



**SCANDINAVIAN-
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**ÉTUDES
SCANDINAVES
AU CANADA**

Gurli A. Woods/Peter Ohlin

Editors/Rédacteurs

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AAESC

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Introduction

The present volume of *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies/Études Scandinaves au Canada* reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the AASSC/AAESC. The contents range from skiing and the search for the Northwest Passage to a Danish writer's view of the Canadian prairies, from seamen's wages in Norway and crime in Iceland to theatre in northern Sweden, and from sound shifts in Canadian Icelandic to European intellectual history and discussions on fiction and literary criticism.

The first part of the book, entitled SCANDINAVIANS IN CANADA, consists of two articles with Icelandic subject matter. Anne Brydon uses the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba for a discussion of the production, reproduction, and transformation of West Icelandic identity, and Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir discusses linguistic variations of West Icelandic *Flámæli*. In this section, Jørgen Dahlie also describes the influence of Norwegian skiing pioneers in the Pacific Northwest.

Under the heading WRITERS OF SCANDINAVIAN ORIGIN, two writers are featured, both of whom were born in Scandinavia. The similarity ends here, however. Danish-born Aksel Sandemose visited the Canadian prairies in 1927 and recorded, in daily entries in his diary, his impressions of the harsh reality of immigrant life on the prairies. Christopher Hale was able to study these diary entries for his article. The prolific Icelandic-born writer Kristjana Gunnars just recently (1989) published a much discussed, postmodern novel, *The Prowler*, which Cristina Gheorghe discusses in her article. In addition to her analysis of Gunnars' book, Cristina Gheorghe devised an interview with Kristjana Gunnars consisting of a series of questions and answers about Gunnars' attitude to *The Prowler* and to fiction in general.

The third part deals with ASPECTS OF SOCIAL LIFE IN SCANDINAVIA. Lewis R. Fischer of Memorial University and Helge Nordvik of the Norwegian School of Economics in Bergen have been collaborating for several years now with respect to Norwegian seafaring labour markets from 1850-1914. The growth of the merchant marine in Norway was so dynamic that by 1875, Norwegians owned the third largest fleet in the world. The present article discusses specifics within this larger framework, such as wage and labour market statistics. The other article in this section, by Will. C. van den Hoonaard, revolves around myth and reality of crime in Iceland. This article is evidence of a growing interest in criminological research in industrialized countries which experience relatively low crime rates.

In the last part, LITERATURE AND THEATRE IN SCANDINAVIA, four articles deal with various topics. Thomas Bredsdorff of the University of Copenhagen discusses Holberg in relation to Machiavellian ideas and situates this Danish/Norwegian author within the trends of European Enlightenment. Bredsdorff demonstrates Holberg's brand of radicalism which allows for reason, the power of persuasion, and laughter as a means of destabilizing phoney authority. Another contribution in this section, by Christian Roy, places Danish author J.P. Jacobsen in the context of the intellectual history of Europe. Jacobsen was considered to be a world classic around the turn of the century, and Roy regards him as an important and unfairly neglected harbinger of our modern consciousness. In the third article, Dieter Riegel discusses Thorkild Hansen's book, published 1965, on Jens Munk, the Danish captain who sailed out of the harbour of Copenhagen on May 9, 1619, in search of the elusive Northwest Passage to China. The last article in this volume is by Dag Nordmark of the University of Umeå. He describes contemporary regional theatre in the province of Norrbotten in northern Sweden.

Peter Ohlin took over the editing of this volume a couple of years ago but was unfortunately unable to finish the process. Since I had begun the volume as Interim Editor, it became my task to also finish the volume. I would like to thank Peter Ohlin for his contribution, as well as the members of the Editorial Board and the readers whose advice and assessment both he and I solicited in order to make a selection from the articles submitted for this volume. Due to the anonymous nature of this type of activity, our many invaluable readers and resource persons cannot be named. We are, however, all the more appreciative of their assistance. Some names, which I *can* mention, are the following: I wish to thank Marcela Moc, a Graduate Student and Research Assistant in Comparative Literature at Carleton University, who did a considerable amount of bibliographical checking, copy editing, and proofreading, and who had many useful suggestions. A note of appreciation also goes to the staff of the Journal Production Centre: to Karen Cughan, who saw her way through the oftentimes complex changes and corrections, and to Christina Thiele, Managing Director of the JPC, who, in addition to the specialized formatting required, also exhibited an exceptional flair for all the small details which are easily ignored, but which must be attended to in order to achieve a high-quality product.

Gurli Aagaard Woods, Ph.D.
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SCANDINAVIANS
IN CANADA

Celebrating Ethnicity: The Icelanders of Manitoba

Anne Brydon
(McGill University)

This paper uses the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba (*Islendingadagurinn*) as the point of departure for a discussion of the production, reproduction and transformation of West Icelandic identity. It outlines an alternative approach to the conceptualization of ethnic identity while examining how identity remains meaningful for those who still define themselves, to themselves and others, as Icelanders.

My primary research was conducted in Manitoba during a seven-week field season in the summer of 1985. The data on which this study is based are derived from the Icelandic Collections at the University of Manitoba, formal interviews with Icelanders, and participant observation at the Festival. A fuller treatment of the research project is presented elsewhere.¹

A brief description of the history and present conditions of Icelandic settlement in Canada precedes a critical dismantling of common understandings of ethnicity in North America. Following this, a redefinition of ethnicity is given and applied to a discussion of the social relations surrounding the Festival, and the production of meaning which occurs during the Festival.

The West Icelanders of Manitoba

Motivated by economic and environmental hardships at home, Icelandic immigration to Canada began in 1874. In 1875, the primary focus for settlement shifted to Manitoba, away from earlier, smaller colonies that had been started in Ontario and Nova Scotia. Many people settled in what was then the small town of Winnipeg (pop. 600). Others went to a reserve on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg which had been established for the exclusive use of Icelandic settlers. The Republic of New Iceland—as the reserve was then known—was established in 1877 with a constitution and government created by its citizens. The first few years were marked by disease, deprivation and dispute, all of this before final stability was achieved and before the Province of Manitoba assumed direct control of the reserve in the 1880s. Demand for more land, created by the greatly increased number of immigrants to the west, led to

the official opening of New Iceland to non-Icelanders in 1897. However, Icelandic-Canadians still refer to the area as "New Iceland", and it has now taken on the symbolic quality of "spiritual" home for Icelanders in North America. Gimli is the central town of New Iceland, and though it is no longer predominantly Icelandic, it is where the Festival takes place each year. Icelanders settled in rural areas beyond New Iceland as well, in the territory between Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba known as the Interlake. This area shares some of the symbolic properties associated with New Iceland. North American Icelanders are referred to as "West Icelanders" (by themselves and by Icelanders in Iceland), and this term will be used interchangeably with "Icelander" throughout this paper.

Today within Manitoba, the Icelanders form a distinct part of the Interlake population along with Ukrainians, Germans, British and native groups. No informants knew the distribution of Icelanders in Manitoba, but the 1971 census lists 27,905 persons of Icelandic origin living in Canada (more recent numbers are unavailable, since later statistics include all Scandinavians in one category). In Manitoba there were 13,070 Icelanders, comprising 46% of the Canadian Icelandic population. In comparison, Manitoba Icelanders formed 70% of the national Icelandic population in 1931. Icelandic communities are spread across the Prairies and British Columbia, as can be seen by the various local chapters of the Icelandic National League.

During the past century, various organizations intended to foster Icelandic identity and unity have been founded, and also have disappeared as their impetus waned. Currently, there are several such groups that form the institutional structure of the West Icelandic community. These include the Icelandic National League, the Canada Iceland Foundation, the Icelandic Department at the University of Manitoba, the *Icelandic-Canadian Magazine*, *Lögberg-Heimskringla* (a weekly newspaper), the Icelandic Festival, Icelandic Language Camp and the Scandinavian Centre, to mention the most prominent.

The *Islendingadagurinn* (literally "Day of the Icelanders") was first celebrated in Winnipeg in 1890, making it one of the oldest, continuously operating ethnic festivals in Canada. With only one exception since its inception, it has been celebrated during the first weekend of August. That first Festival was a notable display of group solidarity: three thousand Icelanders marched through the streets of Winnipeg to Victoria Park, where they listened to speeches and poetry expressing support for Icelandic independence from Danish colonial rule. Over the years, this format became the basis of the Monday events of the present day Festival: a parade, speeches and sporting competitions. The early

impetus for the Festival was to provide a sense of unity with Iceland and an opportunity for the immigrants to experience a sense of group solidarity. This content gradually changed, however, as a new generation took over who were aware that they were more a part of Canadian society. The focus in the 1920s and 1930s was on the values of the first generation, of hard work and a longing for Iceland which was expressed through poetry in terms of love for the land.

Logistical problems in Winnipeg led to the relocation of the Festival in Gimli in 1933, where it was consolidated with other Icelandic Festivals which had appeared in the Interlake. The first cottages in Gimli had been built during the previous decade, and more Winnipeg people were being attracted to the lakeside for recreational purposes. As mentioned earlier, the Festival from its outset was a one-day (Monday) event comprising a parade, speeches and sporting competitions. During the sixties, attendance at the Festival began to decline. There was a fear that without a change in its format, the Festival would eventually die. Consequently in 1969, a group of Winnipeg and Gimli businessmen (all of Icelandic descent) reorganized the structure of the Board of Directors which controlled the Festival. They began to align the Festival with other tourist and sporting events occurring on the same weekend in Gimli. Inclusion of these additional events led to the expansion of the Festival to its current three-day format. The Festival is presently an eclectic mixture of music, sports, ceremony, a parade, midway rides and souvenir stands, dances and games: all serving as a backdrop for reunion with friends and family, and celebration of a holiday weekend.

The Category "Ethnicity"

The Icelanders believe they now face the impending loss of their ethnic identity. They feel that the decline in knowledge of the Icelandic language which is now being experienced within the community represents the final stage of their assimilation into North American society. Their fears, I argue, are premised on certain sociological and commonsense understandings of ethnicity. In turn, these understandings are derived from the same Western conceptualization of culture as embedded in attributes or characteristics. A consequence of such a conceptualization is that change within the ethnic group is seen to lead to the loss of that which makes it authentic.

Ethnicity is commonly understood to be an analytical category. That is, it is assumed to describe a particular form of social organization. Though there is disagreement as to the precise definition of the term, there is expressed little doubt that ethnicity exists as a particular

phenomenon. The issue of analysis, therefore, has been the description of characteristics of a particular group in order to relate them to other social factors or extrapolate certain general patterns of ethnic group formation.

Anthropology, since the publication of Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, has sought to contextualize ethnicity in the nexus of human social relations, wherein emphasis is placed upon the maintenance of those boundaries which distinguish the group from its neighbours. The advance in thought which Barth's contribution represents is contained in the notion of ethnicity as subjectively determined through social interaction. He argues that ethnic groups are "categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people."² However, his model was derived from research in traditional societies, and, as Barth himself acknowledges, raises problems when applied to the North American context.

Until recently, anthropological paradigms concerned with cultural analysis have had little impact on the understanding of ethnicity in North America. Instead, ethnic studies have been dominated by sociologists and social historians, who do not seek to question the historical roots of the ethnic category. Rather, the dominant paradigm in which they work is that of assimilationism. An assimilationist model posits ethnic groups as tradition-based units differing structurally from the dominant group by, for example, religion, language, or economic production. There are two assumptions behind this model. First, ethnic culture is seen to be embedded in particular social traits. Second, change within the group is understood as a step-by-step, generation-by-generation merging with the dominant culture at the institutional level which eventually leads to the disappearance of cultural difference. And this, in turn, assumes that culture, what people carry in their heads as knowledge of their world, is materially determined by socio-economic forces.

Two other paradigms, acculturation and multiculturalism, were developed later when it was seen that the disappearance of ethnic traits was not occurring as predicted. Though they credit more legitimacy and more importance to the maintenance of certain traditions, and deny the necessity of disappearance, these later models are equally premised on the definition of ethnic culture as social trait. These similar approaches to the study of ethnic groups emerged out of the United States between the two world wars when waves of mass immigration from Eastern Europe, and to a lesser extent Asia, were then arriving in North America. It

is evident today that assimilationist thought in academic discourse was not so much objectively based, as it was an ideologically-premised social doctrine designed to accommodate foreigners into a national dream of Anglo-conformity.

The linkage between these analytical approaches and commonsense understanding has occurred in two ways. The first is through the popular press and, in Canada, the promotion of the policy of multiculturalism. Interest in ethnic identity has increased since the late sixties, and has given rise to a great number of ethnic associations and festivals which celebrate the colourful aspects of ethnic traditions. Second, both academic approaches and everyday understanding share common roots in a conceptualization of ethnicity which is linked to the rise of the nation-state in the West since the eighteenth century. Briefly, in this view the self is seen to be equal to the nation. That is, there is a particular personality associated with each nationality and each individual shares equally in it. Linked with the concept of nationality are notions of blood relationship, of primordial sentiments which a group of people share. They are considered to have existed indefinitely, rather than having historical origins.³ What is held to be true for the nation is equally true or applicable to ethnic groups. The difference is that ethnic groups are contained and form a minority within the nation-state. Interestingly, whereas a person can become a *naturalized* citizen of a nation, one cannot in the same manner apply to change ethnic membership. Consequently, the defining element of nationalism or ethnicity (as vague as that element might be) is believed to persist over time. However, nationalism and ethnicity are seen to differ in how they respond to change. Within the nation, change is perceived as progress, as a natural unfolding of history. But for the ethnic group, any change is conceptualized as loss.

The following definition of ethnicity is proposed: ethnic identity is an ideological representation of social relations which is contextualized in a particular historic formation. It involves a constant negotiation of the symbolic representation of identity through social interaction, and is contingent upon the consequences of these actions. These negotiations are situated within particular social, economic and historical circumstances, and are influenced by them. Change is a normal process of ethnicity which does not necessarily end in assimilation. Though the content of identity changes according to changing circumstances, it must retain the appearance of an "authentic" representation of the past.

This approach to ethnicity will be further extrapolated with reference to the Icelanders and the Festival. In summary, it is necessary to recognize that ethnicity is not an analytical category. Rather, it is a

description of how people organize themselves at the ideological level, and is a result rather than a cause of social action.

Icelandic Identity and the Creation of Meaning

It is apparent from conversations with Icelanders and from observation of the community that many individuals have maintained a strong sense of themselves as Icelanders. Yet this circumstance is rendered problematic when traditional measures of ethnicity are applied to the Icelandic community, since few distinctive attributes or practices have been retained. Language is perhaps the most distinctive trait of Icelandic identity, but its signifying role is declining as knowledge of the language disappears (this is not to deny the importance of the Icelandic programme at the University of Manitoba in fostering awareness of the language; however such instruction cannot substitute for linguistic skills developed in the home from childhood on). Further, religion and occupation no longer act as markers of ethnicity. Icelanders no longer dominate the Lake Winnipeg fishing industry as they once did, nor do they dominate the politics and business interests of Gimli and other Interlake communities, though they still retain a high profile in each. Icelanders are not ghettoized in any particular occupation but rather participate in all manner of economic activities. The stigma that can be associated with identity differences has not been a major problem for West Icelanders. Instances of prejudice during the first years were isolated, or at least were balanced by more positive experiences of acceptance: the dominant racial theory informing immigration policy at the beginning of the twentieth century held that Nordic peoples were the most suitable immigrants. Further, Woodsworth,⁴ in his study of the effects of mass immigration on Canadian society, speaks glowingly of the hardworking and eager-to-succeed Icelanders. Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada during the 1870s, made evident his admiration and support for the first Icelandic immigrants. And once the inhabitants of Winnipeg in 1875 learned that Icelanders were not Eskimos, they too were agreeable to the Icelandic presence: too little was known of Iceland for negative ethnic stereotyping to occur.

The meaningful aspect of ethnic identity cannot be explained in terms of institutional preservation or distinctiveness. This is not to deny that language, religion or occupation (to mention the most typical markers used to indicate ethnicity) are not relevant to a discussion of identity formation. They are not, however, necessarily indicative of *ethnic* identity. That is, there is nothing about these traits which *a priori*

refers to ethnicity. Rather, they can indicate class, for example, or be used as a rationale for prejudice or conflict between groups.⁵

Ethnicity is historically created, first as the cumulative product of interactions between social forces and historical circumstances, and second as a conceptual field on which historical events (or material and non-material representations of them) are selected, interpreted, and negotiated in group interaction, to become the symbolic mediators of ethnic identity. This bi-partite division, it should be noted, is analytical rather than actual. The interaction between the two levels is continuous and mutually influencing: historical action in material terms is in part motivated by ideological constructions. Social structures are created historically, through human action, in reaction to particular situations and to fulfill specific functions. They can persist or change, depending on how members of the ethnic group continue to interpret their value or use. Intra-ethnic group action is one type of social interaction, which is contextualized in a shared history, and uses shared knowledge as symbols to conceptualize ethnic identity.

Over the years, the Icelandic Festival has become a prominent focal point within the community, where it is a major arena for the expression, production, reproduction and transformation of Icelandic identity. It is the one time of year in which West Icelanders are able to gather together and become aware of themselves as a whole, and to enact the social dramas which in turn reaffirm and reinterpret cultural knowledge. Through the use of symbols, celebration expresses ethnicity as part invention, and part retention of past practices and beliefs. In this way ethnicity is a continuous dialogue between past and present. Hobsbawm refers to this process as *inventing tradition*: "essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition."⁶ By using "ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes,"⁷ a group is able to establish or symbolize social cohesion. These created traditions are more likely to be legitimized through negotiation rather than through force in the case of an ethnic group. They are subject to success or failure, because they rely on their being interpreted within the realm of already legitimated cultural symbols, and must not appear to be too new or radical within this context of cultural conservatism. Frequently, these creations may be connected to structural changes, and thus can serve as articulators of ethnic group change. That is, they are conscious or unconscious responses to circumstances within the community which may have prompted changes in the interpretation of cultural symbols.

What renders identity meaningful for those West Icelanders who remain involved in the community is generated within the group through the interplay of notions of meaning and social action. Focus on cultural celebrations, festivals and rituals frequently provides anthropologists with rich and complex texts through which social groups can be understood. The Icelandic Festival provides an ideal location for an analysis of this kind since it is the nexus for a complexity of social relations and actions, bounded in time and space.

As will be outlined below, a distinction arises during the weekend celebration between what I term the public Festival and the private Festival. Whereas the public aspect is negotiated and debated, the private is experienced emotionally and personally. Although personal, it is linked to the community through use of a shared set of symbolic resources. However, these symbols move beyond those which are considered typically representative of ethnic identity. The public/private distinction, while providing a mechanism for retaining the meaningful aspect of West Icelandic identity, represents as well a continuity with the dichotomization of human activity dominating Western industrialized societies. The distinction between work and play, home and workplace forms a powerful part of our ideology and how we shape our identities: it becomes even more powerful for Icelanders when linked with notions of community and identity.

Icelanders comment on the lack of focus to the Festival, on how it is an amalgam of contrasting events without a central focus or theme. Each year the Festival Board attempts to deal with these reactions by making some alterations to the event's content and structure. These alterations may be in order to attract bigger crowds, to make it more economically viable, or to try to satisfy what they see as the needs and desires of the community. Ethnic groups are supposed to have colourful costumes, exotic foods, interesting customs and crafts. Icelanders display what they can, but by judging what people say, its effect decidedly lacks the otherness that ethnic festivals are intended to invoke. The traditional women's costume, for example, is worn only by a handful of women, since its heavy, black material makes it unbearable in the summer heat. And though there are some traditional songs in Icelandic, I was told that these will lose some of their significance as the language gradually disappears. Most of the content of the Festival does not make any attempt to be "ethnic."

Since the changes to the Festival were begun in 1969, criticism has grown of how the Festival portrays the Icelandic community. It is argued that there is too much emphasis placed upon attracting tourists and

making a profit, which results in the exclusion of cultural content and the alienation of a segment of the community. Much of this criticism comes from outside the Festival structure, from those who either are active in other Icelandic associations, or are simply interested in their ethnic identity. This opposition is not uniform, but varies both in its intensity and in its content.

Some critics desire more representation of theatre, dance and music, and more emphasis on honouring not only the pioneer past, but also the history of Iceland. Others are less concerned with what the Festival does not present, than with what it *does* present. They dislike the romanticized image of the settlement period presented in the speeches and in the short articles published in the programme: their stance was summarized for me as the "inspirational vs. warts-and-all" approach. Nor do they like the dominating presence of the Shriners in the Monday parade. Their perception is that Festival organizers benefit from presenting themselves publicly as having struggled against adversity in order to achieve success. These latter critics were more likely to present their arguments in a humorous or satirical manner, and not necessarily in overt social action.

Those on the economic side of the debate see no discontinuity between how they define the Icelandic Festival and economic concerns; but those with cultural interests see a contradiction, where that which makes an Icelander distinctive from the rest of North American culture is minimalized behind a façade of middle class symbolism. They are at a loss to be able to devise more cultural alternatives, since there is very little that is traditional, and even less which would be of interest to the tourist trade, especially when what is defined as traditionally Icelandic is conservative or tied with the past.

This domination of economic interests in the Festival Board structure is represented symbolically in the Festival in a variety of ways. One way revolves around an attempt to fit with the multicultural framework of Canadian society. The Monday programme has become a display for the public of how successful the Icelanders have been since coming to Canada, and thereby signifies how the Icelanders fulfill the ideal of the immigrant: to achieve recognition within the larger society while maintaining a sense of one's heritage. Whereas the parade was once composed of Icelanders displaying their numbers to the Anglo-Saxon majority, it is now the Icelanders who watch and organize as others come to New Iceland to participate in the performance. As the President of the Board remarked in his address, attracting important people to the Festival, and placing them in the parade and on the stage, symbolizes the ability of

the West Icelanders to fulfill the immigrant's dream. They can, in the face of fiscal uncertainty, stage a complex celebration through hard work and linkages with what is successful in Canadian society.

In another sense the representation of success can be seen to cross-cut divisions within the community as to what the Festival should contain. Icelanders see themselves as motivated by a desire to distinguish themselves, to succeed in life, and to be seen to stand apart from the crowd, to be unique. In the Festival (and elsewhere) success becomes defined by outer group perception. What defines success outside the group is seen as compatible with, rather than contradictory to, success within the group. For those who want more cultural content, there is, for example, the Celebrity Concerts, recorded by the CBC and performed by musicians who are from the community but who have achieved success outside it. It is also expressed for those who see a more economic motivation by the dignitaries on the stage, and the demonstration of the community's ability to mount a large and complex celebration. Further, it is noteworthy that one can look at the names and faces of some of the Shriners in the parade, and see Icelanders in amongst them, their Icelandicness submerged in the symbology of the Shriners. What is significant about this public representation of Icelandicness is that it defines itself in terms of the outside. Conceptions of what represents success do differ within the community, yet the notion of recognition by others underlies them both. It is not the practices themselves but the uses made of them which come to be symbolic for any group. Though there are few practices which fit multiculturalism's definition of ethnic celebration, the Icelanders are nonetheless able to define for themselves what is traditional and authentic about the Festival.

In distinction to the public, the private Festival is defined through play. The notion of play as used here entails that which opposes itself to public definition of ethnic identity. The inversion of the public does not necessarily mean a move toward licentious behaviour, though there are examples of this being the case. Play and inversion also involve a notion of something beyond the outsider's perception that only those with special inside knowledge can perceive. Several West Icelanders pointed at various aspects of the celebration and claimed that here was where the "real" Festival could be found. It was always expressed as something hidden from view, apart from what they believed the Board was promoting. These aspects ranged from events which were part of the programme but were considered to be overlooked by Festival organizers—these included the latter half of the parade (the part following the Shriners), the children's races, the old timer's dance, the talking with people in

the park during the Monday speeches—to the events which occurred spontaneously outside the official Festival, such as the innumerable parties. Frequently these aspects were presented as something threatened by loss, especially if they involved older members of the community. The retired farmers and fishermen, those who remember earlier times in the Interlake, are seen as the holders of an authenticity threatened by time and change.

A final aspect of play is found in the interplay of memory and experience, and the evocation of the past, though a past more broadly based than is found in official histories. It is about returning home, and re-affirming and renewing ties with family and friends. This inversion of daily life is experienced as something which remains outside the publicly defined Icelandic identity, yet is where people are able to establish or re-establish their sense of belonging to the community. There is a separation between that which is made artifactual, museumized, put out as a display and that which is still vital, implicit, not fully defined. And then there are the private markers: the ones of personal significance, where personal dramas are linked with that which is seen to be Icelandic. By not labelling things specifically as representative of Icelandicness, the Icelanders can keep them private, personal, and meaningful, without making them part of a public discourse.

Going to the Festival is associated with family reunions. Attendance at the celebration is higher for those living in Winnipeg than for rural dwellers,⁸ and the association of return with reunions makes the former particularly relevant. One possible explanation of why the family is linked with the experience of ethnic identity, is that though the publicly acknowledged ties with the out-group are in the area where Icelanders had to, or chose to, assimilate, the family is seen to remain private and intact, because it is less affected by dominant socio-economic forces. The importance of the family unit crosscuts urban North America, as is evident from the extensive travel undertaken to maintain family relations, and in this regard the West Icelanders are not unique. However, kin ties have particular symbolic value amongst Icelanders on the one hand because of the tradition of tracing genealogies, and on the other hand because of the importance of the family as an economic unit in Iceland and North America during the settlement period. That the family should still be central to many West Icelanders is in part due to historical circumstance. Because of the original group settlement of New Iceland and the comparatively low rate of migration in and out of the province, the Gimli area remains a focus for large extended families. The linkage between the Festival and the family reunion is reinforced by

their occurrence on a holiday long weekend, thus tying them both to a typically Canadian practice of summertime revelries and festive release at summer cottages.

This provides the conditions for experiencing identity, but returning home has a greater significance to Icelandic ethnicity. Fischer⁹ likens the operation of ethnic identity to that of dreaming. Fragments of stories, of customs and myths are passed on from the older generation and are incorporated into the individual's own life experience. Thus memory and experience intermingle, and in the process produce a transformed notion of ethnicity. There are constraints, albeit flexible ones, on what experiences and memories can be thus labelled. For Icelanders generally, this relates to experiences connected to the family, to events occurring through Icelandic associations, or through experiences associated with the Interlake region.

Returning home, if it is a positive experience—or even if it is not—is rich with meanings and significance. There is a conjunction between the Festival and the act of returning, because the Festival supplies the reason or excuse for this sort of inner celebration. Obviously Icelanders will experience this impact in differing degrees, and some not at all. But the Festival provides the context for the possibility, and remains a marker of significant events. The Festival is possibly more important in this aspect for the Icelanders who live away from the Gimli area, especially those from Winnipeg who maintain connections with Gimli through family cottages. It takes on more emotional aspects: of time spent apart from everyday life of school and work, a return to what is deemed authentic in life.

I want to relate two brief examples that I think capture this sense of personal relevance, as it is expressed through, on the one hand, the current debate within the community, and on the other hand, the blending of returning home with renewing the past.

The first deals with an incident which occurred at one of the dances which take place each night of the Festival. Two people, in their mid-twenties, who are both involved with Icelandic organizations and Festival committees, were talking to me about what they thought important about the Festival. They began to disagree: one person felt that it was most important that the Festival succeed financially, and that this should be the basis for decisions regarding content. The other individual believed that it was important to get more genuine cultural content, so that people would be reminded of that for which their heritage stands. They quickly became conscious of their disagreement, and aware that they were enacting a very usual discussion from within the community.

They then turned it into a performance for the anthropologist who sat watching and listening, thus pointing at their disagreement as something significant about themselves. And while they argued, they laughed, enjoying the fact that even by arguing, they were arguing about something they shared in common and cared about deeply. This is essential, this focus on the same central issues and symbols, albeit from differing perspectives within the community. At the same time, this incident illustrates how the public discourse and the private experience can become linked in social action, in an act of sharing.

The other incident involves an Icelander born and raised in Gimli, but who is now an executive living outside of Manitoba. He had returned to Gimli for the Festival weekend. One evening, he went to the local movie theatre, where some forgettable teen movie was playing, and stood in line with all the teenagers in order to watch this movie. At the Gimli movie theatre, the floors are made of wood and slope down toward the front. Before each show, the patrons are asked not to place pop cans or bottles on the floor, since they make too much noise rolling the length of the theatre. This man went to the movie, alone, expressly to re-experience the illicit pleasures of his youth, of rolling a pop bottle noisily down the sloping floors.

This private act had nothing to do with the public face of the Festival. Yet for him, this personal ritual of reenactment, of doing something in his everyday life he otherwise would not do, gave him a sense of return to something deeply felt about place, but neglected in his day to day life. What is significant here is that the act was contained in, and gained meaning from, the time marked and set apart by the Festival. Further to this example, when I used the above story in a paper I gave at a conference in Winnipeg, an Icelander in the audience talked to me about it afterwards. She said that going to the Gimli movie theatre, to roll bottles or not, was an annual ritual for many people she knew, even for those who did not normally go to the movies. Clearly, what is at one level experienced as a private act is nonetheless linked to a shared notion of identification with the past and with place.

For those who seek to perpetuate the sense of their ethnicity, there is a crisis of meaning when that which is intended to represent their identity loses relevance in their everyday lives. There are no guidelines for being an ethnic when the symbols "run out," and it is at that point that the contingent and inventive aspects of culture are exposed. New symbols must constantly be generated to link the present with the past so that they are experienced as vital to those who order their lives around them.

The Festival is two things: publicly, it is a time where they tell others about themselves, for public consumption, about what they think they ought to be saying. Then there is the time when they get together, and tell themselves other stories about themselves. These are the anecdotes of everyday life, the private dramas and comedies they experience, that people piece together throughout their lives to build a picture of the community that they contain within themselves.

Notes

¹ Anne Brydon, "Celebrating Ethnicity: The Icelanders of Manitoba" (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1987).

² Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in Fredrik Barth (ed.) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), p. 10.

³ For example, see Benjamin Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁴ J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates* (Toronto: F.C. Stephenson, 1909).

⁵ Jérôme Rousseau, "Classe et Ethnicité," *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 2(1) (1978), pp. 61-69.

⁶ Hobsbawm, p. 4.

⁷ Hobsbawm, p. 6.

⁸ Richard M. Rice, "Mothers, Daughters and Grand-daughters: An Examination of the Matrilateral Bias and Related Variables in Jews and Icelanders in Canada" (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1971).

⁹ Michael M.J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds.) *Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

From Kongsberg to the Pacific Northwest: Norwegian Immigrants and the Development of Skiing, 1920–1950¹

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For the current generation, skiing in the Pacific Northwest conjures up at least two contrasting images—that of the high-flying expensively outfitted alpine skier and the sleek lycra-suited cross-country runner or nordic competitor. The televised World Cup downhill races have contributed to the first image, the increasingly popular “people’s” ski marathons to the latter. Today’s participant and observer alike would have difficulty in recalling a third image, one that connects the famed silver-mining community of Kongsberg,² in Norway, to the spectacular jumping competitions of the Pacific Northwest a half-century ago. For those with an interest in the skiing pioneers of an earlier era, it can be instructive to take a glimpse back in history, to discover the roots, as it were, of the contemporary ski scene in this region.

For example, in the Nordahl Kaldahl files of the British Columbia sport archives, there is a particular photograph which merits more than passing interest.³ It was taken almost fifty years ago at the Snoqualmie summit east of Seattle where a famous Kongsberg jumper had just made a record-setting leap. Those in the picture are Olav Ulland, Hjalmar Hvam, Tormod Mobraaten, Olaf Svedahl, and Birger Ruud—all but Svedahl were Kongsberg natives and all but Ruud, immigrants to Canada and the U.S. In the same files one finds an account of the Portland (Oregon) Rose Festival of June, 1951. It was held in conjunction with a ski competition *inside* the Mutonomah Stadium before some 23,000 spectators. The entry list of ski jumpers included Mobraaten, Kaldahl, Olav and Reider Ulland, still going strong in competition against the likes of a Falkanger, Mohn, and Forland. But perhaps the best example of the strong links between Kongsberg and skiing in the west can be seen in the action taken recently by Petter Hugsted. This Kongsberg skier, gold medal winner in jumping at the 1948 Winter Olympics, has arranged to have a selection from Mobraaten’s dozens of silver trophies placed on permanent display in the Kongsberg ski museum.⁴ His action underscores the importance attached to the Norwegian immigrant’s impact on the development of skiing far from his home community. Mo-

braaten was just one of many whose outstanding abilities helped to extend an Old World tradition and prepared the way for the popularity of the sport in the Pacific Northwest.

The glory days of Leavenworth, Revelstoke, Snoqualmie, Princeton, and Hollyburn have long since faded, and the jumping hills now stand silent and untracked. The thousands who once thrilled to the spectacle of airborne skiers in person have become armchair viewers but the traditions *have* survived: the talented Mobraaten and his compatriots—Olav Ulland, Henry Sotvedt, the “Portland Express” Hjalmar Hvam, and Nordahl Kaldahl—to name the most prominent of the Kongsberg immigrants, have surely left an imprint, as distinctive and deep as that made by their triple-grooved skis on the tournament circuits of the region. By focussing on these individuals and on other pioneers of Rossland, Camrose, Spokane, or Cle Elum, it should be possible to assess their contribution, perhaps to demonstrate that the very character of their approach to skiing may have unwittingly hastened the decline and re-birth of the sport in its present form.

It needs to be said first that skiing for the Scandinavians who emigrated westward meant more than just competition, important as that may have been. Some fifty years ago, the Norwegian-born secretary of the Edmonton Ski Club gave a perceptive assessment about the ski meets: “I am quite in accord with Mr. Nels Nelsen’s article . . . that it was due to the competitions we used to arrange that the broad interest in the ski sport started. Those tournaments gave something to the press to write about and people began to talk skiing. In this way there was a chance to bring out the fact that a tournament was only a way of showing what could be done on a pair of skis . . . , that the great mission of skiing was that everyone goes skiing for health and exercise and the comradeship . . .”⁵ However, for those who flocked to watch ski jumping particularly, the “great mission” was largely overlooked. Those people identified more readily with the sports writers who dubbed the Revelstoke jump “Suicide Hill”. A graphic description of an event at the third annual western Canadian championship on the hill in 1931, suggests how such an attitude might have prevailed:

The most dramatic incident during the whole tournament was furnished by Kaare Engstad of Burns Lake, formerly of Camrose, . . . who in some way misjudged the intense speed of the unusually steep hill and probably “missed” the take-off, with the result that his skis got tilted dangerously forward. The air-pressure proved too strong . . . the points of the skis turned more and more downwards until he landed with the skis in a perpendicular position, the points deep

down in the snow throwing him with a terrific impact on his neck as both skis broke in splinters . . . it was later announced that no serious injuries had been sustained.⁶

Indeed, Engstad, who came from Vang in Hedmark, won the Canadian combined championship in 1932 and was chosen for the Olympic team the same year. Despite the above colourful description, spectacular falls were the exception. Hjalmar Hvam tells of his boyhood experiences in Kongsberg when he and his brother would carry milk down the slopes on skis to their neighbours. When they wondered how the boys could deliver it still warm, despite bringing it some distance, Hvam's brother blurted out "we don't fall!"⁷ There is much truth in that observation. It was the "born with skis on their feet" childhood that stood behind the phenomenal four-way competitive careers that the best of the Kongsberg skiers established.⁸ Not only did Hvam, Mobraaten, and Sotvedt jump exceptionally well, they also won numerous trophies in the alpine and cross-country events. Hvam at one time in the 1930s took first prize in twelve consecutive downhill races in the Pacific Northwest, no mean feat for someone who hadn't intended to compete again after leaving Kongsberg.

Much more will be said about the Kongsberg connection in what follows; however, it will be appropriate here to point out that the skiing traditions in the west had other notable precursors. Accounts in the Norwegian-language *Canada Skandinaven* in 1912 tell of a group of Norwegians who organized ski clubs in Edmonton and Camrose. In the latter place, the club was initially known as the Fram Ski Club with J.R. Engelbretson the first president. Membership in those early years and after attests to the pronounced Norwegian cast of the club: Bjørnson, Maland, Evenson, Meikkelson, Nordmoe, Gotaas, Aasen, Rogstad, Servold—the names are memorable and their origin unmistakable. Nordmoe and three generations of Servolds have been especially prominent but, all have helped shape the Camrose impact on the national and international ski scene.⁹

The Camrose story is not atypical. It appears that often when Norwegians (as well as Swedes and Finns) found themselves in the appropriate surroundings, skiing developed in one form or another. There is considerable evidence that for many immigrants skiing became an institution, a mediating activity that helped them make their way in a new environment. In fact, one writer with a large audience in Norway did a feature article recently, suggesting that for some Norwegians ". . . who overcame difficulties . . . it was the sport (of skiing) that helped

them overcome, if one can use such a description, and helped shape their future in the new world." For those who could not find work in winter, he said, "... their experience as skiers became their salvation."¹⁰ While the Camrose pioneers may not have put it in those terms, skiing became an indelible part of their history as well. In the same way, the legacy of Olaus Jeldness of Rosslund and Spokane, Engwald Engen of Phoenix, Sigurd Paul Hansen of Ione (Washington) and Nels Nelsen of Revelstoke is bound up with the introduction of skiing to those communities.

Jeldness, a highly successful mining entrepreneur, was almost fifty years old when he organized the first downhill and jumping meets in Rosslund in the 1890s. Moreover, he competed in and won both events and continued to foster growth of the sport in Spokane. Like Jeldness, Engen had come to the eastern United States from Norway, settling eventually in the mining town of Phoenix, where he helped form the ski club in 1908. Sigurd Hansen was one of the first to leave Kongsberg for the west; he competed in the U.S. national championship in 1913 and pioneered ski jumping in Ione, Cle Elum, and the Leavenworth in the 1920s.¹¹ Nels Nelsen's contribution to skiing in the west was belatedly recognized some forty years after his death with his induction into the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame in 1984. Nelsen, in addition to his impressive ski jumping career, probably worked harder to spread the gospel and the "great mission" of skiing than any other competitor. An executive member of the western branch of the Canadian Ski Association Nelsen worked to advance the larger interest in the sport, both in his writing and by his prowess on the hill. However, he was not above a little chauvinism if he thought that Central Europeans were taking too much credit for the progress of skiing:

Wherever the Norwegians settled skiing was introduced; all they asked in return was that this sport be conducted in a manner worthy of the ideals and lessons learned while in school and on skis in Norway. Their greatest reward was the satisfaction of knowing that their work was well done, . . . A contrast may be found in the so-called sports directors . . . hailing from middle Europe, who came to this country to the accompaniment of much ballyhoo . . . These gentlemen are never first, they always follow the Norwegian ski pioneer. We break the ground . . . We do the hard work, as we should, we organize. We teach in schools, in meetings, in the ski-hills. . . . And the first thing we know, a yodeller from the Alps is amongst us, getting himself installed as a know-it-all instructor, reaping what we planted . . .¹²

Despite such sentiments, Nelsen disclaimed any personal credit for the advancement of the sport. If anything, he faulted himself as a com-

petitor for not, as he stated, ". . . carrying out the true gospel of skiing." He applauded the likes of Engstad, who as president of the Burns Lake Ski Club in 1934, had helped the people realize ". . . what a wonderful, healthy, clean sport skiing is, and are proving it by giving the Ski Club all the support and cooperation they can."¹³ What Mobraaten said in a recent interview was that his participation in the sport was a source of personal enjoyment and if people could sense that, it was its own reward. "We had such great, friendly competitions; there were never any bitter rivalries and I look back on those days with pleasure because we had a chance to do what we liked. If the crowds came out to see us, that was just an extra for everyone."¹⁴

Mobraaten, Hvam and Ulland still live in the Pacific Northwest and their recollections of the tournament scene of the 1930s are vivid. They do not dwell on their own accomplishments but are quick to invoke the names, anecdotes, and memories of that era. Nonetheless, this trio, along with the late Henry Sotvedt and Nordahl Kaldahl embodied the best of the Kongsberg tradition: a brief accounting of their life and times will indicate that collectively these immigrants had much to do with laying the foundation for skiing that has persisted to the present.

