments on the relative dearth of maternal affection in Cecilia's experience. Hungry for parental contact, Cecilia, then in her first year at school, desires to sit embraced in her mother's lap, a position of which she is aware from an unlikely source: "Det hade hon sett på bilder i tidningar—mammor med sina barn i famnen och det så alltid så skönt och tryggt ut" [She had seen that in pictures in newspapers—mothers with their children in their laps, and it had always looked so nice and cosy] (13). Alas, Eva never seems to have time for such physical contact and consequently dismisses her daughter's need for it—in contrast to her obvious conscientiousness about providing, within the constraints of her limited budget, for Cecilia's basic material needs.

The language of sexuality provides a focal point for Hasso's treatment of the restrictions on Cecilia's development and her mother's role in them. The linguistic taboos are by no means limited to the Dalbergs. In what initially seems to be an isolated incident at the beginning of Chapter 3, the father of the Jonsson twins discovers two fourteen-year-old boys painting the words "knulla" [fuck] and "fitta" [cunt] on an exterior wall of the block of flats where he resides. Jonsson strikes one of these youths before chasing them away. Clearly disturbed by their audacity, he fears that their graffiti might indicate a general moral decline, which could have damaging consequences for his own children: "Vad började världen komma till, undrade han. Ungarna började bli alldeles omöjliga. Han tänkte på Kalle och Kajsa. Dom var visserligen bara nyss fyllda tio. Men man visste ju aldrig" [What was the world coming to, he wondered. Children were becoming completely impossible. He thought about Kalle and Kajsa. They had just turned ten. But one never knows] (24). This brief account sets the stage for Cecilia's encounter with the vulgar verb *knulla* in the following chapter, when she discovers a woman vigorously scrubbing it off a wall in the building where she and her mother live. That evening Cecilia innocently begins to ask her mother, "Vad betyder k-n-u-l-l" [What does f-u-c-k mean] but is interrupted when her horrified mother switches on a light. Cecilia notices "hur hon hade blivit alldeles vit i ansiktet" [how she had become completely white in the face], more so than on any other previous occasion.

Eva's embarrassment prevents her from handling the matter in other than a confusing and prohibitive manner, however, and by so doing she plants a seed of sexual inhibition in her daughter's mind. "Det är bara det att ordet som du stavade är ett Syndens ord. Ett ord man aldrig får säga—förresten finns det egentligen inte alls. Det är ett påhittat ord som ... som ... Det betyder ingenting. Glöm bort det Cecilia" [It is just that the word you spelt is a sinful word, a word one must never say. Besides, it does not mean anything at all. It is a contrived word which ... It does not mean anything. Forget it, Cecilia] (40). Eventually Cecilia learns about the basic fact of sexual intercourse. Hasso suggests that her friend Kajsa Jonsson is the source of her enlightenment about various matters. Cecilia realizes that she is more aware of adult matters than her mother would like her to be: "... hon förstod inte att Cecilia visste en massa saker, som enligt Momo var tabu" [... she did not realise that Cecilia understood a lot of things which according to Momo were taboo] (72). In any case, her mother's linkage of sex with sin has made a deep impression on her juvenile mind: "Hon visste vad alla dom där fula orden betydde, som Momo påstod var—SYNDENS ORD. Det hade Kajsa minsann talat om—för det visste hon genom Kalle" [She knew what all those vulgar words meant, which Momo insisted were sinful words. Kajsa had talked about the—for Kalle had told her about them] (72).

Yet Hasso carefully emphasises that it is not merely Eva's embarrassment about certain taboo words that impairs Cecilia's sexual enlightenment, but her mother's intense discomfort with the phenomenon of human sexuality as such. When Cecilia hesitatingly asks Eva about the matter, particularly about the male anatomy, her mother rejects this opportunity to discuss sex at all, apparently having no intention of taking any part in her daughter's sexual education, insisting that it is a dirty subject. Instead, she tries to assure Cecilia, "när du blir lite större ska jag be att doktor Lind talar om för dig hur en människa är skapad. Både pojkar och flickor. Det är mycket bättre att en läkare förklarar sånt" [when you are a little bigger I shall ask Dr. Lind to talk with you about how people are made. Both boys and girls. It is much better for a doctor to explain it] (66).

Notwithstanding these maternal inhibitions, Cecilia undergoes fairly normal sexual maturation, although she cannot communicate with her mother about it, because she understands that the topic remains one of intense shame in their home. Some of the consequences of this are innocuous and arguably typical of children and adolescents generally. In order to masturbate, for instance, she goes into the toilet of the flat that she and Eva inhabit and uses

the sounds of the plumbing to conceal her behaviour from her mother. After these autoerotic episodes Cecilia invariably suffers a guilty conscience (72–73). When Gustav spends the summer of 1932 in his hometown of Helsingborg, Cecilia wrestles with her feelings, unable to tolerate the thought that he might either befriend another girl or masturbate. It is an emotional struggle that she is compelled to fight alone, because of Eva's earlier dismissive attitude toward erotic matters as acceptable topics of conversation: "Hon önskade att hon kunde få tala med Momo om sådana här saker. Men det förstod hon skulle aldrig gå. Det enda Momo brukade säga var att ju äldre en flicka blev, desto mer fick hon lära sig av livet" [She wished that she could speak with Momo about these matters, but she understood that that was impossible. The only thing Momo used to say was that the older a girl becomes, the more she learns about life] (135). Immeasurably more seriously, after Cecilia is raped she believes that telling Eva about the incident is out of the question, and she takes measures to conceal the attack. "Momo skulle aldrig få veta något. ALDRIG" [Momo shall never learn about it], she vows (151). It is this inability to communicate with her mother even after having been the victim of a sexual assault that places her in a dilemma a few weeks later; she is compelled at the age of fifteen to go—in despair, alone, and of her own volition—to a gynaecologist and, in turn, to an exploitative abortionist. Even then, Cecilia believes she must act anonymously: she presents herself as "Monica Palmgren," disingenuously denies that she has a telephone, declares that she is employed in a shoe shop, and gives a false address (170–171).

Long before Eva reveals to Cecilia that they are biologically mother and daughter, the reader suspects that Eva's inhibitions stem from a traumatic sexual experience and that this unidentified skeleton in the family cupboard is indirectly influencing the girl. But Hasso also places part of the blame for Cecilia's inhibitions on the form of Christianity to which she is exposed. She and her mother worship every Sunday at an unidentified parish church in Södermalm, where there does not appear to be any particular religious instruction for children and where, with one exception, the services are boring and do not communicate anything positive to Cecilia. The only clergyman mentioned, Pastor Eriksson, is burdened with unsavoury signs; to Cecilia this balding, bespectacled man, who is empowered as her guardian (*förmyndare*) to sign legal documents on her behalf, seems generally strange and unappealing. He does, however, give her a fine bookmark as a birthday present (52). After she begins to earn a salary and can purchase Christmas presents, she believes it would be appropriate to give Eriksson a handkerchief: "Han talade ju ständigt om tårar—Guds tårar

över människornas synder. Han grät nästan själv, när han dundrade på i kyrkan om allt hat i världen” [He talked relentlessly about tears—God’s tears over people’s sins. He almost cried himself, when he harangued in church about all the hatred in the world] (99). Yet Eva will brook no criticism of their pastor, and her own faith seems to be intact; she believes in God’s ultimate providence, despite the economically disadvantaged circumstances under which she and her daughter live.

Yet Eva’s Christianity entails a heavy burden of guilt, which she transmits to Cecilia. Much of this has ramifications that involve the girl’s evolving sexuality. Perhaps most explicitly, Eva explains to her that menstruation is divine punishment for Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden (75). Indeed, in the wake of this explanation, the word *straff* [punishment] becomes a leitmotif in *Momo* (80, 87, 89, 162). By partial contrast, Kajsa and Kalle Jonsson are not required to go to church regularly, although Cecilia notices them occasionally at the Sunday morning services. This clearly indicated distinction ties in with the children’s varying attitudes toward sexual conduct. Cecilia regards extramarital sexual relations and masturbation as sin, whereas there is no evidence that her less constrained friends share that belief.

Indeed, Hasso makes Cecilia’s predicament stand out in particularly bold relief by creating in her classmate Kajsa Jonsson a foil whose introduction to the realities of her sexuality involves none of the inhibitions that cause Cecilia such great anguish. The fact that this friend has a brother and that they live in an apartment with sexually active parents is determinative to her enlightenment. “Du skulle höra mamma och pappa stöna från sängkammaren ibland” [You should hear mom and dad moaning in their bedroom sometimes], she reveals. “Kalle och jag skrattar så vi dör, för dom tror inte att vi hör dom. Men det är väl bara naturligt skulle jag tro” [Kalle and I laugh ourselves to death, because they think we do not hear them. But I suppose it is only natural] (73). Hasso carries Kajsa’s healthy attitude a step further when the two girls discuss masturbation. Cecilia emphasises her belief that sexual intercourse outside marriage is sin, and adds that feeling sexually aroused is similarly sinful. When Cecilia asks Kajsa how she satisfies her longings, she answers without reservation that her boyfriend plays a key rôle: “... är jag i skolan så har jag ju alltid Nisse på rasterna och han brukar lägga handen där och föra den fram och tillbaka och det känns väldigt skönt ... och ... ja annars gör jag det själv” [... when I am at school I always have Nisse during the breaks and he usually puts his hand there and rubs it to and fro, and it feels really nice ... and ... otherwise I do it

myself] (74). The possibility of using this friend as a source of sexual information emerges when Cecilia, at age ten, witnesses a man masturbating in Silverlings Hage and asks her keenly embarrassed mother about penises. When Eva's halting explanation proves unsatisfactory, Cecilia responds that she could ask Kajsa, who would know because she has a brother. Eva's blunt reply to this suggestion further inhibits her daughter: "Nej—det ska du absolut inte göra Cecilia. Sådana där saker talar man aldrig om. Det är fult" [No—you are absolutely not to do that, Cecilia. One never discusses those matters. They are dirty] (66).

After Cecilia reaches puberty and belatedly acquires a basic understanding of human sexual behaviour, Kajsa's unrestrained demeanour in this regard proves more than she can harmoniously absorb. When this erstwhile schoolmate asks her whether she feels "kåt" [randy] about any boy, Cecilia pleads unsuccessfully with her not to use that word, which she regards as a vulgarity. She also finds it "nästan lite billig" [almost a little cheap] that Kajsa's father—a policeman—allows her to wear deep red lipstick. Cecilia finds this loss of innocence puzzling, and fears that it may affect her as well, but allows that it may be a normal development, which she, too, is experiencing: "Hon kände sig smutsig inuti på något sätt. Att Kajsa kunde ha förändret sig så? Eller var det hon själv? Hon kände ju på ett sätt likadant. Var det helt enkelt så att Kajsa var ärligare än hon[?]" [She felt dirty inside somehow. Could Kajsa have changed so much? Or was it herself? She felt that she was the same. Was it simply that Kajsa was more honest than she?] (134).

Had *Momo* been published during the 1930s, it would have been a cogent example of a *tendensroman*, or *roman à thèse*, a moving account of the plight of a young girl whose passage from childhood to adolescence and sexual maturity would have proceeded more smoothly had sex education evolved at a more rapid pace, and whose tribulations with a rape-induced pregnancy would have been lessened had the statute concerning abortion been amended a few years earlier. Furthermore, with regard to Eva Dalberg, had this novel appeared a few decades earlier it might have been hailed as a timely piece that calls attention to the plight of a shame-ridden working woman, showing how her self-imposed quasi-isolation from much of society compels her to live a perennial lie about her unwed parenthood, and how her shame has indirect consequences for her daughter. One could reasonably ask whether *Momo* was written a generation too late.

In places, to be sure, *Momo* can be read as a retrospective defence of legalized abortion and, concomitantly, a warning against the perils of

returning to the pre-1939 state, in which some terminations of pregnancies were conducted under exploitative and unhygienic conditions, with disastrous, occasionally lethal, secondary effects. Quite unnecessarily, Hasso distinguishes the two gynaecologists whom Cecilia visits by placing vastly different signs on them. The first, A. Hedberg, treats her in a sympathetic and professional way, and upon learning more of her plight elects not to charge either for his services or for the medication he gives Cecilia to control her nausea. Not surprisingly, in his conversation with a colleague to whom he refers her he declares that abortions should be legal, at least in cases such as hers. Hedberg speaks in a friendly and respectful tone to Cecilia and his other patients (171–174). By contrast, that second gynaecologist, Arvid Gren, appears to lack professional scruples entirely. Perhaps as an indication of his lack of personal appeal, his waiting room is, in contrast to Hedberg's, empty. Even his physical appearance betrays his dearth of moral principles: "Han var mörk och hade en genomträngande blick" [He was dark and had a penetrating gaze]. Gren, like his barren office, seems emotionally sterile and unconcerned about the emotional health of his patient. When Cecilia declares that her pregnancy was the result of a rape, he refuses to accept her sincerity and replies too succinctly, "Tyvärr hör jag den ursäkten ganska ofta" [Unfortunately I hear that excuse quite often]. His fee for the procedure is 300 *kronor*, and in addition to monetary payment he feels at liberty to have intercourse with Cecilia while she is bound in his gynaecological examination chair about to undergo the abortion: "En gång mer eller mindre ... spelar ju ingen roll nu" [One time more or less ... does not matter now] states this thoroughly unsympathetic and exploitative character (181–183). His victim resists his advance and leaves the room. Yet Cecilia is left emotionally dangling when, as the result of having being hit and injured by a motor vehicle, her pregnancy is terminated. While she is hospitalized and suffering guilt because she believes that her negligence has cost a human life, a physician assures her that the death of a foetus during the second month of a pregnancy cannot be equated with that of one that was only a few weeks from full term and thus viable outside the womb. In this respect there is closure. Otherwise, *Momo* gives no satisfactory answer to the problem of unwanted pregnancy in the context of that time. Before the legalization of abortion, Hasso suggests, there was simply no genuinely satisfactory release from the kind of dire straits into which Cecilia's combination of being born to a shame-ridden mother and being raped has thrust her. This is the young protagonist's realization at the close of the narrative. Eva's willingness to acknowledge her

own maternity is only a first step on the path that Hasso suggests must be walked.

Beyond its defensive and admonitory aspects, *Momo* stands as an insightful fictional reconstruction of the predicament of a girl during the era of Hasso's formative years and, secondarily, that of her shame-filled mother. Though lacking a high degree of artistic finesse, her debut novel is valuable primarily as a memoiristic contribution to the significant corpus of imaginative literature in the Swedish women's movement, a work that hardly deserves the neglect it has suffered in contemporary literary scholarship. Read in tandem with general histories of early twentieth-century women's rights in Sweden, *Momo* helps to illuminate subjects that literary convention and social taboo have often left tenebrous.

NOTES

¹All the translations are the author's own.

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Austria: Location of a Traumatic Scene

Wittgenstein in Cecilie Løveid' *Østerrike*

WENCHE LARSEN

ABSTRACT: In her play *Østerrike* [Austria] (1998), Norwegian playwright Cecilie Løveid unfolds a queer love story inspired by two sources: Ludwig Wittgenstein's diary from his stay in Norway, and Ibsen's *Brand*. The audience is put in touch with Ludwig's drama by means of a neo-expressive language—a *Lingua Trauma* (Hal Foster)—that gestalts Ludwig's trauma through shocking configurations of forbidden relationships that link love to degradation, loss, and death. In its attempt to expose and transform the traumatic scene, the play shifts its attention from a heterosexual to a homosexual relationship, a change that is tangled up with a traumatic experience associated with the death of Ludwig's father. The degraded relationship is redignified by means of a moving final tableau that transforms the traumatic scene into a beautiful theatrical image. The essay also examines the play as a "work-in-process," from exhibits, to première, to published work.

