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GURLI AAGARD WOODS



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GURLI AAGAARD WOODS

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# Mermaids Losing Their Heads

## A Study of the Mermaid Cult in Andersen, Ibsen, and Svendsen

MARINA ALLEMANO

ABSTRACT: With Hanne Marie Svendsen's explicit use of the mermaid topos in her novel *Rejsen med Emma* [The Journey with Emma] (1996), the mermaid figure in Henrik Ibsen's play *Fruen fra havet* [The Lady from the Sea] (1888) takes on a different meaning than that commonly ascribed to her. Likewise, from a contemporary humanist perspective (specifically, that of Charles Taylor) that re-examines the notions of "an inner nature" and the "authenticity of the self," the female water creatures in the Romantic texts by F. de la Motte-Fouqué (*Undine*, 1811), John Keats ("Lamia," 1820) and Hans Christian Andersen ("Den lille havfrue" [The Little Mermaid], 1837) become rather unheroic figures.

RÉSUMÉ: Avec l'usage explicite que fait Hanne Marie Svendsen du topos de la sirène dans son roman *Rejsen med Emma* [Voyage avec Emma] 1996, la figure de la sirène de la pièce *Fruen fra havet* [la Dame de la mer] 1888 prend un sens différent de celui que l'on y attribue communément. De même, dans une perspective humaniste contemporaine (ex. Charles Taylor), où l'on réexamine les notions d'une "nature intérieure" et de "l'authenticité du moi," les créatures aquatiques féminines des textes romantiques de F. de la Motte-Fouqué (*Ondine*, 1811), de John Keats ("Lamia," 1820) et de Hans Christian Andersen ("Den lille havfrue" [La petite sirène], 1837) deviennent des figures assez peu héroïques.

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In a discussion of cult movies, Umberto Eco writes about “magic intertextual frames” or “intertextual archetypes,” terms that do not have the quasi-religious connotations of Carl Jung’s more common term, “archetypes.” Regardless of their origins, according to Eco (as opposed to Jung), an archetype is simply a cultural “topos or standard situation that manages to be particularly appealing to a given cultural area or a historical period.” The recycled, intertextual archetype also provokes in the observer “a sort of intense emotion accompanied by the vague feeling of a *déjà vu*, that everybody yearns to see again” (Eco 1988: 448). The intertextual archetype triggers off images and patterns that all seem well known to the observer. You say “Mermaid” to a Dane, and I’ll say “sorrowful yearning” and point to the statue at Langelinie in the harbour of Copenhagen. This is the way Danes have come to feel about the Mermaid: a sweet but sad and somewhat delicate archetype that is so very Danish.

However, before the sculptor Edvard Eriksen cast his statue in bronze in 1913, under the sponsorship of Carl Jacobsen of Carlsberg, and before Hans Christian Andersen created his famous Little Mermaid in prose in 1837, the mermaid figure had led several different mythological, folkloric, and artistic lives in different parts of the world. It seems that the traditional mermaid has been a female figure to reckon with. In myths from the Indian subcontinent, water maidens are associated with wisdom, prophecy, and power over the elements; in ancient Greece, the related sirens (actually half birds and half women, although in French the word “*sirène*” is now the term used to mean “mermaid”) are associated with ferocity, danger, and seduction by means of their alluring songs; and the evil serpentine lamias are likewise predators of humans. During the middle ages, the mermaid also becomes a strong erotic figure in European folklore: a beautiful woman, whose white well-shaped breasts and long golden hair (or green for added exotica) are emphasized. For instance, the morgans in Brittany, the German nixies, and the Russian russalki are seductive, but also treacherous to men. In Paracelsus’s alchemical system of the four elements, ondines represent the powerful water element and as such do not have any moral dimension; hence we see the beginning of the topos of the mermaid’s soullessness, which is later popularized by the Romantics. In all cases the water maiden remains in control of her Self, whether she is associated with mental or erotic power. She kills or captures men in rivers, in wells, and at sea, and, in rare cases, provides counsel. She is rarely a victim, but neither is she a progressive, emancipated woman, to say the least.<sup>1</sup>