Prior to the 1937 Dominion Championships in Banff, Kongsberg native Rolf Sivertson noted that the forthcoming meet would bring together many old rivals from Norway. Before coming to Canada and the U.S., the skiers belonged to different clubs in the district, Hvam and the Engen brothers to Nymoan, Kaldahl and Sigmund Ruud to K.I.F. (Kongsberg Idretts Forbund), and Sotvedt and Mobraaten to Sagrenna: "For several years the Pacific Northwest title developed into a competition purely between the Vancouver three. If Mobraaten won, Kaldahl or Sotvedt were second or third. If Nordahl won, Henry and Tom were in either second or third position and so on . . . with the whole gang at Banff it'll be like old times."¹⁵

The Banff meet was one of dozens that saw these skiers competing for two decades throughout Washington, Oregon, Alberta and British Columbia. It was as much happenstance and chance, as it was design that brought the immigrants together. For example, Hjalmar Hvam settled originally in Saskatchewan in 1923, where he joined his brother. The younger Hvam had worked in Rjukan but was concerned with the health of workers in the industrial milieu and wrote home extolling the virtues of the prairie climate. Hvam came to Canada when he was twenty-one and attended Outlook College for two years to pass the winter months. Later he headed for the Pacific coast and worked in the logging industry before going to Portland. By the time he got back on skis, seven years

had elapsed since his competitive days in Kongsberg. Hvam said that “. . . skiing was something that I left behind and it was only because of the insistence of some Norwegians in Portland that I agreed to start once more.”¹⁶

Mobraaten had also worked in Rjukan. He came directly to Vancouver in 1930 just as the worst of the depression hit and he rode the rods to the prairies to work as a farm hand. While there he heard from Kaldahl that the fishing was good off the B.C. coast which prompted him to return. He had neither money nor ski equipment then, and making a living took precedence over skiing. However, with little employment to be found in the winter months, Mobraaten joined other Scandinavians who had built cabins on the Hollyburn ridge area of West Vancouver. Here he recalled that a Norwegian, Sigmund Fulsebakke, hand-crafted him a pair of touring skis from cedar. They were good enough for him to win a prize in a cross-country tournament near Seattle in 1933. It was during those years that Swedish-born Rudolph Verne, in many ways the real father of skiing on Hollyburn, would give skiers boots and equipment even when there was little chance he would be repaid.

Mobraaten's clubmate from Sagrenna, Henry Asbjørn Sâtvedthagen (later Sotvedt) was determined not to follow his father's occupation in the silver mines of Kongsberg. Instead, he opted for Canada and landed in Winnipeg in 1929. He worked on a farm in Saskatchewan for two years where he perfected his English and met up with Mobraaten. Both responded to Kaldahl's invitation to head west, and thus began what was to be a life-long association on the tournament trail. Kaldahl had left Kongsberg in the early 1920s when work was scarce, and at a time when the largest number of immigrants from Scandinavia were leaving for Canada.¹⁷

For Olav Ulland, the passage to America differed in notable ways from that of his many Kongsberg colleagues. One of seven ski-jumping brothers—Sigurd and Arne were two other world-class skiers—Olav sailed on the *S.S. Bergensfjord* to New York in 1937. He was on his way to a jumping instructor's position in Seattle for the Pacific Northwest Ski Association. His four-month visa expired later the next year, and he had to go “into hiding in Canada's mountains” awaiting arrangements for permanent entry to Washington. Ulland had attained instant recognition in skiing circles in 1935 when he became the first individual to jump over the 100 meter mark. At that time he was in Italy as coach of the Italian Olympic team and had also coached in Czechoslovakia and France. Incidentally, Ulland's skis from his record-breaking jump are now in the Kongsberg museum. Like Hjalmar Hvam, Ulland had no

intention of skiing competitively when he came out west. Nonetheless, he soon found himself back on the hill, partaking in his last tournament on Leavenworth when he was 60.¹⁸

The history of skiing in the 1930s and 1940s, in statistical terms, involves a mind-numbing total of jumping distances, cross-country and alpine times. Such an account would blot out the flesh and blood characters who made up the history, and the human dimensions of the sport would hardly be recognized. In some ways, newspaper headlines hint at the drama, but these are best supplemented by personal reminiscences. For example, the famed Silver Skis downhill runs on Mount Rainier in the 1930s encompassed a four- to five-hour climb, and competitors faced an almost 4000 foot vertical drop on the return run. Mobraaten recalls the 1936 race in which the "Portland Express," Hvam, narrowly beat him for the first prize. Mobraaten was a demon for speed and on this run he took one fall, cut his nose and forehead and came hurtling over the finish line with blood streaming down his face: "I almost caught Hjalmar but he was just too tough for me, he's a fellow in remarkable condition."¹⁹ Hvam remembers those races well, as does Ulland who said he was no downhill expert but felt he had to take his place with the rest. Hvam, by the way, always stressed how important it was to keep physically strong and he attributed his stamina to hard work on the green chain and to his summer employment with the forest service in Portland.

A recitation of tournament statistics would perhaps give some indication of the nature of the winter schedules that the skiers followed. In any one season, competitors frequently traversed the length and breadth of B.C., Washington, and Oregon, by car and train, often on their own, but sometimes assisted by the sponsor club. As an example, in the 1929 season, Per Sandnes of the Omineca Ski Club in Burns Lake attended tournaments in Revelstoke, Banff, Vernon, and Portland. As a top ranked competitor, Sandnes and others similarly rated, would be in demand. When the interest and excitement of these ski meets grew, the pace was accelerated and the skiers themselves, as Mobraaten, Hvam, and Ulland confirmed, got caught up in tournament fever. Some of the local headlines suggest the atmosphere of that time: "Championship Ski Tournament Thrills 5000, Mobraaten Runs and Jumps off to Canada with Honors" (1934); "Ski Tournament Full of Thrills, Hvam Honor Man" (1936); "John Elvrum Wins Spokane Tournament" (1931); "Banff Skiers Get Thrills and Skiers Spills" (1938).²⁰ These carnivals at Leavenworth, Spokane, and Banff were typical in that they brought together the Norwegians whose enthusiasm had been re-kindled and whose

evident zest for friendly competition attracted the crowds.

Though most of those watching would not themselves take up the sport, there is little question that skiing had become part of the public's vocabulary. Many would echo the sentiment of the Canadian who first witnessed a jumping meet in Norway: "what was remarkable to me was the speed with which they ran off the jump. A horn blew; the man jumped; before he had reached the bottom of the hill the jump was measured and the numbers of meters recorded, and another man on top of the hill started."²¹ An observer at Revelstoke in 1922 described the scene as repeated countless times in the west: "In ten minutes the big spectacle was to start on the world's greatest ski hill. A cheer rings out from thousands . . . Then suddenly all is quiet . . . The bugler high up on the hill sounds reveille. On the very top . . . there is a skier ready for the leap. The megaphone announces Nels Nelsen—the long wall of spectators up the hillside cheer and wave their hats."²²

From the 1930s and into the post-war decade they came to cheer the Kongsberg contingent. Not that they always won but their presence gave the tournaments that extra quality, an intense but amicable rivalry. Mobraaten as the youngest of that group said: "I was always determined to go for the top but I had the highest regards for my fellow skiers. We used to try to beat each other for the longest standing jump even if that sometimes put us out of contention." Hjalmar Hvam recounts a time on the Multorpor jump when he had made a jump landing near the critical point. His friend and arch-competitor, John Elvrum, was famous for his tremendous spring and Hvam tried to signal to him to take less speed. Elvrum thought he was simply waving to him. He proceeded to jump, landed on the flat in an explosion of splintered skis, and lost consciousness for a time!²³ It was on the Multorpor jump on the occasion of the fifteenth annual meet in 1947 that Olav Ulland demonstrated that the "old boys" from Kongsberg could still be competitive by winning. The list of competitors then—Art Granstrom of Everett, Hermod Bakke of Leavenworth, Helge Sather of Spokane, Ole Tverdahl of Seattle, Olaf Rodegaard of Portland as well as Hvam and Sotvedt indicated that the Norwegian influence was still pronounced.²⁴

In an interview in 1975, Olav Ulland noted that this influence had lessened for obvious reasons: "The ones who kept ski jumping alive and went up every weekend and prepared the hills for the kids and coached them on their own time are either all too old, have passed away, or aren't able to go up anymore. And I'm about at that stage now." Sixty-five at the time, Ulland remarked that as a portent of the future, the annual Leavenworth meet had to be cancelled for lack of participants.²⁵ An era

had ended. Ulland's neighbour, post-war immigrant Gustav Raum, the 1946 Holmenkollen junior winner, observed: "Jumping is not a lifetime sport despite the Ullands and Hvams who made it seem that way!"²⁶ Four decades after it was recorded in the Leavenworth *Echo*, the claims for the pre-eminence of that ski centre still capture the imagination: "Leavenworth held the torch of skiing high and brought here a procession of the world's best jumpers beginning with Nels Nelsen of Canada and ending with Olav Ulland of Norway . . . And finally, and not the least important, [here in Leavenworth] we have put a winter bloom on the cheek and a sparkle in the eye of thousands who knew not the joy of skiing . . ." ²⁷

As we now contemplate the era of mass participation in the sport, especially the phenomenal growth of cross-country skiing, it is well to recall that the tracks were set and the ski trails broken well before our times. We should reflect on the way in which one course was marked out in Burns Lake some sixty years ago: "The class A cross-country run was flagged out by Vilhelm Schelderup . . . Being a B.C.L.S. and also a Norwegian, when he stated that the distance was nine miles, one may depend that they were all there and the going not too easy."²⁸ As for the downhill enthusiasts, they might examine Hvam's display of four trophies from Mount Baker in 1936, one in each discipline, Mobraaten's all-round performance at Princeton two years later, or Sotvedt's pioneering slalom and downhill contribution while he was rewriting the nordic record book in the 1930s. In short, the exploits of the Kongsberg and other Norwegian immigrants opened up a world of skiing in the Pacific Northwest. Those who now enjoy the sport partake of their legacy.

This brief examination of Norwegians and skiing hardly constitutes a full history of the sport. However, the research to date does suggest some characteristic features of the development years that can be identified. First of all, the focus on tournaments—ski jumping, cross-country, and the nordic combined—patterned on such Old Country events as the Holmenkollen ski festival, reveals a particularly Norwegian or Scandinavian bias. The immigrants built the jumping hills and laid out the cross-country circuits much as they had done in Norway or Sweden. And the fact, for example, that fifty kilometer races were staged at all, considering the small number who actually competed, tells us much about their expectations.

Initially, only Scandinavians took part as a matter of course. Almost all the competitors in jumping in the 1920s and 1930s were Norwegian. As exposure to the nordic events widened, non-Scandinavians entered into competition. Scandinavians participated in alpine skiing as well

and, while not necessarily founders of clubs and associations, they were usually involved as the "technical" people in the organization of club and district tournaments. In sum, the rather spectacular exploits of the Kongsberg skiers, especially on the jumping hills but also in the other disciplines, in reality introduced the possibilities of this winter sport to the Pacific Northwest. The subsequent development is perhaps something which not even the most enthusiastic immigrant skier could have envisaged.

Notes

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented for the 75th anniversary of Camrose Lutheran College, Camrose, Alberta, 11 April 1986, and for the 39th annual Pacific Northwest History Conference, Corvallis, Oregon, 24 April 1986. The present version was given in Stavanger for the second seminar of the Norwegian-American Historical Association (Norway chapter), 24-28 June 1986. It has benefitted from discussions I have had with Paul Gotaas and Clarence Servold of Camrose, and Petter Hugsted of Kongsberg, and I am pleased to record my thanks to them.

² Kongsberg, literally "king's mountain," is located in Buskeryd *fylke*, just over an hour by rail south-west from Oslo. As early as 1769 it was Norway's largest centre next to Bergen and at that time had over 4000 people employed in the silver mining industry. On 13 May 1987 King Olav officially opened the Kongsberg ski museum in the same building, the *Bergverkemuseet*, which houses artifacts and records of the silver industry from 1669 to its closing down in 1957. For details, see *Laagendalsposten Magasinet* (13 April 1987), particularly Per Sundman's "Først smeltehytte . . . i dag museum," pp. 14-15.

³ In addition to picture files, scrapbooks, and trophies located in the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame, and made available through the cooperation of Robert Graham, I have had access to Kaldahl's personal records, courtesy of his daughter, Rosemary Clapham, and I am pleased to acknowledge her assistance.

⁴ See note 2 above. After this paper was written, Anne Sotvedt and Rosemary Clapham gave me permission to select several trophies won by the late Henry Sotvedt and Nordal Kaldahl which were then handed over and are now on permanent display in the Kongsberg museum. See also *Western Viking* (10 April 1987), for details of Olav Ulland's donation to the same collection.

⁵ *The Hiker and Skier*, 4.7 (6 February 1936), p. 4.

⁶ *Canadian Ski Annual* (1931), p. 76.

⁷ Interview with Hjalmar Hvam, 2 March 1986.

⁸ During the period 1928-1948, Kongsberg skiers dominated Olympic and world championships, amassing over 7000 trophies in major tournaments. The red-sweated jumpers sporting the white "K" were synonymous with skiing excellence, the Ruud brothers Sigmund and Birger being the most famous skiers. See "Den største dagen i hele vår skihistorie" in *Laagendalsposten* (14 May 1987), for additional details.

- ⁹ *Canada Skandinaven* (6 March 1912). See *The Globe and Mail* (11 December 1986), for both the current plight of nordic combined skiing in Canada and the persistence of the Camrose tradition as personified by Jon Servold.
- ¹⁰ *Drammens Tidende of Buskeruds Blad*, nr. 149 (1975).
- ¹¹ Information on Jeldness and skiing at the turn of the century has been excerpted from Leif Halse, "Olaus Jeldness, Champion af Canada i Skiløbning og Hopping" in the Sotvedt Papers in my possession, first published in *Western Canadian Ski Annual* (1928 and 1929), pp. 82-84.
- ¹² "Pioneering on Skis in Canada," *Norse Canadian* 1 (January 1939), p. 9.
- ¹³ *The Hiker and Skier*, 4.5 (9 January 1936), p. 14.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Tormod Mobraaten, 13 February 1986.
- ¹⁵ Sotvedt Papers and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (11 February 1935).
- ¹⁶ Interview with Hjalmar Hvam, 2 March 1986.
- ¹⁷ Interview with Mobraaten, 13 February 1986, Sotvedt Papers. Kaldahl files, and interview with Anne Sotvedt, 6 March 1986.
- ¹⁸ Interview with Olav Ulland, 1 March 1986. For additional details see Greg Davenport's "Ski Affinity Begins with Norway Winter," in *Nordmenn Ved Kysten* (supplement to *Western Viking* (10 October 1975)).
- ¹⁹ Interview with Mobraaten, 13 February 1986.
- ²⁰ For representative headlines and details, see Sam Wormington, *The Ski Race* (Sandpoint, Idaho, 1980), *passim*.
- ²¹ Letter from Howard Bird, in *Canadian Ski Annual* (1926 and 1927), p. 30.
- ²² *The Norseman* (17 February 1922).
- ²³ Interviews with Mobraaten and Hvam.
- ²⁴ The Bakke brothers, Magnus and Hermod, were among many of the Norwegian-born skiers from Oslo who competed with the Kongsberg elite in the 1930s and into the post-war period. See *Western Viking* (4 April 1986).
- ²⁵ Davenport, *loc. cit.*
- ²⁶ Interview with Gustav Raaum, 1 March 1986.
- ²⁷ Wormington, *op. cit.*
- ²⁸ *Canadian Ski Annual* (1927 and 1928), p. 46. Incidentally, Norwegians—Ivor Fosland, Emil Skarland, Knute Nysveen, and Per Sandnes—took the first four places in class "A"; fellow countrymen Haakon Maydol, Schelderup, and John Berg headed the "B" class.

Bibliographic Note

The foregoing is based on a number of sources, and it draws heavily on the writer's association with Scandinavians and the sport of skiing in B.C. over the past half-century. The paper also owes much to many informal discussions with Christian and Hallvard Dahlie in recent years. However, I am

especially indebted to a number of individuals who have given generously of their time for interviews. They include Tormod and Peggy Mobraaten, Olav and Ruth Ulland, Clarence Servold, Hjalmar and Vera Hvam, Anne Sotvedt, Gustav Raaum, Paul Gotaas, and Rosemary (Kaldahl) Clapham. I have also benefitted from examinations of the private collections and memorabilia of the Ulland, Sotvedt, Hvam, and Mobraaten families, as well as Peggy Pratt's personal papers on the late Jack Pratt.

Other sources consulted in the preparation of this paper include the Nels Nelsen file, the C.A.S.A. files, and the Nordahl Kaldahl files and scrapbooks located in the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame, and I acknowledge Robert Graham's assistance in this connection.

The Polarization of Sound Change in Different Social Contexts: The Development of Icelandic in North America and Iceland

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Introduction

The research reported in this paper* was conducted as a preliminary examination to a larger more detailed study currently under way. The project was prompted by a newspaper article, written by Professor Haraldur Bessason of the University of Manitoba.¹ In his article Bessason suggests that the apparent mergers of /ɪ/ and /e/, and /ʏ/ and /ö/, especially in the long variants, a feature usually referred to as *Flámæli*, may be a stable, characteristic feature of the Icelandic spoken in the Icelandic settlements around Winnipeg, Manitoba (hereafter referred to as Western Icelandic). This claim becomes interesting in view of the fact that the same feature, once prevalent in certain regions in Iceland, is now virtually extinct there.²

The first part of the paper reports on efforts to establish whether in fact *Flámæli* is a dominant feature of Western Icelandic. This was accomplished through the study of a collection of interviews with Icelandic speakers in Canada, which were conducted by researchers other than the author (mostly for ethnographic purposes) and which are preserved in the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba. The results tend to support Bessason's claim as *Flámæli* was indeed found to be prevalent in the speech of the majority (67%) of those interviewed.³

Secondly, the paper focuses on the possible explanations for the survival of *Flámæli* in Western Icelandic. It raises questions of whether *Flámæli* was a dominant feature in the speech of the earliest settlers — that is, whether the settlers brought the feature with them in such numbers as to account for its spread — and to what extent the survival of this feature could be attributed to transfer from English.

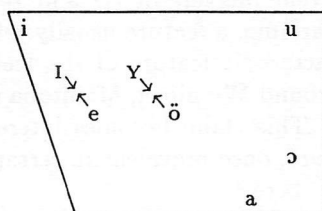
The paper ends with a discussion on whether, as scholars have suggested, *Flámæli* involves complete vowel mergers and whether it is a part of an ongoing phonological change in the Icelandic vowel system. We suggest that whatever the nature of the *Flámæli* process may be, it is

enhanced by the particular sociolinguistic context of Western-Icelandic as a dying immigrant language in North America.

What is *Flámæli*?

Icelandic in Iceland is commonly considered virtually free of dialects, although there are certain linguistic features that are associated with certain geographical areas. The variations that do exist have for the most part been free of social stigma and enjoyed equal status. The important exception to this rule is the case of *Flámæli*, or "slackjawed speech" (even the name reflects its undesirability). *Flámæli* refers to the lowering of the high front lax vowel /ɪ/ and the high front rounded vowel /y/, and the raising of the mid front vowel /e/ and the mid front rounded vowel /ø/, mainly in their long variants but are also found in the short variants. See the diagram of the Icelandic vowel system below:

Diagram 1



The apparent mergers seem to form a more open front mid vowel and a mid rounded vowel, eliminating the tense/lax distinction in the high vowels. The result of these apparent vowel mergers is that words such as:

[skɪ:r]	'a milk product'	and	[ske:r]	'small island'
[vɪ:ðʏr]	'wood'	and	[ve:ðʏr]	'weather'
[flʏ:ʏʏr]	'flies'	and	[flö:ʏʏr]	'tiles'

are perceived as homonyms. In the short variants the apparent mergers form these homonyms:

[kɪŋɔ]	'sheep'	and	[kɛŋɔ]	'feeling'
[lʏŋɔ]	'mood'	and	[lönɔ]	'lands'

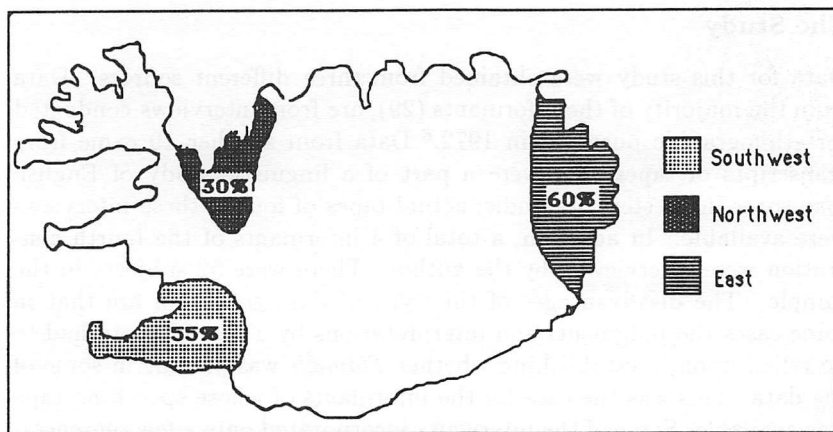
Hereafter the *Flámæli* features will be represented in the following manner:

[skɪ:r]	[ske:r]
[kɪŋɔ]	[kɛŋɔ]

The underlining indicates that [ɪ:] [i] have been lowered and [e:] [e] have been raised in the speech of the particular informant.

Development and Distribution of *Flámæli* in Iceland

Few studies have been undertaken regarding the distribution of *Flámæli* in Iceland. The most extensive one was a part of a major general dialect survey carried out by Björn Guðfinnsson in the 1940s and published in 1946 and 1964. About 90% of those tested were children or teenagers between the ages of ten and thirteen. Guðfinnsson found *Flámæli* in three different regions of Iceland; in East Iceland (Austfirðir), where over 60% of those tested showed evidence of having *Flámæli*, in the Northwest (Hrútafjörður), where 30% demonstrated *Flámæli*, and in southwestern Iceland, where 55% of the subjects in the sample demonstrated *Flámæli*. Other areas of Iceland were thought to be virtually free of *Flámæli* (see Map 1). It is important to the argument as to the survival of *Flámæli* in North America presented later in this paper, that in eastern and northwestern Iceland *Flámæli* extended only to the apparent lowering of [ɪ:] and [ʏ:], whereas in the Southwest, this feature was extended to [e:] and [ö:] and to the short variants as well. The highest concentrations of *Flámæli* were found in the villages and towns toward the centers of the *Flámæli* areas.⁴



Map 1

The earliest known instances of *Flámæli* date back to the early or middle part of the last century.⁵ Very little is known about its origins

and spread. In *Breytingar*, Björn Guðfinnsson's handbook for teachers of Icelandic first published in 1947 (the book was reissued as late as 1981), Guðfinnsson warned, based on his impressions and those of his colleagues, that *Flámæli* was on the offensive and that speakers transfer the "confusion" to the orthography, causing misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. He suggested ways in which this phenomenon could be eradicated through the educational system.⁶

In 1959 Benediktsson commented that *Flámæli* is "the only feature of pronunciation which is systematically opposed at all levels of instruction and education with the result that it has been claimed that it is losing ground in the youngest generation. The outcome, however, is not certain."⁷

Today *Flámæli* is all but extinct in Iceland, even in the areas where it was most pronounced. Due to extensive social and official efforts, *Flámæli* was counteracted so that today it can hardly be considered a feature of modern Icelandic in Iceland.

In view of the above, it becomes interesting to study the extent of *Flámæli* in the Icelandic spoken in Canada. The first question is whether *Flámæli* is in fact prevalent in the speech of the descendants of Icelandic immigrants in Manitoba. If so, the second question must be: what are the reasons for its survival?

The Study

Data for this study were obtained from three different sources. Data from the majority of the informants (29), are from interviews conducted for ethnographic purposes in 1972.⁸ Data from another 19 came from transcripts of tapes that were a part of a linguistic study of English loanwords in Western Icelandic; actual tapes of four of these interviews were available.⁹ In addition, a total of 4 informants of the fourth generation were interviewed by the author. There were 52 subjects in the sample. The disadvantages of this type of data collection are that in some cases the judgments and interpretations by a second party had to be relied upon in establishing whether *Flámæli* was present in some of the data. This was the case for the informants of whose speech no tape was available. Some of the interviews incorporated only a few sentences, sometimes not enough to give a clear idea of what type of *Flámæli* the informant demonstrated.

Another disadvantage is that there was no way to ensure that a relaxed, informal register could be elicited — in other words, that informants were not paying too much attention to the way they spoke. We

Table 1

Generation	Women	Men
1st	3	5*
2nd	9	13
3rd	3	8
4th	1	3
unclear	2	5

*Of the first generation, two had come to Canada as teenagers, six as young children.

later found in our own, more extensive interviews that some informants demonstrated no *Flámæli* during the actual interviews yet presented examples of it when the tape recorder was off, before or after the interviews, over coffee or goodbyes.

Ideally, the distribution of the informants according to generation should have been equal, but this was impossible at this time. The subjects were mainly from the Icelandic settlements around Lake Winnipeg in Canada. Some lived in Winnipeg but had grown up in the settlements. The oldest informant had completed a few years of elementary school. Two of the youngest informants held university degrees, one had studied Icelandic at university, and had *Flámæli*, even though none of her Icelandic instructors had *Flámæli*.

Below is a table showing the characteristics of the subjects according to sex and generation in Canada:

We make no claim that this pilot study should be regarded as a statistically accurate study. We do suggest, however, that our results support an impressionistic and popularly acknowledged claim that *Flámæli* is a prevalent feature in Western Icelandic, especially the variety spoken around Winnipeg, Manitoba.¹⁰

The Results

Of the 52 informants, 35, or 67% demonstrated *Flámæli* in one form or another; 17 informants had no *Flámæli*. Of the 35 that did have *Flámæli*, 8 had *Flámæli* of all the long variants and of the short variants as well (except /ö/). Another 7 had *Flámæli* only of [ɪ] and [y:], and 7 informants had only [ɪ] (in three of those cases only a few sentences were available for study). A total of 19 informants had *Flámæli* of [e:]. Table 2 presents a more detailed chart of the results. The underlining of the phonetic symbols represent vowels where standard Icelandic has

Table 2

Fjöldi málhafa	ɪ:	ʏ:	ɨ:	ö:	ɪ	ʏ	e	ö
1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
1	x	x	x	x	x	x		
1	x	x	x	x	x			
3	x	x	x					
7	x	x						
7	x							
8	x	x	x		x	x	x	
2	x	x	x		x			
1	x	x	x		x	x		
2	x	x			x			
1	x		x				x	
1	x					x		

[ɪ:] and informants had [ɪ].

The most interesting result is the extent to which *Flámæli* has developed in Icelandic Canada. Not only is there *Flámæli* of the long variants excluding /ö/, but also, in about half of the cases (18 out of 35), of the short subsystem.

Surprisingly few instances of /ö/ were found in the data. This may be due to the fact that there are fewer instances of /ö/ than of either /ɪ/, /e/, or /ʏ/ in the language and, as this vowel was not directly elicited, there may have been fewer examples present in the data. A more likely cause for the absence of front rounded /ö/, however, is that there seemed to be a process of unrounding of this vowel taking place in the dialect. This is a separate process from the vowel mergers. Words such as [kyö:ɔ̯] “meat”, [smyö:r] “butter” and [fyö:ʏʏr] “four” were produced as [kye:ɔ̯], [smye:r], and [fye:ʏʏr]. Unrounding of /ö/ is rarely found in modern Icelandic, although the examples above are all possible. However, to the best of my knowledge the following examples are unique to Western Icelandic: [eksʏm] for [öksʏm] “axes, dative, sg.” and [kye:kʏr] for [kö:kʏr] “cakes, nom. pl.”. Unrounding of front rounded vowels is a common occurrence in language attrition and language loss, and its interaction with *Flámæli* warrants further study. It is however, a separate phonological process from the one which is the focus of this paper.¹¹

The data provide evidence that not only is *Flámæli* a feature of Western Icelandic, but it has developed beyond its distribution in Iceland when it was at its peak. Recall that only in the Southwest of Iceland

had *Flámæli* extended to the raising of [e:] and [ö:] and to the short subsystem. In the East and Northwest this feature has only been found in [ɪ:] and [ʏ:]. In this study we found examples of all features in the speech of the informants (with the exception of /ö/).

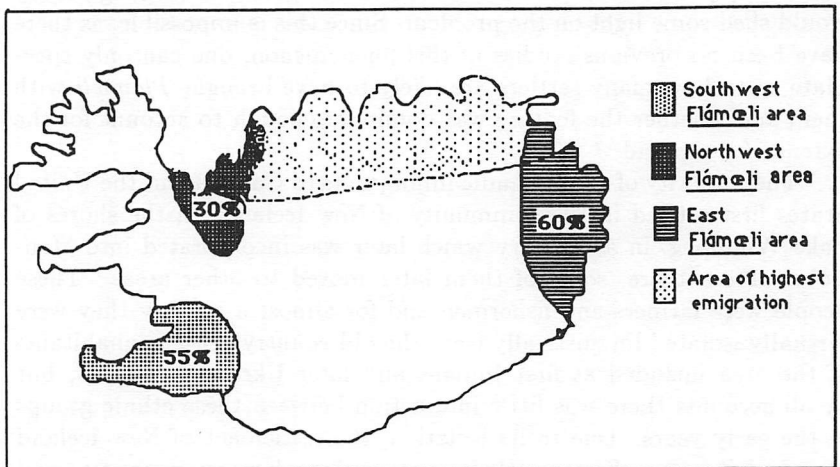
Why has *Flámæli* Survived in Canada?

The first questions addressed below are whether the settlers brought *Flámæli* with them and whether its distribution today reflects the distribution of *Flámæli* in the speech of the first immigrants. The assumption being that by virtue of high frequency at the beginning, the feature spread faster than it ever could have, if allowed, in Iceland. Ideally, a comparison of the speech of the immigrants at their arrival in Canada and the speech of their descendants who still speak the language today would shed some light on the problem. Since this is impossible, as there have been no previous studies of this phenomenon, one can only speculate as to how many settlers are likely to have brought *Flámæli* with them and whether the feature was dominant enough to account for the extent of its spread.¹²

The majority of the Icelandic immigrants to Canada and the United States first settled in the community of New Iceland, on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, in a territory which later was incorporated into Manitoba. From there, some of them later moved to other areas. These people were farmers and fishermen and for almost a century they were virtually isolated linguistically from the old country. Other inhabitants of the area included at first Indians and later Ukrainian settlers, but by all accounts there was little interaction between these ethnic groups in the early years. Due to its isolation, the settlement of New Iceland governed its own affairs, with its own written laws, newspapers, and religious education conducted in Icelandic for a number of years. According to Icelandic tradition, children were taught to read and write Icelandic at home and learned English only when they entered elementary school. Many people of the first generation never learned English, simply because there was no need for them to do so. Isolation and self government are ideal conditions for dialect leveling. It is important that unlike, for example, the Norwegians, the Icelanders never had difficulty understanding one another. Haugen has suggested that mutually unintelligible dialect differences among Norwegian settlers may have sped the substitution of English for Norwegian.¹³ This was never a factor among the emigrants from Iceland. Karttunen reports that the Finns also adopted English very quickly, as they settled mostly in already established settlements¹⁴ and were therefore under more pressure to con-

form than were the Icelanders, who settled together and established new settlements in isolated areas.

Of the more than fourteen thousand Icelanders that emigrated to Canada, most came from areas in the Northeast of Iceland, which had been the hardest hit by unusually severe winters, volcanic eruptions, and subsequent loss of livestock in the early 1870s. Map 2 illustrates the distribution of the emigrants according to Jónius Kristjánsson's extensive report on the history of the emigrants and their characteristics,¹⁵ and the *Flámæli* areas of Björn Guðfinnsson's study from the 1940s. As to how many of the settlers actually had *Flámæli*, one can only infer roughly by looking at their places of origin and how widespread *Flámæli* is likely to have been at that time.



Map 2

Guðfinnsson's study took place in 1941, or 68 years after the first large group of emigrants had left Iceland for Canada in 1873. *Flámæli* is thought still to have been on the offensive in 1941.¹⁶ Thirty percent of Guðfinnsson's subjects in Hrutafjörður demonstrated *Flámæli*. Sixty percent in Eastern Iceland had *Flámæli*, as did 55% in the southwestern corner of the country. The dotted area indicates the region from which the majority of the emigrants to North-America originated. The area of highest emigration overlaps with the northern most part of the eastern *Flámæli* region, or in Norður-Múlasýsla, where in 1941 57% of the subjects tested demonstrated *Flámæli*. In other areas where *Flámæli*

was found, and from where some immigrants are thought to have originated, such as in Hrutafjörður, only 30% of the subjects demonstrated *Flámæli*, and the southwest region had 55%. It is an important consideration that only in the southwest region did the *Flámæli* extend to [e:] and [ö:] and to the short variants. Guðfinnsson claims that *Flámæli* was furthest advanced in this area, but due to migration to the fishing towns in the Southwest from regions that were free of *Flámæli*, the overall percentage of speakers with *Flámæli* was skewed. However, it seems clear that those emigrants who might have had *Flámæli* in their speech were likely to have lowered [ɪ:] and [ʏ:] only.

Considering that 55% of youths from 10 to 13 in a given area had a dialectal feature that was on the offensive in 1941, and which is thought to have originated in the language some 100 years earlier, one can safely assume that fewer speakers must have had the feature in the 1870s. Further, keeping in mind that the areas of most frequent emigration only marginally overlap the *Flámæli* region in the East, the number of immigrants that must have had the feature diminishes. This does not exclude *Flámæli* from the speech of the first settlers; quite to the contrary, some of them had this feature, but it is highly unlikely that there were enough speakers to warrant such an extensive spread as indicated by the study above. We can safely assume that the majority of the original Icelandic settlers in Canada did *not* in fact have *Flámæli* in their Icelandic.

The argument is brought home when the type of *Flámæli* found in the Icelandic of Manitoba is compared to the *Flámæli* found in eastern Iceland. Our study produced ample examples of the raising of [e:], although few of the raising of [ö:], and *Flámæli* in the short subsystem as well. This advanced version was only found in the southwest of Iceland, which does not overlap with the area of highest emigration. *Flámæli* in Western Icelandic has evolved further than in the area where it had advanced furthest in Iceland. Thus, the explanation that the extensive spread of *Flámæli* in Western Icelandic was due to so many of the early settlers having brought it with them can be rejected.

Another possible source of explanation is that the high frequency of the mergers are due to language contact, in this case, influence from English. There is very little indication that *Flámæli* is caused by direct influence from English, that is, transfer of English vowel features onto the Icelandic. If that were the case, why would not other vowels be affected? The only obvious transfer that we observed concerned Icelandic proper names, which were usually produced using English sound inventory without Icelandic case endings; in other words, they were pronounced as if they were English. In those cases there was clear English

transfer: 'Gunnar' became [gʌn:ɚ], 'Hulda' became [huldə] or [hʌldə]. Direct transfer from English can safely be ruled out as the major cause of the survival of *Flámæli* in Canada.

A possible explanation for the frequency of *Flámæli* in Western Icelandic involves viewing *Flámæli* as an ongoing evolutionary process of simplification within the Icelandic vowel system, along the lines of those well-documented cases in Icelandic since its divergence from Norwegian in the ninth century.¹⁷ In his thorough analysis of the evolution of the Icelandic vowel system, Benediktsson considers the series of mergers that characterize its development to constitute a coherent, systematic process, a single tendency to reduce the number of distinctive features by which the vowels are distinguished from one another.¹⁸

The vowel system of Modern Icelandic furthermore proves to be distinctly asymmetric, with five front vowels as opposed to three back vowels (cf. Diagram 1).

The vowel system of *Flámæli*, with the vowels /ɪ/ and /e/, and /y/ and /ö/ merged, would result in a further simplification of the distinctive features needed to distinguish them by eliminating the tense/lax distinction of the high front vowels and would result in a more equitable three front and three back vowel system.¹⁹

From an acquisitional standpoint, Guðfinnsson comments that "children who are acquiring language learn the *Flámæli* sounds quickly. They invariably reject the correct sounds if they are given a choice, and after having acquired the *Flámæli* are reluctant to give it up"²⁰ ([author's translation]). If we assume that children construct the optimal grammar from the available input, this argues for some type of simplification process in the language, which facilitates the acquisitional process. However, it is important that none of the informants in any of the studies had the sounds completely merged; and the ease with which *Flámæli* was eradicated in Iceland suggests that the process is one of approximation of sounds and not a complete merger.

Trudgill²¹ presents evidence from earlier forms of English in which lexical sets include vowel sounds that had apparently merged but later split again. Labov, Yeager, and Steiner report five cases of "false" mergers. They believe that there is strong evidence to suggest that intuitive and impressionistic judgments of "same" and "different" sounds by speakers and phoneticians are unreliable. The spectrographic analysis of their own data indicates that the ear is sensitive to the first formant but much less so to the second and third formant positions. Their two-formant plots showed "systematic differences in F₂ positions of certain word classes which phoneticians can begin to perceive reliably only after

their attention has been directed to them by the visual display.”²² If this is so, then it is perfectly possible that two underlyingly distinct sounds can pass from one generation to another perceived as one sound, later to split.²³ This may be the case for *Flámæli*.

Finally, we are left with the questions of why *Flámæli* no longer exists in Icelandic as spoken in Iceland, and why it has survived and evolved in Canada. Here a closer look at language in its social context is in order.

In the early 1800s, along with nationalistic movements to establish independence from Denmark, there was in Iceland an upsurge to “purify” the language and make it more like the language of the “Sagas”. The language in this case served as a symbol of things Icelandic. Prescriptivism in language study became the prevailing trend. As a result of this movement, the only regional feature that became stigmatized was *Flámæli*, which was thought to be an ugly and slovenly manner of speech. In education, *Flámæli* was thought to hamper reading and writing instruction, as the “confusion” of the merging sounds was invariably carried over into the orthography, creating homonyms and causing a lapse in communication. This argument was presented by Guðfinnsson in 1947 in the first edition of *Breytingar*.²⁴ Efforts were made to eliminate this feature from the language, and measures were implemented at all levels of instruction which proved very successful.²⁵ I have found no references in the relevant literature to other instances in which prescriptive measures have been successful in reversing ongoing sound change to this degree.²⁶

If the link between language and ethnicity in Iceland was extremely strong, in Canada it weakened with each generation removed from the original settlers from Iceland. Certainly it can be argued that the functional range of the language has narrowed from its role as the national language in Iceland. Reduction in language use under language contact increases the rate of spread of simplification trends, as proved to be the case in Western Icelandic so far as *Flámæli* was concerned. The *Flámæli* phenomenon is a clear example of how social context affects the rate of sound change. *Flámæli* and its realization in Iceland and in Canada is an example of extreme effect, where different social contexts have polarized ongoing sound change. Hill suggests that “where social support of a language is strong in an intact speech community, and the functional range of a language covers most areas in which communication takes place, these factors will tend to suppress simplifying trends.”²⁷ Add to this an extreme association between ethnicity and language and a very small population of speakers who look to an older literary language form

as a model, and one has an ideal situation for prescriptive views to be effective in influencing linguistic change. In this case systematic social opposition seems to have prevented a coalescence of vowels, which might have led to a simpler, more symmetric vowel inventory.

In Canada the other extreme seems to be the case. The Icelandic descendants in Canada were aware of the stigma attached to *Flámæli*, at least during the last fifty years. However, the functional range of the Icelandic spoken in Canada gradually narrowed, as Icelandic became solely the language of the home and among friends in informal settings. English became the language of education, commerce, and so on, as well as of all domains of language other than the most informal ones. Parallel with this development were shifting language loyalties and national identities as the descendants of the immigrants came to view themselves as Canadians of Icelandic descent, rather than Icelanders. The reduction in usage and in incentive to preserve the language enhanced already existing simplification trends and increased their rate of spread.

Implications for Further Research

Vowel mergers are well known phenomena in the world's languages. There is a great deal of evidence of vowels having merged, eliminating distinctions where they had previously existed.²⁸ The causality and general mechanisms of the mergers themselves are less clear and it seems that *Flámæli* as an ongoing merging process may pertain to these issues.

Previous analyses of the Icelandic vowel system mirror the traditional view that each language state has a system with "a life of its own," which continually strives for a symmetric and equidistant distribution of its segments. In this tradition, phonological evolution involves a constant tug of war between the "expressive needs of man and his tendency to reduce his mental and physical exertions to the minimum."²⁹ This view has been criticized for ignoring the social context of language use. Labov pointed out that language does not exist in a social vacuum and that no serious student of language should ignore this factor.³⁰ Trudgill takes this view further, suggesting that the dividing line between "natural" (internally driven) or "unnatural" (socially motivated) sound change is not as clear-cut as it would seem at first glance.³¹

If *Flámæli* is a purely "natural" process within the language, why is it found only in these three geographical areas in Iceland and does not seem to spread from one area to another? What were the social characteristics of its users? Why did *Flámæli* become stigmatized and not other regional dialect features? A recent reanalysis of Björn Guðfinnsson's data has in fact demonstrated a correlation between lower

economic status and the use of *Flámæli*.³² The nature and spread of *Flámæli* in Iceland certainly pose questions as to the causes and spread of sound change in Icelandic within its social context.