RÉSUMÉ: Dans sa pièce *Østerrike* (Autriche) (1998) la dramaturge norvégienne Cecilie Løveid raconte une histoire d'amour homosexuelle qui s'inspire du journal de Wittgenstein consacré à son séjour en Norvège ainsi que de *Brand* d'Ibsen. Les spectateurs sont initiés au drame de Ludwig par un langage néo-expressif—une *lingua trauma* (Hal Foster)—qui donne une gestalt au traumatisme du Ludwig à l'aide de configurations choquantes de relations interdites qui font le lien entre l'amour et la dégradation, la perte et la mort. En vue d'exposer et de transformer la scène traumatique, l'action change d'une relation hétérosexuelle à une relation homosexuelle, mêlée à une expérience traumatique reliée à la mort du père de Ludwig. La relation dégradée reprend de la dignité dans un tableau final émouvant qui transforme la scène traumatique en «belle scène théâtrale». On examine également la pièce en tant que «travail en cours de production» depuis les expositions jusqu'à la première et l'oeuvre publiée.

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Østerrike [Austria], the ninth play of the Norwegian playwright Cecilie Løveid (b. 1951), premiered as part of the Ibsen festival at the National Theatre in Oslo in August 1998. As in her earlier plays, Cecilie Løveid used a historical person as her main character, this time the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951).¹ The drama is set in Ludwig's cottage, in a dramatic fjord landscape in western Norway in 1931, a time when Ludwig Wittgenstein in fact stayed in Skjolden, Sognefjorden, in a cottage he had built in 1914. Like that in which the play is set, the cottage was called "Austria" by the locals. Here Wittgenstein wrote a diary and part of his *Philosophische Untersuchungen*,² and this diary and Ibsen's drama *Brand* are used as exhibits in Løveid's play.

Løveid has used Wittgenstein's diary, and Ibsen's drama *Brand* as intertexts for her own drama, which is a playful dialogue with these texts. Not only is the drama of Ludwig set in Ibsen's landscape,³ but both of her main characters, Ludwig and Agnes, are linked to the main characters in Ibsen's play. Ludwig is linked to Brand through the use of symbolic imagery, and through his devotion to an ideal calling, which puts him in a similar existential situation; and Ludwig has even sent Agnes Ibsen's drama with an enigmatic letter of invitation and proposal. He has sent her the play in its original "danonorwegico," which she misreads as a tourist guide, travelling up the fjord on board the local tourist and cargo ship *Hurtigruten* to meet him. Agnes also brings an old Victorian dress, her so-called "Agnes costume," which links her to Ibsen's Agnes as a representation of ideal femaleness. In her prologue, Agnes mentions a scene from *Brand*, that turns out to be a scene that Ludwig has added to the play in his letter of proposal. Although the scene does not exist in Ibsen's play, it is a rewriting of two existing scenes in *Brand*. The first is a dramatic event told by a woman in the hunger-stricken village. Her youngest child has died, and her husband hit the dead child in desperation. Later Brand imagines the two elder brothers witnessing this scene. The other scene is Brand's telling his mother how, as a child, he saw her greedily grasping his father's hidden fortune, while the father lay dead in his bed, still holding his hymn book in his hands. His mother excuses herself by telling him that the marriage had wrecked her life.⁴

As in Løveid's earlier plays, the historical references do not simply refer to the historical exhibits, but are used, rewritten, interpreted, and transformed into her own fiction—her story—which is broadened and put into a humorous context through these additional levels of signification.

QUEERING THE TRIANGLE OF LOVE

The play, which consists of a prologue and nine scenes, portrays a meeting between Ludwig and his would-be fiancée Agnes in his cottage. Agnes arrives in response to Ludwig's letter of proposal, but the philosopher, torn between his need for a "decent" human being and his need for solitude, is not thrilled to see her. He rejects her, but also asks her to answer his proposal, and his ambivalence informs their dialogue, which constitutes the dramatic action.

Already in the prologue we get a warning that there might be other circumstances than Ludwig's philosophical studies standing between them. Agnes mentions Ludwig's "only friend," David, who is dead, and who has taken half of Ludwig with him. "The other half the Devil would take."⁵ In spite of knowing this, Agnes arrives full of hope that she will "fulfill a dream." What dream, and whose, we are not told, but we soon understand that the scene is set for yet another "tragedy of love," which is Løveid's specialty.

Ludwig's speech is a mosaic of hidden quotations from Wittgenstein's diary. In this diary Wittgenstein sets out to examine the tragedy, his own spiritual constitution, and his relationship to various people. Wittgenstein here discloses his love for a certain Marguerite, who seems to be the main exhibit for Agnes in Løveid's play,⁶ in addition to Agnes in Ibsen's *Brand*. There is no reference to any other love relationship in Wittgenstein's diary, but we find several references to some of the men in his life, and Løveid seems to have spun her love story around these enigmatic relationships. The diary, like Løveid's play, is full of self-accusations and degrading self-characterizations, Wittgenstein also mentioning a confession concerning what he is and what he has done, possibly referring to the forbidden love that seems to have inspired Løveid.⁷

From Wittgenstein's stories of an articulated, acceptable love of a woman and possibly a hidden, forbidden love of a man, Løveid evolves her own story. In her unfolding of the drama of Ludwig's relationship to a woman, she reveals a relationship to a man. The unfolding of this relationship, in turn, reveals a *primal* relationship, and all these relationships are intrinsically interwoven in a tragic pattern of ambivalence, pain, and death.

The revelation of the hidden relationships and their common tragic pattern motivates the working out of the play. While, on the surface, the play is engaged in the philosophical problems of the tragedy and the

practical problems with Agnes, Ludwig's relationship to his dead lover is gradually lifted into the light of the play—foreshadowed by the injured turtle hauled up from the fjord, and the crying calf lifted into the light from the cargo hold of the ship as Agnes enters Ludwig's deep, dark fjord landscape. Ludwig and Agnes, both unaware of the hidden drama, and the way their destiny is linked to this drama, fight their way through attraction, love, hatred, and repulsion, for the most part ignoring the naked man playing the piano in the background who makes contact with Ludwig through an imaginary language of body and music, interfering with his relationship to Agnes.

CECILIE LØVEID'S *LINGUA TRAUMA*

Cecilie Løveid's drama may in a certain structural and symbolic sense be seen as a *passion play*, in that she uses a passionate rhetoric linking love to sacrifice, death, redemption, and resurrection. Her use of metaphorical, polysemantic dialogues, visual tableaux, and body language is charged with passion and pain, a *Lingua Trauma*, or *Traumatic Realism*, as Hal Foster calls it,⁸ causing bodily upheavals by *exteriorizing* mentally structured *traumas*, communicating painful experience through a *troumatic*, open kind of representation, a language marked by its holes of signification, where the (mentally structured) trauma can take place.⁹ The figures of *Traumatic Realism* work as an *exteriorization* of an internalized wound through *anti-sublimating* representations pushing illusionism to the point of the real in a way that changes the body's relation to the image, getting physically and emotionally *involved*, touched or shaken, approaching the traumatic point.¹⁰

The *troumatic* figure demands a bodily, affectively situated *gaze*, which transgresses the distance of the objectifying, sublime gaze.¹¹ The symbolically speaking and sensuously present, traumatized body, posed in a situation of affective interaction, revealing its *wound* through codified signs, puts the spectator *in touch* with the trauma by activating the spectator's own experience and emotions.

Cecilie Løveid's expressive visual language, particularly her *tableaux*, create such bodily communicative *troumatic* configurations of the trauma at the heart of the play. In a shockingly grotesque way the tableau creates a *real* configuration that puts into play the traumatic relationship in which the audience is involved. This way of communicating through the body links Cecilie Løveid's drama not only to Foster's *Traumatic Realism*, but also to a

neo-expressionistic tradition of anti-sublimating art, including Artaud's *Theatre of the Cruel*, *secretion art*, and Joseph Beuy's shamanistic wounds, as well as postmodern art such as *carnal art*,¹² *abject art*, and *superrealistic art*, where the physical *wounds* of the previous traditions have been transformed into aesthetically coded *troumas*.¹³

The unrepresentable *trauma* which is communicated through the *troumas* of the polysemantic, expressive *lingua trauma*, not only reproduces traumatic effects, but also *produces* such effects.¹⁴ Thus, the tableaux and metaphors staged in Løveid's plays put us in contact with the meaning and affects of the traumatic event of Ludwig's past. Through her *troumatic* figures, particularly her tableaux, Løveid *makes a scene*, a *troumatic scene*, (re)presenting the trauma in the most disturbing way, both revealing and hiding the relationship in which we are involved. Løveid's scenes, like *hysterical scenes* in Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic sense, represent not so much realistic dramatic action taking place in historical time, as timeless, or time-implosioning, events involving a pathetic, semiotic sensualism mobilizing all sorts of movements, the voice, gestures, and "thoughts" that no longer possess the normal status of thoughts, as Julia Kristeva puts it.¹⁵

What creates scenes, more than love stories do? "Love is drama," says Løveid, quoting Nietzsche.¹⁶ And no material is better for studying the human being than the dramatic, amorous dialogue, where (wo)man is constituted as lover, situated between ecstasy and abjection, sublime idealization and carnal repulsion, involved in phantasmatic, imaginary, and symbolic relations with the other, and even mixing the levels, in the confusion of the experience.¹⁷

Ludwig's cottage Austria is the location of these scenes, through which we are to reach *The Scene* of Ludwig's drama, the *troumatic scene* linked to the traumatic scene from his childhood in the country Austria. The topos represents a complex unity of *external* and *internal spaces*, the external places of the events as well as an internal, imaginary space. The dialogue and the images and gestures can be interpreted on two levels: the external, realistic level attached to the plot, and the internal, symbolic level attached to the imaginary situation of the main character. The internal and the external level of signification are related to both the main motif (Ludwig's love relationships and their interfaces), and to the side motifs of the play (the discourses on the tragedy, Ludwig's existential situation, and so on). In addition, the discourses are put into a dialogue with Ibsen's and Wittgenstein's texts. This outlines my understanding of the complex structures of language, subject, and meaning operating in Løveid's text,

particularly through her use of tableaux. The *polysemantic* structure of signification puts a wide range of extra-verbal, trans-realistic elements of signification into play, as in Agnes's monologue and the scenery of the prologue, in which Agnes describes the fjord as of the "deepest in the world," referring not only to the fjords of western Norway, where Wittgenstein stayed in the 1930s, but also to the location of the play (and of Ibsen's *Brand*), and to Ludwig's mind (linked to Ibsen's *Brand*).¹⁸ The hurt turtle that is hauled up from the fjord and the crying calf from the cargo ship may likewise be understood as metaphors for the trauma to be revealed. As the ice-covered mountain in *Brand*, which Agnes takes to be the main figure in Ibsen's play, is linked to Brand's character, so the ice house in Løveid's play may be linked to Ludwig, both metaphors representing the brutal behaviour of the characters toward others. These figures can be seen as *exteriorizing metaphors* that give a concrete, meaningful form to Ludwig's internal reality.

It is typical of Løveid's drama that we find these excessively meaningful scenes, with polysemantic, metaphoric dialogue and tableaux, at the beginning and end of the drama, framing the more realistic action of the play, and *opening the meaning* of the action so that it becomes a symbolic extension of a traumatic state of mind. In this way we usually find two sets of beginnings and endings in Løveid's works, one for the realistic action and one for the extra-realistic, symbolic meaning.

THE TROUMATIC SCENE IN AUSTRIA

The scene that Ludwig adds to *Brand* in his letter of proposal is the scene linked to his childhood trauma, a trauma to be lifted into the light of the play as a traumatic scene, where the internal drama can take place in an exteriorized form. But we are not allowed to know this scene until Scene Eight, after a long period of struggle, during which Agnes touches upon Ludwig's work and his relationship to David.¹⁹ Ludwig and Agnes end up making a desperate kind of love. Ludwig asks Agnes to put on her Agnes costume, and he ends up embracing the empty dress.²⁰ He asks Agnes to redeem him and help him commit a murder, and we are worried that somebody might get killed (Agnes? Ludwig?), but we are relieved to find that Ludwig wants Agnes to burn his manuscripts.²¹ None of this actually happens. Neither love nor death is to be realized in the play. It is the love-and-death from Ludwig's past that is to be put into play.

Agnes says she will play her scene, which Ludwig has added to *Brand*; but to play the scene they need a dead body:²²

Ludwig. I am the dead person.

Agnes. You?

I thought you would be the boy.

Ludwig. The boy?

Agnes. The boy in the scene. The boy who sees his mother.

Ludwig. He is not in the play.

I can be the mother.

Agnes. The child soul.

The one who is alone.

The one who walks about in the palace alone.

Makes his first attempts at suicide.

And his first attempts to write.

The least gifted.

The smallest one.

Ludwig. No. He's not here.

Agnes. A boy is watching the corpse of his father.

With his dog.

The mother enters during the night and hits the corpse and says

You have destroyed my life.

Is this the way it was?

Shall we try?

After having first volunteered to play the role of the corpse, and then that of the mother, Ludwig in the end wants to play the dog that says nothing, but sees and hears it all. Agnes responds, "What happens to the dog then?" To which Ludwig answers, "I kill it."²³ Then the scene is over. But Scene Eight continues with a cryptic dialogue between the two where "Agnes moves the sky," dancing in the northern light, and Ludwig tells her off; someone is watching from the other side—waiting:

Agnes. Is he waiting?

Ludwig. What did you think?

Agnes. What does he want?

Ludwig. What do you think?²⁴

A man is waiting. Is it the local gardener and ferryman? Waiting for

Ludwig's love? Or David? Waiting for him—to die? Is it Death? Agnes is shocked, but Ludwig does not notice her change. He talks about planning their future and tells her how he wants to give her “the whole sky ... if you promise not to try to take the sky with you. / Try to change it with the linen or try to grab the stars. / But meditate on your life in solitude and your situation beneath it. / Agnes, what is your reply?”²⁵ Agnes does not answer in words, but takes off the Agnes costume, leaves it with Ludwig, and takes her leave, like Ibsen's Nora.

In the last scene, called “A Beautiful Scene on the Theatre,” we find Agnes on board the ship in the fjord, and Ludwig left behind with David, who is again naked by the piano. After yet another reflection on the tragedy, and the artificial opposition between tragedy and comedy, David approaches Ludwig in an intensely sensuous way. Their hands clasp; David helps Ludwig put on the Agnes costume, climbs the piano, and lies down “like Christ in Hans Holbein's painting *The Dead Christ in the Tomb*.” Ludwig mounts the corpse, kisses it as in an ecstasy of love, screams, hammers the corpse, and throws himself to the floor.

Ludwig. You have destroyed my life!

Agnes, on board the ship, turns around, pressing Brand toward her chest “like a pup,” then opens the book, tears it, and echoes Ludwig's words:

Agnes. You have destroyed my life!

In the darkness. A woman travels out of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Norwegian philosophical fjord landscape. Aerial cable. Broken langeleik [Norwegian zither].

*The end*²⁶

In these two final scenes, we witness the interweaving of Ludwig's love relationships in a pattern involving a mixed exchange of roles, where the traumatic scene of the (hitting, shouting) mother, the (dead) father, and the (watching, listening) child and dog is shown to constitute a problematic imaginary matrix for his relation to Agnes and David, a dyad of love and hate, even in death—and Ludwig is the silent *witness*, who takes on all the parts of the unbearable scene in turn. This scene, then, is the traumatic scene of Ludwig's passion play.

In the last scene of the play Ludwig and the dead lover are re-acting this scene through a *traumatic tableau*, gestalting the affects and meaning of the scene in an open, enigmatic, yet shockingly true and moving way. The purpose of this scene is said to be to “better the condition of the soul.” The

troumatic scene does not change reality; it does not try to sublimate or harmonize the trauma. On the contrary, it depicts it in a most crude and physically explicit way. But in allowing the scene to take place as an existing truth in an empathetic-affective mode, the play transgresses the internalized social revulsion to the situation, re-basing the de-based relationship, Ludwig's "effeminate" gender identity, and his ambivalent feelings for his love objects. Ludwig's relationship to himself, to his parents, and to David is redignified through this relationship's coming to life as a *troumatic* tableau, lifted into the magic realm of tragic beauty, transformed to the level of human myth through a "Beautiful Scene on the Theatre."

A WORK-IN-PROCESS

In the version of *Østerrike* performed at the National Theatre in Oslo in August and September 1998, director Jon Tombre ended the play with Agnes leaving Ludwig. He cut not only the end tableau, but also the very scene of the trauma, and the whole story involving David. The motif concerning Ludwig's homosexuality was represented through a confusingly abstract character called "The Gardener," who combined elements from David (as a half-dressed piano player), a local friend/lover and handyman, and an anonymous witness and ferryman, who also represented the locals and Death. This compound character made the story confusing and had disastrous consequences with respect to the inner logic of the play.