With the Romantics, the configuration changes somewhat, especially with Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Mermaid*, who is the very picture of pathos, and, more importantly, a figure who rejects her Self and more than anything wants to merge with something entirely alien, which she almost does: first in the Prince's castle and finally in her transcendent state. She loses her Prince and her earthly life, and becomes one of "Luftens Døttre" [the daughters of the air] (Andersen 1982: 91), that is, a candidate for the inclusion among the Blessed in God's Heavenly Kingdom. Her closest literary relatives in time are the eponymous Undine and Lamia, the former created by the German Romantic poet Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué in 1811, and the latter evoked by John Keats in his famous poem of 1820. However, Undine's story ends on quite a different note than does the *Little Mermaid's* adventure. Through her elemental power Undine gets the better of her fickle knight Ritter Huldbrand, who eventually settles for a comfortable life with the vain and ordinary Bertalda. Unlike Andersen's Prince and Princess, whose lives are spared by the *Little Mermaid*, Ritter Huldbrand and Bertalda die prematurely; in an ingenious twist of the revenge motif, the powerful water nymph weeps her knight to death with her tears. Although de la Motte-Fouqué's Ritter Romance is imbued with a curious blend of Pagan and Christian values, it is quite faithful to the traditional femme fatale figure, where the erotic water element triumphs and kills. In Keats's poem, the charming nymph undergoes an excruciating transformation from serpent to woman that matches the horrible suffering of the *Little Mermaid* at the hands of the sea-witch, all because of the Corinthian Lycius, with whom she "fell into a swooning love" (Keats I: 219). However, in the end Lamia also loses her man—as well as her own human shape—thanks to Apollonius, the gruff sophist who spoils the wedding party and disenchant the illusionary beauty of the nymph and her castle with his eye, which, "Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly, / Keen, cruel, perçant, stinging" (Keats II: 299–301).

The three Romantic writers reframe the mermaid topos to accommodate their shared Romantic agenda, which foregrounds sensibility and emotionality, with an emphasis on lovelorn women in distress, although the causal connection between desire and loss in the three narratives differs: de la Motte-Fouqué idealizes the primal force of the pagan water element and in a way reverses the values of Christian soulfulness and soullessness, while Andersen prioritizes the Christian virtues of faith, charity, and self-sacrifice. Keats's tragedy, on the other hand, occurs as the inevitable consequence of Reason or Philosophy's staring down conjurations and "charms": "Philoso-

phy will clip an Angel's wings, / Conquer all mysteries by rule and line" (Keats II: 234–235). Toward the end of the century, in 1888, Henrik Ibsen responds to the Romantic script of loss in his own somewhat enigmatic version of the yearning and unhappy mermaid, in *Fruen fra havet* [The Lady from the Sea], and in 1996 the Danish writer Hanne Marie Svendsen enters into a direct dialogue with Ibsen while creating her own unique image of the archetypal mermaid in her novel *Rejsen med Emma* [The Journey with Emma]. In the following discussion, I will deal specifically with the intertextual connections between the mermaid figures in the texts by the Romantics—especially Andersen—and those rescripted by Ibsen and Svendsen. Furthermore, I wish to demonstrate how Ibsen and Svendsen redefine the notions of “interiority” and “authenticity” that were so central to Romantic thinking.

Common to Andersen's and Ibsen's mermaids are the sea element, the feminine yearning for a man, and the woman's definitive choice to let her man go, not in the traditionally destructive way, but literally by letting him go. In contrast to de la Motte-Fouqué's wild and victorious Undine, who recedes back into the water, and Keats's utterly helpless Lamia, whose human form vanishes when faced with the Philosopher, Andersen's mermaid becomes a Christian martyr and Ibsen's heroine a bourgeois housewife. Apparently Ellida Wangel becomes “akkla-akklimatisert” [ac-climatized], as Ballested's line goes.<sup>2</sup> As should be apparent in the following discussion, some readers—myself included—approve of the latter two mermaids' seemingly bland choices and would argue that the Little Mermaid and Ellida merely lost their heads momentarily but finally grew up—got their heads back on, so to speak. However, the narrator in Hanne Marie Svendsen's *Rejsen med Emma*, who has studied Ibsen's play carefully, disagrees—at least at the beginning of her sea journey. She says,

Som man måske vil huske handler dette stykke om fyrpasserens datter Ellida, som lever i neurotisk passivitet med sin venlige mand, doktor Wangel, og drømmer om den fremmede sømand, som hun ude ved havet har bundet sig til, men senere brudt forbindelsen med. Da sømanden dukker op, ikke kimære eller drømmebillede, men en virkelig mand—oven i købet med skottehue—gribes hun af rædsel og søger beskyttelse hos ægtemanden. Men efterhånden som det går op for hende, at hun inderst inde ønsker, hvad hun ikke har turdet, at hun længes efter at give slip på hele sin borgerligt betryggede tilværelse, komme væk fra fjordlandets fade indelukkethed ud på det vilde uberegnelige hav, insisterer hun på, at Wangel skal lade hende vælge i

frihed uden at påkalde sig sine ægteskabelige rettigheder. Det er han ikke meget for, men han giver sig til sidst. Klogt af ham, for hans kone opgiver øjeblikkelig sine havfruedrømme, afviser den fremmede sømand og kan i slutningen stå med Wangel i hånden, mens de gensidigt repeterer for hinanden, at man må leve i frihed under ansvar.