Above we have discussed the view that *Flámæli* is a part of an ongoing simplification tendency within the Icelandic vowel system which has been reversed in Iceland due to extreme social pressure, but enhanced in the dying dialect of the immigrant communities around Winnipeg. In future research we intend to reexamine this claim. *Flámæli* is obviously a simplification process. However, further research, especially a detailed spectrographic analysis of *Flámæli* as it appears in Western Icelandic, may tell us whether these sound changes are actually mergers or merely approximations that have become more prevalent as the functional range of the language has been reduced to basically one informal register due to language attrition.

Notes

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¹ Haraldur Bessason, "Aðrósta kjötið og klína upp húsið," *Lesbók Morgunnblaðsins* (Reykjavík, June 16, 1984), pp. 4-5. Haraldur Bessason, "Hún fór út með bojjfrendinu," *Lesbók Morgunnblaðsins* (Reykjavík, 23 June 1984), pp. 11-13.

² Only a few speakers of the older generation remain. See Björn Guðfinnsson, *Mállýskur I* (Reykjavík, 1946) and *Mállýskur II* (Reykjavík, 1964). Höskuldur Thráinsson and Kristján Árnason, "Um reykvísku," *Íslenskt mál* 6:113-134. Thórunn Blöndal, *Nokkrar athuganir á framburði Reykvíkinga fyrr og nú* (MS, 1985).

³ As these data were obtained from other sources, Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson and Gísli Sigurðsson (see Notes 8 and 9), males and females are not equally represented, nor are the four generations of speakers.

⁴ Björn Guðfinnsson (1964), pp. 105-108, 97-98, 83-88.

⁵ Thórunn Blöndal (1985), p. 95.

⁶ Björn Guðfinnsson, *Breytingar á framburði og stafsetningu* (Reykjavík, 1981), p. 38.

⁷ Hreinn Benediktsson, "Icelandic Dialectology, Methods and Results," *Lingua Islandica* 1 (1959a), p. 95.

⁸ Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, *Viðtöl við Vesturíslendinga* (unpublished interviews, 1974).

⁹ Gísli Sigurðsson, *Viðtöl við Vesturíslendinga* (unpublished interviews, 1982).

¹⁰ This is supported in Stephen Clausing, "Dialect Preservation in American Icelandic: A Methodological Study," *Word* 35 (1984): 76-87. Clausing found that 10 of his 19 informants demonstrated *Flámæli* and that another 3 informants seemed to be suppressing it.

¹¹ Unrounding of front rounded vowels is a well-known phenomenon in language loss. An example would be Texas German [šein] for German [šön] 'schön' (Robert King, personal communication).

¹² See also Clausing (1984).

¹³ See Einar Haugen's discussion on Norwegian in America in for example: "The Scandinavian Languages: Fifty Years of Linguistic Research," *Current Trends in Linguistics* 9, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp. 1461-1625.

¹⁴ Frances Karttunen, "Finnish in America: A Case Study in Monogenerational Language Change," *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Change*, ed. Ben G. Blount and Mary Sanches (New York: Academic Press, 1977), p. 175.

¹⁵ Júníus Kristjánsson, *Vesturfaraskrá 1870-1914: A Record of Emigrants from Iceland to America 1870-1914* (Reykjavík, 1983), Introduction, p. xviii.

¹⁶ The fact that most of Björn Guðfinnsson's informants were children and teenagers complicates the possible interpretation of his results. Does the extent of *Flámæli* amongst the youths reflect the extent of *Flámæli* in the community? Do we have a sound change in progress? Or will some of these teenagers later drop *Flámæli* in favour of standard forms?

¹⁷ Hreinn Benediktsson, "The Vowel System of Icelandic," *Word* 15 (1959):306.

¹⁸ See also, Kristján Árnason, *Quantity in Historical Phonology: Icelandic and Related Cases* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Ch. 2.

¹⁹ Magnús Pétursson, *Drög að Hljóð kerfisfræði* (Reykjavík, 1978).

²⁰ Björn Guðfinnsson (1981), p. 38.

²¹ Peter Trudgill, *On Dialect: Social and Geographical Perspectives* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 103.

²² William Labov, M. Yaeger and R. Steiner, *A Quantitative Study of Sound Change in Progress* (Philadelphia: U.S. Regional Survey, 1972), p. 4.

²³ The implication is that eventually these vowels would have merged in the same way that other vowels in previous forms of Icelandic have merged.

²⁴ Björn Guðfinnsson (1981), p. 38.

²⁵ Studies conducted by the R-IN project of the University of Iceland have revealed very little evidence of *Flámæli*. See: Höskuldur Thráinsson and Kristján Árnason (1984), and Þórunn Blöndal (1985).

- ²⁶ This view is supported by Robert King (personal communication).
- ²⁷ Jane H. Hill, "Language Death, Language Contact, and Language Evolution," *Approaches to Language: Anthropological Issues*, ed. William C. McCormack and Stephen A. Wurm (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), p. 66.
- ²⁸ Labov, Yaeger and Steiner (1972), Ch. 6.
- ²⁹ André Martinet, "Function, Structure and Sound Change," *Word* 8 (1952): 27.
- ³⁰ William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), p. 181.
- ³¹ Trudgill (1983), Ch. 5.
- ³² Gísli Pálsson of the University of Iceland (personal communication).

WRITERS OF
SCANDINAVIAN ORIGIN

Intertextual Notes in a Metafictional Autobiography: *The Prowler* by Kristjana Gunnars

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This paper explores some of the narrative strategies employed by Kristjana Gunnars in *The Prowler*,¹ a poem/story/novel that experiments with form and content, while implicitly proving that form is content. Written from a postmodern perspective, self-reflective in the extreme, the story opens a plurality of dynamic meanings to be explored equally by a contemporary reader and a directing author.

It is the story of a poverty-stricken country, Iceland, whose children are patient cultivators of vegetables, trees, and love. It is the story of proud Icelanders offering polite thanks for the useless CARE packages sent from the United States, only to instruct their children to dump the unnecessary toys in the garbage bin. It is a story about lies told to a starving population about a "harmless" American Base that endangers their lives. It is also a story about children who look desperately for clothes to warm their frail bodies marked by all the diseases of poverty: tuberculosis, scurvy, and polio. It is about children who crave precious tomatoes to quench their perpetual hunger or engage in a hunger strike against an unfair God, children who seek surrogates to replace their own toiling parents. It tells you how to keep your identity safe from the lurking temptations of wealth, and how to disguise this identity better so that you may be able to preserve it from dangers. It is a story made of questions that remain unanswered: questions about the perpetual longing that exists in human souls for imaginary, exotic places and their mysterious beauty that could help them escape from a dreary fate.

The fragmentary, aphoristic style employed by Kristjana Gunnars is perfectly suited to its task, suggesting more than it describes, sketching, probing, urging, yielding, and withdrawing meanings that are ultimately to be provided by reader as much as by text.

One of the first questions to be raised is that of the significance of the chosen title: *The Prowler*. Who or what is the prowler? The answer is a multiple one; it is given directly by Gunnars throughout her book, and/or inferred by us as readers from other less explicit clues offered by the text. The prowlers are all and every one of the following: the author,

her text, her characters, and her readers. The author is a prowler represented in the text by any of the roles played by the narrator: a school girl who goes prowling in the library of one of the schools she attended (§86),² or a young girl who is prowling through the streets of her childhood with her first lover (§126). At a secondary level, Gunnars is a prowler like any of the contemporary authors who chase narrative threads through other texts for their intertextual “bricolage” or rummage among memories and symbols to weave autobiographical-metafictional webs. At a third level, once the text is assembled, the author joins her reader in reception by prowling through the written text. The whole text is a prowler since it “has been prowling in the reader’s domain. Telling itself and then interpreting itself. Incorporating that which does not belong to a story” (§164). Some of the secondary characters are prowlers too: a frightening thief, or maybe even a wanted murderer, who has killed a young girl; a mysterious passenger on a passage boat, who works only at night to assemble a puzzle representing an exotic painting from a remote and prosperous country, and who is helped through a curious, tacit understanding of the narrator as a young girl. Gunnars’ readers are also “prowlers” since they are invited and directed to “prowl” through traces of life experiences, their own painfully sweet memories, and the theoretical reflections inspired by such memories. The action of “prowling” is seen as a general kind of metaphor for rebellion against enforced patience and against the eternal boredom of a poverty-riddled childhood. “Prowling,” in Gunnars’ view, is synonymous with daring to be imaginative, and is equal to the complex narrative process of self-reflection and self-creation of all metastories.³

The Prowler is a clear instance of a new hybrid genre called by some contemporary critics “(auto)biographical metafiction.”⁴ “Metastory” is a recurrent term in *The Prowler* together with other pronounced metafictional features of Gunnars’ text, which is “a story that does not desire pretense” and “must incorporate its own metastories” (§55). Metafiction could be defined loosely as fiction about the writing of fiction.⁵ Gunnars’ discourse includes all the aspects of metafiction. She thematizes metafiction diegetically in her discussions on the power of storytelling to create worlds:

All the stories deliberately collected have notes of regret in them. A touch of wishfulness that the story were describing an alternative world. (§100)

or

It is a story where the boundary between that which is written and that which is lived remains unclear. (§146)

She actualizes metafiction diegetically as she presents her readers with multiple versions of her own childhood in Iceland and new versions of the Brothers Grimm's fairy-tale "Hansel and Gretel," in which the author/narrator and the Hungarian boy come to the United States, or to American universities, as to another gingerbread house inhabited not by a witch, but by a different cultural identity; it is an adventure that might prove to be less destructive than expected, or less openly dangerous (§75, 163, 137). The author thematizes metafiction linguistically as she addresses the issue of the limits and powers of fictive language:

The writer cannot escape repression. The text represses the writer. The text is the writer's prison. The words will not take the writer into themselves. The author is therefore locked out of the book. (§93)

It is possible to be so full of love that the voice that is inundated with words is unable to speak. The simplest words clamour to get out, but all that emerges is silence . . . Love seeks refuge in figurative language. Love is ashamed of itself, of its own transparency. It is vulnerable territory. (§101)

Gunnars writes in clear intertextual relation with Saussure's linguistics and with the ensuing debate on the arbitrariness of the sign; she adopts a postmodern perspective on language as necessarily bound to ideology:

Words are not what they signify. We confuse the signifier with the signified. Words are only words. They live in an atmosphere of their own. Words are suitcases crammed with culture. I imagine a story of emptied containers. Bottles drained of their contents. Travel bags overturned, old clothes, medicine bottles, walking shoes falling all over the airport floor. To come to your destination with nothing in hand. To come to no destination at all. (§52)

Gunnars is covertly actualizing metafiction diegetically by incorporating into her book several formulas: the detective story, the love story, and the game. The detective story is present in the text in various alarming rumours about hunting a thief or a murderer: "it is possible that this is a crime story" (§71). The love story is chosen by Gunnars as the preferred genre: "On the other hand it is much more likely that this is a love story" (§72). The game, as a third story formula present in *The Prowler*, is a textual game of cards made out of time and signification:

I have sometimes thought: it is possible there is no such thing as chronological time. That the past resembles a deck of cards. They are not scenes the rememberer chooses, but simply a deck that is given. The cards are shuffled wherever a game is played. The same game may be played several times. Each time the game is played the configurations are different, and a new text emerges. I imagine a text that refuses to play its own game. (§81)

Metafictional texts are neither entirely "open" nor "closed." Gunnars is explicitly aware of this feature of her discourse when she writes, in a double intertextual allusion to the narrative strategy employed by James Joyce to end *Finnegan's Wake* and to Borges' permanent aspiration to write a perfectly circular story ("The Aleph," "The Babel Library"):

It must be possible after all to find a beginning to any story. Even if it is arbitrary. I have been thinking that there is an actual beginning to this story and that a story should end with its origins. (§166)

Metafiction is situated at the borderline that separates art from life, signifiers from signified, possible worlds from the actual world. Metafictional texts underline the self's possibility of transgressing those borderlines in an analytical, playful way that involves its authors and readers. Gunnars takes us a step further, to a point where we realize that authors and readers may be equal competitors in decoding a text that is quasi-independent and resists decoding:

It was James Joyce who said: the reader wants to steal from the text. The reader aspires to be a thief. For that reason the text must not be generous. It is a relief not to have such rules. To play such games. Hide and seek. Not to have rules perhaps means you are free to steal from yourself. Finally. (§53)

Another border that is transgressed by Gunnars is that of genre. *The Prowler* is not a regular novel, or a regular short story, or a poem. Both the author and her readers are set free in a kind of organic paradigm of creativity, similar to that of divine universal creation:

It is a relief not to be writing a story. Not to be imprisoned by character and setting. By plot, development, nineteenth century mannerisms. A relief not to be writing a poem, scanning lines, insisting on imagery, handicapped by tone. A relief just to be writing. (§3)

And later on in the book, in the same vein:

It is a relief to be under no obligation . . . Not to count the pages as they accumulate. Not to think about a climax or a denouement or an introduction. Instead just to watch the egg hatch. It is there and

I know it will hatch. I have often thought, if God were a writer He would write such a curious story. (§28)

The reading and writing experiences are actualized by the interplay of three elements: text (a metafictional biography), context (the double socio-historical referents of Gunnars and her readers), and intertext which situates the story within a larger paradigm and is a sum of all the allusions, influences, parallels, and comparisons with other texts.⁶ This larger intertextual frame is made accessible by Gunnars to all categories of readers by means of sometimes sophisticated, sometimes common-sensical allusions. Intertextuality is a phenomenon which may direct the reading of a text and control its interpretation, and which is the opposite of a linear reading.⁷ As Riffaterre says,

The very core of the literary experience is that perceiving mode known as intertextuality. The text refers not to objects outside itself, but to an intertext. The words of the text signify not by referring to things, but by presupposing other texts.⁸

The Prowler begins with an epigraph of marked Derridean nuance, which is at the same time a quotation from another book, an epigraph that functions as a double intertextual allusion:

The story of my life doesn't exist. Does not exist. There's never any center to it. No path, no line. There are great spaces where you pretend there used to be someone, but it's not true, there was no one. Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*

The first lines of *The Prowler* plunge us into the specific intertextual mechanics of metafictional autobiography. The delegated narrator speaks with James Joyce's voice and then slides imperceptibly back into another voice which might belong to the main narrator, who speaks for Gunnars, or to an anonymous, self-reflective, omniscient narrator. The same first lines manage to raise some of the current problems of metafiction: the limits and the possibilities of representation inherent in a language that is quasi-independent of its creators, and the disappearing borders between genres.

Perhaps it is not a good book, he said. James Joyce said, but it is the only book I am able to write. It is not a book I would ever read from. I would never again stand in front of people, reading my own words, pretending I have something to say, humiliated. It is not writing. Not poetry, not prose. I am not a writer. Yet it is, in my throat, stomach, arms. This book that I am not able to write. There are words that insist in silence. Words that betray me. He does not

want me to write this book. The words make me sleep. They keep me awake. (§1)

The Prowler offers intertextual echoes with such famous novels as Günter Grass' *The Tin Drum* (§83), William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (§65), Joyce's novels, and folk and fairy tales, such as the Brothers Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel," and Hans Christian Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling". What is particularly interesting about the intertextual notes of *The Prowler* is the actual process of interaction between its metafictional text and theoretical concepts and works. This process results in establishing a minimal difference between theory and fiction. We encounter several allusions to Barthes' "Death of the Author" (§96), to Barthes' and the general post-modern notion of "bricolage" as the assembling of texts from other texts (§69), to Proppian Russian Formalist folk-tales analysis (§146), to Pirandello's theorized independence of the created discourse, or independence of characters from their creator (§94, 95), and to Calvino's narrative strategies displayed and explained as a mixture of chance and carefully planned games (§80, 81).

In conclusion, Gunnars' wish to create a circular book is fulfilled. It is a self-reflective book in more than one way. First, the narrative structure of the book could be described as a perpetually repeated cycle of various levels, starting from metatheoretical reflections, continuing with intertextual allusions, reaching the individualized facts of this story, rising to the generalizations inferred by narrator and readers from these facts, and then returning to the initial metatheoretical reflections. Secondly, on the thematic level, the stories are told only to be retold, with no traceable time-sequence and in various different versions of the same events which are offered as equivalent possibilities. Last but not least, the recurrent metaphor of the mirror, encountered in *The Prowler* as well as in numerous other contemporary metafictional stories (for example those of Borges), best represents the narrative strategy proposed and used by Gunnars, whereby literary creation or artistic creation, in general, is a joint endeavour of both writers/artists and their readers/public. In Gunnars's words:

The reader is new to being a hero. He is not used to this spotlight, to having books named after him. I conceived of another sort of self-portrait: the painter paints her own image, but paints it directly on the mirror. The viewer sees not the image of the artist, but his own face through the lines of oil paint. The face looking back at the viewer will have an expression of helpless concern. (§111)

Notes

¹ Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1989.

² The numbers following quotations from *The Prowler* refer to the sections, or very short chapters rather than to pages.

³ As Gunnars writes: "In the metastory there are figurative prowlers looking for something. But there is very little for them to find . . . The prowler does not know he already has what is being sought" (§110).

⁴ Linda Hutcheon, "Postmodern Paratextuality and History," in *Texte*, 5/6 (Toronto: Editions Trintexte, 1987), p. 311.

⁵ For further details see Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), p. 154.

⁶ See Linda Hutcheon, "Literary Borrowing . . . and Stealing: Plagiarism, Sources, Influences and Intertexts," in *English Studies in Canada* 12 (1986), No. 3, pp. 231, 234, 236-37.

⁷ The term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva, in 1967 ("Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman," in *Critique* t. XXXIII (1967), pp. 438-65; used also in *Semeiotike: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp. 143-73). It broadly defines the formal category of textual interaction actualized in reception and production. As early as 1966, Gerard Genette introduced one of his variant terms for the textual interaction, the metaphor of palimpseste. This was his first definition of palimpseste (in "Proust palimpseste," in *Figures I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 166-67):

Comme l'écriture proustienne, l'oeuvre de Proust est un palimpseste où se confondent et s'enchevêtrent plusieurs figures et plusieurs sens, toujours présents tous à la fois, et qui ne se laissent déchiffrer que tous ensemble, dans leur inextricable totalité.

In 1979, Genette elaborated on the phenomenon of "transcendence textuelle — c'est-à-dire de tout ce qui met le texte en relation, manifeste ou secrète avec d'autres textes." Such a relationship establishes different hierarchical positions and nuanced interactions of trans-, inter-, hyper-, para-, meta- and archi-textuality (Gerard Genette, *Introduction à l'architexte* (Paris: Seuil, 1979)). For the purposes of this analysis, the working theoretical frame will be a mixture of Riffaterre's (see note 6) and Hutcheon's definitions. They both look at intertextuality as generated by a reader who is competent enough to recognize, respond to, and activate the textual referents/interpretants offered by an author in his/her discourse.

⁸ See also Michael Riffaterre, "L'Intertexte inconnu," *Littérature*, no. 41, "Intertextualités médiévales," (1981), pp. 4-7. Also Michael Riffaterre, "Interpretation and Undecidability," *New Literary History* XII (1981), pp. 227-42.

Interview with Kristjana Gunnars about *The Prowler*

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Kristjana Gunnars
(University of Alberta)

Gheorghe: Kristjana, I have a very rare opportunity to discuss various aspects of modern or postmodern fiction and literary criticism with the author of the book I have myself written about. It seems to me that in *The Prowler* you display a permanent awareness of contemporary theoretical assumptions that underlie the creative process, making several intertextual allusions to Barthes, Derrida, or such innovative writers as Joyce. What do you think is the relation established between theory, its metalanguage, and the creative process?

Gunnars: Although it was ideas from the postmodern controversy you mention that brought me to the writing of *The Prowler*, I never defined what I was doing as belonging to a specific theoretical framework. Although I was very much aware, also, of the history and development of *gynocritics* (using this term as defined by Elaine Showalter), I was not exactly concerned with “female” writing either, when I wrote that book. I may have been most influenced by Roland Barthes. What attracted me was the conscious, unapologetic use of the subjective — complete infiltration of the subjective — on the world. I found in what Barthes was doing a joy in the opportunity to validate the self. In relation to gynocritics as well, I found it painful to notice the persistent *invalidating* of women’s experience for one thing, and children’s experience for another. The voice of the powerless is what intrigued me. When you take the militancy, authority, power, out of the voice, and leave yourself with language only, then the grid of significance changes. Under the screen of language, anyone can speak, and all the voices are equal. I wanted to step back and simplify the written language to such a degree that language would not be the “dark glass” through which we see so murkily (through rhetoric and cultural packaging), but a clearer window into the glaring passages of writing itself. Those passages are subjective. In some manner, all writing is life writing. It has not been possible to do what I was trying to do with confidence until the last few decades. This way I think the presence of new literary theory acts as *enabler*. Literary

theory, as practised on all fronts, is therefore indispensable to the (alternative) writer looking for validation. Some theory is also more writerly than other theory. In postmodernism, criticism has become very creative. I do not see the work of Derrida and his “followers,” for example, as critics “vying for primacy with the writer” (Showalter again). I see postmodernism again as enabling. For writers like myself who have been living within university walls since youth, and likely will go on doing so, it is tiring to live with the imposed idea that there is a duality in you: the writer and the scholar. It is a binary, an opposition, that does not have to exist. Writing is a making use of the whole of yourself. If that is also a critical dialogue, I think it should be incorporated into the creative dialogue. The relationship between theory and its metalanguage, therefore, with the creative process, is all inclusive, infiltrative, mutually absorbing of each other. I do not see a difference, essentially, between the processes of thought. Also because I agree with the Derridean supposition that our individual texts are composed of masses of other texts. That is a reality, not merely a theory, for someone like Barthes, and it is a reality to me. It is a reality for James Joyce, and that is why he is also in my book.

Gheorge: Do you feel that titles and names are significant? If so why have you chosen as the title of your experimental book *The Prowler*?

Gunnars: Titles and names are significant to me; they have to be since they are part of language and all of language is significant. However, I think names especially were rendered too great a symbolic significance in New Criticism, and in some sense *The Prowler* is written against the grain of that particular mode of theorizing about literature. So as *response against*, I take pleasure in devaluing, designificating (if I can put it that way) titles and names. Sometimes it is good to let names be; use real names as they exist in the real world being described — real in a subjective sense, which includes given names. My title is *The Prowler* because of the recurring motif, or *leitmotif*, of the prowler figure which could refer to any given person, including the reader, and was therefore good as a *medium* between text and reader. The text reading the reader is possible with a cross reference like that. The prowler in the house looking for things to steal (mystery); the prowling protagonist (loitering without intent); the prowling writer looking for moments to remember; the prowling reader looking for significance (in the text). I liked the idea of prowling as purposeless: the beauty of purposelessness. The idea that there is no message, no intent, no force behind the text, is at the back of it all, poetically.

Gheorghe: I have not been able to classify *The Prowler* in any of the traditional genres or sub-genres. What motivated you to experiment to such a degree?

Gunnars: Carrying on with the former answer, concerning lack of intent, *The Prowler* was not so much *written* as it simply *happened*. I had been studying for my Ph.D. in literature and theory for a while, and after all this reading I decided to write a book that would observe none of the rules. There would be no plot, no characters, no rising action, no resolution, and so on. I decided to take the postmodernists to heart and just *write*. There is more to this than just a desire to forego established mannerisms in literature. I was tired of being told what to do. Tired of being on the receiving end of everything. I also took to heart the concerns of gynocritics (a term I don't like): how can women realize their own stories and forms and voices without first abandoning the field? So it was a matter of "unlearning" — and I still think much of education now has to consist of unlearning (the canon, the primacy of the author even, etc.). So I took my typewriter one day, put it on my floor, sat down and *wrote*. The story intrudes. There are characters. There are images, dialogue, dramas. Writing becomes a tug of war between what you try to wrestle yourself out of and those literary conventions that you keep locked in.

Gheorghe: What is the purpose, if any, of the non-linear flow of *The Prowler*. Should we look at it as your own individualized form of the "stream of consciousness" technique introduced by Woolf?

Gunnars: There is no hidden purpose or meaning behind the non-linearity of the ordering of *The Prowler*. As I said, the writing of that book was an attempt at abandoning the militancy of meaning. It is a book that happened this way. But there is more to this than meets the eye. I am not sure "stream of consciousness" is possible. I think self censoring goes on all the way to the origins of one's thoughts. I imagine little orderlies chipping away at our imagination ceaselessly. Nor do I have such faith in language that even if I were able to express exactly what occurs, the moment it occurs to me, I would be able to find the right words for it. I don't think language is composed of words that are containers of meaning. Language is something learned; as formidable an opponent as a pharmacist's cupboard, and coming up with a prescription to express a state of mind or an idea, is no less difficult than finding the ingredients to cure an infection. We engage in selective memory. We blot out what was painful and unresolved. We hold on to the good moments. We notice things in relation to past experience. Those are survival

techniques that the mind has developed, just as the body introduces a form of morphine into the body instantly, when a pain inducing event occurs. *The Prowler* is a confrontation of sorts with that particular awareness. It is possible things have occurred you do not remember because they were too painful. So the rememberer searches. Therefore the "detective" element so many critics and reviewers have picked up. The possibility of a murder. The probable crisis. I presented a number of imagerial equivalents for the structuring of the book. One is the puzzle that is being reconstructed on the voyage — by the protagonist (or writer) and the unknown other (or reader). We do not pick up puzzle pieces in a special order. We pick up a piece and then look for where it might fit. Another image is the deck of cards. It is a given set, much as a lived life is a set of givens. We shuffle them and reshuffle them. The object of playing with cards is not to have them in chronological order. When they are in order, there is no game. The idea of the *game* is not incidental either. A game is played by more than one person. A game is arbitrary, in a sense. It has its own rules and its own precepts. Nothing outside of the game matters while the game is being played. Sometimes a game is a gamble. There is money involved. All this I think, and more, relates to (the business) of writing and reading.

Gheorghe: You seem to situate yourself on the Barthes-Derridean position of allowing readers the ultimate freedom of textual decoding. Hence I have ventured to impose my own reception grid on *The Prowler's* discourse, and it seems to me that I discovered a rhythm that replaces chronological sequence by a circular, oscillating movement between the metalinguistic and linguistic level. What are your comments about this circular pattern, at which you hinted in stating your wish to finish your book at the beginning?

Gunnars: The "pattern", if any, is for the reader to create. I view the "rhythm that replaces chronological sequence" as the rhythm or pattern of the game [see previous answer]. There is a circular motion there, in the sense that a card game or a puzzle has a set number of pieces and they are thrown together anew at every reading. Within the larger circular motion of beginning-end-beginning there are smaller circles. Smaller stories conspire for privilege with the large story. So I see it. But structurally, I have not imposed a definite grid, because I intended to work outside of structural concerns in the same way that I wanted to work outside the more traditional realistic/modernistic narrative framework (beginning, middle and end). There is a tug and pull between the linguistic and metalinguistic; the fictional and metafictional elements of the

narrative. I do not see that as necessarily circular, but in a sense, one always ends where one started. This is a narrative that tries to begin a hundred and sixty-seven times, so to speak.

Gheorghe: How important is it, in your view, that readers decode your text, that they act as detectives being given textual clues to find out their coherent reading model?

Gunnars: I would like my reader to “decode” enough of the text to come up with a coherent story or combination of motifs or leitmotifs for the narrative to work. I have provided all the material, as I see it. But I have not been authoritarian about it, or at least I tried not to be. So the reader is free to do an internal reading and frame an answer from the clues provided. Since this narrative works on the supposition that both the narrator/writer and reader are involved in solving the same “mystery,” I have proposed the idea of team work. This is not just reader response; it is also writer response to reader response. What critics and reviewers are saying about *The Prowler* is interesting to me because I have not presented a fiction of rights and wrongs, of correct interpretations versus incorrect ones. I am not scandalized by strange, unexpected readings of this book. All kinds of readings have occurred, as far as I can see. That is the critics'/readers' privilege. I recently read an article on this book by a Danish critic who claimed it was about whatever the reader wished it to be about. “Therefore,” he wrote, “it cannot possibly disappoint you.” That is another way of looking at the matter. In other words, he presents a reading of no decoding at all. That is fine too. It is worst, I think, to read this as if it were a naturalistic narrative in the realist manner. One such reading did come to me in the form of a review article in an Icelandic weekly, and it was the closest I have seen to an actual “incorrect” reading — because it did not read the narrative in the spirit in which it was written. Perhaps that is the main thing an author asks of the reader: to read it in the right spirit. You cannot really apply the tools of realism to a surrealist work, for example. These things almost go without saying. As to decoding, I think the only decoding I expect is reasonable intelligence or sophistication in the reading. I write for the reader to whom ideas are a source of joy, for a lot of my work is the dramatic or poetic working out, or playing out of an idea.

Gheorghe: From your text which states repeatedly that your readers are equal in rights to the text and the author, I understand that you do not want to impose a univocal message. However, if we both agree that this ultimate independence possessed by readers is a post-modern

characteristic of metafictional texts, it follows that metafiction owes its very existence to your readers performing their contract of reading and decoding. To rephrase my question: is it essential that your readers "get" your intertextual allusions, your metatheoretical reflections, for your text to exist in its full plurality or not?

Gunnars: Yes, I think it is essential for the reader to understand what the metafictional aspects of *The Prowler* are doing in order for the text "to exist in its full plurality." I have written this book to some degree for people who have studied literary theory. I am responding to the work of theorists, in particular postmodernists. But readers who do not have that kind of background, I have discovered, are not hindered from appreciating the book. So I have been informed. The book has been read by doctors, writers, students, housekeepers — in other words, people in all professions — and the text appears to be accessible enough to cover them all. On the other hand, the levels of reading differ, and not all readers can find all in it I wanted them to find, but I never expected unanimous understanding. Complexity is fine, but accessibility is also good. One of the problems with much postmodernist writing, both non-fiction, fiction and poetry, is that those who are not oriented towards theory and have no background in it do not like what they are reading. A lot of criticism is aired, and people take sides, as if it were an ideological war. By writing with theoretical jargon in order to express the correct nuance of their thoughts, some postmodernists alienate those who are not in possession of the same language. They feel stupid, and in return they say the language of the postmodernists and semioticians is stupid. I see nothing gained by engaging in that debate. Fiction writers have to write for a broader audience and if they do not, they cannot expect a broad audience. Any kind of engagement on the reader's part is a fulfilling of the contract. The only way a reader will not be "playing along" is if he or she is bored and disinterested. Then, in any case, I have failed.

Gheorghe: What is your opinion of the proclaimed "death of the author?" I do not mean only Barthes' article, but rather the concept in general.

Gunnars: In the sense that the text is primary and there is no originality because all texts are grown from other texts, I think the idea of the impossibility of an author at all is both intriguing and accurate. It seemed to me already a decade ago that I as an author would not be likely to create anything new, no more than those I had read somehow spontaneously managed to imagine everything from scratch. The clas-

sical age did not admire originality: you were good if you could retell an old tale well. The romantic era did something to investigate the possibility of originality, but what appeared were subjective emotions and a search for commonality in emotion. No emotion, it was discovered, is original either. We are products of what we have read. I like Barthes' notion of all texts being part of the same gigantic text of mankind. We accept found poetry, for example, as relevant. We recycle ideas, stories, language and signs. Thereby, we solidify the idea of one large text wherein there is no author, but only many workers. I also, however, see the death of the author as an aspect of the desire to do away with the authoritarian voice. Barthes speaks of militant writing and shows how it is possible to speak without being militant. The quelling of authority is compelling because authority in its various forms — didacticism, lecturing, propaganda etc. — is ugly. The authoritarian voice is an appropriating voice: a colonizing movement. It was this desire to enter a text without the authoritarian voice that led me to write *The Prowler* in the first place.

Gheorghe: Could you elaborate on what you mean by the independence of the text, or even the supremacy of the text over its author?

Gunnars: I mean by the supremacy of the text over its author much of what I mentioned in the last answer. But this idea also concerns reader response. The reader as critic is privileged to take the "meaning" away from the author: to find meaning where there is none; to "decode" in his or her own way. Language is, as I mentioned in the text of the novel, a collection of suitcases crammed with culture. The nuances of words are out there, independently of the author's intention, and very often a person will write something entirely unintended. I find this happening all the time when I teach writing. The student, or mentee, or consultee, finds that he or she has written what I, the reader, am not reading. Some of my students are horrified at the possibilities they have brought up. There is so much life in language that it is impossible for the writer to control it once it is on the page. When I wrote *The Prowler*, I wanted to present a text that was conscious of its own duplicitousness, and a narrator who was aware of the possibilities of multi-readings, but would not try to control them. I speak about this extensively in my last poetry collection, *Carnival of Longing*. I find the idea of not being able to make oneself understood, because the nature of language itself defies one-dimensional readings, rather sad. Therefore the isolation and sorrow expressed in that book. The novel is much more willing to play with the problem. I see the business of writing nicely expressed by the image

of *The Blob* — the movie remade at least three times — where a little organic/chemical blob just grows and grows and becomes uncontainable and ultimately terrifying. The Blob is language.

Gheorghe: From your text it is clear that you try to avoid classifications, labels, and categories in order to achieve creative freedom. I almost hesitate to ask if you think of yourself as a postmodern, feminist writer?

Gunnars: No, I do not think of myself as a postmodern writer. Nor do I see myself as a feminist writer. I cannot separate these ideologies or theoretical concerns and make them independent of one another. There are truths in all kinds of theories. The writer should, I think, resist classifications, because they are ultimately narrowing.

Gheorghe: How do you situate yourself, if at all, within the Women's Movement and Feminist Criticism?

Gunnars: I am in the women's movement by reason of being a woman and thinking. Any thinking woman cannot isolate herself from the feminist program entirely. Practically speaking, it is too difficult to have to work harder for less; be fourteen times better than a man to get a reasonable job. Psychologically speaking, it is too difficult to be denied one's full personhood; not to be taken seriously; to be dismissed. Creatively, it is too difficult not to be acceptable to the reading public because there is no platform for one's language, emotions, concerns, ideas and stories. There is no platform because it has not been visualized or publicized. These are women's concerns. Women are to some degree immigrants everywhere. Feminist criticism is part of the package. We need to have it there in order to help create a platform from which we can write. While I don't like narrowing all the world to a few concerns, the problem is still there and has to be addressed. So I keep an interested eye out for what goes on in feminist criticism, and I realize I have written creatively in response to much of what I have seen happening critically. Feminist criticism is an enabling thing, making space for women's writing. but I am not exclusively a feminist and I am not known as such, mostly because I do not write in the area myself. I mean critical writing; theory.

Gheorghe: Do you believe there should be a clearly delineated and separate Feminist Literature or Criticism? Which, in your opinion, are its assets, results and possibilities?

Gunnars: I think feminist literature and criticism should be identifiable, but not so separate that only feminists so labelled will read it. I do not see any reason to "ghettoize" women's concerns. But I am not in a

position now to say what I think the features of feminist writing should be, or are. That is altogether too large a concern for me to tackle here.

Gheorghe: What do you think of Life Writing? do you consider *The Prowler* as a form of Life Writing because of its marked autobiographical features?

Gunnars: You have posed a question too extensive to answer here. I do think *The Prowler* belongs to the genre we call life writing, but it extends beyond that into poetry and fiction, as you yourself say. I wrote that novel ("novel") after spending three or four years studying life writing at the university. I was preparing for my comprehensives in biography. A number of theoretical problems intrigued me concerning the relationship between fiction and reality; the author and the self; memory and imagination; private and public language; and so on. I suppose reading all the biographies and autobiographies I was reading at the time put me in the "mode". So I included a number of autobiographical features, supposedly. However, those are not necessarily "true" elements. What the author imagines is just as autobiographical as what he or she has experienced. The problem lies with our definition of autobiography. All fiction, in a sense, is autobiography. All autobiography, conversely, can be fiction. It is the writing itself that focuses our concerns. But for a fuller discourse on these matters, I should refer you to some critical articles I have written on certain autobiographies for the academic shelves. I continue to work with life writing and hope to someday have a book of criticism and theory.

Gheorghe: You have written and published extensively, poetry and fiction that transgress genre and traditional oppositions of form/content, language/metalinguage, writer/reader. Your writing is compelling, puzzling and mesmerizing. So last, but not least, what makes you write?

Gunnars: What makes me write? Funny how language fails at a time like this.

Note

* Cristina Gheorghe met with Kristjana Gunnars at the sessions of the AASSC/AAESC at the University of Victoria in May, 1990. Informal discussions between the two of them at that time led to a more formal, written interview in which Gheorghe provided the questions and Gunnars the answers.

Aksel Sandemose's View of Prairie Canada

Christopher S. Hale
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During the latter part of 1927 the up-and-coming Danish writer, Aksel Sandemose (1899–1965), visited the western Canadian prairies. Canada had been in the news in Denmark ever since 1924 when the United States passed its Immigration Act, virtually halting the flood of immigrants to that country. This left Canada as the only place in North America to which prospective immigrants could go. The Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway actively promoted this immigration, especially to the prairie provinces, and Canada became known as the “land of the future”. Books, pamphlets and articles on Canada appeared in Denmark, and Sandemose read many of them. He even wrote a review of one such book, *Canada som Fremtidsland*,¹ by C. Mikkelsen, the editor of the Hjørring newspaper, *Vendsyssel Tidende*, who had been there in 1926 and written a glowing account of conditions and the possibilities for Danish immigrants there.²

Born in Nykøbing, Mors, Denmark, of a Danish father and Norwegian mother, Sandemose had gone to sea at the age of 17 during the height of World War I. Sailing on board a Danish merchant ship, he travelled to Iceland and eventually Newfoundland, where he jumped ship and spent the next few months ashore, part of the time working in a lumber camp in the interior of the island. At the beginning of 1917 he hired aboard another Danish ship in St. Johns and returned to Denmark via Spain, Portugal and the Farøe Islands. This journey provided a good deal of material for his early novels. After attending a university preparatory course, Sandemose struggled to establish himself as a writer, and finally in 1923, with the help of the influential author Johannes V. Jensen, he managed to publish his first book, *Fortællinger fra Labrador* [*Stories from Labrador*], which proved to be a considerable success. There followed a series of novels, mostly about life at sea, but these were not very well received by the critics.

By 1927, Sandemose had reached a low point. His future as a writer was in doubt, he had been forced to take a job as custodian at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, a position he thought degrading, and he was very strapped financially with a wife and three children to support. Quite likely thoughts of leaving Denmark now occupied his

mind. However, in March of that year his latest book *Kabautermanen* [*The Kabauterman*] appeared, and it received good reviews. In addition he was awarded a stipend and was able to get a job as "special correspondent" with the Copenhagen newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* to go to Canada and write a series of articles on conditions there. The trip was productive, for on his return, dozens of Sandemose's articles on Canada appeared in the Danish press, and he wrote three novels set in Alberta. The first of these, *Ross Dane*, which appeared in 1928, is about a Danish immigrant of the same name who goes to Alberta with a group of settlers and establishes the colony of Beaver Coulee on the prairie. Ross is pictured as the ideal pioneer and successful farmer who quickly becomes the leader in the community. The second in the trilogy, and Sandemose's first Norwegian novel, is *En sjømann går i land* [*A Sailor Goes Ashore*], published in 1931. In this book the protagonist, Espen Arnakke, is Sandemose's alter ego. He kills a man in Newfoundland after jumping ship there, and flees to Beaver Coulee where as he adjusts to the harsh conditions of life on the prairie, he tries to come to terms with the fact that he is a murderer. The novel *September*, from 1939, likewise set in Beaver Coulee, deals with a love triangle, but it is also concerned with the question of the extent to which a first-generation immigrant has become a real Canadian or remained a part of the old country.

This article is a sampling of the impressions Sandemose had of Canada and the use he makes of some of them in his writings.

On August 10, 1927 Sandemose left Copenhagen, sailing from England on the Canadian Pacific steamer *S.S. Montcalm*, and arriving in Montreal on August 21. After a short trip to Erie, Pennsylvania to visit his brother, Anton, and sister, Anna, he boarded the train for Winnipeg, where he arrived on September 9.