Through the courtesy of the National Theatre, it has been possible for me to study two manuscripts from this work-in-progress, Løveid's first version from 1997 and director Jon Tombre's version from May 1998. A comparison between these two texts, the performance at the National Theatre, and the published version makes it clear that a tough struggle of interests and interpretations has taken place. In both of her versions, Cecilie Løveid focuses on the sexual relationship between Ludwig and David, which is shown at an explicit level throughout the entire play by the division of the role of the anonymous, local gardener and the dead lover David. Tombre, however, blurs the relationship between Ludwig and David, focusing on Ludwig's relationship to Agnes, which is interrupted by a mysterious piano player, whose relationship to both Ludwig and Agnes is most unclear.²⁷ In his first version, it is suddenly revealed at the end of the play that the piano player/witness/local friend/gardener/ferryman had fallen in love with Agnes at their first meeting. This is an unmotivated sidetrack without

relevance to the main story. The performance at the National Theatre seems to have been the product of a compromise between Løveid's and Tombre's two initial versions, which could explain why this performance seemed so unclear with respect to which story it wanted to tell, and what function David/the gardener/ferryman and the homosexual relationship should have in the play.

Even though the dead lover is going to win the contest for Ludwig's heart, Agnes evidently also plays an important role in Løveid's play, not only as one of Ludwig's objects of love, but as a *medium* between Ludwig and his other love-objects, as an initiator and *vehicle* of the plot, and as a *subject* in her own right who faces her lover and makes her own choice—leaving him, thereby embodying an independent voice in dialogue with Ibsen's and Wittgenstein's texts.

Whereas the performance at the National Theatre was in many ways richer than the first two versions, Løveid's printed version seems superior by far. Here the author has at last fulfilled the narrative desire of her material; she has created a narrative subject who knows precisely which story to tell, and from whose perspective all the elements of the plot are chosen, who heads stringently toward the revelation of the *Troumatic Scene*, and who puts us in touch with the plot's moving, traumatic core.

Løveid's working methods as a playwright have always been characterized by such creative interactions with artists on the floor. It is interesting to study her work-in-process in this way, to follow the development of her plot through the struggle between the different characters, and to see how each character carries a particular interest in the play. Each particular interest promotes a particular interpretation of the many possible stories and charges the plot with a particular ethos, involving and moving the audience through an ongoing process of re-creating, imagining, and experiencing what it is really all about.

NOTES

¹In *Barock Friise* (1993), Løveid uses material from the life of Zille Knudsdatter Gad, a Norwegian scholar from the turn of the seventeenth century; in *Maria Q* (1994), from that of Maria Quisling, wife of Vidkun Quisling; and in *Rhindøtrene* (1996), from that of Hildegard von Bingen.

²Wittgenstein (1998). First published in Innsbruck 1997: *Denkbewegungen*.

³"The play takes place in our time, partly in, partly around a fjord village on the west

coast of Norway” (Løveid 11, quoting Ibsen 5). Løveid plays with three levels of historical time in the play: the time of Ibsen/Brand, Wittgenstein’s time, and her own/our time. See, for example, Agnes’s monologue: “Independent Tours in Western Norway 1931 She’s dressed in the fashion of our time, but carries as company and alter ego a Victorian Woman’s Costume” (11). All translations of Løveid’s texts are my own.

⁴Løveid 16, Ibsen 34, 38, 49–50. The symbolic use of double meaning, charged with melodrama, in Ibsen’s dialogue and scenery is also well worth comparing to that of Løveid’s.

⁵Løveid 12. Løveid/Agnes here links Ludwig to a classic Faust motif, the contradictions between the quest for knowledge (an ideal calling) and the quest for love (commitment to other people), a major motif in Ibsen’s dramas, including *Brand*. This may explain why Agnes says that her scene is not to be found in Ibsen’s play, while Ludwig claims to have read it several times (88). Ludwig seems to be confusing the play with his own life.

⁶Wittgenstein 31, 36, 56, 57, 73, 79, 82, and notes. According to notes by Knut Olav Åmås, this is Marguerite de Chambrier, born Respinger (Wittgenstein 125). Wittgenstein writes that Marguerite de Chambrier, after being engaged to a bourgeois (of whom Wittgenstein disapproves), says that she wants to marry him. But after first having written in his diary how he fears to lose her, he now seems to have refused her. According to Åmås, Marguerite de Chambrier actually visited Wittgenstein in Skjolden in 1931 (Wittgenstein 157) shortly before she married an American, Jerome Stonborough (Wittgenstein 133). Løveid’s dialogue is partly based on quotations from Wittgenstein’s diary, where he refers to his refusal of Marguerite (Wittgenstein 81–82). According to Åmås, Wittgenstein even visited Marguerite de Chambrier one hour before her wedding ceremony, swearing that if she would stay with him she would be saved (Wittgenstein 137).

⁷Wittgenstein 65, 82–83, 114. Wittgenstein links his confession to his mother. He writes that his mother died with a confession unspoken, and he hopes that his own confession has given words and redemption to them both. This involvement of the mother in his own traumatic story is relevant both to Løveid’s play and to one of the corresponding scenes in *Brand*, where Brand witnesses his mother’s behaviour at his father’s deathbed (Ibsen 49–50). There are many other interesting parallels between Løveid’s play and *Brand* and Wittgenstein’s diary. The main characters are characterized by extreme contradictions; for example, both have a compulsion to give away to strangers all their worldly belongings, and yet they are extremely tough on the ones they love, denying them even what they need to live. In Wittgenstein’s diary, as in Løveid’s play, we are told that Wittgenstein/Ludwig gave away both clothes and property to the locals (Wittgenstein 172; Løveid 23).

⁸Foster 130.

⁹*Trouma* is a concept borrowed from Lacan. It is a compound of *trou* [hole] and *trauma*. *Trouma* [Greek: wound] is defined as a “breaking in of the exterior,” a physical upheaval caused by violent external events turned inward, or as an imaginative structuring of a wound, a “wounding of the wound,” on the border between the physical and the psychological (Foster 29, 134).

¹⁰Foster 138–41, 152; Seltzer 21.

¹¹Foster 138–41, expanding on Lacan with the help of Merleau-Ponty.

¹²Orlan’s term; see Fausing.

¹³See Fausing who mentions artists like Cindy Sherman and Orlan.

¹⁴Foster 132.

¹⁵See Kristeva, “Om hysterisk tid” 39.

¹⁶Løveid 64.

¹⁷Kristeva 153, 167–69.

¹⁸Løveid 11.

¹⁹Ibid. 87.

²⁰The Agnes costume seems to represent ideal femaleness, and is used to depict a difference between the woman (Agnes) and the idea of a woman (the dress), to thematize Ludwig’s/men’s often problematic relationship to women, directed by phantasmatic representations caught up in a mix of desires and ideas of essential femaleness. Ludwig’s desire seems related to this culturally coded idea, which makes it difficult for him to relate to the real woman (45–47), and to so-called “effeminate” qualities within himself. Ludwig’s “effeminate” gender identity is revealed as problematic (85).

²¹Another parallel to Ibsen, this time to Eilert Løvborg’s manuscript in *Hedda Gabler*.

²²Løveid 87.

²³Løveid 91.

²⁴Ibid. 92.

²⁵Ibid. 93. The expression to “change the sky with linen” refers to an old children’s custom of trying to make northern lights by waving linen (see 28). This “larger than life” supernatural belief in the possibility of moving the sky is linked to children (28) and women (Agnes, 87, 91, 93). Agnes is shown to have this capability (91), and by leaving Ludwig, she refuses his attempt to suppress this gift by asking her to promise to abstain from using it. This message may also be linked to the playwright’s refusal to abstain from the use of excessive, trans-realistic elements in her plays, which go far beyond Ibsen’s use of realism and symbolism. Consequently, the dialogue between Agnes and Ludwig can be interpreted also as Løveid’s hidden dialogue with Ibsen. Is it because she realizes the extent to which Ludwig is emotionally caught up in his love affairs with dead lovers (lover and father) that Agnes leaves him in the

end? And is this Løveid's way of rewriting Ibsen, by creating *another* Agnes, who *refuses* to have her life dictated and ruined by an idealism rooted in a libidinous pattern preoccupied with death? Is this Løveid's way of breaking a pattern of sacrificed women represented through Goethe's "ewig Weibliche" Gretchen (as a model for Ibsen's Solveig and Agnes) and saving them for life?

²⁶Løveid 95.

²⁷In Tombre's manuscript The piano player is called The gardener in the cast list, but The piano player in the text, and in the cast list from the National Theatre he is called David, even though he was never referred to as other than The gardener in the text. The rest of the characters, relations, and motifs linked to Ludwig's homosexual relationships, the Director has tried to fit into the compound character through physical acting, but this does not work. This shows how crucial it is to choose the right combination of characters, since their functions are deeply related to each other, and to the intrinsic, symbolic structure of the plot. Løveid's first version ends with David and Ludwig naked together, and then separated. David, after touching Ludwig's hands, climbs the piano, where he lies down like a white, shining corpse, and Ludwig creeps alone on the floor toward his typewriter, whistling David's theme to the sound of the shivering, lighted aerial cable. Tombre's first version, on the other hand, ends with The piano player disclosing his feelings to Agnes as she is leaving Ludwig to his ideas (his philosophy on the tragedy) and (David's) music.

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ON ØSTERRIKE

Programme:

August 1998. Nationaltheatret: *Østerrike, en overmaling av Ibsens Brand av Cecilie Løveid*. Oslo: The National Theatre.

Selected reviews:

- Serck, Peter. 4 September 1998. "Høyrøstet mumling." *Morgenbladet*.
- Rygg, Elisabeth. 31 August 1998. "Poetisk lek over samliv." *Aftenposten*.
- Paulsen, Cathrine Th. 31 August 1998. "Mye å tenke på." *Dagsavisen*.
- Storebø, Lars Harald. 31 August 1998. "Wittgenstein i Ibsenland." *Klassekampen*.

Interviews:

- Leirvåg, Siren. 28 August 1998. "Ibsen har sine rever bak øret." *Morgenbladet*.
- Krefting Enger, Ruth. 28 August 1998. "Cecilie Løveid leker med alvor." *Aftenposten*.

DRAMATIC WORKS BY CECILIE LØVEID

1976. *Tingene, tingene*. One act. Published in *Vinduet* (February 1976). Oslo: Gyldendal.
1977. *Mannen som ville ha alt*. Radio play. NRK Radioteatret, Bergen.
1980. *Hvide lam og Lille Tigerinde*. Radio play. NRK opplysningsavd, Bergen.

1980. *Du, bli her!* Radio play. NRK Radioteateret Trondheim; 1983. Published in *Måkespisere*. Gyldendal.
1982. *Kan du elske?* TV Drama. NRK Fjernsynsteatret Oslo; translated and broadcast in several countries.
1982. *Måkespisere*. Radio play. NRK Radioteateret Bergen; Prix Italia, 1983; 1983. published in *Måkespisere*. Gyldendal. Translated and broadcast also on Radio France and Swedish Radio; English translation in Janet Garton and Henning Sehmsdorf. 1989. *New Norwegian Plays*. Norwik Press.
1983. *Sug*. Performance by Smugteatret and Alle tiders Duster at Bryggens Museum, Bergen.
1983. *Vinteren revner*. Play. Den Nationale Scene in Bergen and Det NorskeTeatret in Oslo; 1983, published in *Måkespisere*, Gyldendal. Translated and produced by Theater in der Drachengasse, Vienna; Spiegelteatern, Stockholm; and Scena Theatre, Washington, D.C., United States.
1983. *Balansedame*. Play. Performed at Høvikodden art centre by Cecilie Løveid, Inghild Karlsen, and Bjørn Ianke. Staged as a play at Teater Aurora, Stockholm (*Fritt fall*) and Den Nationale Scene, Bergen in 1986 and at the Wiener Festwochen in 1992 (*Ro-ko-ko*). As a radio play: Westdeutsche Rundfunk (1988): NRK Radioteateret, Oslo (1988) (*Fødsel er musikk*); Süddeutsche Rundfunk, Saarländische Rundfunk, and Radio France. Published in 1984. Oslo: Gyldendal.
1984. *Dusj, 1 opera for 2*. Operalibretto. Staged by Cecilie Løveid, Synne Skouen, Marianne Heske, and Hilde Andersen at the Bergen festival. As TV drama by Jannicke M. Falch (*1 videopera for 2*), NRK Fjernsynet, Musikkavd., Oslo.
1984. *Lydia*. Radio play. NRK Radioteatret Oslo; Sveriges Radio, 1985; Süddeutsche Rundfunk, 1984; and Westdeutsche Rundfunk.
1985. *Madame Butterfly on the Beach*. One act. Vika-teatret, Oslo. Published *Norsk dramatikfestival-85*. Solum, 1985.
1985. *Vift. En barnesang*. Radio play. NRK Radioteatret Oslo; 1985, Prix Futura, Süddeutsche Rundfunk. Published Solum, 1985.
1985. *Titanic—skipet som ikke kunne synke*. Performance; co-production with Lisbeth Hiide, Lars Steinar Sørbo, and actors from Den Nationale Scene, staged at Den Nationale Scene, Bergen.
1986. *SeteSange*. Performance, co-production with Tone Avenstroup, Øyvind Berg, Hans Petter Dahl, Geir Gulliksen, Ragnar Hovland, Hotel Proforma/Kirsten Delholm, and artists from Hordaland Kunstnersentrum, at the Bergen festival.
1986. *Fornuftige dyr*. Play. Den Nationale Scene, Bergen. As a TV play, Fjernsynsterateret, NRK, Oslo, 1986. As a radio play, Sveriges Radio. Published, Gyldendal, 1986.

1990. *Dobbel Nyttelse*. Skuespill. Oslo Nye Teater, Centralteateret, Oslo. Published, Gyldendal, 1988. English translation, Janet Garton, in *Contemporary Norwegian Women's Writing*. Norvik Press, 1995.
1989. *Badehuset*. Grand performance, co-production with Verdensteateret, at "Cuba," open square, at Grünerløkka, Oslo. Published, Gyldendal, 1990.
1990. *Da-Ba-Da*. One-act dance performance, co-production with Un-Magritt Nordseth. Scenehuset, Oslo.
1990. *Tiden mellom tidene eller Paradisprosjektet*. Play, co-production with Lillith theater and Carl Jørgen Kjøning, BlackBoxTeater, Oslo. Published, Gyldendal, 1991. Translated and staged by ETA-Theater, München.
1991. *Barock Friise eller Kjærligheten er en større labyrint*. Play, co-production with Lillith theater and Scirocco dance company, Schøtstuen, the Bergen festival and Scenehuset, Oslo in 1992. Published, Gyldendal, 1993.
1993. *Konsekvens*. Dance performance, co-production with Un-Magritt Nordset, Seilduksfabrikken, Oslo.
1994. *Maria Q*. Play. Nationaltheatret, Oslo. Translated and staged, California State University, Hayward, 1997. As radio play, Sveriges Radio, 1995. Published, Gyldendal, 1994.
1996. *Rhindøtrene*. Play, co-production with Lillith theater, Den Nationale Scene, Bergen, and Black BoxTeater, Oslo. Published, Gyldendal, 1996. French translation, M.E.E.T, 1997.
1998. *Reise med båt uten båt*. Libretto for soprano and double bass, co-production with Bjørn Ianke and Siri Torjesen. Recorded on Ianke, Bjørn, *The Contemporary Solo Doublebass II*, CD, Simax Classics, Oslo; performed at the Sigrid Undset Festival, Lillehammer, and the Bergen Festival, in 1998.
1998. *Sappfokjolen*. Radio play. NRK, Oslo.
1998. *Østerrike*. Play. Nationaltheatret Oslo. Published Oslo: Gyldendal, 1998; to be staged in Copenhagen by Norwegian stage artist Kjetil Skøien at Kaleidoskop Theatre in 2003.
1999. *Den riktige vind*. Children's play. Hordaland teater, the Bergen Festival.
2000. *Hjerterdame*. Libretto for opera, premiered at Ringve Museum, Trondheim, on 6 May 2000.

TRANSLATIONS IN ENGLISH

1989. *Seagulleaters* (1983), *Måkespisere*. Trans. Henning K. Sehmsdorf. In Garton and Sehmsdorf, *New Norwegian Plays*. UK: Norvik Press.
1995. From *Double Delight* (*Dobbel nyttelse*). Trans. Janet Garton. In *Contemporary*

Norwegian Women's Writing. UK: Norvik Press.

Vinteren revner has been translated for Scena Theatre, Washington, D.C., United States, and *Maria Q* for California State University, by Bill Mishler, who has also translated *Barock Friise* and *Rhindøtrene*.

Performing Femininity as a Transgressive Act

Björk's Selma in Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark*

CHARITY MARSH

ABSTRACT: In Lars von Trier's musical film, *Dancer in the Dark*, there are numerous binaries. The primary binary, and the premise for the film, is constructed on the distinction between what is real and what is imagined. Throughout the film the main character, Selma, played by Icelandic pop star Björk, moves back and forth between these two worlds. She composes and performs musical numbers in her head (a contextual abstract view of the "real"), in order to cope with all that is happening in what the rest of the cast, and consequently the audience, view as the "real" world. Here it becomes evident that the musical, and by extension the music itself, is associated with fantasy, whereas the dramatic dialogue is considered reality.

RÉSUMÉ: Dans la comédie musicale de Lars von Trier, *Dancer in the Dark*, il y a plusieurs relations binaires. La plus importante de celles-ci et la prémisse du film, repose sur la distinction entre le réel et l'imaginaire. Durant tout le film, le personnage principal, Selma, joué par la vedette pop islandaise Björk, va et vient entre ces deux mondes. Elle compose et interprète des comédies musicales dans la tête (une vue abstraite contextuelle du «réel») afin de pouvoir faire face à tout ce qui se passe dans ce que les autres acteurs (et donc les spectateurs) voient comme le monde «réel». Il devient évident que la comédie musicale, et par extension la musique elle-même, est associée à la fantaisie, alors que le dialogue dramatique est considéré comme réalité.

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In a musical nothing dreadful ever happens.

(Selma in *Dancer in the Dark*)

In Lars von Trier's film *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), the Icelandic singer Björk participated in two significant ways. Not only did she star as the leading role, Selma, but she also composed the musical score and the soundtrack. Unlike American musicals as Selma conceives them—big, crazy, light, and always ending happily—this is an intensely melancholic and sombre film, which captures its audience through the emotional struggles of an immigrant woman who will do anything—even sacrifice her own life—to keep her son from going blind. As in von Trier's previous two films from this trilogy, *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *The Idiots* (1998), various gendered themes and conventional narratives are repeated throughout *Dancer in the Dark*. Von Trier's creation of child-like roles for the heroines of his films preserves and mimics a feminine, and often retrograde, if not contrived, ideology, in which women are regarded as weak, yet also strong, in the name of martyrdom for the "greater good" of their families (or their society). Von Trier's heroines are often portrayed as being incapable of coping with their realities by "socially acceptable" means, and thus they are often required to construct "alternate" realities, which are perceived by others (at times including the audience) as *maladies à la tête*—mental instability.

In order to unpack these conventional notions of gender and identity, I take up Judith Butler's theoretical understanding of sex and gender as performance. Moreover, I argue that although *Dancer in the Dark* seems to perpetuate a conventional patriarchal narrative structure, there are, in fact, two musical moments in the film in which Björk's character Selma disrupts traditional narrative and transcends strict boundaries between reality and fantasy. This disruption allows for a more ambiguous outcome and the possible distortion of the heteronormative performance of the "ideal" feminine.

DANCER IN THE DARK: PLOT SYNOPSIS

Dancer in the Dark is set in the state of Washington in 1962. The tragic heroine, Selma, is a Czechoslovakian immigrant factory worker and single

mother who is going blind from a hereditary disease. Instead of openly talking about her fate, she keeps her disease a secret, so that her son, Gene, does not discover that he too will go blind.¹ Selma has immigrated to America so that Gene may undergo an expensive operation that, if successful, will spare him his sight. In order to earn enough money to support her family and save for Gene's operation, Selma works in a steel-cutting factory. Although she cannot see well enough to do her job without jeopardizing her safety and well-being, she takes on extra shifts and additional part-time work. To keep her secret Selma explains to her friends that she must earn extra money in order to send money back to her sick father, Oldrich Novey. Oldrich Novey, however, is not Selma's father, but a retired star, famous for his roles in European musicals.

Selma loves musicals; in fact, she lives by and through them. Musicals are incorporated into all aspects of her life. She goes to the theatre with her best friend Cathy to watch and/or listen to musicals. She participates in a local production of *The Sound of Music*, playing the leading role, Maria; and she also imagines her life as a musical. Throughout the film Selma composes musical numbers in her head, developing them from the sounds in her environment. For instance, as she works in the factory the sound of the pressing machines and the clatter of the workers around her become the soundscape for the song "Cvalda." Selma's happiness is dependent upon the sounds in her environment; these are the sounds that inspire her music.²

Selma and Gene live in a trailer on the property of the county sheriff, Bill, and his wife, Linda. After Bill confides to Selma his secret woe—that he does not have enough money to sustain his wife's lifestyle³—Selma confides to Bill the truth about her eyesight and her plan to save Gene. Then, in order to cover up for his inadequacies as a provider, sheriff Bill, Selma's trusted friend, steals the money she has saved for Gene's operation. When Selma discovers the money is missing she goes to Bill's to recover it. Once Bill realizes that Selma has not divulged his secret to his wife, he insists that in order for Selma to get her money back she will have to shoot him. In fact, Bill begs Selma repeatedly to shoot him.⁴ Even though he continues to plead with Selma, Bill also continues to tell his wife that Selma is stealing his money and trying to take advantage of him. A struggle ensues, and Selma blindly shoots Bill many times; he dies, and she is eventually arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. However, Selma is able to retrieve her money before

the police manage to arrest her, and, with the help of Jeff, her suitor, she takes it to the hospital to pay for Gene's operation. Although Cathy and Jeff attempt in various ways to save Selma, and Gene pleads for his mother's life, Selma is hanged, and the film ends with the drawing of the curtains following Selma's execution. Throughout all her turmoil Selma seems to be able to survive because of the musical numbers she composes in her head; she relates to the world somewhat differently than the other characters, and it is this difference that allows her to challenge stereotypical ideas of the feminine and to fracture von Trier's image of the heroine.⁵

SELMA'S RELATIONSHIPS

One of the more frustrating elements of *Dancer in the Dark* is Selma's complex relationships to the other characters, in particular her relations with the male characters. For the most part, these men are only truly supportive of Selma during the fantastical musical moments that she imagines. Selma constructs contextually "utopian" relationships with the characters who can understand her and whom she can count on, but these relationships are built on illusions. It is because of the "real" actions of these characters that Selma's fate is ultimately sealed. They are all to some extent partially responsible for Selma's death.

Early in the film the audience is introduced to the music director of the local amateur production of *The Sound of Music*, which Selma is starring in as Maria. The characterization of the music director uses stereotypical gay signifiers, which are intended to help legitimize his association with musical theatre. Diva-like, he condescends to the cast, in particular to Cathy and Selma, and ignores anyone else's ideas of how the musical should be performed. At the end of the film it is he who convinces Selma to stay at the theatre until the police arrive. He behaves paternalistically when Selma comes to tell him that she is unable to play Maria because of her employment and familial commitments.

Another character who adopts a disciplinary or caretaker role in relation to Selma is Norman, her boss at the factory. Not only does Norman chastise Selma for learning her lines while on the job, he also catches her daydreaming, and he gets angry with her for the loss of production that she could

potentially cost him, and ultimately does, on the night shift. During one of the musical numbers Selma breaks the large pressing machine by inadvertently placing a sheet of metal on top of another one and subsequently brings the entire factory to a temporary halt. When Norman hands Selma her dismissal notice he claims that it is thanks to his efforts that Selma does not have to pay for the broken equipment. Norman also suggests that he might be able to find her a different job, where her failing eyesight will not be such a problem.

Jeff, Selma's often-dismissed suitor, will not leave her alone. Although she tells him regularly that she is too busy to have a boyfriend, he waits for her every day outside of the factory, and often follows her, "to make sure she is all right." The audience is often made to feel sorry for this bumbling man, who seems only to have Selma's best interests at heart. However, his insistent behaviour can also be understood by the audience to be more acceptable because of Selma's blindness and her perceived inability to watch out for her own safety, an inability that she proves over and over again does not really exist.⁶ Although Jeff is portrayed as *thinking* he loves Selma (and he actually may), he does not attempt to understand the complexities of her situation. At one point in the film he even asks Selma why she went through with her pregnancy even though she knew she might pass on the hereditary disease to her child. Jeff's passive-aggressive attitude is disheartening, especially considering that Selma attempts "to correct" the situation he faults her for by paying for the operation with her life. Moreover, by using the money to pay the lawyer's fees in order to save the woman he loves, Jeff thwarts Selma's efforts to save Gene, and disrupts her sacrifice.

Gene's relationship to his mother does not fully develop on screen. The mother-son bond is implied but not shown. During the few moments that Gene and Selma do spend together on screen, the pair are often in turmoil, with Gene being punished for not doing his schoolwork and Selma demonstrating signs of being a "good mother."

Selma's most complicated relationship with a male character is with Bill, the sheriff. The power imbalance between these two is tremendous. Bill is not only the sheriff, but also her landlord and Gene's "protector." Selma is also Bill's confidante; they share their most private secrets, which puts Selma at an even greater disadvantage. Throughout the film Bill uses Selma's friendship as a means to his own ends. Although he knows how much pain

and suffering Selma has undergone to pay for Gene's operation, he still asks if he can "borrow" the money. When Selma refuses, Bill apologizes for asking and suggests that instead he should just kill himself. Selma automatically assumes the position of caregiver and counsellor in order to dissuade Bill from committing suicide. Finally, after Bill is accidentally shot while they struggle physically over Selma's money and Bill's gun, Selma is held completely responsible.

Selma is arrested and tried for Bill's murder. In the course of his prosecution, the district attorney exploits Selma's honest intentions and her loyalties: she remains bound to her promise to keep Bill's secrets even after his death. The district attorney also calls the "real" Oldrich Novey to be a witness for the prosecution, thus exposing Selma's lie about her father. However, in this scene we come to understand the place and importance of Oldrich Novey within Selma's musical world and the pleasure that Novey and his musicals have brought to Selma throughout her life.

As I stated earlier, Selma's relationships with these characters are transformed dramatically within her musical life. From the chorus of "In the Musicals," in which she sings "You're always there to catch me when I fall" with the chorus director, the district attorney, and Oldrich Novey, to the duet about the impact of her failing eyesight, "I've seen it all," which she sings with Jeff, Selma imagines male characters who are more understanding of her feelings and her situation than are those in her "real" life. These characters come to be "in tune" with Selma's "Manifesto" (tvropa.com). During the fantastical musical number for "Scatterheart," Bill, Gene, and Linda serenade Selma;⁷ Bill forgives Selma for shooting him, dances with her, and then hurries her out the door so that she can avoid the police, whom he had told Linda to call in an earlier dramatic dialogue. Within this musical number Linda stops accusing Selma of betraying her and Bill. Instead, she urges Selma to hurry before the police come and take back her money. Gene is in the yard riding his bicycle around, and all three of them sing the chorus, "You did what you had to do," in recognition of Selma's actions. At the conclusion of "Scatterheart," Selma ends up in the river, washing the blood from her hands.

Selma's relationships with the female characters (aside from Linda, who is affected by Selma's relationship with Bill) are entirely different from those discussed above. Selma's relationship with Cathy is one of love and

understanding. Cathy, a worker in the same factory as Selma, is supportive of Selma's love of music and musicals. The two women are both part of the local musical production, and when they go to see musicals on the big screen Cathy explains to Selma what she cannot see because of her failing eyesight. Cathy is Selma's best friend in both her "real" and "imagined" lives. This becomes apparent when we examine the first musical number, "Cvalda," a duet between Cathy and Selma. This duet emphasizes their relationship both inside and outside the music.

Once Selma is arrested and sentenced to death, it is Cathy who fights for a reduction in Selma's sentence. Although Cathy hires a lawyer with the money for Gene's operation, in the end she allows Selma to give up her life to save her son. During the execution, when Selma begins to panic and cry out, it is Cathy who runs past the guards and up the stairs to the platform to place Gene's glasses in Selma's hands in an effort to comfort her during the last few remaining moments of her life. Selma's relationship with Cathy is one that she does not have to alter in her musical imagination—Cathy is an integral part of Selma's musical realm, but it is the "real" attributes of her relationship with Cathy that are emphasized in the musical numbers.

The last relationship that develops in *Dancer in the Dark* is the one between Selma and the prison guard. During Selma's final days the guard becomes fond of her, and the two women begin to share stories and concerns. It is the prison guard who realizes that Selma needs noise in order to compose music in her imagination. The guard is also acutely aware of and sensitive to Selma's blindness. As Selma is walked to the gallows she falters, and the guard gives her a beat, a sound—just what Selma needs in order to move into her musical realm. Until the very end of her life the guard continues to comfort Selma, even once the noose is around her neck and Selma begins to sing. However, this next-to-last song is not in Selma's imagination—it is for everyone in the "real" world to hear.

LARS VON TRIER

Dancer in the Dark is the third chapter in Danish film director Lars von Trier's *Gold Heart Trilogy*. Although neither of the first two films, *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *The Idiots* (1998), are musicals, they both express the same

foreboding as *Dancer in the Dark*. Also, all of these films rely on and valorize very particular notions of the feminine. Von Trier borrowed the name of the trilogy, *Gold Heart*, from a children's story about a young girl who continually gives away everything she has to everyone around her.⁸ At the conclusion of the story she has nothing left, but remains happy and optimistic.⁹ During her life "she achieves a kind of sanctification and transcendence through martyrdom" (Smith 2000, 24), simultaneously perpetuating and disrupting conventional narrative. It is from this story that all three of von Trier's heroines emerge. All of the central female characters in his trilogy give of themselves continually and, ultimately, sacrifice themselves for their masculine dependents—a husband in *Breaking the Waves*, an adoptive community in *The Idiots*, a son in *Dancer in the Dark*.

In "Imitation of Life," Gavin Smith's article on *Dancer in the Dark*, he emphasizes what I would argue are the predominant and most problematic qualities of the trilogy, "emotional regression, fear of abandonment and deliberately simplified personal and moral dilemmas" (Smith 2000, 22). All three films, Smith continues, "feature a pure, childlike, selflessly giving heroine who comes into conflict with the social order: her uncompromising emotional absolutism and freedom from self-consciousness are sufficiently disconcerting to raise questions about her mental state" (Smith 2000, 22/24). Although Smith does not necessarily problematize the gendered and misogynist overtones of the films or the concerns he himself raises, he does indicate "a troubling correspondence between von Trier's quest for a purer form of cinema and the emotional endurance tests to which he puts his actresses and the characters they play" (Smith 2000, 24). From his description it would be difficult to argue that there are no misogynist undercurrents within "the films' idealized yet masochistic conception of femininity" (Smith 2000, 24). When questioned about his relationships with the actors and how he manages to get what he demands from them, von Trier revels in his reputation as a "powerful" director. In one interview von Trier was asked if he directed actors in different ways, depending on their gender. In his response von Trier ignores the specific reference to gender and replies,

Björk just gave an interview where she said, "He loves to cause people pain," and I think that's perfect. ... I think Björk's talk about how difficult it was to act is a necessary excuse for her performance. If you want to put it in terms

of schizophrenic people, it's not the split itself that's painful, it's making the leap between the two. (Engmann 2000, 82)

In other words, von Trier does not take responsibility for Björk's discomfort; rather he views her pain as stemming from an individualized process of the dialogic relationship between Björk and Selma. Indeed he places the responsibility for the difficulty of acting upon Björk. Von Trier's association of Björk and/or the character Selma with schizophrenia, especially as a coping mechanism for women, engenders particular meanings. The connection of mental illness with women has a long history and has often been used to delegitimize their personhood and suppress their subjectivity. Von Trier's theories regarding the category of "woman" come to light in several interviews, as do the common (mis)representations of women's emotional and mental (in)stability. In her interview with von Trier, Rebecca K. Engmann relates the psychological aspect of Selma's musicals to Judy Garland films, suggesting that the films seem silly or naïve unless Judy Garland's mental instability is understood. Von Trier explains, "Yes [understanding the psychological elements of women] is knowledge you have to add [to the film] yourself. It's a psychological experience you have to provide" (82). Engmann then goes on to ask, "What on earth attracts you to the *troubled side* of womanhood?" (Emphasis added.) He replies, "Oh, God, is there any other side? [Laughs] Well, we all have mothers, don't we?" (82). It is important to look at the ways the questions were constructed and how these constructions themselves perpetuate ideologies by predetermining understandings of gender norms.