Bybilledet domineres af Ejendomme som er opført af offentlige Institutioner, —af Bankerne, Hudson Bay, af Canadian Nat. og C.P.R. og Kirkerne. De stridende religiøse Sekter kappes i Kirkebygning—fra et ark. Synspunkt ikke altid heldigt Resultat. Løjerligste Beklædninger og Folketyper. Parliament Building med Dr. Victoria (Stemning i Damen, Scepter, Krone, smuk den gamle—Symbol)³

[The cityscape is dominated by blocks of buildings erected by public institutions—by banks, Hudson Bay, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway and churches. The contending religious sects vie with each other in the building of churches—from an architectural point of view not always with fortunate results. Strangest characters and ways of dressing. Parliament Building with Q. Victoria (a spirit in the lady, sceptre, crown, good looking the old girl—symbol)]

Winnipeg was the first goal of all those who immigrated to Canada, and from here they could take the train westward to find farmwork or to purchase a homestead.

Eager to see what life on the prairies was like, Sandemose took the train out to Maryfield, just across the Saskatchewan border, on September 12.

Maanen 4-doblet, rødner som en Solnedgang . . . Det vilde, tungsindige Saskatchewan . . . Vender en Sten i Stubmarken, Jord som sort Diamant, blaalig Tone, fed.⁴

[The moon quadrupled in size, reddens like a sunset . . . The wild, melancholy Saskatchewan . . . Turn over a stone in the stubble field, soil like a black diamond, bluish tint, rich.]

Here, if we are to believe a couple of articles he wrote for *Berlingske Tidende*,⁵ he bought an old decrepit horse and rode about the prairie for four days, looking around, before returning to Winnipeg.

The morning of September 27 found him again on the train, heading for the Saskatchewan town of Redvers, 28 miles southwest of Maryfield, where he planned to see a Danish farmer, Godtfred Madsen, whom Mikkelsen had visited on his trip. However, it took a while before they could meet, and Sandemose, now with a fever and chill, was relegated to staying in the town's only hotel. Sitting in his room, he jotted down the following:

Hotellet er fælt, men Gud tilgive dem, de vide vist inte hvad de gjøre. En Victrola larmer i Spisestuen under Maaltiderne til Underholdning for de spisende, Fluerne medregnet, et Ocean af Fluere, Tusinder, Millioner, dovne Efteraarsfluere, som ikke flytter sig fra Hænder og Ansigt, før man klemmer dem ihjel, eller som sejler i Fløden med vemodige Benbevægelser. Falder de om paa Ryggen, ligger de som kæntrerede Skarnbasser og bevæger Poterne i sentimental Victrola-Takt. Vært og Værtinde er et svært Par, Manden med en vældig mørk Haarbusk, begge vist forhenværende Arbejdere, mistænker dem alvorligt for at være Irlændere. Deres utalte kvindelige Betjening er unge, pomadiserede og 'søde' som Hele Halvdelen af Amerika, hvis ene Halvdel er brutal, busy og grov, den anden aah saa sweet. Kunde den amerikanske Udmark samles i een Person, maatte det blive en Mand, der ernærede sig som Rovmorder om Dagen og efter Fyraften spiser Icecream til Grammofonledsagelse, med et Glansbillede af Jesus paa Væggen og Love-Story-Magazine opslaaet paa Bordet.⁶

[The hotel is awful, but God forgive them, they know not what they do. A victrola makes noise in the dining room during meals for the entertainment of the diners, the flies included, an ocean of flies, thousands, millions, lazy autumn flies which don't budge from one's hands and face until you squish them to death, or which sail around in the

cream with mournful leg movements. If they fall over on their backs, they lie like overturned dung beetles, moving their paws in a sentimental victrola-tempo. The landlord and landlady are a stout couple, the man with very dark bushy hair, both most likely former labourers, seriously suspect them of being Irish. Their countless female staff are young, pomaded and 'sweet' like the whole half of America, half of which is brutal, busy and coarse, the other oh, so sweet. If the American wilderness could be united in one person, it would have to be a man who makes his living as a robber and murderer by day and after quitting time eats ice cream to the accompaniment of a record player, with a glossy picture of Jesus on the wall and an open copy of Love Story Magazine on the table.]

After a couple of days he was rescued by Madsen who drove him around the area, as they discussed conditions in the country and observed the threshing season.

Halmen blæses over Stakken og tumler ned paa den anden Side i det tiltagende Mørke, Trolde der bolttrer sig i den skumle Aften. Det første Halmbaal viser sin røde Tunge ude i det nordlige. Manden, som passer Værket, tænder sin Pibe og sætter Ild til Halmbjerget med samme Flamme.⁷

[The straw is blown over the stack and tumbles down on the other side in the increasing darkness, trolls romping in the somber evening. The first straw fire shows its red tongue over to the north. The man looking after the threshing machine lights his pipe and sets fire to the mountain of straw with the same flame.]

On October 6 Madsen drove Sandemose the 25 or so miles from Redvers to the town of Alida where he stayed at the farm of Simon Hjortnæs.

Man er herude paa Farmene sat tilbage til et tidligere Tidspunkt af Danmarks Historie, da der levedes et særegent Samfundsliv paa hver enkelt af de ensomme Gaarde i et tyndt befolket Land. Mens det endnu er Nat, hører man Stemmer fra Staldene, Hestene fodres, der malkes og muges. Imod Dag gry hæver Centrifugen sin snurrende Stemme, og Husmoderen kalder til Morgenmad. Naar Maden er spist, giver Husbonden ved Bordenden sine Ordre for Dagen. Forskellen fra det Liv, som man har levet i Byen, føles meget stærkt. Stadig er herude *Natten* Mysteriet, Lysene slukkes og Menneskene sover. En Nat man er vaagen ser man Sneens hvide Lysning i Stuen, hører Fugletræk over Husene, en Lyd fra et Dyr, som i Stilheden er gaaet Husene nær. Og man lukker paany sine øjne, hører andre Aandedræt som en Hvisken i den store Nat.⁸

[Out here on the farms one is put back to an earlier point in time in Denmark's history when a distinctive social life was led on each one of the solitary farms in a thinly populated country. While it is still night,

one hears voices from the stables, the horses are being given feed, the cows milked and the dung cleared out of the stalls. Toward daybreak the cream separator raises its whirring voice, and the housewife calls to breakfast. After the meal, the master of the house at the end of the table gives the orders for the day. The difference from the life one has lived in the city is felt very strongly. Out here the mystery is continually *the night*, the lights are turned out and the people sleep. One night when you are awake, you see in the living room the white light from the snow, hear the flight of birds over the farm, a sound from an animal which in the stillness has come near the houses. And again you close your eyes, hear other sounds of breathing like a whispering in the great night.]

Simon Hjortnæs was the founder of the Dannevirke Danish colony in Alida, and he was well known to Danish immigrants as he had the reputation of helping them get started in the new country. He had been born in Vrensted, Vendsyssel and immigrated to South Dakota with his parents in the 1890s. According to legend, in his early 20s he had wandered up into southern Saskatchewan looking for some runaway horses, had liked the land he saw and decided to take a homestead there.⁹ Later other Danes settled in the area, and Hjortnæs became the *de facto* head of the colony and popularly known as King Dane. Sandemose was quite impressed with Hjortnæs, as he was a very hard-working and successful farmer and seemed to epitomize the ideal immigrant to the Canadian prairies. In an article for the newspaper *Vendsyssel Tidende*¹⁰ Sandemose mentions that Hjortnæs became the inspiration for the character Ross Dane in his first Canada novel. Ross's adventures in the first part of the book run closely parallel to the stories that circulated about this Saskatchewan farmer.

After a week with Simon Hjortnæs, Sandemose returned once more to Winnipeg. There, because he had run out of money, he stayed three weeks with one of his wife's relatives, taking side trips to places like Lake Winnipeg and Portage la Prairie. About an especially desolate stretch of land outside the city he writes the following:

Himlen stod saa mærkelig rusten og tør over de høstlige Skove, og med ett følte jeg en brændende Tørst. Jeg drak kold Kaffe af en Flaske, men den lindrede ikke. Et Øjeblik troede jeg at være greben af en pludselig Trang til Alkohol ved at stilles over for dette døde Land, indtil det, jeg savnede, bredte sig ud i en Vision for mine Øjne. HAVET. Det kom over mig som en uudholdelig Smerte, at der var Hundreder af Mil ud til det, at jeg ikke med Exprestog kunde naa det hverken i Morgen eller i Overmorgen. Jeg grebes af et Ønske om at tage dette Land med mig og brede det ud paa Vancouver Islands Kyster, saa disse ynkelige Træer og den arme Steppe kom til at lude

ned mod Stillehavets Bølgeslag.¹¹

[The sky hung so strangely rust-coloured and dry over the autumnal woods, and at once I felt a burning thirst. I drank cold coffee from a bottle, but it didn't assuage my craving. For a moment, I felt myself seized by a sudden need for alcohol in the face of this dead land, until what I was in want of spread out in a vision before my eyes. THE SEA. It came over me like an excruciating pain that I was hundreds of miles away from it, that even on an express train I couldn't reach it either tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. I am seized by a desire to take this land with me and spread it out on the coasts of Vancouver Island, so these wretched trees and miserable scrub would overhang the dashing of the waves of the Pacific Ocean.]

Sandemose uses a similar description in reference to the deserted area of prairie through which Ross Dane and his companions pass on their way to Beaver Coulee in Alberta.¹²

Finally he was able to break loose from the hold Winnipeg had on him, and even though virtually penniless caught a westbound train through Saskatchewan.

Her ind mod Saskatoon ser jeg endelig den Prærie, som jeg har set for mig i min Barndom, og som jeg har ventet at møde her i Canada. Først nu ser jeg den—det endeløse, plane Lavland uden Træer. Der er milelangt mellem Menneskeboliger. Her maa Verden, Livet og Tiden gaa i Staa, naar Sneen er kommen.¹³

[Here toward Saskatoon I finally see the prairie, which I visualized in my childhood, and which I have expected to meet here in Canada. Only now do I see it—the endless flat lowland without trees. It's miles between human habitation. The world, life and time must come to a standstill here when the snow arrives.]

On November 5 he arrived in Holden, Alberta.

Mere Skov her, mere bølget og vaxlende Land. Der er Strækninger her, som kan minde om Danmark—en Kombination af alle Danmarks Egne med Undtagelse af Vestjylland og Kysterne.¹⁴

[More wooded here, more rolling and varied landscape. There are stretches here which are reminiscent of Denmark—a combination of all Denmark's districts except western Jutland and the coasts.]

Here he stayed with a farmer, Peter Sorensen. Sorensen was very fond of telling anecdotes, and he was also well versed in local history, so Sandemose learned a great deal about the small Danish colony there from him. In fact, many of the stories Sandemose heard from Sorensen he used in the novel *Ross Dane*. They both went hunting together, and

Sorensen drove Sandemose around the area so he could meet a number of the inhabitants.

On November 17 Sandemose left Holden for the Danish colony of Dalum near Wayne, Alberta. This settlement was to be immortalized as Beaver Coulee in all three of his Canada novels.

Landet hæver sig her vestover med Hills af Sandsten, Jord, Mineraler, Kul, Metaller. Wayne ligger paa en Slette, helt indkredset af Højder, et betagende Sted. Slædeturen op fra Wayne til Højsletten, Rimtaage, flammende koldt, slørede Stjerner. Himmel og Land samme graahvide Farve, man kunde gaa omkring her en Nat uden at kende Vej eller Mening. Coyoten hyler gennem Kløfterne og faar glammende Svar fra den anden Ende.¹⁵

[The land here rises to the west with hills of sandstone, earth, minerals, coal, metals. Wayne is situated on a plain, completely encircled by hills, an impressive place. The sleigh trip up from Wayne to the plateau, the frosty mist, bitterly cold, blurred stars. Sky and land the same grayish white colour, you could wander around here some nights without knowing why or where you are going. The coyote howls through the canyons and is answered with a baying from the other end.]

The minister in Dalum, Peter Rasmussen, Sandemose had met already in Holden when the latter had held services there, something which he did occasionally, since Holden had no Danish church. Pastor Rasmussen had come to Dalum in 1920, two years after the colony had been founded, and had established a Danish high school there, designed to help newly arrived immigrants get used to the new country both linguistically and culturally. Sandemose greatly admired the work such high schools did, but his opinions on religion did not exactly correspond to those of most people in Wayne.

Der var i Gaar hos Menighedens Formand Peter Rasmussen Møde i 'Dansk Folkesamfund', en Forening til Støtte af Danskheden . . . En Sang, dernæst Dagsordenen blev løbet igennem paa 2 Minutter, men der var intet paa den. Saa atter en Sang og Formanden for *Folkesamfundet* udtalte at det var bleven ham sagt, at Pastor Juhl kunde ønske at holde et Foredrag. Det gjorde han med Udgang fra et, jeg sidste Søndag holdt paa Skolen om Evolution. I 1 1/2 Time snakkede han sort om Skabelse og Profeti, om Hvalfiske med Luftkamre etc., hvorefter man igen sang. Pastor Rasmussen spurgte derefter, om jeg vilde tale og om Forsamlingen i det hele taget vilde høre paa mig. Ingen svarede.¹⁶

[Yesterday at the house of the congregation's chairman, Peter Rasmussen, there was a meeting of 'Dansk Folkesamfund', an organization for the support of Danish institutions . . . A song, afterward the

agenda was run through in two minutes, but there was nothing on it. Then again a song, and the chairman of *Folkesamfundet* stated that he had been told that Pastor Juhl would like to give a talk. He did so based on one I had given at the school last Sunday on evolution. For an hour and a half he spoke blackly about creation and prophesy, about whales with air chambers, etc., after which we sang again. Pastor Rasmussen asked afterward if I would like to speak and if the audience on the whole wanted to listen to me. No one answered.]

For five days Sandemose stayed with John Andersen. Sandemose describes the snowstorm they weathered in the remote coulee where Andersen had his cabin.

Naar Vinden kommer til Coulee'en bruger den Bakkerne som Streng. I Syd sprang en skarp Kant frem, der skreg det som Heste, der løber i frossen Sne. Saa raabte Vinden over til næste Bakke og brølede rundt den, gav et Hvin og foer til næste Højde . . . Fra Time til Time skifter Coulee'en Tone, evig den samme og aldrig den samme. Og gaar man paa Højderne langs den, da aabner den Syn, som minder om alt, man har drømt, fra Danmark til Mount Everest og Maanens døde Kratere.¹⁷

[When the wind comes to the coulee it uses the hills like strings. In the south a sharp cliff edge jutted out, it shrieked there like horses running in frozen snow. Then the wind shouted over to the next hill and roared around it, gave a whine and went on to the next one . . . From hour to hour the coulee changes its mood, eternally the same yet never the same. And if you walk on the hills along it, it opens up visions which remind you of everything you have dreamed, from Denmark to Mount Everest and the moon's dead craters.]

John Andersen was a self educated man of letters who was well read and had written a good deal, though he had not yet published anything.¹⁸ He and Sandemose took to each other quite readily, and John Andersen appears in the guise of Vilfred Larsen, one of the most positive characters in the novel *En sjømann går i land*.

After nearly a month in Dalum, Sandemose left for Calgary where he stayed in the Hotel Palliser.

Udenfor ligger Calgary, jeg bor højt og ser langt ud over Byen, hvor Røgen i Skumringen staar tegnet som faste Masser i den klingre Luft. De nedsneede firkantede Tage danner en sprængt og forvirret, men alligevel roligt virkende Mosaik. Calgary ligger i Red Deer River? Dalen, Floden ligger med Isskruer, her og der slaar Strømmen sort og levende igennem . . . Oven over staar Broen saa ene, en Larve der er gaaet i Staa, da den havde faaet Forbenene over . . . Calgarys Gader som alle andre canadiske: et Par Hovedgader godt oplyst, de andre er bælgsorte Kløfter, saa man uvilkaarligt skifter Revolveren

over i Frakkelommen før man gaar gennem dem . . . Vesterude ser man ind i Bjerger, Tinder og Spir, de er ingen Kulisse som Bjerger paa Afstand ofte ellers, man ser ind i dem og aner deres Evighed.¹⁹

[Outside lies Calgary, I have a room high up and am looking far out over the city where the smoke in the twilight is drawn in compact masses in the crisp air. The snow-covered square roofs form a broken, tangled, but nevertheless calming mosaic. Calgary is located in the Red Deer River(?) valley, the river lies with ice packs, here and there the current breaks through, black and alive . . . Above it the bridge is so alone, a larva which has come to a standstill after getting its front legs across . . . Calgary's streets are like all other Canadian ones: a couple of main streets well lit, the others pitch black crevasses, so that you instinctively move your revolver into your coat pocket before you go through them . . . To the west you look into the mountains, pinnacles and spires, they are not stage sets like mountains in the distance often seem to be, you look into them and sense their timelessness.]

While in Calgary he discussed the problems of immigration with the Danish vice-consul Peter Pallesen. But judging from his diary, he was now quite depressed, without money and simply wanted to leave.

Jeg er træt af Landet her nu og længes hjem. Dog har jeg ikke nogen egentlig Hjemvé, bliver bare træt og sløv, husker ikke godt, glemmer alting. Jeg skulde ønske, at jeg var paa Bispebjerg. Hvad du evner kast af i det nærmeste Krav, som er at slippe helskindet fra Calgary.²⁰

[I am tired of this country now and long for home. Yet I don't actually suffer from homesickness, just get tired and sluggish, don't remember well, forget everything. I wish I were back in Copenhagen. You have to deal with the most pressing problem here and now which is to escape safe and sound from Calgary.]

On December 19 he took the express train out of Calgary, headed for Toronto. For the next one and a half months he stayed in Erie, Pennsylvania, and on February 10, 1928, he sailed with Canadian Pacific's *S.S. Metagama* back to Europe.

Two years later, in 1930, Sandemose tried to get a job with the government of Nova Scotia, helping Danish immigrants who wished to remain in that province.²¹ However, he was turned down, the reason being that his Canadian experience was limited to the prairie provinces and did not include the maritimes. Yet Sandemose did in fact emigrate that same year. But he chose instead Norway, the homeland of his mother, and from then on he wrote almost entirely in Norwegian.

One of the main reasons Sandemose had gone to Canada was to report on the situation of the Danish immigrants and to form an opinion

about the advisability of immigration. Any Dane moving to Canada, Sandemose quickly discovered, was in for a rude shock, and on the streets of Winnipeg were frequently to be seen "the fallen Dane", the one who couldn't make it.

Han kom herover som *Dansker*, han troede, der blev blæst Fanfare, naar han gik i Land, at alle Canadas Farmere vilde slaas om ham. Og saa spørger man ham frækt: Denmark? A city in Sweden maybe? Han faldt igennem netop fordi han var Dansker, et af de dygtigste og bedst oplyste Mennesker i Verden—som jeg lærte i Skolen og som mine Børn vel vil lære det.²²

[He came over here as a *Dane*, he thought they'd blow him a fanfare when he came ashore, that all of Canada's farmers would fight over him. And then someone has the audacity to ask him: Denmark? A city in Sweden maybe? He failed precisely because he was a Dane, one of the most capable and enlightened people on earth—something which I learned in school and which my children will presumably learn.]

True, there was plenty of work during the harvest. The farmers would board the train at each stop and go through the cars, trying to hire extra help on the spot. But it was hard work, and only the fittest would make it through the season. The following passage from Sandemose's diary is based on the experience of a farmer he met in Maryfield, Saskatchewan.

Arbejdet er for haardt. Det levner ingen Evne hos Mennesket, dræber Interesse og Glæde, er et glædeløst, ufatteligt ensformigt Slæb, det samme om igen, om igen uden Nedgang i Tempoet. Op Kl 5-5 1/2, Davre, i Marken Kl 6, et lynende Stræk uden Hvil eller Pause til Kl 12. Raver til sidst i Blinde, Stubmarken rejser sig paa Enden, Negene bliver til Fjender, hadefulde Væsener, der ikke vil som En selv, Neglene flaaes uden at man opdager det, go ahead, go ahead! Middag Kl 12, æder som et Dyr, skal være ude i Marken Kl 1. go ahead! Myg og Fluor æder En op, Avner og Frø gnaver hver Stump af En, som var man broddet af en Legion Hvepse. go ahead! Naar endelig Kl 7 Dagen er forbi, har Fyraften ingen Glæde, alt er ligegyldigt, man slæber sig hjem, æder, lister ud i den utætte Vogn, hvor allerede et Par Stykker sover, triller omkring, og sover som en Bevidstløs. Næste Morgen Kl 5—Come along! Naar man har været i det Arbejdsorgie en Uge er man ikke længere en Mand, men et kønsløst mekanisk Væsen, der mumler vaagen og i Søvn: Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead. Det vilde man ogsaa svare, hvis nogen satte En en Revolver for Panden: Skal jeg skydes? Gudskelov! Go ahead!²³

[The work is too hard. It leaves a person no capability of anything, destroys any interest or joy, is a dismal, incomprehensible drudgery, the same thing over and over again without a letup in tempo. Up

at 5 or 5:30 o'clock, breakfast, in the field at 6 o'clock, at lightning speed without rest or pause until 12 o'clock. At the end you are staggering blindly, the stubble field rears up, the sheaves become enemies, hateful creatures that don't do as you want, your nails are torn without your realizing it, go ahead, go ahead! Dinner at 12 o'clock, eat like an animal, supposed to be back in the field at 1 o'clock, go ahead! Mosquitoes and flies eat you up, chaff and seeds gnaw at every bit of you, as if you were being stung by a legion of wasps, go ahead! When finally at 7 o'clock the day is at an end, quitting time holds no joy, everything is irrelevant, you drag yourself home, eat, creep out into the leaky bunkhouse where a few men are already asleep, fall over and pass out. The next morning at 5 o'clock—come along! When you have been in that orgy of work for a week, you are no longer a man, just an emasculated, mechanical creature mumbling both awake and asleep: Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead. You would also give the same answer if someone put a revolver to your head: Are you going to shoot me? For God's sake! Go ahead!]

This harshness of reality destroyed the dreams of many a Dane.

Et er at være et Sted i Tanken, et andet er at være der med baade Legeme og Sjæl. At føre en Drøm ud i Virkeligheden er som at vækkes af sin Søvn med en Pisk. Dertil kommer, at mangelen på Dansker saa daarligt nemmer, at det her er dødelig Alvor, at man skal hjælpe sig selv. Hvorhen han end vender sig, vil det lyde ham imøde, snart brutalt, snart haanligt, snart beklagende: Du maa hjælpe dig selv. Hjælp dig selv, hjælp dig selv.²⁴

[It's one thing to be somewhere in your thoughts, something else to be there in both body and soul. To carry a dream into reality is like being awakened from sleep with a whip. In addition it happens that many Danes don't properly learn the lesson that here it's deadly serious that you have to help yourself. Wherever you might turn, these words will ring in your ears, sometimes brutally, sometimes derisively, sometimes deploringly: You must help yourself. Help yourself, help yourself.]

Things were especially hard for the married woman. Often she would be left behind in Denmark while her husband came over and spent a couple of years working to earn enough money to send for her and the children. This, Sandemose thought, was a big mistake. Sometimes she was forgotten, or her husband simply could not make a go of it, and that would lead to the breakup of the family. Even if the man managed to purchase a homestead, set up a cabin on it and send for his family, the disappointment on the part of the woman could be tremendous.

Naar Hustruen omsider kommer og ser dette Hus, er det ikke altid hun forstaar, hvad det har kostet Manden af Sved og Stræb at give hende dette. Overgangen fra det hjemlige til denne foreløbige Hytte

falder hende altfor haard, mangen Gang havde det nok været bedre, om hun var kommen med hertil straks. Da vilde hun have glemte sine Krav til Hygge, til det tilvante, og denne Hytte vilde være bleven hendes første eftertragtede Maal, naar hun havde prøvet at leve paa Naade, stuvet sammen med andre, og den Dag hun flyttede ind i den, vilde være bleven en Festdag. I Stedet har hun nu følt et Fald, en Fornedelse.²⁵

[When the wife at long last comes and sees this house, she does not always understand what it has cost her husband in sweat and toil to give it to her. The transition from the familiar to this temporary cabin is much too hard on her, it would have been infinitely better if she had come here with him at the same time. Then she would have forgotten her claims to comfort, to what she was used to, and this cabin would have become her first sought-after goal, after she had tried to live on charity, crowded together with other people, and that day she moved into it would have been a day for rejoicing. Instead she now feels a letdown, a denigration.]

Conditions were likely to be quite primitive, it was often miles between farms, and the loneliness could be deadly. One of the experiences that seems to have stuck most in Sandemose's mind, and which he uses in *Ross Dane*,²⁶ is the following. Driving out on the prairie near Redvers with Godtfred Madsen,

Pludselig kom vi fra et Birkekrat, der piskede Bilen som et Haglvejr, ud foran et Træhus, en Lade saa det ud til. Ved Lyden af Vognen kom en Kvinde frem i den aabne Ladedør, og sjældent har jeg set mere trøsteløs Syn end det modfaldne Ansigt paa Baggrund af Mørket indenfor. Ved hendes Skørter tittede to smaa Ansigter frem, hun gik ud i det vaade Græs og stod ventende der, da Bilen holdt. Synet slog ind i mig som noget fuldt af Gru, et Menneske, der var ude for en Helvedsstraf. Bleg, hulkindet og fortabt stod hun der, slappe, haabløse Træk. Uden om strakte sig den milevide Prærie, her var hun alene, alene—og Danmark laa tusind Mil borte som det forjættede Land. Bor du *der*? Ja, Manden er paa Høstarbejde inde i Alberta. Ak, jeg læste i det Ansigt og hørte paa hendes Røst, at hun var ved at sørge sig ihjel. Langt, langt borte var Danmark, her stod hun og havde ikke saa megen Kraft i Behold, at hun evnede at forbande det nye Land.²⁷

[Suddenly out of a thicket of scrub birch, which lashed the car like falling hail, we came out in front of a wooden house, a barn, it would seem. At the sound of the engine a woman appeared in the open barn-door, and seldom have I seen a more dreary sight than that dejected face against the background of darkness inside. By her petticoat two small faces peeked out, she walked out into the wet grass and stood waiting there as the car stopped. The sight struck me as something full of horror, a human being who had met with a punishment from Hell. Pale, hollow-cheeked and disheartened she stood there, flaccid,

hopeless features. All around the prairie stretched for miles, here she was alone, alone—and Denmark lay thousands of miles away like the promised land. Do you live *there*? Yes, my husband is off doing harvest work in Alberta. Alas, I read in that face and heard in her voice that she was on the point of grieving to death. Denmark was far, far away, here she stood having not even enough strength left to be able to curse the new land.]

The question arises, then, should anyone emigrate to Canada, in Sandemose's opinion? The answer is, yes. If you are already a farmer in Denmark, under 35 and willing to work hard, and especially if you own no land already, then you might consider the possibility. Otherwise, stay in Denmark.

Sandemose did hear of success stories in Canada, people who against all odds made it in the new country. One such person was the farmer Peter Rasmussen in Dalum who came from Denmark around 1913 or 1914 with his wife and small children.

Faa Maaneder efter ramte en haard Ulykke dem, Manden mistede sit ene Ben. Jeg gætter paa, at denne Katastrofe svejsede Parret sammen med ubrydelige Baand—de arme Mennesker sad der henviste til sig selv i et fremmed Land uden Arbejde og Førlighed. Jeg gætter videre, at Kærligheden til Manden gennem denne Ildprøve dræbte Savnet af det gamle Land. De bøjede sig kun for at stige. Nu 13-14 Aar efter er Manden en Leder i sin Kreds, en af de dygtige Farmere som man som Dansk er stolt af at have trykket i Haanden. Dette Hjem er et af de mest danske Hjem i Verden, et Hjem uden Hjemløshed. Man bekender: Jeg er glad ved at have Rod fælles med disse to.²⁸

[A few months later a serious accident occurred, the man lost one of his legs. I can imagine that this catastrophe welded the couple together with unbreakable bonds—those poor people sat there, thrown on their own resources in a strange country without work or health. I would go on to surmise that love for the husband through this ordeal by fire killed their longing for the old country. They bowed down only to rise. Now 13-14 years later the man is a leader in his district, one of those capable farmers with whom I as a Dane am proud of having shaken hands. This home is one of the most Danish homes in the world, a home without homelessness. I confess: I am glad to have roots in common with those two.]

Peter Rasmussen appears as the one-armed farmer Peder Hansen in *En sjømann går i land*.

What of Sandemose's own situation? Was Canada a place he himself would want to settle in? He was not a farmer, but he could do physical labour, as certainly his time as a sailor proved. His diary mentions in

several places that he has come to like the land and feels he'll miss it when he leaves. Yet ultimately the answer is no. One must keep in mind that Sandemose was a writer, and that such an occupation could hardly flourish on the prairies of the 1920s. The diary states:

Her er ingen Brug for Kunst og Videnskab, for intet sjæleligt Overskud findes. At rejse en Farm, *at bo* er bleven alt under de Vilkaar, som Landet nu giver . . . Det som læses paa Farmen er lidt: Maaske en Avis fra en Provins i Danmark, ellers gudelige Traktater, Familie-Journalen og en 20-øres Roman. Sjældnen er der Tid og Trang til stærkere Kost. Disse Folk er kommen med et ganske bestemt Formaal for Øje: At tjene sig op af Armod. Det andet viger. Kulturen paa Prærien, tal ikke om den, der er ingen. Der kan ikke være nogen, den er ikke savnet, ønskes ikke. Den vil blive skabt af kommende Slægter . . . Det Kulturliv, som her leves, samler sig om Kirken. Der er ringe Plads til noget uden for den.²⁹

[There is no use here for art or science, as no mental surplus exists. To establish a farm, *to live* has become everything under those conditions the country now offers . . . Little is read on the farm: perhaps a provincial newspaper from Denmark, otherwise devotional literature, Familie-Journalen and a dime novel. There is seldom any time or desire for stronger fare. These people have come with one quite specific objective in view: to work their way up out of poverty. Everything else gives way. Culture on the prairies, out of the question, there is none. There can't be any, it isn't missed, isn't wanted. It will be created by future generations . . . What cultural life that is led here has the church as its focus. There is little place for anything outside of that.]

The conclusion must then be that Sandemose was not suited to life on the Canadian prairies. He was an intellectual, and such people as John Andersen he found to be few and far between. What western Canada of those days needed was men and women who were willing to toil long hours and endure the burdens of privation in order to develop the country. Only then could people like Sandemose make a go of it.

Notes

¹ C. Mikkelsen, *Canada som Fremtidsland* [*Canada as Land of the Future*] (Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 1927).

² Aksel Sandemose, "Canada som Fremtidsland," *Hareskovgrundejerblad*, nr. 14, 15 July 1927.

³ Winnipeg, Sept. 10, 1927. This and the following quotations, if not otherwise noted, are from Sandemose's "Rejsedagbog" which he kept during his Canada journey. This diary consists of daily entries with place and date written for the most part in pencil on stationery acquired primarily from Canadian

Pacific steamer *S.S. Montcalm*, the *Hotel Viger* in Montreal, and the *Palliser Hotel* in Calgary. I am indebted to Johannes Væth for allowing me to use and quote from his copy of this diary. Translations of all quotations from the original Danish made by the author.

⁴ Maryfield, Sask., Sept. 15, 1927.

⁵ "Saskatchewan, I-II", *Berlingske Tidende*, 9-10 July 1928.

⁶ Redvers, Sept. 28, 1927. See also Sandemose's article, "Redvers", *Berlingske Tidende*, afternudgave (20 August 1928), for a similar description.

⁷ Redvers, Sept. 29, 1927.

⁸ Alida, Oct. 8, 1927.

⁹ For a fuller account of the Hjortnæs legend see Frank M. Paulsen, *Danish Settlements on the Canadian Prairies. Folk Traditions, Immigrant Experiences, and local History*, National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Paper no. 11 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1974), 72-76.

¹⁰ Aksel Sandemose, "Simon P. Hjortnæs i Danmark", *Vendsyssel Tidende*, 5 December 1929.

¹¹ Winnipeg, Oct. 19, 1927.

¹² Aksel Sandemose, *Ross Dane* (Copenhagen: Det Schønbergiske Forlag, 1976), pp. 53-54.

¹³ Saskatchewan, Nov. 4, 1927.

¹⁴ Holden, Nov. 6, 1927.

¹⁵ Wayne, Nov. 18, 1927.

¹⁶ Wayne, Nov. 28, 1927.

¹⁷ East Coulee, Dec. 4, 1927.

¹⁸ According to his nephew Axel Ostergaard, John Andersen became a close friend of the American literary critic Edmund Wilson during World War I, as they served in the same unit. Also in 1940 Andersen did get a book published called *The Road We Have Covered* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1940).

¹⁹ Calgary, Dec. 16, 1927.

²⁰ Calgary, Dec. 18, 1927.

²¹ Source, two letters: Aksel Sandemose to Department of Industries and Immigration, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 27 January 1930 and H.H. Congdon, Department of Natural Resources, Halifax, Nova Scotia to Aksel Sandemose, 15 February 1930.

²² Winnipeg, Sept. 10, 1927.

23 Maryfield-Reston, Sept. 17, 1927, in the train. Sandemose uses almost exactly the same words in "Høst i Canada", *Berlingske Tidende*, afterudgaven, 23 December 1927, to describe what he views as a typical harvest worker's day.

24 Alida, Oct. 9, 1927.

25 Alida, Oct. 10, 1927.

26 Aksel Sandemose, *Ross Dane*, pp. 136-137. Translated by the author in *Aksel Sandemose*, Ross Dane, tr. by Christopher Hale (Winnipeg: Gunnars and Campbell Publishers, 1989), pp. 105-106.

27 Redvers, Oct. 3, 1927.

28 Wayne, Dec. 13, 1927. See also Aksel Sandemose, "Livet paa Canadas Prærie. III. I Kolonierne", *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, 5 May 1928.

29 Redvers, Oct. 3, 1927; Redvers, Oct. 5, 1927; East Coulee, Dec. 4, 1927. Sandemose devotes a whole article to prairie culture, "Kulturen paa Prærien", *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, 11 June 1928.

ASPECTS OF SOCIAL LIFE
IN SCANDINAVIA

Norwegian *Matroses*: Wages and Labour Markets for Seafaring Labour, 1850–1914¹

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In the sixty-five years between the repeal of the British Navigation Acts and the outbreak of the First World War the Norwegian merchant marine expanded from less than three hundred thousand net tons to a carrying capacity of well over 1.7 million net tons. By 1875 Norwegians owned the third largest fleet in the world, a relative position they more or less retained for the next forty years. The growth of the merchant marine was so dynamic in this era that it served as an engine of economic growth for the national economy, especially in the years before 1880 and again from the late 1890s to 1914.²

Traditionally, much of the historical interest in the world's merchant marine in this period has focussed on issues such as capital formation and the role of technological change in reducing transportation costs. Less attention has been devoted to the role of the other crucial factor of production: the seamen who manned the vessels. This oversight also characterizes the work of Norwegian maritime historians, which by and large has had little to say about conditions in the labour market for seamen.³ By ignoring the history of seafaring labour, Norwegian scholars have overlooked a topic of immense importance. Service at sea was in the nineteenth century an extremely important component of the Norwegian employment structure. Between 1850 and 1914, for example, the proportion of what we might call the "economically active population" finding gainful employment at sea averaged almost fourteen percent. Among males, who had a significantly higher rate of labour force participation and who hence contributed by far the largest share of this labour pool, the figure was almost 8.5%.⁴ Yet despite the obvious importance of this economic sector to employment patterns in what was in the nineteenth century a relatively under-developed country, historians have told us relatively little about conditions in the labour market for

seamen. In an historical sense, Norwegian *matroser*, or seamen, have been an almost invisible group.⁵

To perform efficiently its transport function, the nineteenth century merchant marine needed sufficient labour to operate a growing number of vessels of increasing size and technological complexity. To do this obviously required shipowners to pay wages sufficiently high to attract the necessary men. In most cases—including the Norwegian—it also meant that seafaring nations had to depend on the growing international maritime labour pool to supplement the domestic labour supply.⁶ As voyage patterns became more complex, and as the international carrying trades grew in importance, shipowners were forced to recruit a larger proportion of crews in this international labour market.

Nonetheless, the domestic labour supply remained crucial to all maritime nations. Although technological change (such as the substitution of steam for sail), increasing vessel size, and growth in labour productivity all reduced the relative importance of labour as a factor of production, the rapid growth of the Norwegian fleet meant that the absolute demand for seamen continued to increase up to the early 1880s. The labour requirement diminished somewhat in the 1880s and 1890s, but rose strongly in the ten years prior to the outbreak of World War I. In the late 1860s, to operate the fleet at full capacity required about thirty-six thousand men. The demand for sailors continued to grow in the 1870s despite declining man/ton ratios,⁷ and by 1881 the fleet reached its historic peak in terms of labour, offering employment to 47,800 seamen. The manning requirement then declined slowly to around 40,000 in 1895 and 32,000 in 1903, before increasing again to about 39,000 sailors in 1910.

In spite of an increasing reliance on foreign labour, and growing competition as other fleets hired Norwegians as seamen, the maritime labour force that crewed the Norwegian merchant marine remained overwhelmingly Norwegian, and the vast majority of sailors were recruited in domestic ports. In this paper we want to inquire about the operation of the labour market in which they were hired. What were these seamen paid and how did their wages change over time? Were there within Norway regional differences in wage rates, and did these tend to increase or decrease? Was there by 1914 an integrated domestic market for maritime labour, and if so, when and under what conditions was it established? These are the principal questions we wish to address in this essay. However, before attempting to answer them, we need to say something about sources. This is so, because the records that we employ are almost unknown by maritime historians outside Norway and

because the Norwegians, who have attempted to exploit them, have all too frequently misused or misinterpreted the data they yield. Most of the records that we will utilize to answer the questions raised above are housed in a magnificent, yet tragically under-utilized national treasure: the Wedervang Price and Wage Archive at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration in Bergen. The material in this repository was collected mainly in the years 1932–1936 by a scholarly team headed by the late Professor Ingvar Wedervang, at the time a professor of economics at the University of Oslo. With generous funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and domestic agencies, Professor Wedervang was able to hire a corps of researchers who set out to try to locate all surviving evidence on Norwegian wages and prices from the past two centuries. The team assiduously scoured both public and private archives, transcribing the material for future analysis. That they performed their task well is demonstrated by the fact that in a parallel search for records of seamen's wages conducted in 1984–85, we were able to locate only fragments of data that had been overlooked in the previous search.⁸

Unfortunately, the Wedervang team was never able to carry out the analytic aspect of their project. World War II intervened just as they were commencing this work, and five years of German occupation followed. To protect the archive, it was shipped from Oslo to Bergen, where it was stored in secret underground caves for the duration. The decision to protect it in this way looks even better with hindsight, since many of the original documents from which the transcripts were derived were subsequently destroyed, some by the Germans and others by capricious bureaucrats unable to discern their value. The destruction of so many of the originals makes the Wedervang Archive a national resource of incalculable importance. In its present form, the archive contains material on a wide variety of wage and price topics. While some of the data stretch back into the eighteenth century, the majority is concentrated in the century prior to the First World War.⁹

The section of the archive devoted to seamen's wages is one of its largest and richest components. Almost all the material on wages has been taken from three types of official documents prescribed by law. The first of these was called the *avmønstringer*, forms which were completed whenever a seaman was discharged from a vessel in a Norwegian port. These documents have their uses, but unfortunately for the historian interested in wages, they do not always contain precise and accurate information. For a variety of reasons, they are also extremely difficult to interpret.¹⁰ The Wedervang researchers collected information from

these sources when necessary, but because of the problem we know to exist with the forms we have excluded them from this study.¹¹

The second type of form is known as the *påmønstringer*, which were forms completed when a seaman joined a Norwegian vessel in a domestic port. They are easy to interpret, and they *always* give precise and unambiguous indications of the rate of pay. For these reasons, we have utilized data drawn from this source extensively. The *påmønstringer* provide a wealth of information in addition to wages. For the vessel, they give name, tonnage, mode of propulsion (and rig if a sailing vessel), and in a crude sort of way, the intended voyage.¹² For each crew member, the form also lists name, residence, occupation onboard, and age. But for our purposes, it is the wage data which is of paramount importance. These are especially easy to collect and analyze, since wages on *påmønstringer* were *always* converted to Norwegian currency regardless of the type of money in which the seaman agreed to accept remuneration. This means that all wages were expressed in *speciedaler* through 1876 and *kroner* thereafter.¹³

There is also one other type of document which contains information on wages: the *bemandingsliste*, or crew list. These documents very much resemble the British Empire "Agreements and Accounts of Crew," of which comprehensive descriptions are readily available.¹⁴ The Norwegian crew lists were opened by the master at the outset of the recruitment period. On the form he inserted details about the vessel and its intended voyage. As he enlisted crew, he also filled in a wide variety of information about each, including the precise level of wages. Once the vessel departed from its initial port, the master was required by law to have the agreement endorsed in foreign ports. The endorsement noted the dates of arrival and departure, and it also listed replacement crew enrolled and their wages. In other words, the *bemandingsliste* gives us a very detailed account of both the crew and the voyage they undertook. It is by far the most satisfactory source, not only for information on wages, but also for a host of other questions about seafaring labour.¹⁵ In particular, these documents are important because they allow us to determine something which is impossible from either the *avmønstringer* or the *påmønstringer*: wages paid by Norwegian masters to crew recruited abroad. None of the few Norwegian scholars who have tried to analyze maritime wages has recognized the differences between these three types of documents, a mistake which has led to a number of serious misinterpretations in the literature.¹⁶

Thus far, we have entered information about more than forty thousand crew onto our computer files from *bemandingslister*. However, we

still have quite a way to go to complete the transcriptions from this source. But we have completed the data collection from *påmønstringer*. Since in this paper we wish to focus solely upon domestic wages, we will rely on wage data drawn from this source only. This should not occasion any serious problems, though, since the *påmønstringer* file is very large: at present, it contains wage data on 558,859 seamen who served in the Norwegian merchant marine between 1850 and 1914. These crew members joined vessels in twenty-two different port districts. Table 1 indicates the districts and the years for which we have data. These ports range from Namsos in the county of Nord-Trøndelag in the north-west to Halden in Østfold on the Swedish border in the south-east. In order to enable the reader to see the distribution of the data, we present in Table 2 a breakdown of the file by capacity, generalized trade, and propulsion.