When von Trier is questioned in interviews about the roles he constructs for his heroines, and his understanding of women in general, he presents a misogynist and heterosexist attitude by giving an essentialized view of gender roles without addressing the possible implications of doing so. When an interviewer pointed out to him that all of the women portrayed in the trilogy are innocent women who sacrifice themselves for men or children, he replied, "Well, what do you want them to sacrifice for? Other women, computers, whatever?"¹⁰ Here we see von Trier, unable to fathom a woman sacrificing herself for anything other than a man or a child, applying a heteronormative discourse. Equally problematic is von Trier's use of the woman as martyr as a device to drive the narrative forward without

necessarily questioning this hyper-feminized ideal. Or, if von Trier is aware of his adoption of this conventional idea of the feminine, why does he not take up a more complex understanding of the feminine? Does he adopt this idea purely as a means of shocking interviewers and audiences alike?¹¹ If so, how should we react to statements in which he reaffirms conventional patriarchal narrative? In numerous interviews von Trier addresses his ideas with words such as irony and melodrama. Yet he fails to call into question conventional ways of understanding and meaning with regard to social relationships. When talking about Selma's ultimate sacrifice, von Trier argues "that [these sacrifices take] place all over—all the time, but in our part of the world there is a tendency to almost make it an ironic thing. But I think that it's actually quite common, maybe not to sacrifice your life, that's very melodramatic, but to do sacrifices yes ... I think it's a human thing to do" (Foehns). However, von Trier regresses to the naïve and romantic notion that women enjoy this traditional feminine image when he states, "I think that women are so moved, because they find the image that we make of them flattering" (Foehns).

When asked if he considers these female characters his "ideal woman," von Trier backs away from the question, arguing that "[m]aybe the fact that they are women is not so important" (Foehns). In this statement von Trier shifts away from a firmly entrenched foundation of conventional narrative and proposes that "woman" and all that the term entails is not significant to the larger structure. It is interesting that although von Trier often tries to dismiss gender as an insignificant factor, all of his remarks presuppose gender and gender role ideology as central to his films. In fact, von Trier's use of gender norms is the foundation upon which his entire trilogy is based. Without the gendered implications, the "meaning(s)" of *Dancer in the Dark* would shift completely. In her work *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Judith Butler explains the significance of using gender norms and the potential effects of disrupting these norms. Butler claims, "The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: 'man' and 'woman'" (Butler 1990, 146). The disruption of gender would have far-reaching effects on *Dancer in the Dark*, which is based on a patriarchal narrative structure. To dismiss as insignifi-

cant the gender of the heroine who must sacrifice her life in the culminating moment of the film to satisfy narrative structure seems a bit ridiculous. von Trier's descriptions of the leading women are based on assumed heteronormative stereotypes deemed relevant for "heroines," as opposed to the positive qualities commonly attributed to (male) "heroes." These stereotypes are founded on years of appropriated and applied gendered norms in which women who are champions, or who are distinguished for their valour, receive less honour than men, and are often stripped of their heroism by means of anti-woman tactics and/or movements.¹² Teresa De Lauretis describes how the roles in a patriarchal and "traditional" narrative plot must be composed if the plot is to "make sense." De Lauretis argues,

The hero must be male, regardless of the gender of the text-image, because the obstacle, whatever its personification, is morphologically female. ... The hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter. (Quoted in McClary 1991, 14)

In other words, because Selma (the heroine) is a woman, if the narrative is to be satisfied and successful closure is to be produced, her fate must be death.

Although von Trier begins to call into question the need for a male hero, his reasoning is sustained through a logic of essentialism. He argues that the lead role in *Dancer in the Dark* could not be performed by a man, because "he [would try] to find a logical solution to things" (Smith 2000, 25). Von Trier further explains that "a woman ... would tend to find an emotional solution. ... But let's not talk in terms of men and women. I feel kind of female, myself, to some degree" (Smith 2000, 25). Von Trier perpetuates the alignment of women with the natural, the emotional, the body, and the irrational. From his statement(s) we can also infer that his alignment of men (but not himself wholly) is with the cultural, the logical, the mind, and the rational.

A person who has watched any one of the films from the trilogy would not find von Trier's responses puzzling. Within his films and in his discus-

sions von Trier highlights the binary of rational versus irrational, and links the heroines to the irrational through intense struggle. All of the heroines have methods for dealing with their struggles; however, their approaches can always be perceived in such a manner that the women appear mentally “unstable,” “peculiar,” or “irrational.”¹³ As we have seen, von Trier blames the characters for their own shortcomings, using semantics in an attempt to mask the actual effects of his underlying ideology; he states, “Bess in *Breaking the Waves* and Selma in *Dancer in the Dark* are supposed to be strong, even though it’s a fragility they themselves refuse to accept” (von Trier, quoted in Smith 2000, 25). Although von Trier appears to create the heroines for his films using a heteronormative ideal image of what the “feminine” should be, I argue that he produces such extreme circumstances that it is hard not to problematize the characters (especially in *Dancer in the Dark*) instead of accepting them wholly as they appear to be constructed. As stated above, Selma is a strong character, but because of the huge power imbalances within the (real and imagined) relationships she sustains with the other characters, the construct of what is real becomes confused and distorted for the audience. Although there is an intense, and what might appear to be overemphasized, oppression of women in the film, there are also cracks within the supposedly totalizing power structures, both institutional and personal, within which Selma lives.¹⁴

Dancer in the Dark contains numerous binaries created and/or perpetuated by the directing, the acting, the filming techniques, and the writing, as well as by the composing and performing of the music. The premise for the film is founded on the distinction between the real and the imaginary. Some of the markers are quite clear, whereas others are less explicit. For example, during the musical scenes the colouring of the film brightens and the filming style changes. The musical scenes were shot with one hundred fixed video cameras surrounding the action in order to allow continual sequencing and a fluid effect.¹⁵ During the dramatic scenes almost everything was shot with hand-held video cameras, which created choppy, more “realistic,” and less polished looking film, very much in documentary style. And much of the dramatic dialogue was improvised (Tate 2000, 80). Throughout the film Selma moves back and forth between the two worlds—real and fantasy—composing and performing musicals in her imagination in order to cope with all that is

happening in what the rest of the cast and subsequently the audience view as the “real” world. Here it becomes evident that the musical, and by extension the music itself, is associated with fantasy, whereas the dramatic dialogue is considered reality.

However, one of the problems with *Dancer in the Dark* is the simplistic separation of the real and fantasy. Although all of the techniques used to highlight the binary may appear to package it well, Selma and her musical address complicate the presentation. The idea that because the heroine cannot manage her own reality she must create an alternative world in order to escape from or cope with her life is questionable. It is too easy simply to dismiss Selma’s fantasy as pure escapism. Musically, Selma represents her view of the world as it could be, perhaps even as it should be. Through this process she does more than cope with her life: this is the space where Selma processes, deconstructs, and subverts the binaries.

BJÖRK

As previously stated, Lars von Trier constructs a particular type of heroine for his films—a child-like woman. Casting the part of Selma for *Dancer in the Dark* was challenging, not only because of this “feminine” ideal, but because von Trier’s vision for the film involved having a lead actress who could also compose “her” (Selma’s) own music. Von Trier first saw Björk in the music video “It’s Oh So Quiet,”¹⁶ and he became obsessed with having her play Selma.¹⁷ Although Björk agreed to compose the music for the film, she was hesitant to take on the acting role. After a year of persuasion, however, Björk finally agreed to play the part. In an interview she claims that the reason she kept resisting von Trier’s invitation was her discomfort with acting: “I’m definitely more at home in the studio doing this, *and she hits a water bottle with a pencil*. ... Making music is a very introverted thing, very personal and private” (Toop). Björk suggests that acting felt to her like an affair, and that she “felt dirty.” She explains that “music has always been the place that sorts me out. Everything else can go horribly wrong, but there’s always music for me” (Gittins 2002, 113).

Once Björk agreed to act and compose for the film, she realized that her ability to play the role would be determined by her ability to identify with

Selma. Björk admitted that as she read the script she felt a connection to Selma: “I straight ahead was defending this girl. I know instinctively ... and I really instinctively knew what this girl’s head would sound like from inside” (Toop).¹⁸ As she became more engrossed in the project she became conscious of an intense conflict between Björk as Selma and Björk as Selma the composer.

Apart from her internal conflicts, there was also discord on the set between Björk and von Trier. Often commented on in the media, but with little specific detail, this friction has been touted as either Björk’s inability to give up power over the process or von Trier’s unquestionable emotional demands on Björk both as Selma and as the composer. In an interview Björk explains, “[The tension was fine] once Lars convinced me, the only way I could do the film was to sacrifice all my idiosyncrasies, and it was very painful” (Tate 2000, 79). However, Björk did hold fast to her rights as composer of the music, even though this caused further tensions.

In most publicity interviews Björk did for this film she held fast to the problematics of identity, whether she spoke about her discomfort with having to give up her own identity to become someone else, or her similarities to and connections with Selma. When Björk asked her co-actor, Catherine Deneuve, about Deneuve’s acting philosophy, she was disappointed with Deneuve’s positive attitude toward becoming someone completely different. Björk explains that becoming someone else does not interest her. She would rather focus on the evolution of her own becoming. Throughout the process of filming as Selma, Björk had difficulty separating her own personhood from Selma’s. Rather than maintaining a distinction, Björk appears to have absorbed Selma into her own character. When asked if she had to sacrifice all her spontaneity to become Selma, Björk talks about her struggle and the blurring of Björk and Selma: the dialogue “was all improvised. ... We’d just do it, and I’d react instinctively to all the situations. Quite often I’d do something he didn’t expect at all. The good thing was I’d been Selma for so long that it was usually right, and it was more Selma than Björk” (Tate 2000, 80).

From what von Trier suggests about the “schizophrenic” nature of Selma’s character, and what Björk describes as her struggle to establish Selma’s identity apart from her own, everyone seems to have had numerous contradictory expectations of Björk’s multiple roles. Remarking on Björk’s

struggle, and her success at bringing Selma to life, as well as the tensions on the set, von Trier suggests,

The experience with Björk was difficult because it was unpleasant, but I will say that once we were filming, we had an incredible connection. She was so willing to *absorb, to become the character*. With barely a suggestion we could understand each other. I've never had that experience with actors. When we were filming—that's the *real* Björk. (Engmann 2000, 82; emphasis added)

Here von Trier implies that there is a “real” Björk as opposed to something else. He seems to claim that Björk herself is a performance, and that the “real” Björk is exposed when she is filming and acting the part of Selma—who was initially constructed by von Trier himself. Von Trier also implies that in performing the content/form of Selma, Björk is in fact performing the “real” Björk. Yet, in making this statement he does not make a distinction between Björk and the fictional character Selma. Here it is important to take up von Trier's blurring of Björk's performances of herself and Selma as well as to further explore the performativity or consequence of such performances.

Butler describes the effects of performativity and the possible outcomes of these effects if they are subtly and politically enforced: “[G]ender is an ‘act,’ as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (Butler 1990, 147). In light of this I want to suggest that perhaps Björk's performance of Selma is indeed “phantasmatic,” and that von Trier's conception of the “real” Björk is a mythologized feminine construct that he tries to immortalize through the dominant patriarchal narrative structure. Furthermore, the ultimate consequences of seeing Selma as the “ideal” feminine are distorted, partially because of the tension between von Trier and Björk and between Björk and Selma. Narratologist Susan Lanser relates the use of narrative (and I would argue patriarchal narrative in this case) to one's desire: “What we choose to support, to write about, to imagine—even in narratology— seems to me as much a function of our own desire as of any incontrovertible evidence that a particular aspect of narrative is (im)proper or (ir)relevant” (Lanser 1996, 259). In other words, Lanser argues that the understanding and conse-

quences of one's desires, whether lived or imagined, establish the basis for the production, reproduction, and consumption of contemporary narrative. Within Lanser's approach to narratology, an approach that allows for the integration of desire, there is space for diversity and difference in the interpretation of those who participate (or not) in the narrative, based on their own lived experience and identity. Unlike von Trier's vision of the "real" Björk, which ties Björk down to an essential core identity, there is, as Lanser suggests, room for performative transgressions. Because performance is wrapped up in identity, and identity is based on lived experience and repetition, the disciplining of bodies through a normative gaze can be transcended. The normative gaze, which functions to subtly, and at times violently, discipline the body, cannot be all-encompassing: the body can subsequently escape precisely because of the performative nature of sex, gender, and desire.

Moreover, in *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Post-feminism* Sophia Phoca examines Butler's explanation of how repeated gender norms "may also draw attention to [the performance] and hence parody that same conservative culture" (Phoca 1999, 60). Referring to Fredric Jameson's notion of postmodern parody,¹⁹ "[Butler] suggest[s] that [parody] can be used to subvert, destabilize, or perpetuate received meaning and values" (Phoca 1999, 60). Even an earnest representation of a performance can be a parody of itself. An earnest performance, far from seeming *more* real, can actually have the opposite effect—the earnest can transform into a parody of itself—by exposing the absolutely unnatural aspects of seemingly natural identity.²⁰ Transgression is possible because identity is staged and repetitious.

Yet, one might suggest that transgression depends on the performer's and/or the spectator's own level of consciousness. On a purely theoretical level we can argue that identities are based on performance. However, how transgressive is a performance when those involved are unaware of the constructedness of identity signifiers? Perhaps what is key here is the separation of conscious transgression from inadvertent consequences.²¹ Björk's internalized conflict between herself and Selma, and the discord she has with von Trier, stem from what I argue are the (mis)interpretations of Björk's performances: her performances as Selma the character, Selma the composer, and Björk the composer. All of these identities are tangled up in von Trier's

construction of the heteronormative ideal woman, which Björk incessantly tears apart by pushing the ideal to a parodic extreme.

SELMA

I play little games when it's hard. Like when I'm in the factory—the machines make these rhythms and I start dreaming and it all becomes music. ... [It's] annoying when they play the last song. ... Because then it goes really big and the camera goes out of the roof and you just know it's going to end. I hate that. I really hate that. I used to cheat on that when I was a little girl back in Czechoslovakia. I would leave just after the next to last song and the film would go on forever. Lovely isn't it?

(Selma in *Dancer in the Dark*)

Selma loves musicals. In order to “alter” or cope with the tragedies of her life, and its mundaneness, she composes an alternate utopian musical life in her imagination. Through the musical numbers Selma adjusts her reality; yet the “fantasy does not soften the tragedy of the character; they co-exist” (Tate 2000, 79). Because her manipulation of the line between reality and make-believe is so complex, as I have argued above, it would be much too simple to say that this fantasy space is pure escapism for Selma. Within Selma’s “Manifesto,” the division between real and make-believe are detailed.

What [Selma] sees in the cinema is flawless ... painless ... and this is where real life is the opposite ... here it is the flaws and the pain that make it shine. The indications of humanity ... of nature ... of life! So the events of the plot will partly be the best, most controlled beauty of music, scored according to the unequivocal systems—juxtaposed with all the flaws and clumsy mistakes of reality. (Tvropa.com)

Yet the outcome of this division is problematic, in that it does not leave room for the various spaces that exist “in between,” limiting one’s understanding and experience. Certainly, as I have already argued, the situation

is more complex, for these ideas deal not just with reality and make-believe, but also with definitions of competence, control, and technique.

In a modernist setting Selma risks her life working in a factory. She is a poor woman with failing eyesight who eventually goes blind. Selma's blindness takes the film into a whole different level. When discussing this aspect of Selma's character, Björk describes her understanding of blindness not as something disabling, but as something to rejoice in. "For me it's more about how we all work with different senses. I am 70% audio and 30% eyes. ... the challenge is to speak out. Most of the world is driven by the eye. ... It's about time other senses were being celebrated."²² The celebration that Björk describes really develops through Selma's character and the composition of her music from the noises surrounding her. These very sounds are the core of her musicals, which, on one level, help to honour her sense of hearing.

Because she incorporates the sounds from her environment into her musical compositions, Selma has most of the ingredients for her music at hand. For example, in "I've Seen it All," the duet she imagines singing with Jeff as she is walking home along the train tracks, the music evolves from the sounds of a train. When asked if the connection between the environment and the music was the original idea behind the soundtrack, von Trier replied,

That was the original idea. And I think that was what Björk liked, because when she saw the script she said that she had a similar experience, when she was younger working in a factory and listening to the noise that became music, so it was the original idea—not a very original idea, but an idea!²³

When talking about her obsession with noise music, Björk explains, "I think the noises I use [to compose] are just about where I am. It's the sound of the world we live in today" (Tate 2000, 80). Within the Selma "Manifesto" the music is described as "the clash between all snatches of melody, tunes, sounds, instruments, text and dance that she has ever heard in the *cinema* and *true life*, with all the same elements that [Selma]—with her gift—is able to find there."²⁴ The musical scenes are described as "Selma's conversation[s] with herself ... sometimes put into the mouth of different people representing her doubt, fear, joy, etc."²⁵ From these statements we begin to understand how Selma incorporates her surroundings, including the people who are around her, into her

musical compositions. For example, when she imagines “Cvalda,” everyone who is working in the factory, including Cathy, takes part in the musical scene. When the music is over the characters are back as they were, and no one is the wiser to Selma’s world.

Although the use of diagetic and non-diagetic sounds occur in moments during the film that are sometimes quite distinct and at other times difficult to decipher, all of the sounds continually reinforce and blur simultaneously the boundaries between reality and fantasy:

The artificial side should still sound artificial ... the musical clichés, and even more so: the sounds from real life ... should never be improved upon ... the closer to reality the better. ... The sounds of real life do not only come from the machines and the daily routines ... they also come from ... Selma who will make use of any part of the location as an instrument. ... She can turn mud into gold ... she can hear the music in the noise ... and when she shows us ... we hear it too.²⁶

Through Selma’s “ears” the audience has the ability to move fluently in and out of what is often thought of as two distinct worlds. For example, during the rehearsal, when the police come to arrest her, and during her trial, Selma composes the song “In the Musicals” in her imagination. The audience watches as Selma dances with the characters and sings about how someone will be there to catch her when she falls. Ironically, the musical director and Oldrich Novey catch Selma as she falls back. However, the audience knows that in “reality” these two men actually help to seal Selma’s horrific fate. Still, the audience becomes engaged with Selma’s realized musical world, which temporarily suspends the ultimate outcome.

REALITY AND FANTASY FUSED

Despite the dichotomous and oppressive themes that appear throughout *Dancer in the Dark*, there are two specific moments in the film when Björk moves beyond the problematic of her character, transcending the “conventional” gender norms and, through her struggle, disrupting the boundaries between fantasy and reality. It is within these two instances

that Selma challenges the other characters and, more importantly, the audience, to bear witness²⁷ to the creation of a new community or layer of existence. At these moments, the narrative becomes more than just a simple and “moralistic” tale. Indeed, it is here that the narrative structure is altered, and the audience (including the characters who are present as well as the spectators) is compelled to comprehend or relate to Selma and her world(s) with a more complex insight into what her relationship to musicals and the world means.

Björk as Selma accomplishes this feat in these two moments by changing the style of her address. The musicals that were once transcendental, and constructed only for her, have been displaced; they are no longer just in her imagination. This transformation begins during the scene in which Selma is in the prison cell; there is little noise, and she listens desperately for any sound that she can use to compose a song. The only noises she hears are the ones she creates; with her ear pressed up against a grate in a futile attempt to hear the people singing in the chapel, Selma begins to sing out loud. She sings “My Favorite Things” from the musical *The Sound of Music*, which becomes her own testimonial. Yet, Selma changes the song from its original version; she alters the lyrical emphasis, the rhythms, even the melody, in order to express her own experience:

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens ...
 Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens
 Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens
 Brown paper packages tied up with string.
 These are a few of my favorite things.

Cream colored ponies and crisp apple strudel
 Door bells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles
 Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings
 These are a few of my favorite things

When the bee stings, when the dog bites
 When I'm feeling sad,
 I simply remember my favorite things
 And then I don't feel so sad.²⁸

All of the sounds during this scene are diegetic; the piece is sung a cappella. Here Selma has made the transition from one form of address to another, as though in preparation for the final moment, when she will address the audience and the characters through music, and she will ask the audience to bear witness to her pain, and to her ultimate sacrifice.

In the next to last scene, Selma walks the 107 steps to the execution chamber. On this journey she moves into the musical world—her world, the one that excludes the rest of the cast. She dances those last steps with other inmates on death row; she lies with them, comforts them, and allows herself to be comforted. Once she reaches the platform and the musical number is finished, she becomes distraught, unable to stand on her own. She is strapped to the board and a black hood is placed over her head. She screams in anguish and torment, shouting that she cannot breathe. The prison guard who has befriended Selma tries to comfort her, and argues with the officials that it should not matter if she does not wear the hood, because she is blind. Finally the guard removes the hood. As she is held there waiting to be executed, Selma cries out for Gene, and Cathy rushes up the stairs, puts Gene's glasses in Selma's hand, and repeats over and over, "You were right Selma, you listened to your heart." At this point Selma begins to sing—for Gene, for Cathy, for herself. At first, she is barely audible in the silence, and then gradually her voice crescendos until she is singing at the top of her lungs. She cannot be denied a voice. Not here. Not now. It is in this final moment that reality and fantasy are fused, the masks are off, and the meaning(s) of Selma's sacrifice begin(s) to form.

CONCLUSION

Just as bodily surfaces are enacted as the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural self. (Butler 1990, 146)

The final moments of *Dancer in the Dark* can be viewed as either a "traditional" suppression of a woman's "newly" discovered empowerment—a moment of silencing and repositioning, or as a "definitive" transgressive act—a moment of transcendence and strength. Although it would be easiest

to accept the first, I argue for the latter. My rationale is two-fold: first, Björk's character Selma fuses her worlds (reality and fantasy) by transferring the music from her "altered state" (her imagination) into the "real," thus shifting her style of address. What this essentially means is that we, the audience, must change our style of listening, and readjust our gaze, which ultimately means that the binary is distorted, and possibly even destroyed (if only briefly).

The second reason I would define the concluding moments as transgressive evolves from the drawing of the curtains once Selma has been executed—the end of this gendered performance. As I have previously discussed, gender is indeed a performance; in fact everything can be considered performance on some level, and how one acts, consciously or unconsciously, can be used as a tool of transformation. Von Trier's struggle to construct such a "real" (conventional) narrative is disrupted, because the performance often becomes a parody, primarily because of its violent exaggerations. However, the parody of Selma's performance is based purely on excess (often considered to be her unconscious acts)—her musical imagined reality. Yet, in the final moments Selma's real and fantastical worlds collide, exploding the preconceived notions of such a tragic yet triumphant moment. Such a performance disrupts the borders of the real and the imaginary and consequently fractures the containment of the mythical, self-sacrificing feminine figure.

NOTES

¹Throughout the film Selma mentions the importance of keeping Gene's condition a secret, suggesting that if Gene becomes aware of the disease, his eyesight will immediately start to fail. Selma's idea that Gene may in fact confuse imaginary symptoms with real symptoms is more suggestive of the dissolution of the boundaries between reality and fantasy in Selma's own mind.

²Further on in the paper I argue that there are in fact two instances that convince the audience that Selma's happiness is dependent upon her ability to use the sounds of her environment to compose songs in her head. In these two particular moments she strains to hear sounds but is faced with silence. Selma must then create her own sounds in order to escape the "reality" of the silence, and ultimately her death.

³It is clear that Bill's inadequacy as a "provider" for his wife's expensive lifestyle

contributes to his “instability.” And although his methods of dealing with his inadequacies are not presented as the same as Selma’s, his incompetence in dealing with the situation seems more of a failure when it is compared to Selma’s ability to save and provide for her family. The success of the male head of the household in providing for his family is an essential part of patriarchal narrative—if a man fails in this capacity or if a woman takes over this role, the “natural order” is threatened.

⁴When Selma comes upon him Bill has his gun out and seems to be contemplating taking his own life because of his failures and guilt. Even at this moment unable to complete the task, he begs Selma to do it for him.

⁵This is only a brief synopsis of the main events in the film. It does not include a description of the musical numbers, or how they are constructed and contribute to the plot of the film.

⁶This notion that a woman needs a man to look out for her is also an essential component of patriarchal narrative structure. The common assumption is that a woman needs a man to care for her, protect her, and provide for her. However, Selma does quite a good job of providing for her family, as is exemplified by the lengths she is willing to go to in order to make certain that Gene is cared for and has his operation.

⁷Many of the songs on the film soundtrack are completely different from the CD recording *Selmasongs*, which was released prior to the film.

⁸Henrik Foehns, <http://www.tvropa.com/Tvropa1.2/...lars_interview.asp?CatName=&PageID=1410&From=141>, 2/6/01.

⁹This type of narrative is problematic in that it perpetuates the notion that women must sacrifice themselves, and also that they must be content with this sacrificial role, for the sake of the “greater good.”

¹⁰Henrik Foehns, Tvropa.com, <http://www.tvropa.com/Tvropa1.2/.../lars_interview.asp?CatName=&PageID=1410&From=141>, 2/6/01.

¹¹One of the few things that distinguish his films from more standard examples of pop culture that relies on “traditional” feminine norms is his bleak filming style.

¹²An example of such a woman is Joan of Arc, who was declared a heretic and burned at the stake. Some dictionaries base the distinction between hero and heroine on much more than just gender. A hero is described as “a person *distinguished* by courage, noble deeds, outstanding achievements ... a man of superhuman strength, courage, or qualities favoured by the gods; a demi-god,” whereas a heroine is marked as “a woman *noted* or admired for nobility, courage, outstanding achievement” (*Canadian Oxford Dictionary*; emphasis added). Even semantically the hero is the more powerful and prestigious of the two. Also relevant to this discussion is the ideology of the “diva,” and the stereotypes of her conceited and demanding nature. And most definitely these imbalances apply to popular music, in which women, no

matter which genre they practise (rock, pop, electronica), are not considered as talented (heroic) as men (for further discussion see Frith and McRobbie [1978] 2000). Nevertheless, there has been feminist music scholarship that engages with disruptive divas, women musicians engaged in subverting conventional understandings and social norms (for further discussion see Burns and Lefrance 2002.). In fact, Björk is often referred to as an alternative diva because of her “eccentric” music and behaviour. (For further discussion see Marsh 1999.)

¹³Historically, the association of women with neurosis has not been particularly uncommon. This is part of the anti-woman discourse, which erupts repetitively. We only have to look to the history of “hysteria,” which was known as a woman’s disease, to understand that the perpetuation of the notion of women as irrational and mentally unstable feeds into and maintains the patriarchal power relations of the dominant ideology. (See Maines 1999 and Showalter 1997.)

¹⁴Although women can find agency within these power structures, these strategies are always used to contain them. As we will see, however, Selma locates the “cracks” by creating an altered reality and fusing real and fantasy in her final address.

¹⁵Foehns 2001.

¹⁶“It’s Oh So Quiet” was a single from Björk’s 1995 album, *Post*. The music video was directed by Spike Jonze.

¹⁷See Foehns 2001.

¹⁸Björk can also understand Selma’s relationship with her son and her desire to protect him from harm. In the past Björk has been known to physically confront reporters who were getting too close to her son, Sindri.

¹⁹In Jameson’s notion of parody “he differentiates between a ‘postmodern parody of resistance’ and a ‘postmodern parody of reaction’. He suggests that the repetition of the former serve the interests of a conservative culture by emphasizing its foundational narratives, while in the latter, repetition can resist dominant cultural signification by emphasizing and therefore repeating, its fictions” (Phoca 1999, 60).

²⁰A good example of Jameson’s notion of parody is the construction of Björk’s identity in the media as ultimate feminine figures such as elf, fairy, pixie, goddess, etc. Björk plays up these seemingly natural feminine norms; however, she undermines them by pushing them to the extreme, thus creating parody. By playing the part to the extreme Björk exposes the artificial nature of gender.

²¹This type of parody occurs throughout the narrative of *Dancer in the Dark*. Von Trier attempts to make the “traditional” idea of the feminine so real that it seems artificial.

²²New York Film Festival, 2000.

²³Henrik Foehns, “Lars von Trier on *Dancer in the Dark*.”

²⁴Tvropa.com. Emphasis added.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷For further reference on trauma and (bearing) witness please refer to Cathy Caruth (1996) and to Shoshana Felman (1995), who focuses on the idea of testimony.

²⁸Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II, "My Favorite Things."

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The Sights of Early Science

A Visual Artist's Response to the Uppsala Natural History Collections

SUSAN GOLD-SMITH

ABSTRACT: As a visual artist I am interested in the parallel strategies of understanding used by art and science. Motivated by developments in my studio work, I travelled to Uppsala to explore the site of eighteenth-century scientific thinking and of the origin of contemporary western scientific classification systems.

The activities of scientific gathering, observing, and comparing will be discussed, as will the legacy of the Swedish botanist, Carl von Linné, his collections and gardens, and the domestic site of early science. The study of natural science before and after Linné will be compared, and the nature of the respective methodologies will be explored through examples of my own mixed media art practice.

RÉSUMÉ: En tant qu'artiste visuelle, je m'intéresse aux parallèles entre les stratégies de compréhension dans les arts and dans les sciences. Motivée par l'évolution de mon travail en atelier, je suis allée à Uppsala pour explorer le lieu de la pensée scientifique au dix-huitième siècle et le berceau des systèmes de classification scientifique occidentaux contemporains. L'article discutera la collecte, l'observation et la comparaison scientifique, ainsi que les contributions du botaniste suédois, Carl von Linné, ses collections et ses jardins et les débuts de la recherche scientifique en Suède. L'article comparera l'étude des sciences naturelles avant et après Linné. La nature des méthodologies respectives sera explorée à partir d'exemples de ma propre pratique des techniques mixtes.

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The work that led me to Uppsala in 1998 began in 1990 on the shores of Lake Baikal in Siberia. I participated in an exchange visit of professionals to the area. I had the opportunity to visit the well-known Limnological Institute on the shore of Lake Baikal and a small biological station in a remote location, also on the lake.

The lake is a natural phenomenon of mythic proportions. It holds one-fifth of the world's fresh water; it is extremely deep, nearly a mile in places; it provides an environment for more than a thousand indigenous species, including a freshwater seal and a fish called the *golomyanka*. This fish is transparent, composed mostly of fat. It swims singly at all levels of the lake and cannot be fished, so it is gathered on the shore for uses in Tibetan medicine. In its displays, the local museum has attempted to assemble a comprehensive description of the lake. It has done so by means of diagrams, models, and comparison charts, but most impressive were the many jars of collected and preserved specimens, including many *golomyanka*.

During my visit my hosts told me creation myths and other stories associated with the lake. The tremendous emotional attachment expressed for the lake deeply impressed me, as did the notable investment of devoted scientific study—all very different ways of describing this truly remarkable lake and attempting to comprehend the incomprehensible.

Influences from these experiences may be seen in my project entitled “Specimens” (Plate I), hundreds of plastic vials containing various bits of flux, text, and image from my research and studio activity—an image of my struggle to reveal the interconnectedness of things.

I recognized the routine of collecting, sorting, and aligning as a function of my studio art practice. I had organized my finds in an archaeological or museological manner, creating categories and comparisons, naming and identifying similitudes—a practice that, not coincidentally, was the basis of magic and pre-Enlightenment science.