Table 1
Påmønstringer Data File by Port District
1850-1914

Port	Period	Port	Period
Tønsberg	1850-1914	Sarpsborg	1871-1914
Kristiansund N.	1850-1914	Skien	1883-1914
Trondheim	1850-1908	Sandefjord	1885-1914
Ålesund	1850-1900	Arendal	1889-1914
Molde	1850-1898	Stavanger	1892-1914
Namsos	1851-1896	Kristiansand S.	1892-1914
Mandal	1852-1868	Brevik	1893-1914
Larvik	1861-1901	Moss	1896-1914
Risør	1864-1914	Kristiania (Oslo)	1899-1914
Halden	1865-1914	Porsgrunn	1900-1914
Frederikstad	1869-1912	Bergen	1906-1914

Note: Dates listed are the earliest and latest for which records have survived. Most series have data gaps for at least a few years and occasionally for much longer. Frederikstad data are also available for some of the town's outports for the period 1896-1912.

Source: Norwegian School of Economics (NHH), Wedervang Archives (WA), WA 43 and WA 44.

We may begin our analysis by examining the temporal pattern of wages. Here we will concentrate on nominal wages, the remuneration received in current dollars.¹⁷ We here focus solely on seamen who served on

foreign-going vessels, since the sample of sailors on coasters is for many capacities simply too small to allow for any kind of rigorous analysis.

We can begin by looking at wage rates for crew who served on foreign-going sailing vessels. Although we have information in our files on thirteen different occupations, several have too few cases (or, like "mates," are impossible to categorize properly) in various periods to allow us to calculate significant means. Table 3 therefore shows ten of the classifications, with means presented at ten year intervals. Perhaps the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the data is that the rates for all capacities rose over the period. The pay for first mates, for example, increased by 188% between 1850 and 1914; second mates enjoyed a boost in pay of 210%, while wages for Able-bodied Seamen (ABs) rose by 147%. Only wages for boys (measured in this case only for those designated as *jungmenn*), which increased by 70%, and for cooks (86%), failed at least to double in current dollars between mid-century and the beginning of the War.

Nominal wages for all categories exhibited upward secular trends. But the pattern was not linear. Instead, wages moved in a wave-like fashion, trending upward but often falling as well. To avoid overloading the paper with numbers, we present in Table 4 a set of yearly means for the most common form of maritime labour, the able-bodied seaman. This shows clearly the upward rising tendency of wages, and it also underscores the fact that the increases were irregular. Similar patterns can be observed for every occupation onboard sailing vessels.

Were these patterns also replicated for seamen who served on steamers? To answer this question we can examine the data contained in Table 5. Because there were no steam-powered vessels on Norwegian registry in 1850, and relatively few in the next three decades, the table begins in 1880. But even in that year, a number of occupations have had to be excluded from the analysis because of a paucity of cases. Since the occupations onboard steamers were not always identical to those on sailing vessels, some care must be taken in comparing Tables 3 and 5. Nonetheless, it is clear that nominal wages also rose for seamen serving on steam vessels. As we do not possess wage data for the two types of craft for the same time periods, it is not appropriate to compare the growth in mean wages for the entire period beginning in 1850. But it is of course possible to do so for the years after 1880. This shows that with the single exception of stewards, those serving on sailing vessels received larger proportional increases than did crew on steamers. Wages for first mates on sailing vessels rose after 1880 by 138%, while first mates on steamers only received 54% wage hikes. Wages for second mates on wind-driven

Table 2
Seaman by Capacity, Trade and Function
in the Pâmønstringer Data File

Capacity	Foreign		Home		Total
	Sail	Steam	Sail	Steam	
First Mates	10,419	7,248	33	257	17,957
Second Mates	11,097	8,782	40	241	20,160
Third Mates	34	479	—	1	514
Mates	34,836	2,068	461	83	37,448
Bosuns	8,998	3,010	86	218	12,312
Carpenters	25,218	4,151	160	202	29,731
Bestmen	20,023	867	1,080	67	22,037
Sailmakers	3,464	—	5	—	3,469
Able-bodied Seamen	93,991	28,787	1,859	1,519	126,156
OSs	57,180	16,617	312	288	74,397
Boys (<i>Jungmenn</i>)	50,696	6,768	409	72	57,945
Boys (<i>Dekks gutter</i>)	9,449	3,462	79	70	13,060
Boys (<i>Drenger</i>)	7,221	456	104	5	7,786
Cooks	23,663	6,762	1,232	67	31,724
Stewards	15,229	8,327	35	66	23,657
Cook/Stewards	7,933	535	13	4	8,485
First Engineers	—	7,630	—	264	7,894
Second Engineers	—	10,466	—	290	10,756
Third Engineers	—	850	—	6	856
Engineers	—	947	—	104	1,051
Asst. Engineers	—	887	—	7	894
Donkeymen	—	2,640	—	16	2,656
Firemen	—	38,089	—	1,457	39,546
Engine Boys	—	634	—	8	642
Galley Boys	—	1,917	—	16	1,933
Coal Trimmers	—	5,681	—	112	5,793
Totals	379,451	168,060	5,908	5,908	558,859

Note: Home Trade is with provisions only. "Mates" and "Engineers" are undifferentiated categories, and include the various ranks within each. "Bestmen" often perform the same tasks as bosuns, albeit for lower wages. *Drenger*, *dekksgutter* and *jungmenn* are various classifications of the English rating "boy."

Source: NHH, WA 43, 44 and 292.

Table 3
Nominal Mean Wages for Selected Capacities
Foreign-Going Sail, 1850-1914

(kroner/month)

Year	1Mate	2Mate	Bosun	Carp.	Sail.	ABS	OS	Boy	Stew.	Cook
1850	49.5	32.2	31.2	33.8	—	27.2	23.9	20.9	—	18.8
1860	55.3	39.5	37.8	39.4	—	32.1	27.3	23.9	32.0	21.6
1870	60.6	44.5	41.1	46.1	41.3	35.2	28.6	22.9	40.5	21.4
1880	59.8	42.9	41.5	46.5	41.6	35.3	28.1	21.5	39.2	21.0
1890	68.7	57.7	54.1	62.4	57.6	48.7	39.2	27.2	54.6	26.0
1900	76.9	63.8	57.2	68.2	62.0	52.2	41.5	28.5	63.7	26.6
1910	101.5	77.6	61.5	76.3	72.7	54.9	43.0	30.5	73.6	28.1
1914	142.4	106.1	87.5	95.1	85.9	67.3	52.4	35.6	96.8	35.0

Note: Third Mates excluded because of small cell sizes. *Dekksgutter*, *drenger*, "mates," Bestmen and cook/stewards excluded because of the difficulty in defining their tasks with precision. The fact that "mates" (*stymenn*) have lower mean wages than first mates in every year suggests that the category includes not only first but also second (and perhaps third) mates. Since these cannot be separated on the available evidence, they have been excluded. Boys include *jungmenn* only.

Source: NHH, WA 44.

ships grew by 147% compared with gains of 111% for their colleagues using the new technology. Indeed, for every occupation that we can compare (save stewards), this generalization holds true.¹⁸

Another way of looking at the differentials between sail and steam is presented in Table 6. In this table we have indexed wages for different categories on steamers to the prevailing wage for similar work on sailing vessels; the mean sail wage for each occupation equals 100 in each year. This analysis shows that for all occupations there was a significant differential in 1880 for service on steamers, ranging from 14% for able-bodies seamen to 79% for cooks. But for all categories except stewards, the differentials had declined by 1914. By the beginning of the First World War, first mates on steamers earned, on average, only two percent more than similar labour on sailing ships; for second mates, the steam differential had declined to five percent. Indeed, the only significant premiums for service on steam vessels by 1914 was for cooks and stewards.¹⁹

Table 4
Annual Nominal Mean Wages, Able-bodied Seamen
Foreign-Going Sail, 1850-1914

(kroner/month)

Year	Mean Wages	No. of Cases	Year	Mean Wages	No. of Cases
1850	27.2	710	1883	44.2	1556
1851	28.7	762	1884	44.4	1404
1852	28.6	706	1885	39.4	1856
1853	31.3	1094	1886	36.9	1517
1854	38.9	1248	1887	37.0	1470
1855	40.3	900	1888	40.8	1587
1856	43.2	871	1889	46.6	2258
1857	42.0	878	1890	48.7	2020
1858	31.1	833	1891	49.0	2011
1859	31.3	769	1892	47.1	2301
1860	21.1	1175	1893	42.1	2283
1861	32.9	1407	1894	42.4	1696
1862	32.8	1377	1895	41.3	1559
1863	34.1	1047	1896	41.7	1877
1864	36.6	1429	1897	42.5	1886
1865	37.5	1625	1898	45.5	1771
1866	38.6	1752	1899	51.2	1855
1867	38.7	1616	1900	52.2	1730
1868	37.6	1582	1901	50.7	1426
1869	35.4	2079	1902	46.5	1252
1870	35.2	1954	1903	47.6	1276
1871	35.5	2144	1904	47.0	1202
1872	38.2	2318	1905	47.3	1175
1873	45.4	1477	1906	51.0	1198
1874	50.7	1525	1907	56.2	1121
1875	46.5	1732	1908	55.7	947
1876	48.1	1748	1909	52.4	856
1877	47.1	1930	1910	54.9	846
1878	42.7	1869	1911	57.9	609
1879	34.0	2451	1912	62.9	512
1880	35.3	1724	1913	66.0	465
1881	36.8	2014	1914	67.3	365
1882	40.3	1766			

Note: The total number of cases is 93,991.

Source: NHH, WA 44.

Table 5
Nominal Mean Wages for Selected Capacities
Foreign-Going Steam, 1880-1914

(kroner/month)

Year	1Eng	2Eng	1Mate	2Mate	Firemen	Able-Bodied
						Seamen
1880	161.8	82.4	94.4	50.0	46.4	40.3
1890	148.8	88.1	95.0	65.1	49.0	45.5
1900	181.7	115.4	98.8	70.0	50.8	47.6
1910	192.7	119.8	116.1	82.2	58.7	55.5
1914	219.9	150.1	145.5	111.9	72.8	70.2

Year	OS	Carpenter	Bosun	Boy	Steward	Cook
1880	34.2	54.5	49.1	26.0	47.0	37.5
1890	36.8	57.5	51.9	30.3	63.1	37.3
1900	37.8	65.6	56.6	27.7	78.9	41.8
1910	40.8	79.4	71.9	29.2	98.5	46.2
1914	49.8	92.9	85.4	36.1	122.8	60.6

Note: Years prior to 1880 excluded because of small cell sizes.

See also note 1 in Table 3. Boys include *jungmenn* only.

Source: NHH, WA 43.

Table 6
Differentials Between Sail and Steam Wages
Selected Capacities, 1880-1914

(Sail wages = 100 for each capacity in each year)

Year	1Mate	2Mate	Bosun	Carp.	ABS	OS	Boy	Steward	Cook
1880	158	117	118	117	114	122	121	122	179
1890	138	113	96	92	93	94	111	116	143
1900	128	110	99	96	91	91	97	124	157
1910	114	106	117	104	101	95	96	134	164
1914	102	105	98	98	104	95	101	127	173

Source: NHH, WA 43 and 44.

Any explanation for this phenomenon must necessarily be tentative at this juncture. However, some qualitative evidence suggests at least a tentative hypothesis. Steam was new to the Norwegian fleet in 1880,

and owners who had invested large amounts of capital in much more expensive steam-powered vessels were understandably concerned about protecting these investments. Peter Jebsen, who likely was the largest shipowner in Bergen at the time, evinced this concern by continually adjusting entries in his account books for crew on steamers; invariably, the new wages were higher than the old.²⁰ Jebsen never explained why he did this, but the two most sensible explanations both point to the legitimacy of the hypothesis above. It is likely, either that individuals with the skills required to operate the equipment on steamers were rare, or that seamen, sensing the caution of owners, used the opportunity to bid up wage rates. As the period progressed, owners became increasingly aware that for most capacities it was unnecessary to increase wages in order to ensure the security of their assets. As a result, the differentials virtually disappeared by 1914. One alternative explanation which will not suffice, however, is the argument that personnel serving on passenger liners account for most of the differentials. Liners were rare in the pre-war Norwegian fleet and, at any rate, because of a quirk in Norwegian law, these men and women were not listed in *påmønstringer*, and hence do not figure in this analysis.

Having established the levels and patterns of wages, we can now turn our attention to a related topic: was there in this period a national labour market for seamen, a series of regional markets, or little market development beyond the boundaries of individual ports? The only discussions in the literature of market integration point toward the argument that there was a reasonably well-developed national labour market, and that this was established quite early in the period. In his study of national prices, Jan Ramstad has argued that there were relatively few significant differences in prices for major commodities by 1860, at least in the southern part of the country.²¹ By the beginning of World War I, with the completion of rail lines linking Oslo with most regions south of Trondheim, and with the growth of an efficient coastal steamship service, the few price differentials that had previously existed had virtually disappeared.²² More germane, however, is the study of market integration conducted by Fritz Hodne and Ole Gjølborg. They concluded that a national labour market existed for a variety of occupations, including seafaring, as early as the mid-nineteenth century.²³

It would not be surprising to find a high degree of integration in the markets for seamen's labour even in a pre-modern society. Seafarers were by and large an extremely mobile group, a characteristic which logically *could* have helped reduce geographic disparities in wages. Further, the trades in which they pursued their livelihoods were generally

competitive, which could also have had the same effect. Still, without testing the hypothesis, we run the risk of falling into the trap that all too often ensnares economic historians: the substitution of logic for careful testing. Since no one has yet rigorously tried to test this hypothesis, it is wise to be cautious.

There are several methods appropriate to this task. One way is to see whether there were significant divergences in various ports from national means. Logically, if divergences were either small or non-existent, it would be reasonable to conclude that there probably was a national labour market. Similarly, if wages in specific geographic areas were virtually identical, we might be in a position to argue for regional labour markets. We have undertaken this analysis. Unfortunately, the necessary complexity of this type of tabular representation makes it difficult to present the results in their fullest form. Nonetheless, Table 7 presents a cross-sectional depiction of the findings for selected capacities for certain ports.

The table concentrates on those ports which show especially pronounced divergences over time. Kristiansund N. is deviant for the entire period; so too is Trondheim, although the differences were greater before 1890. After 1890 Ålesund paid consistently higher than average wages. Halden shows a distinct shift, from a low wage port prior to 1890 to a locale with higher than average wages thereafter. Oslo, Bergen and Stavanger, when we have wages for them after 1890, all appear as ports with significantly lower than average wages.

In all cases, it is possible to suggest (although not prove) possible causes, and we have speculated on these elsewhere.²⁴ But to do so at this point would be to go off on a tangent. The important point that needs to be underscored is that the existence of these wage differentials provides reason to further pursue the analysis. Had we been unable to find significant divergences, it would have supported the assertions in the literature. Since we know, however, that these differentials in fact existed, we need to push the analysis one step further by asking the question of how the *trends* in the various ports relate to one another.

To this end, we have run a set of multiple correlations (using Pearson's *r*). This procedure basically allows us to compare the changes in wages in one port with those in every other port on an annual basis. It will not tell us *why* regional or national markets did (or did not) exist, but the strength of the relationship will give us a pretty good idea of whether in fact there were wage markets. This procedure basically confirms the suspicions raised in Table 7. Correlations ranging between +.58 and +.91 were found for all pairs of ports prior to 1890, except

Table 7
Divergences by Port From National Mean Wages
Selected Capacities, 1850-1889 and 1890-1914

(Sailing Vessels Only)

A. 1850-1889

Port1	Mate	Bosun	ABS	OS	Boy	Cook	Steward
Kristiansund N.	+17%	+11%	+ 9%	+8%	+12%	+9%	+6%
Trondheim	+ 8	+ 7	+10	+7	+ 4	+6	+6
Namsos	+ 2	0	+ 2	+3	+ 3	+1	0
Halden	- 6	- 4	- 5	-5	- 1	-3	-2

B. 1890-1914

Kristiansund N.	+ 8%	+10%	+ 6%	+9%	+ 4%	+8%	+7%
Trondheim	+ 2	+ 1	+ 4	+3	+ 1	+5	+2
Halden	+ 6	+ 8	+ 4	+7	+ 6	+8	+5
Ålesund	+ 5	+ 3	+ 3	+4	+ 3	+3	+4
Porsgrunn	+ 2	+ 2	+ 1	+2	+ 2	+1	+1
Brevik	+ 2	+ 1	+ 3	0	+ 1	+2	+1
Oslo	- 6	- 4	-6	-6	- 4	-3	-8
Bergen	- 4	- 5	- 4	-8	- 2	-5	-1
Stavanger	- 7	-10	-10	-7	-11	-9	-9

Note: Percentages calculated by averaging indexing divergences for each port.

Source: NHH, WA 43 and WA 44.

for those involving Kristiansund, Trondheim and Namsos. In the period after 1890, the range was between +.61 and +.97, except for pairs involving one or more of the ports listed in Panel B of Table 7. Not surprisingly, the highest correlations for all capacities were found among the ports bordering the Oslo fjord.

But correlating absolute wages in this way may well lead to erroneous conclusions, since the procedure may mask the fact that the data contain common underlying trends (among other things, this may lead to the problem of multi-collinearity).²⁵ A better method of running these multiple correlations is, therefore, to correlate first differences (annual changes rather than absolute values). We present the results of this exercise in Table 8.

The results are in many ways startling. Far from confirming the

Table 8
Selected Correlations, Selected Ports
Able-bodied Seamen on Sailing Vessels Only, 1850-1914

A. 1850-1889

	Krist. N.	Namos	Trond.	Mandal	Tøns.	Halden	Risør
Krist. N.	—	.34	.31	.40	.25	.28	.36
Namos	.34	—	.48	.56	.61	.62	.53
Trond.	.31	.48	—	.65	.71	.63	.68
Mandal	.40	.56	.65	—	.74	.69	.72
Tøns.	.25	.61	.71	.74	—	.81	.80
Halden	.28	.62	.63	.69	.81	—	.76
Risør	.36	.53	.68	.72	.80	.76	—

B. 1890-1914

	Krist. N.	Trond.	Åles.	Berg.	Stav.	Arend.	Risør	Tøns.	Oslo	Fred.	Hald.
Krist. N.	—	.28	.35	.39	.41	.30	.33	.36	.44	.41	.22
Trond.	.28	—	.73	.51	.55	.49	.64	.53	.50	.61	.49
Åles.	.35	.73	—	.58	.55	.53	.69	.60	.56	.64	.54
Berg.	.39	.51	.58	—	.87	.66	.77	.75	.68	.75	.62
Stav.	.41	.55	.55	.87	—	.70	.80	.76	.65	.76	.66
Arend.	.30	.49	.53	.66	.70	—	.88	.91	.75	.83	.80
Risør	.33	.64	.69	.77	.80	.88	—	.92	.68	.88	.86
Tøns.	.36	.53	.60	.75	.76	.91	.92	—	.73	.89	.87
Oslo	.44	.50	.56	.68	.65	.75	.68	.73	—	.84	.95
Fred.	.41	.61	.64	.75	.76	.83	.88	.89	.84	—	.97
Hald.	.22	.49	.54	.62	.66	.80	.86	.87	.95	.97	—

Note: All correlation coefficients are positive.

Source: Calculated from NHH, WA 43.

existence of a national labour market prior to 1890, or showing little or no relationship between ports, the coefficients suggest a far more complex pattern. It appears that there were obvious *regional* markets for maritime labour, a possibility as yet unmentioned in the literature. In the southern part of the country, there is some evidence for a single market, although probably not before the late 1870s. In the north, on the other hand, the correlation coefficients suggest no definable regional market, and wage rates in none of the ports in the area were strongly related to any other.

After 1890, however, the picture is radically different. From the analysis, it appears that there was a relatively stable labour market encompassing all of southern Norway east of Mandal. Stavanger and Bergen, the two principal towns in the southwest, would seem to constitute yet another distinct market all their own, with marginally more affinity to the towns to the north of Bergen than to the ports to the south. The northern ports seem to have coalesced into a market of sorts, with the continuing exception of Kristiansund N.

We are presently attempting to explain all this, but our explanation must still be regarded as tentative and subject to revision. In the extreme south, we are fairly confident that we understand the creation of a regional market. All the major ports were linked by a modern, efficient transportation system which facilitated labour mobility and hence the creation of stable, integrated markets. The high correlation between Bergen and Stavanger at first glance seems more difficult to explain. While it is true that the two towns were only 115 kilometres apart, they followed radically different paths in pursuit of economic development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bergen was the leading Norwegian port in the transition from sail to steam; the result was a rapidly growing merchant fleet and a sizeable investment in new technology. Stavanger, the second largest port of registry in 1875, with some 107,000 tons of shipping, did not manage such a successful transition to steam, and the shipping tonnage decreased substantially after 1900. Furthermore, those Stavanger investors who did invest in steam had to compete for labour, not only with Bergen, but also with the rapidly expanding fleet in Haugesund (located on the coast between the two larger centres). Excellent coastal steamship connections between these ports existed by the 1890s, and this in effect meant that the labour markets became increasingly integrated. The rapid growth of the fishing industry after the mid-1890s and continuing high rates of emigration to the United States created a labour scarcity and forced up wage rates. Given the coastal transport facilities, the most logical reference, for Stavanger owners, was wages in Bergen. This, we believe, helps explain the high correlation coefficients between the two ports.²⁶

In northern and northwestern Norway, it appears that local factors blocked the integration of maritime labour markets. In Kristiansund N., the foreign shipping industry was closely related to the export of dried, salted cod (*klipfisk*) to Mediterranean markets. This profitable trade explains both the consistently high wage levels in the port and also the extreme fluctuations in wages which make it appear so different. There is a high correlation between the volume of cod exports from the port

and the level of maritime wages; in this sense, it seems that the wage pattern was more related to exports than to shipping in general. If this is correct, it makes more understandable the low correlations between Kristiansund N. and other regional ports. Indeed, all the northern ports appear to have wage patterns more related to local conditions than to the factors that likely influenced wages elsewhere.

Regardless of whether these hypotheses withstand further testing, it is clear that the standard interpretation which suggests the early formation of a national labour market for maritime labour is in need of revision. While there are other tests to be performed on the data, the correlations suggest patterns quite different than those that might have been predicted. Specifically, the evidence suggests that local market conditions were much more important in determining both wage levels and trends than has previously been believed. Although fluctuations in demand, and the influence of the international maritime business cycles obviously exerted a strong and fast growing influence prior to the First World War, these appear to have been secondary in Norway.

This essay does little more than scratch the surface in examining wages and markets in the maritime sector in nineteenth century Norway. It does, however, establish a few important points that challenge existing assumptions. First, it shows that nominal wages rose rapidly in the six and a half decades prior to World War I. But contrary to what most historians have assumed, wages did not rise in a linear fashion; instead, they rose in waves. Wage increases after 1880 were more rapid for labour employed on sailing vessels, with the result that premiums for working on steamers had virtually disappeared by 1914. The wages paid were determined to a great extent by local rather than international conditions, and they were set in a complex array of markets. In southern Norway, after the late 1870s, there was something akin to a regional labour market, similar to the one on the west coast south of Bergen by the 1890s. In the north, however, there is no evidence of a regional market even by 1914.

We hope that this essay does something more than merely correct a few myths in need of revision. We also hope that it sounds a warning note to scholars. All too often we suspend our critical faculties and accept arguments as established truth rather subjecting them to tests. The tacit acceptance for so long that there was really little worthwhile to learn about nineteenth century maritime labour is a case in point.

Notes

¹ We would like to extend our appreciation to a number of scholars who have lent assistance to this study. Edgar Hovland and Fritz Hodne made a number of useful suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. Christopher J. Munday assisted in both the collection and analysis of the data, and also contributed some important insights which helped to clarify the meaning of some sources. We are also grateful to Jan Ramstad, Kjell Bjørn Minde and Geir Løkken of the Wedervang Project at the Norwegian School of Economics for assistance. Funding for the data collection and analysis was provided by the Faculty of Arts Research Fund at the University of Bergen, the Norwegian Social Science Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and Memorial University of Newfoundland, using funds provided by the SSHRCC. A previous version of this paper was presented at the "Sailing Ships and Sailing People" conference at the University of Western Australia.

² For a recent overview of the development of the Norwegian shipping industry in this period, see Helge W. Nordvik, "The Shipping Industries of the Scandinavian Countries, 1850-1914," in Lewis R. Fischer and Gerald E. Panting (eds.), *Change and Adaptation in Maritime History: The North Atlantic Fleets in the Nineteenth Century* (St. John's, 1985), 117-148. The Norwegian experience is placed in international perspective in Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordvik, "Maritime Transport and the Integration of the North Atlantic Economy, 1850-1914," in Wolfram Fischer, R. Marvin McInnis and Jürgen Schneider (eds.), *The Emergence of a World Economy, 1500-1914* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 519-544.

³ Some of the exceptions include Lasse Reinholdt, "Sjømenns Lønnsforhold: Tønsberg, 1847-1914" (Unpublished MA thesis, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, 1975); Harald Hamre, *Skipsfarten i Stavanger i 1870-åra: En næringsøkonomisk undersøkelse* (Stavanger, 1985); Fritz Hodne, *Norges økonomiske historie, 1815-1970* (Oslo, 1981), especially chapter V; Fritz Hodne and Ole Gjølberg, "Market Integration during the Period of Industrialization in Norway," in Paul Bairoch and Maurice Lévy-Leboyer (eds.), *Disparities in Economic Development since the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1981), 216-225; Gjølberg, "A Note on Wages, Standards of Living and Social Stability among Norwegian Seamen between 1832 and 1914," *Economy and History*, XXI, No. 1 (1978), 13-28; Gjølberg, "Økonomi, teknologi og historie. Analyser av skipsfart og økonomi, 1866-1913" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, 1979).

⁴ *Norges Offisielle Statistikk: Statistiske Oversikter, 1948* (Oslo, 1948), Tables 126 and 128. The "economically active population" is calculated by subtracting from total population certain "inactive groups," including those aged fourteen and under, housewives, rentiers, and individuals receiving various sorts of social assistance.

⁵ In Norwegian, the word *matroser* is used not only to refer to seamen in general but also to describe a particular kind of seaman. The more specific

usage refers to what in English are called "Able-bodied seamen" (ABs), the most common form of maritime labour.

⁶ This problem is discussed in Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordvik, "From Namsos to Halden: Myths and Realities in the History of Norwegian Seamen's Wages, 1850-1914," *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, XXXV, No. 1 (1987), 41-64; Fischer and Nordvik, "Fish and Ships: The Social Structure of the Maritime Labour Force in Haugesund, Norway in the 1870s," *Sjøfartshistorisk Årbok 1986* (Bergen, 1987), 139-170. By the mid-1870s, Norwegians were recruiting about a quarter of their maritime workforce abroad. But this was a small proportion compared to the foreign component in many other fleets, including the Canadian, which drew roughly eighty-five percent of its crew from foreign lands. See Lewis R. Fischer, "The Great Mud Hole Fleet: The Voyages and Productivity of the Sailing Vessels of Saint John, 1863-1912," in David Alexander and Rosemary Ommer (eds.), *Volumes not Values: Canadian Sailing Ships and World Trades* (St. John's, 1979), 117-155; Rosemary E. Ommer, "Composed of All Nationalities: The Crews of Windsor Vessels, 1862-1899," in Rosemary Ommer and Gerald Panting (eds.), *Working Men Who Got Wet* (St. John's, 1980), 191-227; Gerry Panting and Eric Sager, "Labour and Productivity in Canadian Shipping, 1863-1900," in Sarah Palmer and Glyndwr Williams (eds.), *Chartered and Uncharted Waters* (London, 1983), 181-194.

⁷ A man/ton ratio is a measure of the number of seamen per unit of carrying capacity (typically per one hundred tons) employed on vessels.

⁸ We have discovered additional data for Lillesand, Egersund, Stavanger and Kristiania (Oslo).

⁹ On Wedervang's project, see Ingvar Wedervang, "Report of the Work done under the Direction of Professor I. Wedervang, at the University Institute of Economics, Oslo, January 1932-June 1936," Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, Wedervang Archives, W3, Box 201. On the archives, see Ole Gjølberg, *Professor Dr. Ingvar Wedervangs Prishistoriske Arkiv. En Systematisert Oversikt* (Bergen, 1974). The latter work is now largely superseded by Jan Ramstad, Kjell Bjørn Minde and Geir Løkken, *Katalog over Prof. dr. I. Wedervangs Lønns- og Prishistoriske Arkiv* (18 vols., Bergen, 1988).

¹⁰ For a more complete discussion of the *avmønstringer* and potential uses, see Fischer and Nordvik, "From Namsos to Halden," 46-47.

¹¹ We intend, however, to use *avmønstringer* in an attempt to perform nominal linkage on Norwegian seamen in collaboration with Jan Oldervoll of the University of Bergen.

¹² Destinations on the forms are sometimes quite specific, naming a particular port or country. But often the form simply indicate that the vessel was bound for a "foreign port." Regardless of specificity, there is a danger in placing too much reliance on *påmønstringer* as guides to intended voyages. This is so because we know from other studies of the international merchant marine

that as voyage patterns grew increasingly complex in the latter years of the nineteenth century, the identity of the next intended port became increasingly useless as a guide to the ultimate trade route. See Lewis R. Fischer, "New York, Rio or Batavia?: Voyage Patterns of Canadian and Norwegian Sailing Vessels, 1860-1900," in Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordvik (eds.), *Across the Broad Atlantic: Essays in Comparative Canadian-Norwegian Maritime History, 1850-1914* (forthcoming, Bergen, 1991); Fischer, "The Great Mud Hole Fleet." For an example of the dangers of placing too great an emphasis on the next port as a guide to voyage patterns, see Kjell Bjørn Minde and Jan Ramstad, "The Development of Real Wages in Norway about 1730-1910," *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, XXXIV, No. 2 (1986), 90-121, especially diagram 8. There the authors characterize some voyages as coastal that were in fact deep-sea, principally because they rely on the description of the next port from *påmønstringer*.

¹³ When the country switched to the *kroner* in 1876, the new currency was pegged at 4 *kroner* = 1 *speciedaler*. On Norwegian currency, see Hermod Skånland, *Det norske kreditmarked siden 1900* (Oslo, 1967), especially chapter 1; Wilhelm Keilhau, *Den norske pengehistorie* (Oslo, 1950).

¹⁴ See, for example, Lewis R. Fischer and Eric W. Sager, "An Approach to the Quantitative Analysis of British Shipping Records," *Business History*, XXII, No. 2 (July 1980), 135-151.

¹⁵ This source is discussed fully in Fischer and Nordvik, "From Namsos to Halden," 47-50. While *bemandingslister* are excellent sources, they are also much more rare than either *avmønstringer* or *påmønstringer*.

¹⁶ Some of the misinterpretations are summarized in Fischer and Nordvik, "From Namos to Halden." The most prevalent is the argument that Norwegian crew were underpaid by international standards. While it is true that crew recruited in Norwegian ports were poorly paid compared to those recruited elsewhere, we have shown that when Norwegian masters recruited in international ports, the wages they offered were virtually identical with those paid by captains of other nationalities. This point is amplified further in Lewis R. Fischer, "International Seamen's Wages: Levels and Trends," *The Great Circle*, X, No. 1 (April 1988), 1-21; Fischer, "Seamen in a Space Economy: International Regional Patterns of Maritime Wages on Sailing Vessels, 1863-1900," in Stephen Fisher (ed.), *Lisbon as a Port Town, The British Seaman and Other Maritime Themes* (Exeter, 1988), 57-92; Fischer, "The Price of Labour: Seamen's Wages in the Canadian and Norwegian Merchant Marines in Comparative Perspective, 1863-1912," in Fischer and Nordvik (eds.), *Across the Broad Atlantic* (forthcoming, Bergen, 1991).

¹⁷ We here use nominal wages since we are concerned with patterns of remuneration rather than with standard of living. For discussions of *real* wages in the Norwegian maritime sector, see Fischer and Nordvik, "From Namsos to Halden"; Fischer, "The Price of Labour." On real wages in Norway in general, see Minde and Ramstad, "The Development of Real Wages in Norway"; Jan Ramstad, "Reallønnsutvikling og Lønns-Struktur for Kvinner i Tekstilindustri på Sagene i Kristiania, 1850-1910," in Mauno Jokipii and Ilkka Num-

mela (eds.), *Historica IV. Föredrag vid det XVIII Nordiska historikermötet, Jyväskylä 1981* (Jyväskylä, 1983), 265–281.

¹⁸ Some other comparisons (sail first): bosuns, 111% to 74%; carpenters, 105% to 70%; able-bodied seamen, 91% to 74%; OSs, 86% to 46%; boys, 66% to 39%; and cooks, 67% to 62%. Stewards on sailing vessels, on the other hand, saw their wages rise by 147% compared with 162% gains for the same occupation on steamers.

¹⁹ An analysis was undertaken to see if these differentials could be explained by anomalies in the surviving data. But this appears not to be the case. The analysis is fully described in Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordvik, "Salaries of the Sea: Maritime Wages in Stavanger, 1892–1914," *Stavanger Museum Årbok 1987* (Stavanger, 1988), 103–132.

²⁰ See especially Peter Jebsens Hovedbog, Bergen Maritime Museum, Ms. 13/13A. On Jebsen as a shipowner, see Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordvik, "From Broager to Bergen: The Risks and Rewards of Peter Jebsen, Shipowner, 1864–1892," *Sjøfartshistorisk Årbok 1985* (Bergen, 1986), 37–68.

²¹ Jan Ramstad, "Kvinnelønn og Pengeøkonomi. En studie av kvinners lønn i testilindustrien i Kristiania, ca. 1850–1910" (Unpublished MA thesis, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, 1982), especially chapter 3. But a forthcoming study suggests that this conclusion needs to be treated with some caution. See Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordvik, "The Regional Economy of Late Nineteenth Century Norway: Maritime Wages as a Measure of Spatial Inequality, 1850–1914," in Mauno Jokipii (ed.), *Sita Kuusta Kuuleminen. Jorma Ahvenaiselle omistettu juhlaKirja* (Jyväskylä, 1990), 89–112.

²² On the economic impact of railways, see especially Einar Ostvedt, *De norske jernbaners historie, 1854–1954* (3 vols., Oslo, 1954).

²³ Hodne and Gjølberg, "Market Integration," 217–219.

²⁴ See Fischer, "The Price of Labour."

²⁵ Multi-collinearity is a statistical phenomenon in which two variables may appear to be related to each other when, in fact, they are related to something else which in turn is related to both. The calculation of compound growth rates using linear regressions suggests strongly that this problem exists for some of the ports under study here.

²⁶ For a more thorough discussion of the shipping industry in western Norway, see Fischer and Nordvik, "Salaries of the Sea"; Helge W. Nordvik, "Fra plog til platform—Rogalands næringsliv 1880–1980," in Edgar Hovland and Hans Eivind Næss (eds.), *Fra Vistehola til Ekofisk. Rogaland gjennom tidene* (Stavanger, 1987), II, 75–84; Lauritz Pettersen, *Bergen og sjøfarten. II: Fra Kjøpmannsrederi til selvstendig næring* (Bergen, 1981).

A Nation's Innocence: Myth and Reality of Crime in Iceland

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Introduction

Countries attach great importance to crime rates because a significant touchstone of a nation's viability is the absence of crime. Iceland is no exception.

With the dramatic growth in crime rates throughout the industrialized world, there is an expanding interest in criminological research in countries which experience slowly growing, or low, rates of crime, but which are, nevertheless, industrialized. This scholarship during the past decade is reflected in comparative work (e.g., Shelley, 1981a), surveys (e.g., Adler, 1983), and, more notably, in case studies of individual countries (e.g., Rottman (1980) on Ireland and Clinard (1978) on Switzerland). The findings relate low crime rates to country size, slow rates of urbanization, an absence of slums, political decentralization of government, citizen assumption of responsibility for social and crime control, and to a criminal justice system that encourages the suspended prison sentence (Clinard, 1978:103).

This paper* explores the public, scholarly, and official perceptions of crime in Iceland and examines whether there is an objective basis to such perceptions. These perceptions are inconsistent, ranging from a crimeless image to one where crime is seen to be on the rise. Public perceptions may involve myth maintenance. Such perceptions not only belie the social nature of crime, but also serve to project a crimeless image of the country in a planet fraught with crime. Scholarly understanding of crime is hindered by the lack of consideration of the totality of historical and social trends.

Public Perceptions of Crime

Public perceptions see Iceland as a "crime-free" country, despite evidence to the contrary. Media coverage of crime — such as a number of articles on shoplifting (e.g., Anon., 1981:20-1) — sometimes dictates public perceptions of crime and may then contradict elements of the established social myth. In Iceland, media coverage of crime brings into

focus the existence of crime, but this glimpse of reality is shortlived because it is not incorporated into the myth. Several recent crimes have also increased public awareness of the "crime problem." For example, Iceland's first bank robbery committed in early February 1984 has increased public concern and has for a time vitiated the belief in a crimeless Iceland.²

However, this concern does not translate itself into an abiding, collective portrayal to the outside world of Iceland as a society where crime exists. Indicative of this "crimeless" myth are popular books, information provided to the casual visitor to Iceland, and the informal sharing of stories which suggest that crime trends in Iceland are innocuous.³ An official publication of the Icelandic Central Bank (Nórdal and Kristinsson, 1967) informs its non-Icelandic readers:

The crime rate is also comparatively low, and murder is almost unknown in the Icelandic community. The suicide rate is also very low.

Also Magnusson (1977), for example, states that:

Crime has been negligible in Iceland, but has greatly increased in more recent years. It is mostly limited to petty larceny, smuggling, embezzlement and suchlike. Murders are rare, but suicides are rather common and on the increase. The prison system is extremely lenient, and on special occasions all but the most serious criminals are let out . . . Drunkenness is a common nuisance, frequently accounting for petty crimes.

Travellers' accounts, too, portray Iceland's innocence of crime. Scherman's book, *Iceland: Daughter of Fire* (1976:265), found widely in North American public libraries, is typical when it speaks of Iceland as "a healthy country physically and spiritually . . . the crime figures are spectacular." And still another observer (Chapple, 1984:28) notes even more rhapsodically that "[t]here is no litter, let alone crime . . . Iceland is indeed a paradise." It may well be that visitors to Iceland will always view the country's crime as *relatively* negligible. But, the myth of a crimeless Iceland prevails, despite scholarly and official concern about crime.