In the past my artistic activity has been supported by forming analogies with practices in other disciplines. At this time I was thinking about the practices of science: collecting and classifying—although I was collecting the uncollectible and pursuing unspecified hypotheses. I was fascinated with science and its creation of theoretical constructs that have the power of truth in our culture, a power that once was the domain of myth, religion, and art.

I travelled to Uppsala to witness the legacy of the great Swedish botanist, Carl von Linné, whose genius formed the basis of our modern systematic classification systems. In Uppsala I hoped to find a physical representation of Linné's early work with classification. Carl von Linné, born in Sweden in 1707, was the developer of our binomial system of classification. He was called the second Adam. He classified

plants, minerals, animals, and some diseases on the basis of likeness and difference. Linné wrote in his historic text, *Systemae Naturae*, "Classification and name-giving will be the foundation of our science."¹

The discourse of science has become linear and hierarchical—and in doing so has separated itself from artistic practice. If I were to witness a transition point in the early history of science, the point where knowledge became quantifiable, perhaps I would be allowed a transparent view of that history. The philosopher Michel Foucault describes early natural history before Linné:

History was the inextricable and completely unitary fabric of all that was visible of things and of the signs that had been discovered or lodged in them: to write a history of a plant or animal was as much a matter of describing its elements or organs as of describing resemblances that could be found in it, the virtues that it was thought to possess, the legends and stories with which it had been involved, its place in heraldry, the medications that were concocted from its substance, the foods it provided, what the ancients recorded of it, and what travelers might have said of it. The history of a living being was that being itself, within the whole semantic network that connected it to the world. The division so evident to us, between what we see, what others have observed and handed down, and what others imagine or naively believe, the great tripartition, apparently so simple and so immediate, into *Observation, Document and Fable*, did not exist.²

This case becomes clear when Foucault quotes Borges, who describes a

"certain Chinese encyclopedia" in which it is written that "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs. (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies."³

When Linné partitioned knowledge, we find that he included a final category, *Literaria*,⁴ a vulnerable addendum that would hold the sediment of unquantifiable language.

Hammerby House is one of Linné's preserved houses outside Uppsala. Gardens surround it. There is a fireproof building on the grounds in which Linné stored his collection and taught his classes. His herbarium cases can be seen, numbered I through XXIV, according to his sexual system for organizing plants. Several of Linné's

own samples are on display, although the main body of his collection is not in Uppsala, but in London, with the Royal Society. I was interested to see botanical samples that took the form of a collage—dried, pressed plants, cut out and glued on an engraving of a classical urn, initialled “C.L.” (Collage as a contemporary art practice began in the early twentieth century with Picasso and Braque. Scissors and glue destabilize context, time, and meaning.)

Linné travelled, observed and gathered, and drew from observation in his notebooks. The activities of the botanist—observation, handling, representation—are remarkably similar to studio practice of the artist. Linné created wallpaper in the second-floor rooms in Hammerby House, using the most excellent botanical prints of his day. The story goes that if he found them to be inaccurate, he would correct them right on the wall.

A postcard in the Hammerby House gift shop portrays an eighteenth-century botanist studying plant samples in a sitting room. It recreates the image of an early scientist working in a domestic setting. It was the practice that solitary reflection and private experimentation periodically gave way to public spectacle. So it is appropriate that we see a mingling of domestic reconstruction and scientific museum in the preserved houses in Uppsala. This parallels the artist's practice of solitary studio work resulting in public exhibition.

Some plants still growing in *Linnéträdgården*, the central city garden in Uppsala, had been planted by Linné himself. The local botanists express a sense of reverence and the feeling of a living connection with history. The atmosphere in the garden is that of a separate, contemplative space. The plants are arranged according to Linné's sexual system.

Foucault writes about this kind of space,

The documents of this new history are not other words, texts or records, but unencumbered spaces in which things are juxtaposed: gardens, herbariums and other collections; the locus of this history is a non-temporal rectangle in which, stripped of all commentary, of all enveloping language, creatures present themselves, one beside another, their surfaces visible, grouped according to their common features, and thus already virtually analyzed, and bearers of nothing but their own individual names.⁵

We experience these spaces in Linné's natural history collections—collected birds displayed in shallow boxes like a drawn table, preserved specimens of frogs and snakes bottled up with their own identifying names, rows of labelled gardens and gardens of labels—but the concept is seen most clearly in the herbarium collections.

The University of Uppsala's botanical museum is called the *Fytoteket*, a word suggesting a *living* museum. I was able to work with the historical collection of Thunberg, Linné's most successful student. The cabinets house 26,000 specimens arranged according to Linné's revolutionary sexual system of organizing plants.

The herbarium collection is close to perfect in terms of Linné's idea of natural history, which was nothing less than the "nomination of the visible."⁶ Linné's task was to reduce the distance between things and language. In his philosophical treatise on botany, Linné discusses the limiting and filtering of visible things in order to transcribe them into language. His idea was to create botanical calligrams: "Displayed in themselves, emptied of all resemblances, cleansed even of their colours, visual representation will now at last provide natural history with what constitutes a proper object."⁷

In the herbarium collection, the natural object as a flattened, dried plant sample comes closest to becoming a calligram—but in the same way as the unruly stems stick out from the stacks of files, the object cannot quite become text.

Jon Eric was one of the contemporary herbarium technicians: I worked side by side with technicians and botanists from several countries. I was drawing and photographing, but we were all silently searching through samples, comparing, moving piles of folders, handling the samples methodically.

At the same time, the ongoing activity of placing individual specimens onto the computer made an impression on me. I was witnessing the next historic transformation of the collection. I wanted to understand the nature of this conversion, how it would further affect the information and distance its meaning (Plate II).

In the studio I began manipulating images on the computer. I created hundreds of images and placed them in plastic docket files. They became part of a project called "The Texture of Knowledge." The resulting images create a similitude of all knowledge—translated into digitalized form—but at the same time the gap is widened between names and things. When I exhibited the project in Mönchengladbach, Germany, in 1997, juxtaposing the various forms that knowledge takes in our culture, it was called "Der Stoff Des Wissens" (Plate III).

Most recently my work has moved to the prepared animal specimen, an aspect of the collections that I found most compelling. Through the gaze of the animal simulated through the photographic process, I have been able to explore the agency of the natural object in relation to the photographer, and perhaps follow an impulse to reconnect names with things in the natural world.

"Messengers and Memories" is a series of photographs taken in the American Museum of Natural History and exhibited at the Natural History Museum in London, England, in an exhibit entitled "Looking at Nature, Looking Back" (Plate IV). I feel that the life-size images implicate the museum spectator and also the photographer,

and expose an uneasy relationship with nature. The work deals with the power of viewing and the control of the gaze, but the photographed animals seem to take on their own agency. I am scrutinizing fine art's culture of museum display as well as that of science.

In his essay "Why Look at Animals?" the writer and cultural theorist John Berger writes that at one time animals were integral to our lives. Animals constituted the first circle of man's surroundings. They were our connection to nature ... messengers of nature. "The nineteenth century, in western Europe and North America, saw the beginning of a process, today being completed by twentieth-century corporate capitalism, by which every tradition which has previously mediated between man and nature was broken."⁸

Foucault describes that rupture as well. He places it much deeper in our history, in the lost similitude between language and nature, the difference between the first names given by Adam—now lost—and those offered by Linné's project. All languages known to us are now spoken against this lost similitude: "a silent gap."⁹

Also included in the Natural History Museum exhibit are three images from a narrative series titled "Animal Stories": the *muntiacus* specimen wanders around the laboratory in the preparatory space behind the public museum (Plate V). Berger says, "Until the nineteenth century, however, anthropomorphism was integral to the relationship between man and animal and was an expression of their proximity. Anthropomorphism was the residue of the continuous use of animal metaphor. In the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared. Today we live without them. And in this new solitude, anthropomorphism makes us doubly uneasy."¹⁰

In my 1999 installation entitled "Curtain Calls" (Plate VI), a series of 5' x 8' oil stick drawings on paper is combined with digitalized photographs infused in fabric, hung like curtains. By drawing the animal I was able to confront the animal object stroke by stroke, and that led to a different understanding than was available to me from my position as photographer.

The photographic images that form the curtains are from the Rothschild collection outside of London, in Tring, Hertfordshire. The sources of the drawn animals were stuffed natural history specimens, although they may seem ambiguously alive. They are from several collections: the horse from the Natural History Museum in London, the bear from the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the rabbit from a university collection in Turku Abö, Finland. For me they hang in the borderland between life and representation, loss and recollection.

Plate I. Detail, *The Specimens*, 1993; 136 plastic vials, 10.0 x 4.6 cm; contents: photocopied acetate, 8 stainless steel shelves, 121.9 x 7.6 cm; collection of the Art Gallery of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario.

Plate II. *Abracadabra*, 1996; 9 x 14 cm, laser print.

Plate III. *The Texture of Knowledge*, 1996, Installation view, black and white photographs; animal specimens from Uppsala Universitet collection; herbarium files from the Thunberg collection, Uppsala Universitet.

Plate IV. *Looking at Nature Looking Back*, 2000, Installation view, Natural History Museum, London, England; black and white photographic prints.

Plate V. *Looking at Nature Looking Back*, 2000, Installation view, Natural History Museum, London, England; black and white photographic prints.

Plate VI. *Curtain Calls*, 1999, Installation view, West Parry Sound District Museum, Parry Sound, Ontario; drawings on paper, dye infused fabric.

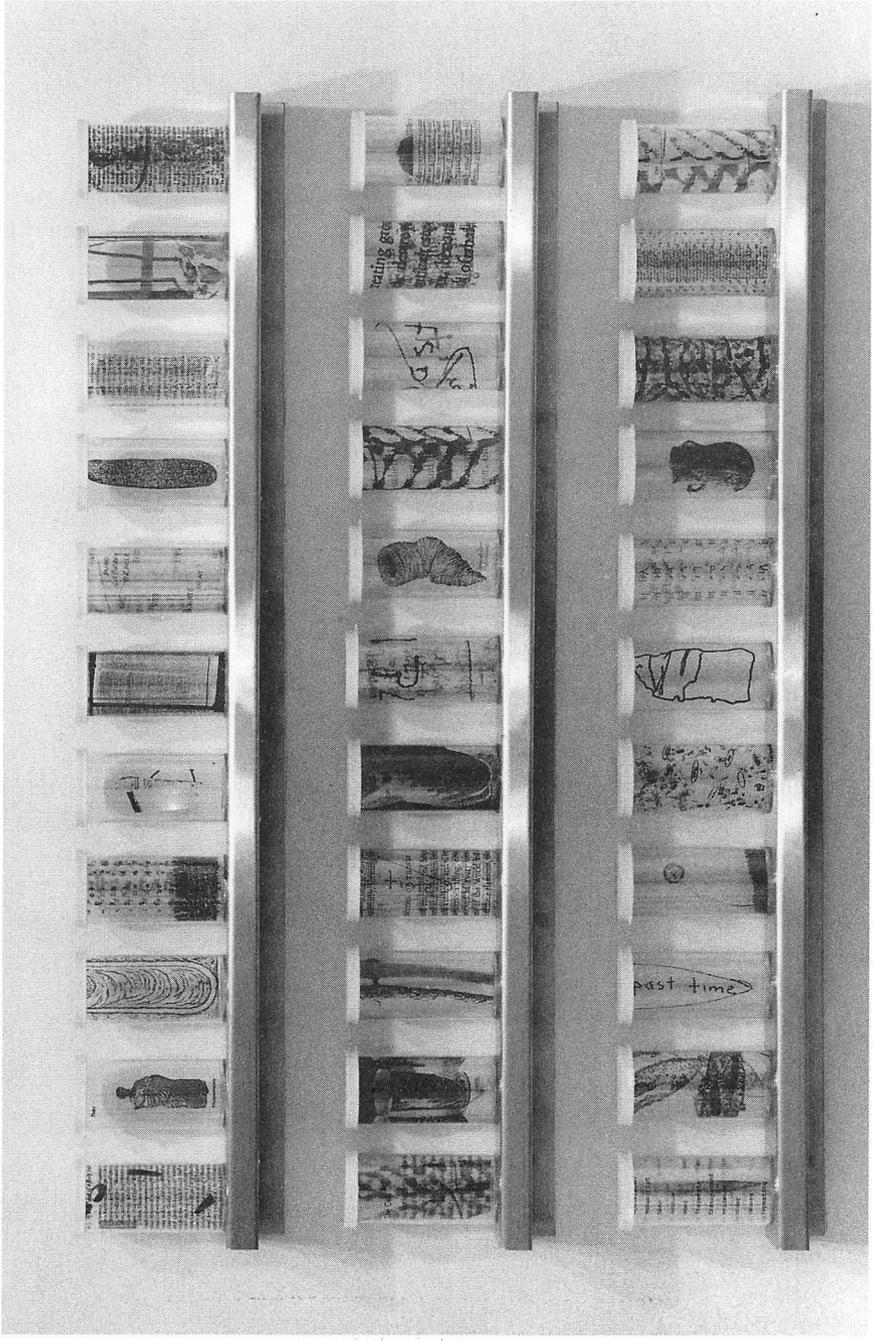


Plate I



Plate II

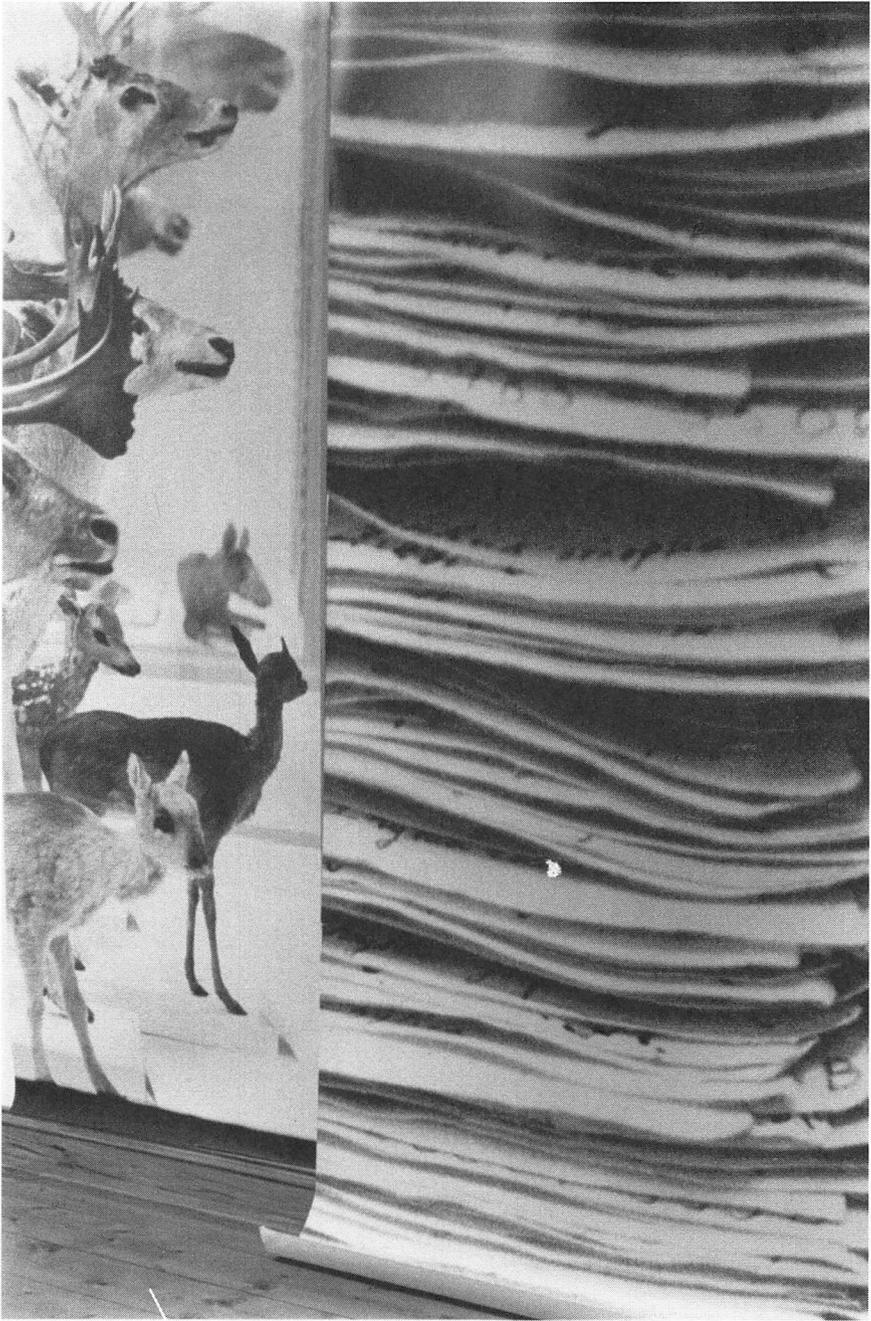


Plate III



Plate IV



Plate V

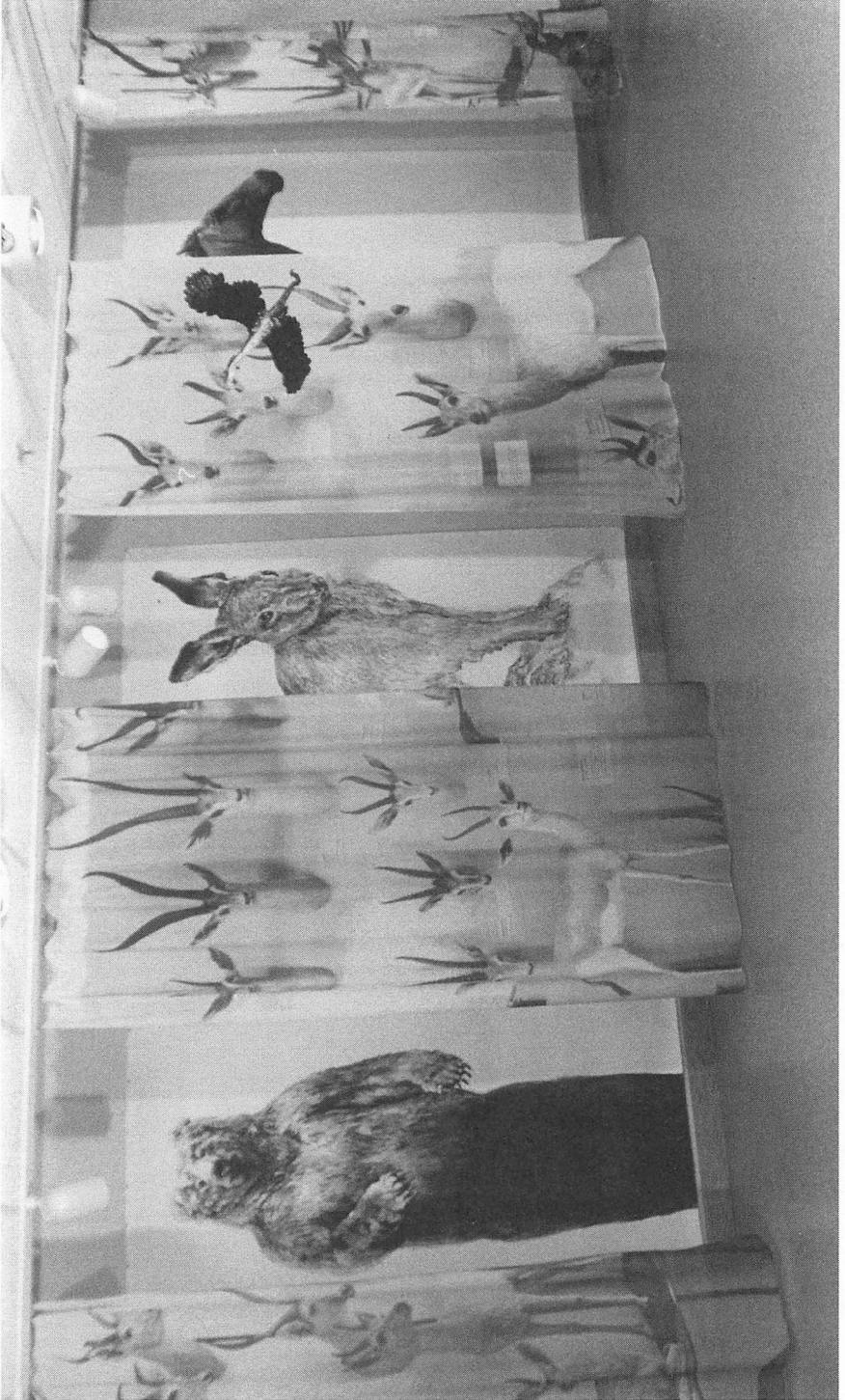


Plate VI

NOTES

¹Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 19.

²Ibid., p. 129.

³Ibid., p. xv.

⁴Carolus Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae* (1735), Facsimile of the First Edition, Dutch Classics on the History of Science, vol. 8 (Holland: Nieuwkoop b. De Graaf, 1964), (Methodus section), unnumbered.

⁵Foucault, p. 131.

⁶Ibid., p. 132.

⁷Ibid., p. 134.

⁸John Berger, *About Looking* (Vintage International, 1991), p. 3.

⁹Foucault, p. 130.

¹⁰Berger, p. 11.

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Varpu Lindström. *From Heroes to Enemies: Finns in Canada, 1937–1947*. Beaverton, Ont.: Aspasia Books, 2000. vi + 265 pages.

Review Article by N.F. Dreisziger
Royal Military College of Canada

MOST WORKS DEALING WITH CANADIAN immigration history focus on the gatekeepers rather than the immigrants. For this reason, an ethnic history specialist receives with high expectations any work that promises to deal mainly with the newcomers themselves. *From Heroes to Enemies* does indeed tell the story of the Finns in Canada, rather than just dealing with such themes as the Canadian reception of immigrants from Finland, or public and governmental attitudes to the Finnish community in this country.

The years 1937 to 1947 were tumultuous times for the people of Finland and, by extension, for Finnish immigrants to Canada. During the early part of this eventful decade the Finns could worry about becoming victims of resurgent German power, or of possible Soviet moves

to pre-empt Nazi expansion into Scandinavia. In March of 1939 the threat came closer, with the German occupation of the Lithuanian city of Klaipeda (Memel), on the Baltic Sea. The actual outbreak of the Second World War in September left Finland seemingly unaffected, but it soon became obvious that the Soviets considered parts of the country essential to their own defence. When the Finnish government rejected Soviet demands for territorial concessions, the Soviets attacked, and the famous “Winter War” ensued. Uneasy peace returned to Finland in the spring of the following year, only to be followed by the country’s involvement in the Nazi attack on Russia in the summer of 1941. In 1944 came the threat of Axis collapse and possible Soviet occupation. Though Finland escaped the sad fate of her less fortunate Baltic neighbours, the war brought much suffering to the Finns and did lasting damage to their reputation.

Though the author of this book does not neglect the international and the “homeland” contexts, she focuses her attention on the situation of the Finns in Canada. She describes their difficult lives, their political divisions, and the generally negative attitudes toward them held both by Canada’s authorities and by her public. She points out that most Finns were considered leftist radicals, and, as a result, Finns in general were seen as undesirable newcomers to

Canada. In fact, if this book had covered only the years 1937 to 1940 its title might well have been "From Enemies to Heroes." The "Winter War" of 1939-40 changed all that. Suddenly the despised Finns became the superstars in the struggle for decency and democracy in the face of totalitarian superpower arrogance. While Canadian admiration for the Finns was nearly unanimous, some divisions remained in Finnish-Canadian society, with the radical fringe of the communist movement rooting for the Soviets. Some Finnish-Canadian youth also faced the choice of whether to volunteer for the Canadian Forces, or to try to get to Finland to fight the Russians there. The fact that the war between the Allies and Nazi Germany was the "Phony War" made it easier for many Finns to choose the second of these alternatives. Their story is told in a fair amount of detail, as are the histories of the Finnish (and Canadian) relief efforts, and even the post-Winter War scheme to settle tens of thousands of the conflict's refugees in Ontario. This plan, the brainchild of Ontario Premier Mitch Hepburn, was a part of his scheme to prove to the Canadian public that Mackenzie King's government in Ottawa was not active enough in matters related to the crises unleashed by the war. Not much came of the project, mainly because some Finnish leaders realized that it was designed more to further Hepburn's political ambitions than to help the Finns.

A large part of the book deals with the destruction of the institutions (the halls, the newspapers, and the like) first of the Finnish-Canadian Left (in the period before June 1941), and then of the Right (in the months after Finland's involvement in the Nazi invasion of the USSR). Although the Finns were spared the most draconian provisions of the Defence of Canada Regulations, their being branded enemy aliens and being placed under even a relatively lenient regime of wartime regulations did inflict upon them humiliation, inconvenience, and, in some cases, outright harm. During the second half of the war the Finnish-Canadian Left was to some extent "rehabilitated." At the same time, sailors of Finnish nationality who had been caught in Canada by the war, including some who had been working on this continent for decades, came to be treated as POWs. The final chapter, "Return to Friendly Relations," deals with some post-war developments, such as relief efforts, and the coming of a less turbulent age for the Finnish-Canadian ethnic group.

There are a few slips and misleading statements in this book. There was, for example, no "provincial election" (p. 117) in Ontario in 1940. The election that Premier Hepburn fought (and lost) was a federal one. Such shortcomings notwithstanding, *From Heroes to Enemies* is a valuable work, based on years of research. The wartime history of no other relatively small Canadian ethnic group is covered in such a scholarly

manner and in so much detail. The exception might be the sad story of the Japanese-Canadians, but most of the literature on that subject deals with Canadian public attitudes and government actions rather than the experience of the Japanese themselves. Because *From Heroes to Enemies* promised to deal mainly with an ethnic group's side of the story, I started to read this book with high expectations, and I was not disappointed.

Daisy L. Neijmann. *Colloquial Icelandic: The Complete Course for Beginners* (with dialogues by Björg Árnadóttir, Jón A. Baldvinsson, Gunnar Cauthery, Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir, and Daisy L. Neijmann). London and New York: Routledge, 2001. viii + 370 pages.

Review Article by Christopher Hale
University of Alberta

IN THE RELATIVELY SHORT SPACE THAT has been provided, Daisy Neijmann has done an excellent job of covering most of the basic aspects of Modern Icelandic grammar and presenting the most essential vocabulary, along with texts and exercises. This is quite a feat, given that Icelandic is highly inflected and a difficult language for most students to learn. Two one-hour tapes also accompany the book.

After a page of "Acknowledgements" and one of "Abbreviations" there is an "Introduction," which includes a couple of paragraphs on the country itself and its language, and a few words on how to learn a language. This is followed by a brief survey of Icelandic pronunciation.

The bulk of the text consists of sixteen lessons or chapters, each of which

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has dialogues, readings, vocabulary lists, grammatical explanations, and exercises. The grammar is introduced gradually, starting with nouns in the nominative case and working up to the subjunctive mood in verbs. In most cases Dr. Neijmann presents the grammar in a very clear manner, and where grammatical terms may be unfamiliar to the layman, she explains them. The reader/student is not overwhelmed by having to deal with too many points at any one time. Normally there are three dialogues in each lesson, the first of which is frequently more general in its theme and somewhat simpler than the other two. They mostly deal with everyday situations such as greeting people, shopping, ordering in a restaurant, sight-seeing, and travelling. After each dialogue there are vocabulary notes. The reading passages deal mainly with the life, culture, geography, and history of the country and give the student samples of a more literary style of Icelandic than the dialogues. Most of the exercises are relatively short, but they do cover the main grammatical points and vocabulary and can be done both orally and in written form. For the student working through the book independently, there are keys to the exercises and translations of the reading passages at the end of the book, as well as an Icelandic-English glossary. Translations of the dialogues are given in the text for the first five lessons, but not subsequently.

Though Dr. Neijmann has on the whole done a superb job of writing a textbook for a very complex language, there are a few points I would like to comment on. On page 10 it is stated that stressed syllables are always long, except before double consonants and before consonant clusters, excepting p, t, k, s followed by v, j, or r. This should read "stressed vowels," not "syllables." On pages 21 and 22 one of the rules for subject-verb inversion says that if a part of speech is moved to the beginning of a regular sentence, the subject will "hide" behind the verb. This, of course, is an oversimplification, and would not apply to, say, conjunctions. The plural of "hundrað" is missing on page 53, though it is given on page 57, and the numbers in Exercise 2 on the same page, and Exercise 6 on page 58, are not the same as those read on the tape. Sometimes when a new noun is introduced, its gender is not indicated, as on page 82, where words for thoroughfares, etc., are presented. Those in the left-hand column have their genders indicated, while those in the right-hand column do not. On page 127 an incorrect construction, "hann er að sitja," is given, and even though it is mentioned as being an example of something an Icelander would not say, I think it should be starred. In the introduction to the Dialogue on page 128, one of the characters is mentioned as coming from the Turk Islands. I believe this should read Turks and Caicos Islands. The masculine gen. sing. second pers. pos-

sessive pronoun listed on page 164 is "Þíns," not "Þins."

I would also like to mention a few points in general about the work. Quite a number of words that are used in the texts are to be found neither in the vocabulary for the relevant lesson nor in the glossary at the back. This almost means that a student will have to have access to an Icelandic-English dictionary or to a speaker of Icelandic if he or she cannot figure out the meaning from the context. Some examples are "fáranleg" (page 117, line 1), "búferlum" (page 134, next to last line), "hræra" (page 181, line 8), "boði" (page 187, line 8), "útbúnað" (page 220, line 11), "verulega" (page 258, line 8), and "kökusneið" (page 268, line 20).

Given that the book was published in Great Britain by someone who teaches at a British university, it is not surprising to find it full of Britishisms. However, since the potential readership certainly includes people in Canada, where there is a large Canadian-Icelandic community, not to mention the United States, I think that North American equivalents of these words should have been included. Examples of these Britishisms are "tights," on page 88, line 8, translating "sokkabux/ur," which in North America are "panty hose"; "football," on page 96, line 29, which North Americans call "soccer"; and "caravan" for "hjólhýsi," North American "trailer," on page 265, line 3.

One other point of criticism I'd like to make concerning the book is the scanty

treatment made of the subjunctive mood. Only three pages are devoted to it in the whole work, and those are in the last lesson. Much more space should really be given to such a complex facet of Icelandic grammar.

However, these relatively minor negative comments should definitely not detract significantly from this work, which is excellent as a whole, and I would like to make some positive, specific remarks as well. The two tapes that accompany the textbook are very well done. Parts are fairly evenly divided between male and female speakers. The actors speak very naturally and clearly and, to add to the reality of the dialogues, special effects are used. For example, in Dialogue 1, Lesson 3, as the two characters walk along the streets of Akureyri one can hear traffic noises in the background. In the telephone conversation in Dialogue 1, Lesson 6, the one character sounds as though he is speaking through a phone. Or in Dialogue 1, Lesson 15, the character who has been to the doctor sounds as though he has a cold. The reproduction of various items from daily life is a useful aid; students are given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with such things as newspaper clippings, bus timetables, menus, and important numbers from the telephone book before going to Iceland. Throughout the text and the tapes Professor Neijmann is very encouraging, and urges the student to keep going. For example, right at the begin-

ning, on page 11, she says, after discussing Icelandic pronunciation, "You are probably wondering how you can remember all of this. Don't worry; you do not need to absorb this in one go. Remember: a little bit a day works better than a whole chunk at once." She also now and then inserts a bit of wit, such as on page 71: "We are now at the point where the inevitable can no longer be postponed: declensions." Excellent advice is given on page 148, where, as a comment on the Icelandic expression "orðinn saddur," she explains that this means "eaten one's fill," whereas the phrase "ég er fullur" does not mean the same thing, but rather "I am drunk." At the end of the book there is a "Grammar summary" with tables of the various declensions and conjugations. This is followed by a "Glossary of grammatical terms," which students not familiar with such terminology will find extremely useful.

Though Prof. Neijmann's book may not be suitable in all cases as the main textbook to be used in a classroom situation, it could certainly function well as a supplementary one. It is, though, definitely well adapted for the student attempting to learn Icelandic on his or her own. It is entirely self-contained, easy to use, and furnished with an index, so that students can quickly find where individual grammar points are dealt with. All in all I must say that I highly recommend the book to anyone interested in learning Icelandic.

Articles / Articles:

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John Lingard
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*Women's Reproductive Rights
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