Scholarly Perceptions of Crime in Iceland

Studies on crime in Iceland stress that a significant increase in crime has occurred since World War II. Guðjónsson and Pétursson (1982) show that between 1940 and 1979, there was a 1281 percent increase of homicide in Iceland. Juvenile delinquency similarly increased, especially since the early 1950s in Reykjavík (Guðjónsson, 1982b). Skinner's

work (1986), however, does not indicate the relative increase of delinquency, but focusses on its variety and etiology. Th. Björnsson (quoted by Guðjónsson and Pétursson, 1982) states that sexual offenses increased strikingly by 950 percent between 1974 and 1977. Another study (Hart Hansen and Bjarnason, 1974) claims that assault multiplied by 415.8 percent in the same period while Penal Code offenses increased by 262.8 percent. Female shoplifting which had already reached 18 cases in 1979, had grown to 32 in 1980 (Guðjónsson, 1982a).

There are inherent problems in drawing on these and other studies of crime in Iceland. First, they do not embody long-term or historical analyses of crime trends, except for the Guðjónsson and Pétursson study (1982) and the work by Hart Hansen and Bjarnason (1974) — both focussing on homicide. Nor do these studies focus on the wider societal context of crime, except again for Hansen and Bjarnason (1974) who attribute the low homicide and crime rates to social stability, relative isolation, fairly limited individual mobility, racial and cultural homogeneity, and a circumscribed tendency towards class and social divisions. Third, this research has not explored the important changing proportion of types of offenses, particularly in light of the process of urbanization and modernization in Iceland. Fourth, these studies have ignored social processes which underlie attempts by officials and the public to “explain” the existence of crime in their midst. It comes as no surprise that the published data on crime in Iceland⁴ exhibit the same inconsistencies and incompleteness as the scholarly work. It is difficult to conduct any extensive investigations.

Thus, while Icelandic crime studies contain a number of empirical observations, they have as yet not dealt with some of the significant processes of social transformation. Research in Iceland reflects the overall Scandinavian approach to criminology and the etiology of crime, i.e., it reflects a social-psychological, psychiatric, psychological or penological fascination with the topic. Only four studies reflect a sociological concern (Guðjónsson, 1982a and 1982b; Thórmundsson, 1977; and Skinner, 1986) and even these are either intensely practical in their focus, or emphasize the unusual (e.g., murder).

Official Concern about Crime

There is, at present, little known about official perceptions of crime in Iceland. And, yet, crime prevention measures reflect official perceptions of crime. It is, therefore, important to examine these perceptions. Gurr, who has written extensively on comparative criminology, deems the “political and administrative reality” of crime a substantive area of research

(Gurr, 1981:106). What follows is a tentative exploration of the political and administrative reality of crime in Iceland, namely the laws and institutions which consider crime.

Officials in Iceland have indicated a rising concern about crime through both legislative and institutional developments. The Penal Code of 1940 forms the basis of these legislative standards. For example, the 1947 Act for the Protection of Children and Juveniles (replaced by a new Act in 1966) reaffirmed the country's stress on community-based approaches to delinquency, using local Children's Welfare Committees to deal with offenders under the age of 15. However, legislative concern about crime became particularly acute in the latter part of the 1960s and early 1970s. Reflecting the fact that Iceland was not immune to the increase of drug-related crimes, especially trafficking, the country adopted a series of laws to combat drug abuse, such as the Intoxication Liquor Law and Law No. 77 (1970) concerning trafficking of opium and other drugs. In 1974 the Narcotic Drugs Court was established. Laws unique to Icelandic culture were also promulgated.⁵

In addition to the above-mentioned legislative developments, institutional developments in the criminal justice system also express official concern about crime. In particular, the government introduced steps to coordinate and facilitate the work of the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney-General's Office. It initiated these efforts soon after World War II, in 1948, and after the interim measures of Law No. 27 of 5 March 1951, it established in 1977 the State Criminal Investigations Police in Kópavogur. The creation of this agency allowed the government to centralize the prosecutor's work and to bring under one wing all arms of criminal-investigative work.

One should also allude to another institutional measure, the school for delinquent boys in Breiðavík (est. 1953) which admits about seven boys a year. In 1973 the government also created a correctional center to deal with an additional twelve youth. The State Prison at Litla-Hrauni in Southern Iceland has also undergone physical and program changes since 1973 to reflect the official concern about rising crime trends and a consequent rise of the prison population from the traditional 29 to almost 50.

The rise of legislative measures and institutional developments demonstrates a serious concern about crime in Iceland, despite public perceptions of Iceland's criminal innocence. We now turn our attention to examining the objective basis of all of these perceptions of crime in Iceland.

Crime Rates

The following paragraphs examine the overall crime rate for six periods: 1946-48, 1949-52, 1966-68, 1969-71, 1972-74, and 1975-77. The crime rates will also be discussed in terms of some of their more salient aspects: their relation to population growth, urbanization (in this context, the rise of new towns), and by type of offense. By relating the character of crime to these specific social phenomena, we shall be able to better understand why confusion has arisen regarding the absence, or, alternatively, the rise of crime in Iceland.

The following data represent only Penal Code offenses (Judgments and tickets) and Penal Law offenses (Judgments only).⁶

General Trends

Table 1 provides an overall summary of all Penal Code and Penal Law (Judgments only) offenses in Iceland. The crime rate has risen from 257.6 per 100,000 inhabitants to 709.3, with a peak in 1966-68 (i.e., 637.5). The relative percentile increases per period are also notable. Such increases were markedly higher for the pre-1969-71 period than for latter periods. The relative increases for the early periods were almost 35% and 78%; for the latter periods the figures were almost 13% and 16%.

Population Growth

Table 2 suggests that for Iceland as a whole, the crime-rate index (using 1946-48 as the base period) is rising faster than the population index. By 1975-77, the population index in Iceland was 162; its index of crime was 275 — 70% higher. It is significant to note that for Reykjavík, the crime-rate index has followed the population index more closely: by 1975-77, the population index was 164, only 12% lower than the crime index.

Given the relatively low rate of growth of crime in Reykjavík, the rest of the country is experiencing a vast increase in criminal offenses. In this connection, it becomes important to understand the population redistribution patterns as a consequence of urbanization which have shaped Icelandic society during the past two decades.

Urbanization

Although Iceland has undergone a monocentric pattern of urbanization since the early 1960s (Jóhannsson and Sveinsson, 1981:224), the growth has been largely concentrated in areas *outside* the capital city, 120 sq. km

Table 1
All Penal Code and Penal Law (Judgments only) Offenses
Iceland, 1946-77

	Average Population	Average Annual Offenses	Average Annual Rate*
1946-48	135,729	350	257.6
1949-52	145,213	520	357.8
1966-68	199,681	1,274	637.5
1969-71	205,065	1,110	541.5
1972-74	213,634	1,306	611.3
1975-77	220,807	1,561	709.3

*Per 100,000 inhabitants.

Sources:

Population: Icelandic Statistical Bureau.

Offenses: 1946-52: Hagstofa Islands (1958: 6, 22, 24)

1966-68: Hagstofa Islands (1973: 18, 28)

1969-71: Hagstofa Islands (1975: 14, 24)

1972-74: Hagstofa Islands (1978: 14, 24)

1975-77: Hagstofa Islands (1983: 14, 24)

in size. Reykjavík's population has remained fairly stable, but the new areas have gained considerably. The relative growth of the Metro area is significant. In the pre-1952 period this area constituted only 8.6% of the population in the country; in the 1975-77 period it constituted 12.6%.

Significantly, the character of these newly urbanized areas is very different from that of Reykjavík. While Reykjavík has been able to absorb the needs of the population by virtue of existing social arrangements, the new areas did not have any such arrangements or structures. Town councils, the development of neighborhoods, the arrangement of services, and even the architectural style as a whole had to be started from scratch in these new areas. The essential difference between Reykjavík and the new towns extends to kinship patterns. Migrants to Reykjavík are able to make extensive use of kin already in the city (Jóhannsson and Sveinsson, 1981:232). This has led Jóhannsson and Sveinsson (1981:235) to speak of "a high degree of personal intimacy and social cohesion often regarded as lacking in modern industrial society." Those migrating to the new towns do not have this support.

Unfortunately, published crime data do not always reflect this urban transformation in the manner described above and therefore crime data are not always broken down into geographical units which correspond to

Table 2
Average Annual Population- and Crime-Rate Index
Iceland and Reykjavík, 1946-77
(Base Period: 1966-68)

		Iceland	Reykjavík
1946-48	Population Index	100	100
	Crime Index	100	100
1949-52	Population Index	107	111
	Crime Index	138	132
1966-68	Population Index	147	156
	Crime Index	247	178
1969-71	Population Index	151	160
	Crime Index	211	146
1972-74	Population Index	157	164
	Crime Index	237	171
1975-77	Population Index	162	164
	Crime Index	275	183

Source: Population: Icelandic Statistical Bureau.
See also Table 1.

these new towns.

Table 3 gives an overview of the distribution of population and offenses in three areas of Iceland, namely Reykjavík, the Metro area (excluding Reykjavík), and other areas in Iceland which are mainly rural districts. The data presented in this table should be treated with great caution. Boundaries for deriving demographic information are not coterminous with criminological data. The definition of what constitutes the Metro area has been statistically changing, each time taking into account areas which were previously excluded, or, alternatively, excluding previous areas. (Actually, this highlights the quickly urbanizing nature of this region).

Population shifts are very noticeable within the country as a whole. The Reykjavík population as a share (40.1%) of the total population peaked in the 1966-68 period, gradually decreasing its share to 38.2% in the 1975-77 period. The drop in its share of criminality is very significant over the years, from 84.0% in 1946-48, to 55.9% in 1975-77. The Metro area outside Reykjavík and other districts have increased their share, from 16% in 1946-48, to 44.1% in 1975-77.

The area around Reykjavík (indicated as "Metro" in Table 3) shows that in the 1975-77 period, its share of the Icelandic population is 12.6%,

Table 3
 Distribution of all Penal Code and Penal Law (Judgments only)
 Offenses: Iceland, Metro area, Reykjavík
 1946-77

	Mean Annual Pop.	Pop. Distrib. (in %)	Mean Annual Offenses	Offenses Distrib. (in %)
1946-48:				
Reykjavík	51,343	37.8	291	83.1
Metro ^a	11,642	8.6	29	8.3
Other	72,744	53.6	30	8.6
Iceland	135,729	100.0	350	100.0
1949-52:				
Reykjavík	56,741	39.1	427	82.1
Metro ^a	6,244	4.3	21	4.0
Other	82,228	56.6	72	13.8
Iceland	145,213	100.0	520	100.0
1966-68:				
Reykjavík	80,106	40.1	810	63.6
Metro ^b	12,466	6.2	155	12.2
Other	107,109	53.6	308	24.2
Iceland	199,681	100.0	1,273	100.0
1969-71:				
Reykjavík	82,020	40.0	676	60.9
Metro ^b	13,272	6.5	154	14.0
Other	109,771	53.5	280	25.2
Iceland	205,065	100.0	1,110	100.0
1972-74:				
Reykjavík	84,361	39.5	814	62.3
Metro ^c	14,184	6.6	195	14.9
Other	115,089	53.9	297	22.7
Iceland	213,634	100.0	1,306	100.0
1975-77:				
Reykjavík	84,412	38.2	872	55.9
Metro ^c	27,806	12.6	223	14.3
Other	108,589	49.2	465	29.8
Iceland	220,807	100.0	1,561	100.0

Total percentages may not add to 100%, due to rounding.

^aIncludes Gullbringu- and Kjósarsýsla, Hafnarfjörður, and Keflavík, but excludes Reykjavík.

^bIncludes Kópavogur, Hafnarfjörður, Gullbringu- and Kjósarsýsla, but excludes Reykjavík.

^cIncludes Kópavogur, Hafnarfjörður, Garðabaer, Seltjarnarnes, and Kjósarsýsla, but excludes Reykjavík.

Sources: see Table 2.

Table 4
Major Penal Code Offenses
Reykjavík's Share of Icelandic Offenses
(in %)

	Sexual	Violent	Property	Other	Total
1946-48	87.5	71.3	89.7	83.5	83.1
1949-52	87.5	76.5	83.8	86.4	82.1
1966-68	62.5	40.9	51.6	19.1	49.0
1969-71	60.0	47.2	68.8	28.9	64.1
1972-74	53.6	53.5	65.9	54.3	63.2
1975-77	62.5	40.9	51.6	19.1	49.0

Sources: see Table 1.

almost double from the previous (1972-74) period, and almost a three-fold increase from the 1949-52 period. Its share of offenses has similarly increased.

The other districts, as far as this table is concerned, includes large towns (e.g., Isafjórður with 3,000 inh.) and even a city (Akureyri with more than 10,000 inhabitants). It was not possible to tease these areas out from the category of rural districts; the criminological data do not lend themselves to this separation.

One is left with the overall finding that while Reykjavík's share of the population has remained the same, its share of crime has declined considerably (see Table 4). Second, despite the aggregate share of population in the new towns and rural districts, their share of offenses has virtually trebled.

Some additional support can be given for the claim that Iceland's growth of crime is largely concentrated in the new towns, by an examination of law-enforcement expenditures in the areas under discussion. When categorizing Icelandic communities into three major groups (i.e., Reykjavík, the immediate area outside Reykjavík, and all Icelandic communities) we see that they all reduced their relative expenditures for law-enforcement work between 1953 and 1968 (Hagstofa Islands, 1967: 3-5, 13-17, 19-25; 1968:18-9; 1970:20-1). Reykjavík's percentage of expenditures devoted to law enforcement decreased from 5.3% in 1953-55 to 3.6%. The area outside of Reykjavík decreased only from 3.5% to 2.8% during the same period, while all Icelandic communities' percentage of expenditures for law enforcement declined from 4.0% to 3.0% (by way of comparison, communities in Newfoundland in 1971 allocated 8 percent of their expenditures to law enforcement (*Daily Mirror*, 1972)). The

State's increasing assumption of law-enforcement work, such as through the creation of the State Criminal Investigations Bureau, explains the relative decline of such expenditures. However, Reykjavík saw the greatest decline of such expenditures, namely a 32.1% drop. All communities in Iceland as a whole spent 25.0% less on this item, while the Metro area (Kópavogur, Hafnarfjörður, Gullbringu- and Kjórarsýsla, but excluding Reykjavík) had the lowest drop, namely 20.0%.

The new towns represent, in the Icelandic context, a recent social and economic phenomenon. While Reykjavík and rural areas have experienced demographic changes, the changes always took place within a traditional environment. The new towns, however, represent a different type of social and economic development, as outlined above. This development is perhaps most comparable to that experienced by developing countries, where new wealth, class, and status are clearly differentiated from the older forms.⁷

Reykjavík is clearly not a center of a crime wave.

Differences by type of offense

As seen above, we are offering the hypothesis that it is the new towns which are experiencing a higher rate of crime. We propose, in this section, to touch upon types of offenses committed in Iceland and to suggest a correlation between certain types of crime and urbanization. First, we examine types of offenses in Iceland as a whole.

Table 5, using a classification of offenses adopted by the United Nations (Shelley, 1981b), emphasizes the points raised above. Crimes against the person have declined since the 1946-52 period. Assaults decreased by 28 percent, sexual offenses by 49 percent, manslaughter by 100 percent, robberies by 14 percent, and acts causing bodily harm by 95 percent. Although homicide and manslaughter have been included in Table 5, it should be borne in mind that such a low rate with a small population can hardly constitute a pattern.

Property crimes have, however, increased significantly. Embezzlement increased by 30 percent, car thefts by 160 percent, fraud by 364 percent, counterfeiting by 487 percent, and other crimes involving property by 987 percent. Theft seems to be the exception to the general vast increase of property crimes. This apparent decrease can be explained by the fact that only since 1966 have car thefts been aggregated as a distinct category, thereby reducing the general theft rate. There is no self-evident explanation for the imputed decline of rates for receiving stolen goods.

Table 5
A Common Core of Acts Defined as Criminal
Iceland

	Mean Yearly Rates		Percent change
	1946-52 (7 yrs)	1975-77 (3 yrs)	
Crimes against the Person			
Homicide	0.1	2.1	+2000
Assault	34.5	24.9	- 28
Sexual Offenses	4.7	2.4	- 49
Manslaughter	4.9	0.0	-100
Robbery	0.7	0.6	- 14
Bodily Harm	30.5	1.5	- 95
Crimes involving Property			
Theft	143.1	92.8	- 35
Fraud	18.4	85.4	+364
Car Theft	10.1*	26.3	+160
Counterfeiting	6.1	35.8	+487
Embezzlement	2.3	3.0	+ 30
Receipt of Stolen Goods	5.7	3.3	- 42
Other	6.2	67.4	+987
Crimes involving Drugs	-no data available-		

This table lists "Robbery" as a crime against the person to conform to United Nations accepted procedure; Iceland still lists this item as a crime involving property.

*Refers to 1966-68 period.

Source: Hagstofa Island (1958, 1983).

Crimes have been on the increase since 1969, with each increase being proportionally larger than the previous one. The crime rate is growing faster than the population. Is urbanization responsible for this increase? Reykjavik's crime rate, and share of the number of offenses, has actually decreased. The Metro area around Reykjavik is the place with an increase in crime, in addition to the rest of Iceland. What form does this crime take? A decrease of personal crime and an increase of property crime is characteristic of this trend.

These findings compare with those of other countries. Rottman (1980), for example, makes the case for Ireland where he observed a similar growth of property-related crimes which, he significantly adds, are related to "growing opportunities for crime," rather than to social

Table 6
 Crimes Rates:
 Iceland, Newfoundland, and Atlantic Canada

	Iceland 1975-77	Newfoundland 1977-81	Atlantic Canada 1977-81
Crimes Against Person			
Murder ^a	2.1	1.0	1.8
Assault ^b	24.9	403.3	416.3
Sexual Offenses ^c	2.4	11.0	11.2
Robbery ^d	0.6	11.1	25.8
Crimes Involving Property			
Fraud ^e	85.4	301.7	247.7
Car Theft	26.5	134.7	225.0
Vandalism ^f	24.9	961.8	1107.9

^aMurder and manslaughter.

^bWounding by intent, causing bodily harm, assault of police officers, assault of police officers, and common assault.

^cRape and indecent assault.

^dWith firearms, weapons, violence, and threats of violence.

^eFalse pretence, personation, and stealing "services".

^fDamage to public and private property.

Sources: Kaill (1984); Hagstofa Islands (1983).

disorganization *per se*. Viccica (1980) makes the point for developing nations where the increase of property crime occurs "at the expense" of offenses against the person, as a nation develops economically. Still, as compared to some its close neighbours, Icelandic crime rates are strikingly low. Table 6 compares these rates with those of Newfoundland and Atlantic Canada.

The greatest discrepancies are found in the rates of crimes against the person and in the rate of one type of property crime, namely vandalism. Vandalism occurs 1/39 and 1/40 as frequently, as compared to Newfoundland and Atlantic Canada, respectively. The Icelandic robbery occurs about 1/18 and 1/43 as frequently, respectively. Assault in Iceland occurs only 1/16 and 1/17 as frequently. For Iceland, Gustafsson (quoted by Swatos, 1984:38) notes that "moral crimes and crimes of violence" have, in fact, decreased.

As a rule, one finds fewer discrepant rates for crimes against property. Fraud occurs 1/4 and 1/3 as frequently in Iceland than in New-

foundland and Canada, respectively. Car thefts are $1/5$ and $1/8$ as frequent in Iceland. Sexual offenses exhibit a rate which is $1/5$ of that of either Newfoundland or Atlantic Canada. (The murder rate has only been included in Table 6 for the sake of interest — its low figure makes comparison in Iceland impossible.) As a general rule, Icelandic crime rates are $1/11$ and $1/12$ of those in Newfoundland and Atlantic Canada, respectively.

Discussion

As stated earlier, countries have an interest in the absence of crime. Authorities relate such interest to law and order, but what sustains the interest of both authorities and the public is a matter of ideology. However, this ideology involves an elaborate cultivation of fiction and fact, myth and reality, in which personal belief issues from collective ideology. Human beings create social life by apprehending objective reality in subjective terms. The results of this process of interpreting reality is the subject matter of the sociologist interested in the social uses of myth. How did this belief become vested with such vigor and importance? How does this society retain its public myths about a crimeless Iceland, despite objective evidence to the contrary?

The structure of this belief rests on two scaffolds. On one hand, the public explains crime in terms of individualistic causes and attributes, while downplaying the social aspects of crime. On the other hand, we see a series of self-presentations to the larger, outside world, where the myth of a crimeless Iceland sustains and fosters the uniqueness of that society in a world fraught with crime.

Perceptual reality is an important building block in the system of public ideology. It implies at once an avoidance of reality and an acceptance of that reality only on those terms which conform to public ideology. In Vidich and Bensman's classic study of a small town, the process of developing a perceptual reality involves a "mutual reinforcement of the public ideology" and "particularization" (Vidich and Bensman, 1968:294).

Vidich and Bensman observed that on the public level a consensus functions to reaffirm the public ideology:

The social mores of the small town at every opportunity demand that only those facts and ideas which support the dreamwork [dreamworld, sic] of everyday life are to be verbalized and selected out for emphasis and repetition . . . In this process each individual reinforces the illusions of the other (1968:303).

The collective process of building illusions, or perceptual reality, is complemented by individuals' particularizing the phenomenon in question. Inasmuch as, let us say, the attributes of class in Vidich and Bensman's community (1968:294), "are seen only in terms of the particular behavior of particular persons," we can hypothesize that in Iceland attributes of criminal acts are relegated to *individual* symptomatic traits. The broad, *social* aspects of crime are ignored.

The individual, psychological dimension is thus emphasized when members of the public explain rising rate of crime. The accused or the criminal is perceived as having a psychological predisposition towards crime. For example, in an interview with the warden of the State Prison, both the journalist and the warden emphasized the mental condition of common criminals (Hallson, 1982). Furthermore, this attitude is particularly evidenced by some recent measures to allow mentally disturbed persons to be placed in cells with prisoners (Bjarnfreðsson, 1981). Crime and mental disturbance seem to occupy, in the public's mind, the same space. Guðjónsson and Pétursson (1984) and Möller and Thórsteinsson (1977) show that in a great majority of cases, the State Criminal Investigations Police requests psychiatric court reports in cases involving homicide, sexual offenses, arson, and physical assault. The preoccupation with the individual, psychological and psychiatric states of offenders is also reflected in the fact that one-third of the research (out of the 35 studies) explores this dimension of crime.

Such individualistic explanations of crime reinforce attempts to trivialize the social context of crime. The continued emphasis on particular types of crime, notably crimes of violence, despite the more marked increase of property crimes, indicates this narrow perception of the cause and nature of crime. Similar myth-maintaining processes, *inter alia*, have been observed by Björnsson and Edelstein (1977) for sustaining the myth of social equality where contradictory evidence is repressed.

What is also driving down public awareness about crime, is the regular exclusion of certain types of criminal behavior as falling outside the realm of crime: tax evasion or cheating, smuggling of alcohol, violence in the home, public disorder under the influence of alcohol, and suicide. Studies on these subject do not exist.

Now, let us turn to the matter of self-presentations to the larger world. The projection of such beliefs is analogous to the two separate channels of communication evidenced in the previously cited study by Vidich and Bensman (1968). The public cultivation of a community's broad, normally friendly image of itself is clearly seen with respect to outsiders. The belief in a crimeless Iceland is most steadfastly main-

tained in the context of Iceland's international relations. The fact that Iceland may be gradually exhibiting increasing crime rates, is consistently shielded from outsiders. As in the Vidich and Bensman study, the community singles out particular individuals and behaviors for gossip and negative talk hidden from public view precisely because they belie the public ideology itself.

Conclusion

Demographically larger and institutionally more complex societies are able to sustain a divergence of opinions, even about such critical areas as crime. The social and institutional matrix of Icelandic society, however, is more integrated because of the persistence of traditional values, historical trends, relative isolation from the larger world, and its demographic and cultural homogeneity (see, e.g., Swatos, 1984:38; Björnsson and Edelstein, 1977). These factors are conducive to creating and sustaining an ideology, belief system, and collective sentiments.

The existence of such beliefs is particularly relevant in Iceland where the myth of a crimeless society persists: as that society becomes increasingly shaped by mass technology, mass information, and mass media, the relevance of social myths acquire their own importance. These myths will assume an increasingly more important role in the collective life of the nation. If such social myths no longer serve to underscore traditional conceptions of the "good society," they tend to obscure the differences between fact and fiction. Under those conditions, it becomes increasingly difficult to come to grips with the occurrence, nature, and cause of such phenomena as crime. Similarly, attempts by Iceland's thirty-third generation to approach such human problems as crime in any concrete fashion will be repeatedly delayed. The popular conception of crime will have to shift from the individual level to the social one.

Notes

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¹ I am indebted to a long-forgotten author for this, not so easily forgotten observation.

² One publisher informed the researcher: ". . . even though the crime rate is lower here than in many other places, it looks like some of my countrymen are doing their best to improve that situation."

³ Numerous stories circulate about Iceland's only prison in Eyrarbakki and about Iceland criminal innocence. These stories are difficult to corroborate, however.

⁴ Modern crime data have been compiled since 1913, the past 73 years. However, no public data exist for 1926-45, 1953-65, and from 1978 onward; published data are thus available for 54 years. Regrettably, twenty years of this data are largely incomparable; another eighteen years have incomplete data. This leaves us with only sixteen years of complete and comparable data.

Changes in police reporting sheets in 1966, along with changes in district sizes and reclassification of towns in 1974 add to the complexity of analyzing even currently available information.

⁵ Especially illustrative of the pre-eminence given to writing and reading in Iceland, is Law No. 61 of 31 May 1979. This Law made it difficult for second-hand book dealers to distribute good quickly. This law arose partially out of the need to curb the practice of second-hand book dealers' selling "hot" books.

⁶ Offenses fall into four major categories: offenses against the Penal Code, those against the Penal Laws, against other laws, and against Narcotic Drug Laws. Each major category is further subdivided into those which involve court judgments and those with ticketed fines; the former is considered a more serious offense than the latter. It was not possible to do an analysis of all major categories and types. Narcotic Drug offenses were only recently identified as such and are thus inadequate for historical understanding. Offenses not pertaining to the Penal Code or Penal Laws, contain minor offenses such as parking tickets and various (but not all) liquor offenses. These, too, were excluded from the analysis because these offenses are not perceived as criminal in the usual sense of the word. The remaining categories (Penal Code and Penal Laws) constitute, in everyday life, "crime." The use of only these types of offenses whose definition has remained fairly unchanged over time presents a better basis for historical comparison. It should, finally, be noted that we were not able to include the ticketed fines since in some cases, the data were lacking.

⁷ It might be worthwhile to explore, in future research, the implications of age distribution for crime rates in various Icelandic locales and whether the urbanization of traditional rural places, such as Akureyri, Seðisfjörður, and Húsavík would account for any increase of the crime rate. Crime data are, unfortunately, not organized in a way to filter out the crime rates of these places.

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LITERATURE AND THEATRE
IN SCANDINAVIA

Holberg: A Scandinavian Slant on the European Enlightenment

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Ludvig Holberg had in his possession a copy of *Tutte le opere* by Niccolò Machiavelli. Late in his day (1751) he published his own brief version of *Il principe*.¹ If you want to succeed and achieve power, so Holberg said, you must behave defensively towards your peers and offensively against those inferior to you. You must do away with conscience, which is a far too heavy burden to carry. Never shoot what you aim at, and do not ever say what you have in mind; make sure that your mind and your mouth do not marry. As for yourself, remember that appearance is more important than reality. If you must steal, do it ostentatiously: only petty thieves are hanged. Do not have scruples about religion or truth; make sure to pretend that you adhere to whatever belief is prevailing. You must gather wealth and never worry about the manner, since a pound is a pound, no matter whether it is stolen or deserved. And so on. The attitude is best summed up in the Latin proverb which Holberg quoted throughout his work: *qui nescit simulare, nescit regnare*.²

By the mid-eighteenth century Machiavelli's analysis of power had gained wide currency, and Holberg might have been familiar with Machiavellian ideas from many other sources than the Italian book on his shelf. Since Holberg was an anglophile who had spent quite some time in England, he must have been familiar with the extraordinary notoriety adhering to the name of Machiavelli in that country since Elizabethan times. There is no question about Holberg's own attitude to the principles of *Il principe*: they are professed through the mouth of the fox, giving private tuition to such animals as are prepared to keep the advice secret; unfortunately, however, the devil has laid his hand on a copy of the fox's lectures and is now disseminating the evil advice among the human beings.

What was Machiavelli up to when he lent his voice to the devious fox, though never for a moment showing the fox's hide? Was he really — as he professes — advising a prospective prince (in which case he is the arch-instructor of dictators and tyrants)? Or was he rather — as the radical, left-wing tradition of Machiavelli-interpretors has it — giving away the secrets of power to the powerless subversives (thus providing them with the tools to overthrow the tyrants of this world)? We shall

never know. Machiavelli has his tongue safely in his cheek, and the two opposing traditions of Machiavelli interpretations have existed side by side for almost five centuries, although with shifting emphasis from one epoch to the next.

The eighteenth century, the time of the Enlightenment, was the epoch that gave rise and emphasis to the radical interpretation: Machiavelli as the great instigator of righteous subversion against corrupt tyranny, culminating in the French Revolution: Robespierre's 'tyranny of freedom turned against tyranny'.

This is the Jacobin tradition of using the insight into the perversions of power to overthrow that power by similarly perverted means. This is how Gramsci read Machiavelli in his prison cell. This is how Baader-Meinhof and Brigade Rosse are reading Machiavelli, believing — unlike Gramsci — that even individual and indiscriminate use of the principles of *Il principe* will do the job.

This, in short, is one bloody tradition of European radicalism: the improvement of existing conditions by means of the very terror that makes existing conditions unbearable.

However, there is a different tradition of European radicalism. It differs from the Jacobin tradition, not simply by being less extreme, but by having a different point of departure. Yet, it is no less deserving of the honourable label of 'radicalism'. In Scandinavia, Holberg as a political philosopher — one of his several capacities — is a key figure and founding father of that tradition.

How Holberg read Machiavelli we shall never know for certain, since he never dealt explicitly with the subject. But, as distinct from the Italian philosopher, there is nothing enigmatic about Holberg's use of Machiavellian themes. The mere fact that he used the devious fox as their mouthpiece, and the devil as their disseminator, suggests that he did not recommend them, neither to the prince nor to his subversive subject. On the other hand, the fact that he did lend his pen to such principles proves that he found them to be a true, or a least a worthwhile, description of reality: this is how power can be exerted.

The question is, what did he suggest as a viable remedy against such abuse of power? There is no question that Holberg was an opponent of tyranny and despotism. How, according to Holberg, can such social evils be contained, diminished, or removed?

At an early stage and, occasionally, throughout his career, Holberg addressed himself to one of the "minor" instances of repression — as men might have said then — the tyranny of men over women: sexual inequality. Being at his best a master of satire and irony rather than of

discursive prose, he had a fictitious woman suggest that male or female names be given not to the baby, whose faculties and propensities are unknown, but to the adolescent at a stage when he or she had shown either intellectual or domestic leanings, so that no person should be excluded from an academic career by the mere fact that the person in question was carrying a female name! "What is there to suggest that a woman should not be able to sleep just as soundly in a judge's seat as a man," he had his female speaker enquire.³ To those who thought that 'nature' — an institution, or concept, carrying immense authority in the eighteenth century — had designed men for the higher and women for the lower stations in social life, he later undertook to prove that, if anything, it was rather the other way around, since 'nature' has endowed men with bigger muscles and, surely, physical power is required for menial and domestic tasks more so than for academic and administrative endeavours.⁴

The first instance of his — truly radical — contribution to the philosophy of sexual roles (1722) is also the first instance of his reference to Machiavelli. "I wondered," he had his subversive female persona say, "whether we women are not just as well-equipped as the men for intriguing, and whether Machiavelli's book is not written for women as well: why shouldn't we be able to dissimulate just as well as any man?"⁵ The emphasis here is not on the question of whether or not the exertion of power necessarily equals cheating and dissimulation. Neither is he recommending Machiavellian ruthlessness as a means of putting an end to the social evil that he is discussing. Holberg's emphasis is exclusively on the inequality of the sexes. He takes the arguments supporting the existing order one by one, and tears them to pieces, by means of reason.

The main distinction between the two lines of European radicalism can therefore be summed up as follows: On the one hand, we have what I propose to call the Machiavellian tradition. I am *not* referring to the enigmatic Machiavelli himself or to that which he might *really* have had in mind when he described the achievement of power. On the contrary, I am referring to the radical tradition of reading Machiavelli, the line from Robespierre, via Lenin, to the articulate, elitist and, in many instances, surely idealist terrorists of the present time: the radicals who believe that present conditions can be improved by using the worst means used by the present powers, with no moral scruples. On the other hand, we have the tradition of the Enlightenment,⁶ in Scandinavia represented by Holberg: the belief in the basic equality of human beings, the trust in reason, and the conviction that rational public discourse can and must be used as the best available means of changing society for the better.

The main target of the Holbergian type of humanist radicalism is the concept of 'authority'. The dichotomy of authoritarian subjugation versus rational examination pervades Holberg's thinking in such matters as education, religion, censorship, and the proper attitude to the professional classes.

Holberg was the first Scandinavian educationalist to suggest that college professors stop lecturing on their favourite subjects in pursuit of whatever they had on their minds. They should, rather, make themselves available for enquiry from the students who would be the right people to decide what *they* would find interesting and worth pursuing.⁷ Although he never surrendered his rather pale Christianity, he did do away with as many dogmas as he could possibly put aside without officially parting with the Lutheran Church, the established religious institution of his country; and whenever he touched on the subject, he would always air his predilection for those who would examine their belief with their own reason — and possibly arrive at a faulty conclusion — over those who, blindly, would adhere to whatever belief was the received wisdom in the street in which they happened to live.⁸

On censorship Holberg is ambiguous, but not incomprehensible, if one keeps in mind that he himself was subjected to censorship (like everybody else in Denmark at the time), and that, quite sensibly, he wrote in order to be published. What gives his anti-authoritarian attitude away is his never hidden admiration for countries like Holland and England where censorship was lifted.⁹ As for the professional authorities of daily life, doctors and lawyers,¹⁰ his attitude is one of scathing satire, comparable to that of a modern anti-authoritarian, such as Dario Fo, or, in a different vein, Woody Allen.

Holberg's attitude to government has always been a stronghold to those who hold him to be a conservative thinker: Holberg was, from the beginning to the end of his professional life, an unflinching supporter of enlightened absolutism, the existing form of government in his country. Fortunately, he was also a historian who had dealt at length with the rise to power of that type of government. There is no need to speculate why he favoured absolutism: we know it from the horse's mouth. Absolutism had been instituted only recently (1660), in Holberg's interpretation, to put an end to an intolerable tyranny exerted by a deeply corrupted nobility. Power, absolute power, was handed over to the king by the leading members of the bourgeois class, not in order to pave the way for a tyrant, but in order to deprive a tyrant of power. By thus diminishing the power of the nobility, the way was paved for deserving members of the bourgeois class to rise to governmental power.¹¹

This was not democracy, to be sure. But Holberg's reasoning, and his reasons for favouring it, are democratic in kind. Might Holberg have developed into a Jacobin type of radical, one who would accept, even favour, the nastiest of means for broadening the basis of power among the populace? Certainly not. This, again, is not speculation. He had little patience with those who were impatient enough to believe that, by violent means, the world could be changed "from one Saturday to the next,"¹² not because he was not in favour of societal improvement, but because he did not trust sudden revolutions. He was opposed to those who wanted to revert to the rule of nobility and the right of birth; he was opposed to sudden, violent changes. An opponent of reactionaries and revolutionaries alike, he was consequently an untiring proponent of what he liked to call "Den store Middelvej" ["the golden mean"].¹³ What is the point of insisting on calling his political philosophy radicalism? An important one, I would suggest, far more important than the relatively minor question of pinning the right label on the coffin of someone passed away a long time ago. There is much more at stake. This is, perhaps, most clearly brought out by the subsequent political history of Holberg's country and its history of political ideas.¹⁴

The political history of Denmark in the century of Enlightenment, unlike that of France, did not end in a revolution and the ensuing rise of Machiavellian, or Jacobin, radicalism. This can surely be accounted for by material causes, into which I shall not venture in this paper, but simply take for granted. Quite possibly this fact contributed to the ease with which a soft, yet vigorously humanistic, Holbergian type of radicalism was revived towards the end of the 19th century, at a time when socialist and/or dogmatic radicalisms got a stronger foothold in countries with a different tradition, such as Germany and France.

There is a heritage to be taken care of. In the early half of the 19th century, conservative romantics throughout Europe (who regarded the Age of Enlightenment with horror) tended to link the belief in reason with the bloody events at the turn of the century: one was the necessary and unavoidable outcome of the other. By denying, or playing down, the radical elements of a figure like Holberg, one reinforces precisely that conservative perversion, the reason being that one then has to accept — what Jacobin and Machiavellian radicals will always want one to do — that there is only one lesson of radicalism to be drawn from the 18th century. One is then left with only two alternatives, when taking stock of that epoch: either conservatism or the radical philosophy of ruthless action; either Burke or Robespierre — everything else is nothing but lip service.

This is a gross distortion of the 18th century, as a careful reading of Holberg can teach us. The heritage bestowed on us by that century is *not* simply the unpleasant choice between complacent conservatism and a radicalism whose necessary corollary is elitist terror.

There were *two* radicalisms, not just one, in the 18th century. There was a radicalism which did not believe that the means are justified by the ends, but rather that the ends are *in* the means: that what we do and how we lead our daily lives, down to the minutest details, are politically significant; that our social lives will stagnate and crumble if we abide by authority; and that they can be changed for the better, and that society at large can become less repressive, if we follow the great guiding light of reason. It is a frail and naïve belief, to be sure, often disappointed and easily ridiculed. Yet, it remains an indisputably humanising element in the European history of ideas.

Since the Scandinavian Age of Reason did not end in 'radical tyranny,' its Holbergian radicalism was readily accessible as a point of departure when, towards the end of the 19th century, a vigorous liberalism and cultural radicalism was taking shape. Its most notable spokesman, Georg Brandes, could, and did, refer quite explicitly to Holberg as a predecessor.

From then on, an unbroken trend can be traced right up to the present time. The spokespersons of the most vigorous element of current radicalism, the feminists, might — if they were so inclined — refer to Holberg as their earliest Scandinavian spokesperson.

Perhaps I may substantiate the bipartition of the tradition from the Enlightenment — the all-pervading point that I am trying to make — by lingering for a moment upon Georg Brandes. Nowhere is the concept of the *two* radicalisms more neatly and succinctly brought out than in the third volume of his *Hovedstrømninger i det 19. Aarhundredes Litteratur* [*Main Currents*], entitled *Reaktionen i Frankrig* [*The Reaction in France*] (1874).

Brandes' sketchy account of the French Revolution is modelled throughout on that very dichotomy, embodied on the one hand in the Girondins, descending from Voltaire and his rational opposition to the Church, and, on the other hand, the Jacobins, descending from Rousseau and characterized by a "tung, alvorlig og pedantisk" [stodgy, solemn, pedantic] spirit, possessed by

Herskesyge og paa Bunden af det Alt Kærlighed til Reglen, det vil sige til Samfundets Ordning efter Rousseaus Grundsætninger.

[overweening ambition and, underlying everything else, devotion to rule, that is to say, to the regulation of society according to Rousseau's principles.]

The leader of the Jacobins, Robespierre, was "den første Fjende af Girondinernes Forstandstro" [the first enemy of the Girondist rationalism], ultimately believing the Revolution to be "under Guds Førelse, ja i Virkeligheden en Gerning af Forsynet" [under the direction of God, in fact His work.]¹⁵

It does not take a sophisticated reader to grasp Brandes' preference. Nor does it make much sense to label Brandes as a conservative, simply because he prefers one heritage of the Enlightenment to another. One may call his account of the final bloody phase of the European Enlightenment slanted. If so, it is a slant firmly rooted, not just in Voltaire, but — as amply evidenced in Brandes' several works on his Scandinavian predecessor — in Holberg.

We shall not, in the foreseeable future, forget the tradition of elitist radicalism inherited from the 18th century: those who read Machiavelli's book as a prescription for change, and who subscribe to the 'tyranny of freedom against tyranny,' the Jacobins, the Leninists, the urban guerillas. They easily overshadow the anti-Machiavellian radicalism, the cultural radicalism, which believes in reason, the power of persuasion, and laughter as a means of destabilizing phoney authority. Holberg embodied that trend.

Finally, it is worth remembering that Holberg was a playwright, an artist. His comedies combine many elements, including elements contradicting the trend on which I have focused. Holberg's comedies, the best of them, are little wonders of comic invention: subtle, ambiguous, multi-layered. *One* layer in many of them is the urge to debunk authority and relieve repression. Laughter is not just the icing on the cake; it is an integral part of Holberg's approach to practical political philosophy.¹⁶

Above, I referred to one of our great contemporaries on the radical European scene (who, like Holberg, also embodies other elements in his intellectual make-up), Dario Fo. I cannot sum up the radical Holberg, the anti-authoritarian political philosopher and author of political comedy, better than by quoting Fo:

"Laughter opens your head so that reason may slip in."¹⁷

Notes

¹ 'Moralske Fabler,' Nr. 132, 1751, in *Ludvig Holbergs Samlede Skrifter*, ed. by Carl S. Petersen (referred to below as *SSkr*), vol. XVII (Copenhagen, 1913-63), pp. 110-12.

² For Holberg's use of this maxim and other references to Machiavelli, see Carl Roos, "Til Holbergs Latinske Epigrammer," *Edda* 44, Oslo 1945, esp. pp. 69-72, and F.J. Billeskov Jansen's commentary to his edition of Holberg's *Epistler*, vol. VI, 1946, pp. 39ff.

³ 'Zille Hansdotters Forsvars Skrift for Quindekønnet' 1722, *SSkr* vol. II, pp. 504-30.

⁴ In his Latin Utopian novel from 1741, translated into Danish only in the late 18th century by the poet Jens Baggensen as *Niels Klims underjordiske Rejse*. Most recent and readily available edition of that 1789 translation (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968), p. 118.

⁵ *SSkr* vol. II, p. 514. For evidence of the constancy of Holberg's views on gender and sexual roles, see also 'Hertes sammenlignede Historier,' 1739, *SSkr* vol. XI, pp. 306-10; or 'Heltinders sammenlignede Historier,' 1745, *SSkr* vol. XIV, pp. 541-44; or his Latin autobiography, 1743, most recent Danish translation by A. Kragelund, *Tre levnedsbreve*, 1965, pp. 504ff.

⁶ It would be preposterous to call it the Holbergian tradition, although in Scandinavia there is hardly a better name for it.

⁷ 'Moralske Tanker' III, 68, 1744, *SSkr* vol. XIV, pp. 335-39. See also 'Epistel' 390, 1749, *SSkr* vol. XVI, p. 368.

⁸ 'Moralske Tanker' II, 85, 1744, *SSkr* XIV, pp. 277f. See also 'Moralske Fabler,' Nr. 227, 1751, *SSkr* vol. XVII, p. 163.

⁹ Epistle 395, 1749, *SSkr* vol. XVI, p. 377. *Tre Levnedsbreve*, translated by A. Kragelund, 1965, p. 563.

¹⁰ Epistle 416, 1749, *SSkr* vol. XVI, pp. 406ff; Epistle 389, *ibid.*, pp. 363f; 'Moralske Fabler,' Nr. 93, 1751 *SSkr* vol. XVII, p. 91; 'Moralske Fabler,' Nr. 164, *ibid.*, p. 131.

¹¹ *Dannemarks Riges Historie* III, 1735, *SSkr* vol. VIII, p. 356.

¹² *SSkr* vol. XIV, p. 400. All translations into English are by the author.

¹³ *SSkr* vol. XIV, p. 316.

¹⁴ At the time of Holberg, Denmark and Norway were a twin monarchy. Holberg was born in one part of the kingdom (Bergen, Norway), and he was a civil servant in another part of it (Copenhagen, Denmark).

¹⁵ Georg Brandes, *Samlede Skrifter*, vol. V, 1900, pp. 20f.

¹⁶ Excerpts of most of the above mentioned texts (in modern Danish spelling and punctuation, but otherwise untampered with) may be found in an anthology designed for schools and general readers, *Den radikale Holberg*, ed. by Thomas Bredsdorff (Copenhagen: Rosinante, 1984).

¹⁷ Quoted from Fo's live performances in Holstebro, Copenhagen, and Rome.

J.P. Jacobsen in the Context of the Intellectual History of Europe

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If Jens Peter Jacobsen is still read today, a hundred years after his death, it is mostly as a Scandinavian classic and in the Nordic countries. And yet, there was a time when he was considered a world classic, on a par with Ibsen and Strindberg. In Germany especially, his fame knew no bounds. Stefan George translated a few of Jacobsen's poems in the early nineties. Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger* obviously owes much to Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne*, down to its Danish setting.¹ Rainer Maria Rilke worshipped Jacobsen: at the beginning of the century, he carried his complete works with him along with the Bible wherever he went, and could mention Jacobsen in the same breath as Shakespeare and Dante. Rilke learnt Danish specifically in order to read Jacobsen, and in view of a book he long intended to write on his favourite author, though he eventually abandoned the project.² In his book on the painters of Worp-swede, Rilke reported that they spent their evenings reading to each other passages from *Mogens* and *Niels Lyhne*. One of them, Heinrich Vogeler, illustrated German editions of Jacobsen's works. Many other Jugendstil artists loved Jacobsen, most notably Max Klinger and his circle.³ Even people who would come to be associated with Expressionism were influenced by Jacobsen. Arnold Schönberg is a case in point, whose *Gurre-Lieder* remain Jacobsen's best claim to fame. In his eulogy of his fellow Expressionist poet and close friend Klabund, Gottfried Benn recalls how he had given him the nick-name Jens Peter, on account of his physical resemblance to their common idol.⁴ Benn even wrote a Dialogue (*Gespräch*) on Jacobsen, where Thom, one of the protagonists, asks his friend Gert:

Aber gibst du überhaupt zu, daß seine Kunst etwas ganz Außerordentliches für jeden von uns Heutigen geworden ist? Nein? Also für viele!⁵

[But don't you admit that his art has become something quite extraordinary for every one of us today? No? For many anyway.]

After this assertion of the tremendous impact of Jacobsen's aesthetics on the writers and artists of the beginning of the century, Thom goes on to point out to Gert the paradox it entails:

Und denke mal, dieser Mensch hat sich auf eine ganz seltsame und eindringliche Art mit den Naturwissenschaften befaßt. Gar nicht so als Dilettant sich rasch an einem kosmischen Problemchen aufgeregt. Nein. Er schrieb zum Beispiel eine Arbeit über die Desmidiaceen Dänemarks.⁶

[And just think, this man has occupied himself in a quite strange and impressive fashion with the life sciences. Not at all as a dilettante quickly excited with a little cosmic work. No. For instance, he wrote a work on the desmediacea [a type of algae] of Denmark.]

Benn refers here to the *Aperçu systématique et critique sur les Desmidiacées du Danemark*, the botany dissertation for which Jacobsen was awarded a gold medal by the University of Copenhagen in 1872. For Jacobsen was a scientist and always saw himself as one, even when he had long neglected biology to dedicate himself to literature. He took it upon himself to introduce the ideas of Darwin and their consequences to the Danish public in a series of articles published in the *Nyt dansk Maanedskrift* in 1871, which led to his translations into Danish of *On the Origins of Species* (1872) and *The Descent of Man* (1875). There have been many attempts in Jacobsen's day and since to interpret his novels as illustrations of Darwin's theories; but they are not very convincing, as Jacobsen, though supposedly a Naturalist, does not stress all that much the determinism of heredity and environment in his works of fiction. There is however something to Gottfried Benn's argument that "das Spezifische in Jacobsens Kunst mit seinen naturwissenschaftlichen Neigungen ganz sonderbar eng zusammenhängt" ["what is specific to Jacobsen's art is connected remarkably closely with his inclination towards the life sciences"⁷], more specifically with Darwinism as Benn understands it: the awareness that everything is submitted to the law of development, and that we are related to all living things, that we partake of the same substance and share the same basic destiny.⁸ In Jacobsen's fiction, people and their emotions, even the noblest, are born, grow, wither, and die. They obey the implacable law of Nature as described by Jacobsen in his poem *Evig* (1875):

Evig og uden Forandring
 Er kun det tomme.
 Alt hvad der var og der er
 Og hvad der skal komme
 Vækkes, spirer og fødes,
 Skifter, ældes og dødes.⁹

[Eternal and changeless
 Is the void alone.]

All that was and is
 And what is to come
 Awakes, sprouts and is born,
 Changes, ages and dies.]

People and their emotions are thus often compared with plants, as in these two passages from Jens Peter Jacobsen's first novel *Marie Grubbe. Interieurer fra det syttende Aarhundrede* [*Marie Grubbe. A Lady of the Seventeenth Century*] (1876):

Saadan var hendes Tanker i den første Tid, det var hende som havde hun en stakket Stund været borttrykket til en forunderlig, rigbroget Fabelverden, i hvis varme, livssvangre Luft hele hendes Væsen havde foldet sig ud som en underlig fremmed Blomst og straalet Sol fra alle Blade og aandet Duft fra alle Aarer, og salig i sit Lys og sin Duft var den vokset og vokset, Blad i Mylder ved Blad, Fold bredt ud paa Fold i ustandselig Kraft og Fylde.¹⁰

[She seemed to have been transported for a short time to a fairy-land, where the warm, life-pregnant air had made her whole being unfold like an exotic flower, flashing sunlight from every petal, breathing fragrance in every vein, blissful in its own light and scent, growing and growing, leaf upon leaf and petal upon petal, in irresistible strength and fullness.¹¹]

Det var saa besynderligt, saa ængstende, nu hun var bleven halvgammel, at føle sig bevæget af de samme tungtaandende Længsler, de samme anelsesfulde Drømme og urolige Forhaabninger, som havde gjennembævet hendes Ungdom; men vilde de vare, vilde de være anderledes end det korte Flor, som en solrig Efterårsuge kunde kalde tillive, et Efterflor, som bygged sine Blomster af Plantens allersidste Kraft, og gav den svag og udtømt i Vinterens Vold?¹²

[It was so strange and disturbing, now that she was middle-aged, to feel herself again in the grip of the same breathless longing, the same ardent dreams and restless hopes that had thrilled her youth. But would they last? Would they not be like the short-lived bloom that is sometimes quickened by a sunny week in autumn, the after-bloom that sucks the very last strength of the flower, only to give it over, feeble and exhausted, to the mercy of winter?¹³]

As is to be expected from a botanist, the plant world figures very prominently in Jacobsen's work. It is indeed by an elaborate and ornate description of it that Jacobsen's first published literary work, the short novel *Mogens* (1872), begins. Here are the first two sentences of this classic description of Nature:

Sommer var det; midt paa Dagen; i et Hjørne af Hegnet. Lige for stod er et gammelt Egetræ, om hvis Stamme man gjerne kunde sige, at den vred sig i Fortvivlelse over den Mangel paa Harmoni, der var

mellem dens ganske ny, gulladne Løv og dens sorte og tykke, krogede Grene, som mest af Alting lignede grovt fortegnede gammelgothiske Arabesker.¹⁴

[It was summer; the middle of the day; in a corner of the hedge. Just in front stood an old ashtree, of whose trunk one could say that it wrung itself in despair over the lack of harmony between its new golden leaves and the thick, crooked branches that evoked more than anything else crudely designed old Gothic arabesques.]

This opening of *Mogens* already makes it clear why Jacobsen was so popular with the artists of the Jugendstil: this intricacy of plant design is distinctly reminiscent of the turn-of-the-century Modern Style (the English alias of *Jugendstil*, the French one being *Art Nouveau*). The mention of "old Gothic arabesques" is also typical of an aesthetics that is distinctly *fin de siècle* and of which Jacobsen was the forerunner: arabesques recur throughout his work, most notably in the titles of his most famous poems, as they do throughout the arts and crafts of the 1900 avant-garde. In J.P. Jacobsen as with the painters Gustav Klimt and Jan Toorop, human figures seem to grow out of luxuriant vegetal surroundings, from the same germinative impulse. Mogens is a very good example of this; he first appears "out of the green," so to speak, in the middle of a description of trees and bushes on a hot summer day:

Og saa Mennesket under Egen: han laa og gispede og saae vemodigt, hjælpeløst, op mod Himlen.¹⁵

[And then the man under the oak; he lay and yawned and looked up melancholy, helpless, towards the sky.]

This sentence could sum up Jacobsen's whole *Weltanschauung*: a human being — not a *mand*, but a *menneske*, a member of an animal species (*homo sapiens*), as such part of Nature, nonetheless dreams of something else, left vague and undefined. Mogens gives expression to a feeling that is doubtless at the root of Jacobsen's famous melancholy, and closely related to his scientific interests, when he explains towards the end of the story:

. . . Og naar der nu baade er Form og Farve og Bevægelser saa yndige og saa lette, og der saa bag Alt dette er en sølsom Verden, der lever og jubler og sukker og længes og som kan sige og synge det Altsammen, saa føler man sig saa forladt, naar man ikke kan komme den Verden nær, og Livet bliver saa mat og saa tungt.¹⁶

[. . . And when there are all at once shapes and colours and movements so lovely and so gentle, and behind all this there is a strange world that lives and jubilates and sighs and longs and can say and

sing everything, one feels so forlorn not to be able to come closer to this world, and life seems so dull and so heavy.]

Jacobsen draws the ultimate consequence of this basic alienation from the innocent joy of existence in Nature in a poem he wrote around 1868, "Med store Tanker har jeg levelt":

Og dog, hvor gjerne veg jeg ikke
 Min Plads i denne stolte Dans
 Og gav med Glæde Aandens Vælde
 Bort for en Bondes sløve Sans.¹⁷

[And yet would I happily give away,
 Leaving the game unwaveringly,
 This realm of proud thoughts
 For a peasant's dull wits.]

In *Niels Lyhne* (1880), Jacobsen's second and last novel, the megalomaniac tutor Mr. Bigum is likewise said to "kunde gribe sig i en fejg Længsel efter at synke ned tid de almindelige Dødeliges Hob og dele deres lave Lykke, blive Borger paa deres store Jord, Borger i deres lille Himmel"¹⁸ ["be sometimes seized with a cowardly longing to sink down to the level of the common herd, to share their low-born happiness, to become a native of their great earth and a citizen of their little heaven"¹⁹]. Except for the latter part, Niels himself realizes this dream of Jacobsen's and finds peace in taking up and managing the family estate:

Han var jævnt lykkelig, og tit kunde man se ham sidde som hans Fader havde siddet, paa et Led eller et Markskjæl, og i en sælsom vegetativ Betagenhed stirre us over den gyldne Hvede eller den toptunge Havre.²⁰

[He was really happy in a quiet way, and often he would sit, as his father had sat, on a stile or a boundary stone, staring out over the golden wheat or the topheavy oats, in a strange, vegetative trance.²¹]

This identification with the vegetable life he had apparently studied out of sheer empathy seems to have constituted Jacobsen's ideal of peace and contentment. It was often as though, like Niels in Copenhagen,

der kom ham en Følelse paa, som om alt det Myldrende, Bristende, Spirende, Ynglende i Vaarnaturen om ham, mystik søgte at samle sig i ham i eet stort, stort Raab; og han tørsted efter dette Raab, lytted til hans Lytten tog Form af en uklar, svulmende Længsel.²²

[he felt as though all the teeming, budding, growing, germinating forces of spring were mysteriously striving to vent themselves through him in a mighty cry, and he thirsted for this cry, listened for it, till his listening grew into a vague, turgid longing.²³]

It is precisely this longing which has become Jacobsen's trade-mark and commended him to the generation of the *fin de siècle*; indeed, it was doubtless the very source of his art, as will become evident from the following passage describing the nature of Niels Lyhne's longing:

Han længtes imod tusinde sitrende Drømme, mod Billeder af kølig Finhed: — lette Farver, flygtende Duft og fin Musik fra ængstelig spændte Strømme af sølverne Strænge; — og saa Tavshed, ind i Tavshedens inderste Hjærte, hvor Luftens Bølger aldrig bar et eneste Tonevrag hen, men hvor Alting hvilte sig til Døde i røde Farvers stille Gløden og ildfuld Vellugts ventende Varme. — Han længtes ikke efter dette, men det gled frem, udaf det Andet og drukned det, til han vendte sig fra det og hentede sit Egen frem igjen.²⁴

[He yearned for a thousand tremulous dreams, for cool and delicate images, transparent tints, fleeting scents and exquisite music from streams of highly strung, tensely drawn silvery strings — and then silence, the innermost heart of silence, where the waves of air never bore a single stray tone, but where all was rest unto death, steeped in the calm glow of red colors and the languid warmth of fiery fragrance. — This was not what he longed for, but the images glided forth from his mood and submerged all else until he turned from them to follow his own train of thought again.²⁵]

Most of the basic elements of Jacobsen's aesthetics are evoked here. The "Billeder af kølig Finhed" and "lette Farver" are typical of Jacobsen's descriptive style, astonishingly reminiscent of French Impressionist painting, with which Jacobsen most likely was not familiar. The following is only one of countless instances of Jacobsen's Impressionist painting with words:

Gjennem de fremadludende Grene paa en ældgammel Ask sivede det gule Sollys straalevis ned over Trappen og danned i den svale, halvklare Skygge et lysende Linielag, der fyldte Luften om sig med et gyldent Støv og tegnede klare Pletter af paa Trappens Trin, paa Dør og Væg, Spæt af Sol ved Spæt af Sol, saa det var, som lyste det, gjennem en hullet Skygge, Altsammen Lyset imøde med egne Farver, hvidt fra Edeles hvide Kjole, purpurblodigt fra Purpurlæber, og gult som Rav fra det ravblonde Haar. Og rundt omkring i hundred andre Farver i Blaaf og Guld, i Egebrunt, i glasblank Spejlglands og i Rødt og Grønt.²⁶

[The yellow sunlight was filtered through the drooping branches of an ancient ash. It pierced the cool dimness, forming distinct lines of light, powdering the air with gold dust, and painting the steps, the wall, and the doors with spots of light, spot of sun upon spot of sun, like a perforated shade. Through the tracery of shadow, each color rose to meet the light: white from Edele's dress, blood-red from crimson lips, amber from yellow-blonde hair, and a hundred other

tints round about, blue and gold, oak-brown, glitter of glass, red and green.^{27]}

Here, as in Impressionist painting, colours come into their own as pure, disembodied impressions. The same thing happens to the "fleeting scents" that float through Jens Peter Jacobsen's world, even before they do in that of Joris-Karl Huysmans' *A Rebours*, the Bible of decadent aestheticism, not to mention Proust. Along with, and indistinguishable from these fugitive, intangible impressions, "tremulous dreams" pervade most characters' psyches, haunting them and stimulating their frustrations. All the while images constantly overflow from an erratic stream of consciousness, whether in Jacobsen's prose or his poetry, which are both characterized by looseness of form and lack of unity to the benefit of the power of expression and impression. This is what made Jacobsen's importance in the Modern Breakthrough: he was instrumental in creating both the modern novel and modernist poetry in Scandinavia. What is more, Jens Peter Jacobsen is eminently representative of that "weightlessness" of European culture diagnosed by his contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche. In the triumphant civilization of late 19th-century Europe, not only was God dead, but the city-dweller's uprootedness was becoming the rule. Nature was as far removed from the Western mind as God. There were no longer any fixed points of reference; all ideas were matters of opinion; sensations became subjective and autonomous; the individual was alone with his aimless dreams, which would often coalesce in visions of Beauty as the new sacrality — or a passable *Ersatz*. Thus arose *fin de siècle* aestheticism. But still, its literary expressions — chiefly in Symbolism — would often display, through paganistic evocations, a longing for communion with the powers of Nature. This applies even to Nietzsche (whose poetry, incidentally, is reminiscent of Jacobsen's). Further proof could be the eventual conversion of Maurice Barrès to a nationalist cult of the earth, after a youth of aestheticism and self-analysis on which was based the novel trilogy that made him famous, *Le culte du Moi*. At any rate, the distant goal of Niels Lyhne seems to be some sort of reintegration into Nature, as is made plain by the following pronouncement:

. . . jeg stævner mod en Strand, hvor Stemninger slynge sig som frodige Ranker opad alle Hjærtets Fibre — en vildende Skov; for hver visnende Ranke er der tyve i Blomst, for hver blomstrende Ranke er der hundred i Skud.²⁸

[I am headed for a coast where sentiments twine themselves like luxuriant vines around every fiber of the heart — a rank forest; for

every vine that withers, twenty are in bloom; for each that blossoms, a hundred are in bud.^{29]}

Again we have here distinctly *Jugendstil* imagery expressing typical Symbolist longings. But Jacobsen's very style also betrays the fact that he is a kindred spirit of the generation of the 1900. Sentences flow on and on in endless streams of adjectives, which are often unusual, when not of Jacobsen's invention altogether. The rich vocabulary conveys a sensuality and a languor which are reinforced by the heavy, somewhat irregular, dizzying and yet enthralling rhythm of the sentences. It is very appropriate that Jens Peter Jacobsen is best known today as the author of the libretto for Arnold Schönberg's *Gurre-Lieder*, for who better than the young Schönberg could convey the feel of Jacobsen's style — "fin Musik fra ængsteligt spændte Strømme af sølverne Strænge?"³⁰ ["exquisite music from streams of highly strung, tensely drawn silvery strings"³¹].

It is interesting to note that, also at the turn of the century, Thomas Mann wrote short novels that are both stylistically and thematically very closely related to Jacobsen's prose fiction, as if the languid style was a reflection of the same gloomy content, namely the debilitating alienation of dreamy individuals from the real world and its real life. In Jacobsen, however, it is not as strictly identified with artistic leanings as in Mann. Granted, Niels Lyhne is a failed poet, much as Tonio Kröger is a minor artist. But Sti Høg, Marie Grubbe's first lover, is a mere sybarite, and yet the very incarnation of the type of character that fascinates Jacobsen — that is, of the *Estetiker* as portrayed by Kierkegaard in *Enten/eller*. He reveals to Marie the existence of a secret society to which they both belong, "de Melankoliske Kompagnie":

Det er Folk, som fra Fødselen af er givne en anden Natur og Beskaffelse, end som Andre, de har et større Hjærte og fortere Blod, de higer og attraar mere, begjærer stærkere, og deres Forlængsel er vildere og mere brændende, end den er hos den gemene Adelhof. . . . Vellyst i Dejlighed, Vellyst i Pragt, i alle de Dele, som nævnes kan, Vellyst i Gemyttets inderste Rørelser, Vellyst i de lønlige Drifter og Tanker, Menneskene selv aldrig ret kan begribe, alt dette, som for Andre tjener dem, naar de er ørkesløse, til stakket Kortvil eller fult Slemmeri, det er for deres Sjæle som Lægedom og kostelig Balsam. Det er Livsens eneste honningdraabendes Blomster, hvoraf de dier deres daglige Føde, og derfor søge de ogsaa paa Livsens Træ Blomster op, hvor hine aldrig vilde tro de fandtes, under mørke Blade og paa tørre Grene, men de, de Andre, kjender de til Vellyst i Sorg eller i fortvivlelse?³²

[It is composed of people who at birth have been given a different nature and constitution from others, who yearn more and covet more, whose passions are stronger, and whose desires burn more wildly than those of the vulgar mob. . . . pleasure in beauty, pleasure in pomp and all the things that pass the understanding of man — all that which to the vulgar is but idle pastime or vile revelry — is to these chosen ones like healing and precious balsam. It is to them the one honey-filled blossom from which they suck their daily food, and therefore they seek flowers on the tree of life where others would never think to look, under dark leaves and on dry branches. But the mob — what does it know of pleasure in grief and despair?³³]

A decade before J.-K. Huysmans' novel *A Rebours* was even published, Sti Høg speaks the language of its hero des Esseintes, the archetypal decadent aesthete, fleeing the crowd to seek strange sensations and indulge in peculiar musings.

But Jacobsen is not only successful at illustrating the extremes of morbid hedonism to which a dreamy temperament can lead; he also excels in showing the frustration that such a constitution can entail for seemingly quite normal personalities, in the characteristically modern compulsion to poeticize life and Nature — the dubious legacy of Romanticism. Though both young Marie Grubbe and young Niels Lyhne (not to mention the latter's mother) display this symptom of estrangement from the world, it is probably best exemplified in Mogens' wife Thora. In order to appreciate Nature, she has to imagine that it is inhabited by trolls, elves, and witches. Returning from a walk with her husband, she compares their house with the one made out of cake in the story of Hansel and Gretel, takes a few steps back to resist the temptation of taking a bite, and then supposes it could also be the palace of the Grand Turk. She imagines that Mogens is an Arab who has come to kidnap her and that they are pursued by guards who catch them, throw them into a big sack and drown them. She then pauses and wonders:

—Lad mig se, hvad kan det være mere. . . ?

—Hvorfor maa det ikke være, hvad det er?

—Jo, det maa det nok, men det er for lidt. . . dersom du vidste, hvor jeg elsker Dig, men jeg er saa ulykkelig — jeg veed ikke, hvad det er — der er saa langt imellem os — nej.³⁴

[—Let me see, what more can there be. . . ?

—Why should it not be as it is?

—Yes, it may well be, but it lacks . . . If only you knew, how I love you, but I am so unhappy — I don't know what it is — there is such a distance between us — no.]

And then Thora bursts into song:

I Længsel,
I Længsel jeg lever!

[In longing,
In longing I live!]

This sheer longing is the very direct consequence of the tremendous distance she feels between herself and the world, including the very man she loves. But *Mogens*, alone of Jacobsen's works of fiction, has a happy ending, as Mogens and Thora walk away hand in hand into the sunrise. By contrast, the rift of longing that Hennings feels separating him from Agathe in Jacobsen's second short story *Et Skud i Taagen* (1876) grows into an abyss of hatred after she has rejected him in outrage at his attempt to slander her fiancé Niels Bryde, whom Henning eventually kills while hunting with him on a foggy day. Henning then proceeds to ruin Agathe, who dies from grief as a result. He then disappears into the haze of his dreams, in a narrative paraphrase of Jacobsen's poem "Monomanie" (1868):

Jeg er gal!
Men jeg kjender mit Vanvid
Dets Ophav og dets Væsen.

...

O jeg hader Rhythmer,
Jeg elsker det, der hviler i Usikkerhed
Mest hader jeg Stormens sikre Flugt
Mest elsker jeg Taagen.
O! ser I det! ser I det!
Mit Paradis kommer:
Over det hvide Sand
Ligger Taagen tæt
Saa mat saa dødt og glandsløst
Saa afsindigt uforstaaeligt
Skulper Havet.

...

For mig lurer det glatte glatte Sand,
Bag mig gabe mine Fodtrin i Sand
Mine svindende Kræfters Grave
I en lang lang lige Linie.

...³⁵

[I am mad
But I know my madness
Its essence and its cause.

...

I love the halted balance,
Hating most the steady

Sweep of stormy wind.
 Best I love the fog.
 See, it's coming, do you see
 My paradise approaching
 As o'er white sands
 The mists are closing in.
 . . .
 Before me the smooth sands
 Lie in wait
 And behind me
 My yawning footprints
 In the sand,
 A straight, long line,
 Where my strength lies buried.
 . . .^{36]}

But in this allegory of Life, Death dwells beyond the wall of fog, and in *Et Skud i Taagen*, Henning meets it in the form of Agathe's ghost. Henning altogether leaves the world of the living and steps into a limbo where Dream and Death intermingle — much as they would in Stefan George's *Lieder von Traum und Tod* of the turn of the century. The poor woman of *To Verdener* (1879) also dies beset by her conscience, drowning herself in the dreary, unalterable stream of Becoming as her supposed victim comes along in a boat, unharmed, singing of happiness before it came, of the poverty of hope, of dreams. This is a fitting epitaph for the sick woman who had cast a spell on the blooming young girl in an effort to steal her health; for she was then filled with remorse as she recovered from her gnawing sickness, thus spoiling what little happiness she had managed to find on the wrong side of the river of life, where even the houses seem to be looking to the other side with spiteful sorrow. The poor woman gives vent to the longing of this world of strangers to life when, first seeing the boat coming with the happy young woman at whom she must throw a bundle containing her sickness, she exclaims: "Jeg kan ikke vente, jeg kan ikke vente" ["I can't reach it, I can't reach it"^{37]}. But she does reach the boat, just as one of the passengers argues that happiness is an absolutely pagan conception: "De kan ikke finde Ordet et eneste Sted i det ny Testament" ["You can't find the word anywhere in the New Testament"^{38]}. Christianity and the superstition derived from it (the woman prays and draws a cross in the mud before drowning herself) are here clearly criticized for systematically distracting people's attention from real life and the duty to live it fully. They make people crave for another world and neglect the real one in which they have to live. But Jens Peter Jacobsen, like Niels Lyhne,

fremhævede . . . , hvilken Kraft og Selvtændighed det vilde give Menneskeslægten, naar den i Troen paa sig selv søgte at leve sit Liv i Samklang med det, den Enkelte i sine bedste Øjeblikke satte højest af det, der boede i ham, i Stedet for at lægge det udenfor sig selv i en kontrollerende Guddom;³⁹

[laid stress on the strength and self-reliance mankind would gain when men had learned faith in themselves, and when the individual strove to bring his life into harmony with what seemed to him, in his best moments, the highest that dwelt in him, instead of seeking it outside of himself in a controlling deity;⁴⁰]

. . . thi det Nye, Atheismen, hvad var det Altsammen andet end Flitterguldsnavne for det ene Simple: at bære Livet som det var! bære Livet som det var og lade Livet forme sig om Livets egne Love.⁴¹

[. . . for after all, the new ideal, atheism, the sacred cause of truth — what did it all mean, what was it all but tinsel names for the one simple thing: to bear life as it was! To bear life as it was and allow life to shape itself according to its own laws!⁴²]

This last sentence can be said to express the basic tenet of Nietzsche's philosophy, even though at the time of *Niels Lyhne's* publication (1880), it was only beginning to take shape. It is a measure of Jacobsen's genius that, largely as a result of his study of the life sciences, he arrived at the same conclusion as the ground-breaking German thinker. Like Nietzsche, he saw and wanted to seize the opportunities for greatness accruing to mankind with the death of God. But like Dostoevsky, he also fully realized the nihilistic potential of this momentous development. In *Pesten i Bergamo* (1882), he uses the plague as an allegory for a world manifestly devoid of divine justice or benevolence, or of any purpose for that matter. Jacobsen's fourth short story thus anticipates Camus's novel *La Peste*, except that it makes no attempt to point to a positive way out of the barbarism into which society lapses when the divine sanction has been taken away from moral laws. Instead, Jacobsen shows us the depths that nihilism can attain in the flagellants' terrible religion of unredeemable guilt, leaving mankind to damnation. This makes Jacobsen's story reminiscent of that of the Grand Inquisitor which appeared in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* only two years before *Pesten i Bergamo* was published, and where, in a prison cell of Seville, a captured Christ is lectured by a cardinal for not having gotten off the Cross and assumed total earthly power, thereby relieving mankind of the burden of freedom so that it could find happiness in this world, if not the next.

In *Pesten i Bergamo*, as in the rest of his work, Jacobsen does not show himself to be so much anticlerical as antireligious, unlike most atheists of his day, who were more concerned with what they saw as the socially regressive role played by the clergy than with any existential alienation brought on by the belief in an afterlife. But Jacobsen, much like Camus after him, could also appreciate the soothing function performed by men of the cloth. This was because his basic empathy for all living things, however humble and vulnerable, made him understand

hvor knugnende tung og trøstesløs Atheismens Sandhed i Sorgens Timer kunde blive at bære, i Sammenligning med hin lyse, lykkelige Drøm om en himmelsk Fader, som styrer og regerer.⁴³

[how crushingly sad and comfortless the truth of atheism would seem in the hour of sorrow compared to the old fair, happy dream of a Heavenly Father who guides and rules.⁴⁴]

Niels Lyhne often reproaches his wife Gerda for her intolerance of people who have not been converted to the new ideas as she has been by him. As she lies dying, he even offers to get the minister to give her the sacrament. She accepts and relapses into the Christian faith:

. . . da Niels for sidste Gang tog hende i sine Arme for at sige hende Farvel, inden Dødens Skygger blev altfor nære, var hun ved sin fulde Bevidsthed. Men den Kjærlighed, som havde udgjort hans Livs bedste Lykke, var slukt i hendes Blik, hun var ikke hans mer, allerede nu, Vingerne var begyndt at vokse, hun længtes kun imod sin Gud.⁴⁵

[. . . when Niels took her in his arms for the last time to say farewell before the shadows of death approached too near, she was fully conscious. But the love that had been the purest joy of his life died out in her eyes; she was no longer his; even now her wings were growing, and she yearned only for her God.⁴⁶]

Niels' aunt Edele, his first love, had also shirked facing death, even though her last words — "Hils — Kjøbenhavn!"⁴⁷ ["My love to Copenhagen!"⁴⁸] had been a touching farewell to this life where she had so shone; but her very last thought is for an actor she had secretly loved from afar. She indulges in a pipe-dream at the moment when, according to Jacobsen, the clearest awareness is required. Despite his compassion for people like Edele Lyhne and Ulrik Christian, Marie Grubbe's first love, full of life and yet deluding themselves on their deathbed, Jacobsen really favours the attitude of King Valdemar who, in the "Gurresange" (1868), vows to his mistress Tove, referring to the castle where she lives:

Og ej vil jeg bytte dets fredsæle Vang
Og Perlen, den lønligen varer,

For Himmerigs Glans og bedøvende Klang
Og alle de helliges Skarer.⁴⁹

[And I would not exchange Gurre's secure walls
And the pearl that they faithfully hold
For Heaven's splendour and its deafening tones
With all the mighty hosts of the saints.]

After Tove's death, Valdemar addresses God in these words:

En Sjæl er elskende Mand og Kvinde.
Du rykke ikke vor Sjæl i tvende,
Til Helved' mig og til Himlen hende.
Thi da faar jeg Magt,
Da splitter jeg din Englevagt
Og sprænger med min vilde Jagt
I Himmerige ind.⁵⁰

[A man and woman in love are one soul.
Do not dare our single soul in twain to rend,
Sending me to Hell and her to Heaven.
For then would I seize power
And shatter Thine angels' guard
To burst with my men's wild chase
Into Thy very Heaven.]

Herre, jeg er ogsaa Hersker,
Jeg har lært paa Kongestol,
Man fra sine Undersaatter
Ta'r ej sidste Glimt af Sol.
Herre, du er paa vilse Vej,
Saadan vel knuser, men hersker man ej!⁵¹

[Lord God, I too am a ruler;
On the throne have I learnt
One does not from a subject take
His one last glimpse of the sun.
Lord God, you err in evil paths;
Thus can sovereign crush but never rule.]

Like Valdemar, Niels Lyhne "tog Parti — saa helt han kunde, imod Gud, men som en Vasal, der griber til Vaaben mod sin retmæssige Herre . . ." ⁵² ["took sides — as wholeheartedly as he could — against God, but as a vassal who takes up arms against his liege lord . . ." ⁵³]. In both these characters Jens Peter Jacobsen displays the Promethean attitude of Camus's Rebel, which does not aim so much at God as at the human condition He is supposed to sanction. Not that the rebel can really hope to change it; to think so would be to flee from it, which he cannot

and will not. Rather, he quite accepts the fact that he is bound to be vanquished by fate, but he is determined to stand his ground to the very end, fully aware of death in the enjoyment of life, like King Valdemar, and unshakably faithful to life at the hour of death, like Niels Lyhne. "Sidste Gang Hjerrild saae til Niels Lyhne, laa han og fablede om sin Rustning og om, at han vilde dø staaende. Og endelig døde han da Døden, den vanskelige Død"⁵⁴ ["The last time Hjerrild saw Niels Lyhne he was babbling of his armor and of how he must die standing. And at last he died the death — the difficult death"⁵⁵]. Jens Peter Jacobsen himself did rise from his armchair to die standing on the 30th of April, 1885, after a sickness drawn out over a dozen years. Like Friedrich Nietzsche in the same period, Jacobsen derived from his debilitating illness an accute sense of the value of life, and a defiant acceptance of the limits set upon it by fate. This famous statement by Albert Camus (in his early essay "Le vent à Djémila") could have been his motto:

Créer des morts conscientes, c'est diminuer la distance qui nous sépare du monde et entrer sans joie dans l'accomplissement, conscients des images exaltantes d'un monde à jamais perdu.⁵⁶

[To create conscious deaths is to reduce the distance separating us from the world, and to attain fulfillment without joy, conscious of the elating images of a world forever lost.]

In Camus' words can be found what was the central concern of Jens Peter Jacobsen: modern man's distance from the world, that can be bridged only by the tragic acceptance of death and of life by the same token in the absence of God. An author who has so brilliantly anticipated many insights of some of the boldest thinkers of our century, as well as his own, does not deserve the relative oblivion into which he has fallen. Largely on account of his ornate, florid, heavily sensual style, the author of *Niels Lyhne*, which Stefan Zweig called "the Werther of our generation,"⁵⁷ was dismissed by later generations for whom beauty was no longer an end in itself, or for that matter a valid concern. However, we need not look upon Jacobsen so censoriously; a century after his death, it may be time to see him in a broader historical perspective, as an important and unfairly neglected harbinger of our modern consciousness.

Notes

¹ Niels Lyhne Jensen. *Jens Peter Jacobsen*, Twayne's World Authors Series 573 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 143.

² Niels Lyhne Jensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-42.

³ Niels Lyhne Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

- ⁴ Gottfried Benn. *Gesammelte Werke. Band 4: Reden und Vorträge*. Herausgegeben von Dieter Wellershof (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1968), p. 971.
- ⁵ Gottfried Benn. *Gesammelte Werke, Band 7: Vermischte Schriften*. Herausgegeben von Dieter Wellershof (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1968), p. 1637. [Translated by the author.]
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *Vermischte Schriften, op. cit.*, p. 1639.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ J.P. Jacobsen. *Samlede Værker. 4: Digte*. Udgivet med Indledning og Kommentarer af Frederik Nielsen (København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1973), p. 162. [Translated by the author.]
- ¹⁰ J.P. Jacobsen. *Samlede Værker. 1: Marie Grubbe. Interieurer fra det syttende Aarhundrede*. Udgivet med Indledning og Kommentarer af Frederik Nielsen (København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1972), p. 103.
- ¹¹ J.P. Jacobsen. *Marie Grubbe. A Lady of the Seventeenth Century*. Translation from the Danish by Hanna Astrup Larsen, "Scandinavian Classics" VII (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1917), p. 85.
- ¹² *Marie Grubbe*, original, pp. 224–25.
- ¹³ *Marie Grubbe*, translation, p. 216.
- ¹⁴ J.P. Jacobsen. *Samlede Værker. 3: Mogens og andre Noveller*. Udgivet med Indledning og Kommentarer af Frederik Nielsen (København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1973), p. 21. [Translated by the author.]
- ¹⁵ *Mogens*, original, p. 21. [Translated by the author.]
- ¹⁶ *Mogens*, original, p. 54. [Translated by the author.]
- ¹⁷ *Digte*, p. 69. [Translated by the author.]
- ¹⁸ J.P. Jacobsen. *Samlede Værker. 2: Niels Lyhne*. Udgivet med Indledning og Kommentarer af Frederik Nielsen (København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1973), p. 37.
- ¹⁹ *Niels Lyhne. J.P. Jacobsen*. Translated from the Danish by Hanna Astrup Larsen. Introduction by Börge Gedsö Madsen (New York: Twayne Publishers and The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1967), pp. 37–38.
- ²⁰ *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 197.
- ²¹ *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 224.
- ²² *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 80.
- ²³ *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 88.
- ²⁴ *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 80–81.

- 25 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 88.
- 26 *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 47.
- 27 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 49.
- 28 *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 81.
- 29 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 89.
- 30 *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 80.
- 31 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 88.
- 32 *Marie Grubbe*, original, p. 161.
- 33 *Marie Grubbe*, translation, p. 146.
- 34 *Mogens*, p. 59. [Translated by the author.]
- 35 *Digte*, pp. 123–25.
- 36 Translation by Niels Lyhne Jensen in *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22.
- 37 *Mogens*, p. 82. [Translated by the author.]
- 38 *Mogens*, p. 83. [Translated by the author.]
- 39 *Niels Lyhne*, original, pp. 203–04.
- 40 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 232.
- 41 *Niels Lyhne*, original, pp. 211–12.
- 42 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 241.
- 43 *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 204.
- 44 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 232.
- 45 *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 208.
- 46 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 237.
- 47 *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 54.
- 48 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 57.
- 49 *Digte*, p. 91. [Translated by the author.]
- 50 *Digte*, pp. 99–100. [Translated by the author.]
- 51 *Digte*, p. 96. [Translated by the author.]
- 52 *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 58.
- 53 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 62.

54 *Niels Lyhne*, original, p. 215.

55 *Niels Lyhne*, translation, p. 244.

56 Albert Camus, *Noces*. Nouvelle édition. (Alger: Edmond Charlot, 1939), p. 47. [Translated by the author.]

57 Stefan Zweig in *J.P. Jacobsen. Niels Lyhne. Roman*. Deutsch von O. Enking. Mit einem Nachwort von Stefan Zweig. (Leipzig, 1925), cited in Niels Lyhne Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

Thorkild Hansen's *Jens Munk*

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On May 9, 1619, Captain Jens Munk left Copenhagen with two ships and sixty four men and travelled west across the Atlantic. His goal — to find the elusive Northwest Passage to China. In September 1620, more than a year later, he arrived back in Norway, with one ship and only two surviving crew members. In 1624 Jens Munk published an account of this unsuccessful and tragic voyage in a volume entitled *Navigatio Septentrionalis*.¹ His exploits were since forgotten, and by the twentieth century he had become no more than a footnote in the history books.

In the early sixties two highly respected writers, the Canadian Farley Mowat and the Dane Thorkild Hansen, attracted attention with books focusing on dramatic episodes from the quest for the Northwest Passage. With the publication in 1960 of *Ordeal by Ice: The Search for the North West Passage*, Farley Mowat revived the memory of the heroes of this long struggle.² Not surprisingly, he devoted a chapter to Jens Munk, entitled "The Black Winter of Jens Munk." It contains excerpts from Munk's book in chronological order as well as a brief account and assessment of his life and achievements. This chapter is in fact representative of the formal method used throughout the book. Mowat skilfully selects excerpts from the more important explorers' accounts and thus presents an authentic view of the difficulties and hardships endured by these men. The various chapters, consisting of documentary materials and Mowat's commentaries, add up to a history of the search for the Northwest Passage. Yet Mowat has more in mind than just creating an objective view of the past based on documents. He states his ulterior motives clearly: he wants "to provide us with an insight into the true nature of the northern world, while at the same time demonstrating the magnitude and grandeur of human endeavour in that hard environment" (p. 14). He wants to show "how many individual men grappled with and came to terms with the great polar adversary" (p. 14). His collection "brings the quality of these men into sharp focus so that we recognize them as superb animals, imbued with that innate strength derived from struggle with physical adversity, to which we owe ascendancy over all other forms of life. This is an ascendancy we may be throwing away" (p. 14). This criticism of modern civilisation culminates in an appeal to his contemporaries "to retain the primal virtues of a tough, unflinching,

physically competent, durable and daring animal in his own right, and of the world that spawned him" (p. 15). Mowat's outlook is basically Darwinistic, and he predicts the decline of mankind "leading to the immense graveyard of other species that armoured themselves too heavily against the physical dangers and challenges, and the reality, of the world around them" (p. 15).

In 1965 Thorkild Hansen published *his* contribution to the history of the discovery of the Northwest Passage. As the unpretentious title *Jens Munk* suggests, Hansen concentrates only on the one explorer.³ Neither Mowat nor Hansen are professional historians, but both consulted and used historical documents. In fact Hansen concluded his book with an impressive list of sixty-nine titles, including several unpublished manuscripts. Undoubtedly he wants to assure his readers that his story is based on historical fact.

Mowat meticulously sets off documentary excerpts from editorial commentary and explicitly states the message and purpose of his book contrary to Hansen who works authentic passages into the flow of the narrative or paraphrases them, normally without mentioning his source, and leaves it to his readers to draw their own conclusions about his message. The result is a literary form that resembles a novel and was labelled a "historical documentary novel" or "historical novel" by critics. Naturally, critics did not fail to notice the weaknesses of Hansen's method. His rendering of historical events is often speculative rather than factual, and he was accused of having created a new myth instead of interpreting history accurately.⁴ The problem of historical accuracy, however, is probably of little concern to general readers, who cannot be expected to evaluate the handling of historical sources in any case. The question why Hansen chose a historical topic in the first place, and what message he wanted to convey is much more intriguing and the answer less obvious. The key to an understanding of the book can, however, be found in certain aspects of Hansen's biography.

To interpret a literary work as an expression of the author's personality does not require any justification. However, such a method is particularly appropriate in the case of Hansen, who always favoured it himself. When he studied literature at the University of Copenhagen, the nineteen-year-old Hansen disagreed with the then dominant critical approach to fiction. He challenged the notion that a work of art was self-sufficient, and that knowledge of the author's life was irrelevant. In a diary entry of February 3, 1946, he discussed this point in commenting on a work by the critic Billeskov Jansen: "One can easily walk around in a pair of shoes without the wish to know who made them, but it

has never occurred to me to read a book without the desire to know something about the author . . . All good books are the result of an experience . . . Artists and art are inseparable, for they illuminate and explain each other."⁵ The diaries, which he kept between 1943 and 1947 and only published in 1974 under the title *De søde piger*, are of special importance to our investigation. They contain many of the central ideas of his later works, and we can see how these originated from specific personal experiences.

Hansen, who was born in 1927, attended high school when his country was occupied by German troops. He knew that students from his class were active members of the clandestine resistance movement and he felt guilty for not joining. With great anxiety he took note of the age of young resistance fighters who were executed by the Nazis. He realized that the sheltered world of everyday life was not the real world. In the real world, young men, some of them not much older than himself, risked their lives and actually got killed. A passage taken from a diary entry of April 7, 1945 shows Hansen's dilemma: "Why do I not join? Because I am too young? . . . the Germans shot several who were younger than me . . . Anyone experienced in this sort of thing can tell by your face that you are afraid, that you do not dare . . ." (p. 62). This traumatic experience was to haunt him for a long time. When the war ended he was unable to come to terms with the feeling of personal failure. On August 24, 1945, he wrote in his diary: "I am not very much in favour of soldiers and the military, but there is no doubt in my mind how much I owe those men, who stormed out of the trenches, while I sat back and wrote poetry" (p. 127).

The feeling of having failed when his country was in need of heroes lead to the idea of history as a testing ground for character. Hansen's protagonists in the documentary novels, Carsten Niebuhr in *Det lykkelige Arabien* and Jens Munk, are tested in adverse circumstances, where they can reveal their innate strength.⁶ In normal day-to-day life the strong characters have no opportunity to show their vitality. Although these heroes do not achieve what they set out to do, they are not crushed by defeat. Rather, they survive their misfortunes, not because adversity has made them strong, but because they are strong from the beginning. Hansen can thus rationalize his failure to join the resistance movement by pointing out that character is fixed and unchanging, as he does in a diary entry from May 24, 1946: "External events can influence us, but cannot change us, cannot make us different people" (p. 200).

Hansen's literary works can be seen as an expression of his desire to come face to face with reality. Besides his major documentary works

— a book about an eighteenth century Danish expedition to the Orient, the story of Jens Munk, a three volume account of the Danish slave trade, and three volumes about the Hamsun trial — he published books about his travels to different parts of the world as well as diaries and interviews.⁷ As a traveller, he actively seeks the confrontation with reality, and documents his experiences in diaries and travel books; as a writer he prefers the documentary novel to fiction. Forty years after the Occupation, his views about the nature of reality have not changed. In *Søforhør*, an unusually candid and comprehensive book of interviews, published in 1982, he says: “. . . we are almost never completely present in the real world . . . But occasionally we experience moments of falling into reality . . .”⁸

Already as a student, Hansen had been interested in investigating the relationship between the artist and reality, and the representation of this relationship in the poetic work. At that time he was engaged in writing his first book, a scholarly study of Jacob Paludan's view of nature.⁹ He visited Paludan and later in the summer cycled to Northern Jutland to get a firsthand impression of the environment which Paludan had described in his works. Similarly, Hansen familiarized himself with the protagonists of his historical documentary novels by studying and personally experiencing the environment in which they had suffered. As a result he is able better to understand the emotional qualities of the written documents. In the case of *Jens Munk*, Hansen and his friend, the writer Peter Seeberg, visited Churchill in the late summer of 1964. Their archaeological expedition, funded by the National Museum of Canada, was successful: they discovered the site of Munk's winter camp, and published their findings in 1965.¹⁰ Hansen was at that time in the process of writing his book on Munk, and he used the opportunity to attempt to capture the atmosphere of the northern landscape as his protagonist might have experienced it: “In a short while the shore will appear, exactly the way it became visible to Jens Munk on September 6, 1619 . . .”¹¹ Hansen returned to Europe by ship, along the same route that Munk had taken more than three centuries earlier, and documented his experience in a travel book entitled *Vinterhavn*.

The theme of destiny also dates from the war years. In the diaries we find evidence that Hansen, leaning towards superstition, repeatedly asks himself whether important events in his life were predestined or merely the result of chance (p. 133). History was full of examples of strange coincidences. The fact that Carsten Niebuhr and Jens Munk survived invites questions about the meaning of their lives and their fates. In *Jens Munk*, Hansen introduces that theme by means of a ‘chronicler’ whose

task it is to speculate about the role of the individual in history: "He does not limit himself to facts and allow these to speak for themselves; instead, he often takes the liberty of attempting to interpret them into an image, an idea. He does not accept Chance as the absolute principle in human destiny; he searches for meaning behind the absurd vicissitudes of life."¹² Since the chronicler is not a historical figure, a fact which Hansen only revealed at the end of the book, his views can be assumed to represent those of the author himself. However, as with all speculations of this kind, the question of destiny remains inconclusive.

The priority of subject matter over form is a crucial point for Hansen. He does not create the historical documentaries on the basis of some theoretical concept. Rather, their particular form evolves from the choice of topic. In his search for suitable materials and events, he turns to the past hoping to find protagonists who have experienced their moments of truth, who have "fallen into reality," who, like himself, have failed but have survived nonetheless. And not surprisingly, it would appear that Hansen's choice of topic is the result of chance.

In the case of *Det lykkelige Arabien*, Hansen had already participated in two expeditions to the Persian Gulf before he found out, by chance, about an almost forgotten eighteenth-century Danish expedition to the Orient. His familiarity with the Arabian landscape, his personal experience of the problems that could afflict expeditions aroused his interest in the life and fate of Carsten Niebuhr. Hansen focused on the tension between the six expedition members and on their tragic fate. One by one they fell victim to malaria. Only Carsten Niebuhr, who had originally only had a minor role in the expedition, succeeded in making his way back to Copenhagen. On his return nobody was any longer interested in the outcome of the expedition: five men had suffered and had died in vain. The most humble of them proved to be the strongest and furthermore possessed the strength to overcome an anticlimactic ending to a great adventure by accepting his fate.

Similarly, Hansen did not think of using the story of Jens Munk for a documentary novel until he happened one day to listen to a radio talk about him.¹³ It is obvious that he was not interested in Jens Munk from the point of view of a historian. But once the topic was chosen he adopted procedures associated with a historian's method of investigation. The composition of *Det lykkelige Arabien* had presented few difficulties: there was abundant source material available, most of the expedition's participants had kept diaries, and a large number of letters were preserved. Thus Hansen was able to narrate most of the story of the expedition by skilfully arranging excerpts from the documents.

The task of writing *Jens Munk* proved to be considerably more difficult owing to the smaller number of relevant documents about Munk.

Hansen's major sources are Jens Munk's own account of his ill-fated voyage to Hudson Bay, published in 1624, a few years after his return to Denmark, and an anonymously edited collection of excerpts from his log-books, published in 1723. Because of the scarcity of contemporary sources directly relating to Jens Munk, Hansen expands the scope of his account to include a broad portrayal of Munk's contemporary Denmark. More importantly, he adds an historical dimension by establishing a link between Jens Munk's fate and that of his father and grandfather who both suffered defeat in their struggles with their aristocratic opponents and their King. Both had been noblemen and were expelled from the ranks of the aristocracy. Hansen is particularly interested in Jens Munk's father, Erik, who managed to regain his ancestors' social position and the wealth that it entailed. Erik Munk did not enjoy his success for very long however. On account of his ruthlessness he had become extremely unpopular. Exploited farmers and aristocratic enemies joined forces and managed to have him imprisoned. After many years of incarceration he finally took his own life.

There can be no doubt that Hansen wants the results of his research to be taken seriously. He claims that historians had not exhausted all available source material, and he repeatedly disputes established scholarly opinion on the basis of new evidence that he has uncovered. His discussion and interpretation of the relationship between King Christian IV and Jens Munk, an important theme in the book, is a case in point. For Hansen, Christian IV's reign marked a decisive turning point in the history of Denmark. The King wanted greatness and power for his country, but put it on the road of decline instead. Thus Hansen establishes an analogy between the two men in terms of their fate: for both, the world of dreams and illusions was shattered, and both were confronted with reality in defeat. Each expected more from the other than he could give: Christian IV withheld the rewards that Munk had thought were his by merit and right, and Jens Munk failed to achieve what the King considered an important objective of his expansionist foreign policy, namely the discovery of the northern route to East Asia. Contrary to traditional scholarly opinion, Thorkild Hansen maintains that the personal relationship between Christian IV and Jens Munk was less than cordial after the latter's return from Hudson Bay. The King had apparently interpreted the long absence of Munk as an indication that the expedition had been a success and vented his anger at the disappointing outcome. He ordered Munk to prepare immediately for a

further voyage to Hudson Bay to recover the ship left behind and to organize the colonization of "Nova Dania." Because of Christian IV's war preparations, this project never materialized. Yet Hansen claims that their relationship worsened, culminating in a violent encounter of the two immediately before Jens Munk's death in 1628. This again is contrary to scholarly *opinio communis*.

Hansen's quest for historical reality, however, is not limited to the purely factual. He tries to understand the emotional context which the documents reflect. When he examines the manuscript of Munk's diary, which is preserved in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, he discovers notations in its margin which are missing in the printed version. He reproduces them for the first time:

Starting from and including February 20, 1620, a number of notations occur in the margin at regular intervals. Thus, against the appropriate date there is written: 21 corpses. Five days later appears: 22 corpses. Against March 9th appears: 26 corpses. Against April 1st: 34 dead. Against April 16th: 47 dead. Against May 6th: 53 dead. Against May 19th: 57. And finally against June 4th, the date of the testament: 61 dead.¹⁴

Hansen's appreciation of Munk's character is considerably enhanced by these seemingly redundant notations which reveal Munk's growing despair and the *sang-froid* with which he faced reality.

In another passage, Hansen reproduces Munk's entry in his diary after composing his testament on June 4, 1620. The expedition's fate then appeared to be sealed when no more than three of the 64 men who had established winter camp at the mouth of Churchill River were still alive. Munk himself was so weakened by disease and the cold climate that he did not expect to leave that inhospitable shore again. He wrote:

Since I no longer have any hopes of living, I can only pray to God that we may be found by some good Christians and that for God's sake they will cause my poor corpse together with the others to be buried in the earth, receiving their reward from God in Heaven, and that this my account be given unto my Gracious Lord and King (for every word herein is altogether true), so that some good may arise unto my poor wife and children out of my great hardship and sorry departure. Herewith, I say good-bye to the world and give my soul into God's keeping. Jens Munk.¹⁵

But with the sudden arrival of spring, the physical condition of the survivors gradually improved and, against all odds, they managed a miraculous return home.

Jens Munk is above all a detailed account of the explorer's life. Hansen considers Munk's aborted attempt to discover the Northwest Passage as the key event in his life and the testament of June 4 as his moment of truth — the climax in a life full of disappointments and dashed hopes. Hansen emphasizes the importance of this episode further by assigning the testament a prominent position at the beginning of his carefully constructed book, and by reproducing it a second time at the appropriate place in Munk's biography. Hansen portrays Jens Munk as a loser who tried three times to gain a respected position in society. Each time he had to start at the bottom, and each time he came very close to success, but failed as if he had inherited from his ancestors the bad luck that had played havoc with their lives.¹⁶

That he had risen this far at all was one of the miracles in his life. Poor and disinherited, the twelve year old Jens Munk left home for Portugal, spent several years in Brazil and returned home in 1599 at the age of nineteen. On arrival he learnt of his father's suicide and then had his request for his inheritance refused by the King. For the next 12 years he was busy trying to make a fortune. One of his exploits, an aborted voyage towards Novaya Zemlia, aroused the King's interest and the fateful relationship between the two commenced. At the request of Christian IV, Jens Munk set out to find the Northeast Passage to China. Although this expedition was unsuccessful, he was now in the service of the King as a captain in the Royal Navy. He participated in the war against Sweden, played an important role in the siege and conquest of Elfsborg and gained the King's confidence. He expected to be promoted to the ranks of the nobility when the war finally came to a victorious end with the treaty of Knaerod in 1613. "Letters patent and distinctions rained down, and with good reason the King was particularly openhanded toward his officers from Elfsborg."¹⁷ Jens Munk, however, was left out; no rewards were forthcoming from the King. His "summer" was over, and according to Hansen, the thirty-two-year-old Munk gave up his ambition to win back his ancestors' privileged position. He married and continued to work as a captain in the King's service. Under humiliating circumstances he now had to accompany Danish noblemen on their various diplomatic missions. In the course of a punitive expedition against pirates who were harassing the northern Norwegian coast he acquired enough wealth to be able to quit the Royal service and enter into a business association with a whaling company. However, within a short time his hopes were dashed again. He lost his ship and wealth in 1617, was poor again and was forced by economic

circumstances to give up his independence and again seek service in the Royal Navy.

When Jens Munk was forty years old, the King commissioned him to organize and lead an expedition to East India across the Indian Ocean. He was given the task of organizing the voyage, but was relieved of his responsibilities at short notice in favour of a nobleman, Ove Giedde, who was totally inexperienced and unfitted for the enterprise. This humiliating experience, however, motivated Munk to embark on the adventure for which he has since become famous — his last desperate attempt to turn around his fate and acquire fame and wealth: the quest for the Northwest Passage.

Hansen argues that the Hudson Bay expedition was initiated not by the King but by Jens Munk himself. In an attempt to prove his worth, Munk entered a race against Ove Giedde, each sailing towards China, but in opposite directions. Hansen is the first to suggest that “the facts chronicled above encourage one to ponder the possibility of a much closer relationship between these two famous expeditions than has hitherto been supposed” (p. 196). He stays very close to his source, quoting occasionally, but his narrative tends to dramatize and intensify the adventurous exploits. When Jens Munk sails into the Norwegian harbour of Karmsund in order to repair a leaking ship, Hansen adds, above and beyond his source: “Jens Munk was not disposed to extend the delay in Karmsund more than was absolutely necessary . . .” (p. 228). This comment was of course meant to remind the reader of Hansen’s interpretation of the voyage as a race between Munk and Giedde, an idea that is reflected in the structure of the book in which reports about Munk’s and Giedde’s progress alternate.

By comparing the inhospitable Canadian Arctic, with its maze of islands, to the Cretan labyrinth of Knossos with Minotaurus demanding human sacrifices, Hansen gives the Far North mythological connotations that neither Jens Munk nor his successors in the search for the Northwest Passage had entertained. Jens Munk sighted the American coast two months after his departure from Copenhagen, but it took almost another two months before Hudson Bay was reached. On September 18, due to severe weather conditions, Jens Munk decided to establish winter camp and thus interrupt the search for the Northwest Passage. The tragic events that followed culminated in Jens Munk’s testament of June 4, 1620 and the miraculous return journey.

Jens Munk and the two remaining sailors left winter camp on July 16, 1620 and sighted the Norwegian coast on September 20. By the 25th they had reached Bergen and Munk’s report ended with an entry

for September 27: "I wrote home to Denmark, to the High Authorities, to report that I had arrived there."¹⁸ The bizarre events that followed heightened the tragedy of Munk's failed expedition. Within a week of his arrival he found himself imprisoned in Bergen, victim of an act of revenge by the nobleman Knud Gyldenstjerne, with whom he had had a quarrel many years earlier. Jens Munk remained incarcerated for about three months until the King ordered his release.

Like Hansen, Farley Mowat places the expedition to Hudson Bay in the context of Jens Munk's biography, which he characterizes as "an epic in itself." For Mowat, Jens Munk is a man who continually grows in respect, prestige and expertise. By 1619 "he had established himself as a fellow after Christian's own heart, and when the King decided to lead the English through the Northwest Passage, Munk was the inevitable choice to command the expedition."¹⁹ Mowat believes that Munk was at the "pinnacle of his career" when he died in 1628 (p. 112). Both authors impose a certain pattern on the events. Mowat wants to use Munk as an example of courage in adversity, a quality he deems essential for the survival of mankind, whereas Thorkild Hansen attempts to demonstrate his belief that acceptance of defeat is a sign of true greatness. Although Hansen contributes to our knowledge of certain aspects of Munk's life, the main characteristic of the book is the skilful use of documentary material to create a myth that reflects Hansen's world view. "Suffering is the mother of life and cannot be suppressed without destroying life itself; the challenge is to make it meaningful in the short time that is at our disposal."²⁰ He had expressed the same idea in *De søde piger*: "There is only one way to overcome fate and that is to accept it."²¹ For Hansen, Jens Munk is the admired "unheroic" hero who is cast down by fate, a man who suffers from his fate as a survivor when he has to leave the dead behind him at Hudson Bay. But Jens Munk is also the man who accepts those defeats as Hansen himself learned to accept his powerlessness and feeling of guilt during the Occupation.²²

Notes

¹ An English translation of Jens Munk's book was edited by C.C.A. Gosch, *Danish Arctic Expeditions: 1605 to 1620*, Book II, The Hakluyt Society Vol. XCVII, 1897 (reprint New York: Burt Franklin, 1970). A new version, based on Gosch's translation, was edited by W.A. Kenyon, *The Journal of Jens Munk 1619-1620* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1980).

² Farley Mowat, *Ordeal by Ice: The Search for the North West Passage* (1960; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973). Recent examples of interest in Jens Munk are Rolf Buschardt Christensen's article "Jens Munk's Search for the Northwest Passage to the Orient," *Federation of Danish Associations in*

Canada: 3rd Danish Canadian Conference Alberta Region Calgary, Alberta, June 16-17, 1984, and Inga W. Wiehl, "Munk: The Story of a Sailor Who Embraced His Fate," *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society* 8.2(1985), pp. 16-32.

³ Thorkild Hansen, *Jens Munk* (1965; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1982). English translation by James McFarlane and John Lynch: *North West to Hudson Bay: The Life and Times of Jens Munk* (London: Collins, 1970), also published as *The Way to Hudson Bay: The Life and Times of Jens Munk* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970). The English translation is an abbreviated version.

⁴ Søren Schou, "Eksistentiel historieskrivning: Om Thorkild Hansen," *Dansk realisme 1960-75* (Copenhagen: Medusa, 1976), pp. 67-88; Jan Ståle Andersen and Henrik Poulsen, "Dokumentarist eller myteproducent? Tilbagevisning af Thorkild Hansens *Jens Munk* som dokumentarisk roman," *Litteratur og samfund*, nos. 17-18 (1976), pp. 83-105.

⁵ Thorkild Hansen, *De søde piger: dagbog 1943-47* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1974), p. 175. Author's translation.

⁶ Thorkild Hansen, *Det lykkelige Arabien: en dansk ekspedition 1761-67* (1962; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1976). English translation of *Det lykkelige Arabien* by James and Kathleen McFarlane: *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761-1767* (London: Collins, 1964).

⁷ Accounts of his travels: *Pausesignaler* (1959), *Syv seglsten* (1960), *En kvinde ved en flod* (1961), *Kurs mod solnedgangen: nye rejsedagbøger* (1982). His other major documentary works: *Slavernes kyst* (1967), *Slavernes skibe* (1968), *Slavernes øer* (1970), *Processen mod Hamsun* (1978).

⁸ *Søforhør: nærbillede af Thorkild Hansen* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 1982), p. 109. Author's translation.

⁹ *Minder svøbt i vejr: en studie i Jakob Paludans digtning* (Copenhagen: Steen Hasselbalchs Forlag, 1947). References to the Paludan book can be found in *De søde piger*, pp. 185-186, 190-191, 208, 211-212.

¹⁰ Thorkild Hansen and Peter Seeberg, *Jens Munks minde-ekspedition* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1965).

¹¹ *Vinterhavn* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1972), reissued in *Kurs mod solnedgangen: nye rejsedagbøger* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1982), p. 91.

¹² *North West to Hudson Bay*, pp. 18-19.

¹³ Erik H. Madsen, "Referat af forfatteren Thorkild Hansens indlæg," *Meddelelser fra dansklærerforeningen*, September 1974, p. 369.

¹⁴ *North West to Hudson Bay*, p. 15.

¹⁵ *North West to Hudson Bay*, p. 12.

¹⁶ Hansen remarked that it took him several years to realize that he had written a new version of the Sisyphus-myth, see *Søforhør*, p. 130 and Erik H. Madsen, p. 366.

¹⁷ *North West to Hudson Bay*, p. 144.

18 Jens Munk, *Navigatio Septentrionalis*, ed. C.C.A. Gosch, p. 58.

19 *Ordeal by Ice*, p. 95.

20 Thorkild Hansen, *Jens Munk*, p. 491. Author's translation. This passage does not appear in the English edition.

21 *De søde piger*, p. 232. The idea of *amor fati*, encountered in Nietzsche's philosophy, contributed to the ideology that Hansen developed from the documentary material. See Uta von Bassi who discusses the influence of Nietzsche and existentialism on Hansen in her *Hansen, Hamsun und die Wahrheit: Eine Studie zur dänischen Dokumentarliteratur am Beispiel von Thorkild Hansens "Hamsun-Prozess"*, Beiträge zur Skandinavistik, Band 2 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), pp. 80-85.

22 A similar view is presented by Soren Schou in *Dansk litteraturhistorie 8: Velfærdsstat og kulturkritik 1945-80* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1985), pp. 638-641.

On Both Sides of the Arctic Circle: The Norrbotten Theatre, a Contemporary Regional Theatre in Sweden

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This overview begins in Kalix, a small coastal town in the north-east corner of Sweden with approximately 10,000 inhabitants, less than an hour's drive from the Finnish border. One Monday, in the beginning of November 1984, the stagehands of the regional theatre of the province of Norrbotten moved into the local school assembly hall to set up the lighting and the simple set for that evening's performance which was, perhaps surprisingly, Federico García Lorca's *Blood Wedding*. More than three hundred tickets had been sold, half of them by the members of the local theatre society at their different places of work, the other half at the co-operative supermarket. That is a very good box office, particularly in view of that evening's competition from television: the Stockholm Open finals between Mats Wilander and John McEnroe.

Before coming to Kalix, *Blood Wedding* had its opening night a couple of weeks earlier in Luleå, the home base of the Norrbotten Theatre and the capital of the province. The performance in Kalix marked the beginning of a month long tour in the province. Two more were put on in Kalix, one for the senior grades of the high school, and later on there were a dozen more in Haparanda, Jokkmokk, Arvidsjaur, Kiruna and other towns in Norrbotten — some of them situated well north of the Arctic Circle.

The first performance in Kalix went well. Although Lorca was a new acquaintance to the majority of the audience, his characters seemed somehow familiar; their love of and dependance on the earth, their strong sense of kinship and their ability to cope with rapidly changing fortunes. The similarities between Lorca's sunburned Andalusia and snowclad Norrbotten were more striking than the contrasts — two remote provinces unfairly treated by those in power, sparsely populated, but with a well-developed self-esteem. Yes, the Kalix audience felt at home and was happy with their evening. They would recommend the performance to families and friends and wouldn't mind more of the same kind next season.

Blood Wedding was one of three productions presented by the Norrbotten Theatre during the autumn of 1984: the others were a satirical cabaret and a fantastic story about a mysterious count, narrated for the children in the primary grades. The Norrbotten Theatre had its first public performance in 1967 and can thus look back on an active period of more than twenty years. With seventy employees and a budget of roughly thirty million crowns — or six million Canadian dollars — it is one of the biggest theatres outside the metropolitan cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. It is also the northernmost, its field of activity being the large province of Norrbotten, consisting of 25 per cent of Sweden's total area but containing only a little more than three per cent of its population.

The Norrbotten Theatre can be approached from various angles. I will try to focus on its importance as the first truly regional theatre in Sweden, the one that has led the way and in many respects served as a model for the other regional theatres that came into being during the seventies. I think it is fair to say that the Norrbotten Theatre has been one of the most successful of the newcomers — in terms of attendance as well as artistic qualities — and that it has drawn more attention to itself from the rest of the country than most of its successors.

The Norrbotten Theatre set out in a spirit of enthusiasm and high ambitions. The young cast saw itself as a group of pioneers in a region where the art of theatre was a phenomenon unknown to the vast majority of the population. Although this pioneer spirit was an important driving force, it was based partly on false assumptions. The theatrical history of the northern provinces does not go very far back, but it extends at least one hundred years. Compared to that of other regions of Sweden, it is a short period and for obvious reasons. In the northern provinces there were no monasteries where biblical plays could be performed, no universities where young noblemen acted in ancient comedies to improve their Latin and learn a dignified bearing, and certainly no court where pastoral plays were staged as a pastime. Most of the professional foreign troupes that came to Sweden in the 18th century, mainly from France and Italy, were engaged by the royal family and thus gave their performances in Stockholm and its surroundings. In Stockholm a more or less permanent and public theatre came into being in the latter part of the 18th century and the first domestic private touring troupes date from the same period. They were mainly active in central Sweden, where several towns provided a sufficient audience. However, some of the troupes ventured north, although not very far into the wilderness. The town of Gävle, belonging to the northern provinces but situated

a mere 200 kilometers north of Stockholm, seems to have had its first public performances in the late 18th century. Notices in the local paper tell of a busy autumn season in 1796, when more than twenty different plays were presented during a period of two months, apparently by one and the same troupe. The 5,000 inhabitants of Gävle, ship-owners and civil servants, craftsmen and shopkeepers, were offered a mixture of German sentimental dramas and French comic operas, a few comedies by domestic playwrights and, not least, a dramatization of Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The season closed with an epilogue, written for the occasion, and a fireworks display.

In 1837 regular steamship service commenced along the northern coast, making travelling safer and less exhausting. From now on, companies regularly toured in the more remote areas of the northern provinces, staying in each town a week or more, presenting the latest successes from the Stockholm stage. Still, the season was comparatively short, starting when the thaw made sea voyages possible and ending when the ice isolated the small provincial towns for the winter period. It is not quite clear when the first company went as far north as Kalix, but it is likely to have been in the 1870s, when this and several other towns in the area expanded rapidly, thanks to the "boom" in the timber industry.

For about another fifty years the private touring companies came and went, from the later part of the century in winter too, once the railways had opened. However, the golden days of the touring companies came to a sudden end in the 1920s. Radio and sound movies entered into competition, and a general rise in prices made their business less profitable. For theatre managers, the twenties were not very bright. Most of those operating in Stockholm escaped unscathed but a great many of their touring colleagues had to close down, leaving the provinces without dramatic arts.

A shift in the political scene was to restore the balance between the capital and the provinces. The first major achievement in the field of cultural policy by the Social Democratic government that came to power in 1932 was the setting up of a state supported national touring theatre, Riksteatern. It deserves some comment in this context, not only because it brought theatre back to the provinces, but also because it is a typical example of public cultural policy in the interwar period. Ideologically, the creation of the National Touring Theatre was easy to justify: taxpayers all over the country made their contributions to the national theatres in the capital, the Royal Dramatic Theatre and the Opera, and they had good reason to expect something in return. The theatre, as was often pointed out by the minister in charge, was

for everyone and not just for a small, privileged elite in Stockholm. The ambition of the new national touring theatre was to bring both geographic and social justice.

The method was simple but significant. The Social Democratic policy of state intervention had worked well in other social sectors and was now applied to the theatre. The private companies had failed to stay in business, and the government-supported touring theatre took their place. The change also involved a sort of structural rationalization — several small-scale theatre workshops were replaced by one big industry, producing its goods in Stockholm but distributing them all over the country. Not surprisingly, many harsh words were uttered about veiled socialism and state monopoly during the first years of the new touring theatre. However, its efficiency could not be disputed — theatre was back in the provinces.

The bigger town of Norrbotten appeared on the itinerary of the new national touring company from the start in the early 1930s, and Kalix was included in 1944. During the rest of the 40s and the 50s, an average of ten different productions were performed in Kalix each season, attracting audiences of approximately 4,000. This figure, equivalent to the population of Kalix at that time, is impressive. No other district in Norrbotten, and only a few elsewhere in Sweden, could show anything like it.

The repertory presented in Kalix, on the whole representative of the total output of the National Touring Theatre, mirrors both the high cultural ambitions of its founders and a certain enforced adaptation to popular taste. The list of the most frequently played authors is topped by Franz Lehár, the Austrian "king of the operettas," closely followed by Shakespeare and August Strindberg.

This era lasted for about twenty years. In the early 60s audiences declined drastically all over Norrbotten, to a considerable extent due to the arrival of television, and the number of performances was consequently cut. Similar tendencies were noted in other parts of Sweden and it was generally felt that the National Touring Theatre had done its best and that other forms of organization should be looked for. The type of cultural policy it represented, one big institution exerting a dominant, nationwide influence, seemed less and less satisfactory.

An alternative approach had been the setting up of a number of municipal theatres in the central and southern parts of Sweden: Malmö got its first resident theatre in 1944, followed by a number of other cities at the end of the 40s and in the 50s. Of considerable importance for the subsequent expansion was a bill passed by parliament in 1964, granting

the public theatres more financial support than hitherto from the state treasury. The reform aimed not only to give existing theatres better working conditions, but also to encourage the setting up of new ones. "Decentralization" was one of the keywords in the argument for change in 1964 — a word that recurred and was heavily stressed in the more extensive programs for reforms in the entire cultural field that appeared ten years later.

This shift of focus in cultural policy was paralleled by other tendencies in Swedish society during the prosperous 50s and 60s. In particular, economic growth stimulated increasing migration from the provinces to the major cities, impoverishing the former and making the latter grow at an unhealthy rate. Government authorities tried to counteract this process with a number of measures, summarized as "regional policy," which were regarded, however, as insufficient by a large part of the population.

Hardest hit were the northern provinces, in particular Norrbotten. The outflow of people and capital increased continuously, laying vast areas waste, closing machine shops and factories and bringing decline to towns and villages. However, the will of resistance was also more vigorous in Norrbotten than elsewhere. One of its expressions was the rapidity with which people in the county reacted to the new signals of 1964. A permanent theatre was a long-felt need in the region; now it seemed possible to carry it into effect. Of course, nobody imagined that a theatre, however welcome, could turn the process of change around and make the region thrive. It could, however, be a source of inspiration to a population in an exposed position and at least add something to the attraction of the county. No means should be left untried and this was an opportunity not to be missed. Action was swift: a committee was set up to make plans and prepare applications for government support, authorities were favourably disposed to the ideas presented, and support was granted. In the autumn of 1967, the Norrbotten Theatre had its first performance. The symbolic value of its coming into being should not be underestimated: while most other public institutions were cut or closed down, this one rose from the depression. It was the first permanent theatre north of Uppsala and the first genuine regional theatre in the entire country — for once Norrbotten was leading the way!

The term "regional theatre" might need some explanation. It signifies a combination of the two previous major models of organization, which in this case means that the Norrbotten Theatre is simultaneously a municipal theatre in its hometown Luleå, and a touring theatre for the rest of the county. Of approximately 300 performances put on each year, roughly half are given in Luleå and half in up to 40 different places

in the county. Simple as it is, this form of organization was applied for the first time in Norrbotten, and has since then served as a model for a number of new theatres set up during the seventies. Judging from attendance it has worked well. The Norrbotten Theatre has reversed the downward trend and is now at a steady attendance level of about 50,000 people a year, divided more or less equally between Luleå and the rest of the county. The previous record of 4,000 in Kalix has been exceeded a couple of times; the average is a thousand fewer.

In the county as a whole, the Norrbotten Theatre has not managed to gather significantly larger numbers of spectators than its forerunners, but the audiences are in some respects different. Theatre for children and young people, largely neglected by the National Touring Company, has held a prominent position in the repertory of the Norrbotten Theatre throughout the years and accounts for approximately 50 per cent of the total numbers in attendance. In accordance with its pronounced aims, the Norrbotten Theatre has also made considerable efforts to reach new groups within the adult population, first and foremost the working-class and lower middle-class group which does not normally come to the theatre. However, it is doubtful whether this ambition has been successful. Socio-cultural traditions of this kind have proven extremely difficult to alter, in Norrbotten as well as in other regions of Sweden. Whatever the reason is, it is not the price of admission, which is much lower than for the cinema or the ice hockey stadium. No more than 5 per cent of the total income of the Norrbotten Theatre comes from the sale of tickets, the remaining 95 being provided by public grants of different kinds.

Does the designation "regional theatre" in the case of the Norrbotten Theatre mean anything more than just a form of organization? As can be seen from its list of performances, the aim has not been merely to present plays, but plays with a particular significance to this particular region. The local character of the repertory has not been easy to achieve, considering the remarkable lack of interest in the problems of Norrbotten shown by the dramatists of the world. In order to fill this gap, the theatre has encouraged local, unknown writers to submit their works, has commissioned plays from more experienced authors, and has produced quite a few put together by the cast itself. The concentration on regional and often contemporary topics means that the repertory is not so much characterized by the great classics of dramatic art, as by problem plays and political sketches, articles for everyday use rather than of everlasting fame.

Maybe the most significant example of these ambitions is a political

revue with the rather insignificant title *The Play about Norrbotten*. First presented in 1970, it is the most successful production yet in terms of audiences. According to traditional standards it is a fairly simple piece of art, totally without literary merits. However, the theme chosen was of great immediate interest and had tremendous public appeal. This was the "regional policy" conducted by local and central authorities, in particular the failure to stop the impoverishment of Norrbotten. A labour exchange turned into a travel agency, offering free one-way trips to the south of Sweden, was the theme of one of the more memorable sketches. Another one showed how various generous public grants increased the bank accounts of shady industrialists, but not the number of vacant jobs. This provocative picture of financial corruption, where capitalists and politicians shared the profits, enraged the County Governor, but filled the auditoriums. Although it was a one-sided caricature, the play nevertheless expressed emotions that were widely felt by common people and gave the theatre a reputation for cheekiness and daring that it still retains.

The Play about Norrbotten was followed by many others, expressing the same kind of spirit and dealing with similar contemporary topics. Several other plays have focused on the forgotten or hidden history of Norrbotten and neighbouring areas. Something of a challenge to the audience has been offered by a couple of plays about the Laplanders and their relation to Swedish society, a very controversial issue still. This clash of cultures, the conflict between the legitimate interests of the original population in the area and those of the settlers, has been dealt with surprisingly little in Swedish literature and drama, and has been more often suppressed than openly discussed. It is to the credit of the Norrbotten Theatre, that it has dared to touch the subject and speak up for another oppressed minority.

Another historical play from recent years deserves attention and reveals a different aspect of ideas and emotions in the northernmost areas of Sweden. This is *The Horse and the Crane*, based on a couple of novels by Sara Lidman. The story is set in the latter part of the 19th century, in a tiny village, not much more than a clearing in the forest, called Smallwater. To some extent it is a story of the reclamation of the inland parts of the northern provinces and the construction of the railroad to the north. To a greater extent it is a play about the emotions that the railway symbolizes. In a striking lyrical form it expresses the yearning of these areas to become part of the "real Sweden" and not to remain just a forbidding and forsaken appendage. The Smallwater people put all their hopes on the railway, the instrument to connect them

with others, to make their world a part of the whole. The railway will enable them to make their contributions to the building of society. It will carry their timber and minerals to justify their demands to be regarded as adequate citizens and it will bring them a fair share of bounties from the south in return.

Smallwater got its railway and a station house erected on the swamp where the cranes used to breed. Nevertheless, the play is about the equal rights which were to come, but somehow got delayed, and about dreams and desires that are still to be fulfilled. The yearning of the Smallwater people and the spirit of resistance, as expressed in *The Play about Norrbotten*, might look contradictory but are in reality two sides of the same coin, both significant expressions of thoughts and modes of life in the northern provinces.

Smallwater seems a proper place to end this overview, similar as it is to the place where we started. The railway did not bring miracles to the village. Somehow there seem to be more trains going south than north, and nowadays only a few make a stop at the station. The Norrbotten Theatre has not managed to change the train timetable, a tall order for any theatre, but it has encouraged the people in Smallwater and elsewhere to keep their dreams alive, telling them over and over again: for better and for worse, this is our land and together we will make it flourish.

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