Selv om der gennem årene måske kom lidt flere nuancer i mit billede af fru Ellida, forstod jeg stadig ikke slutningen på det stykke. Hvordan kunne Henrik Ibsen lade sin kvindelige hovedperson blive hos denne initiativforladte, svage, skikkelige, drikfældige doktor? Hvorfor kunne hun ikke få lov til at afprøve eventyret? (Svendsen 1998: 15–16)

[As you might recall, this play is about the daughter of a lighthouse keeper, Ellida, who lives with her kind husband, Doctor Wangel, in a state of neurotic passivity while dreaming about the stranger, a sailor with whom she bonded out by the sea, but later broke off with. When the sailor turns up, not as a chimera or a dream picture, but as a real man—wearing a Scotch tam no less—she is overcome with fright and seeks protection from her spouse. But when she gradually understands that what she really wants to do is what she has not had the courage to do so far, that she longs to let go of her entire safe middle-class existence, to get away from the stale stuffiness of the fjord and embark on the wild unpredictable sea, she insists that Wangel let her choose freely without claiming his marital rights. He is not too keen on this but finally gives in. A wise move it is, for his wife immediately gives up her mermaid dreams, turns the stranger away, and now, in the final scene, is able to hold hands with Wangel, while they assure each other that one cannot live in freedom without responsibility.

Although my picture of Ellida became a little more nuanced over the years, I still didn't understand the ending of the play. How could Henrik Ibsen let his female protagonist stay with this weak, harmless doctor, who likes his drink and lacks initiative? Why couldn't she be allowed to try out the adventure?]<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein, some readers have questioned the bittersweet ending of Hans Christian Andersen's story. Although the Little Mermaid does try out the adventure, she is ultimately denied a life with the man she desires. It is this adventure with Eros, desired and then denied, that I will examine with the help of Hanne Marie Svendsen's insights and the ideas of the Canadian philosopher and political theorist Charles Taylor, who is best known for his work *Sources of the Self: The Making of the*

*Modern Identity* (1989).<sup>4</sup> But first a discussion of Hanne Marie Svendsen's *Rejsen med Emma*.

Svendsen's novel is thematically rich in a subtle way. Ostensibly it deals with the question of Ellida Wangel's denied adventure, but in fact it deals more with the processes of writing and reading fiction as well as life, with the inherent difficulties in separating desire, dreams, fantasies, memories, and stories from real life, and in knowing the nature of the so-called "authentic self."<sup>5</sup> The narrator is a middle-aged woman writer who is a passenger on a freighter sailing to some unspecified port in South America. Her writing project on board the ship *Emma* is Ellida's passion with the outlawed *Stranger*, which she repeatedly attempts to shape in words on her laptop computer. She imagines heated, erotic embraces and a flight from the law through exotic landscapes. But her story goes nowhere. Like Ibsen's Ellida, Svendsen's Ellida, and her narrator as well, remain passive. Moreover, the narrator is constantly inter/rupted by real life on board the ship, as well as by her own imaginings of stories that might be hiding behind the faces and gestures of the crew members. She, again like Ibsen's Ellida, has a tendency to dream up things and catch herself, as well as her fellow men, in a web created by her own words and mental pictures. Aware of the dangers of the imagination's running amok, she reprimands herself: "Du må ikke danne dig billeder. Det er det kærlighedsløse, det er forræderiet" [You shouldn't conjure up images. It's a loveless act, it's treachery] (Svendsen 1998: 73). Most of the inter/ruptions, however, are caused by another passenger on the ship, an elderly woman, Sofie Tobel, who is the captain's aunt. She is, according to the narrator, an annoying busybody, an old woman who meddles with everything and everyone. But as time goes on, and the subversive drama of politics on the ship unfolds, the narrator's initial feelings about Sofie Tobel change. The perception of Mrs. Tobel as a meddler changes to a new picture of her as a caring person; the old lady turns out to be a fighter of the ills of the world, a caretaker of the oppressed and rejected. At first, the narrator ridicules Mrs. Tobel's "blødende hjerte" [bleeding heart] (Svendsen 1998: 72), but eventually she learns to respect and even like Sofie, who, on her own initiative, rescues one of the wounded revolutionaries in the South American port city where the freighter picks up its cargo of bananas, smuggles him aboard *Emma*, and arranges for him to obtain political asylum in Denmark. The writer-narrator realizes that Sofie Tobel's adventure is the very antithesis of Ellida's, and it is this discovery that becomes the turning point for her. She loses interest in Ellida's romance with the outlawed *Stranger* and drops her project. She returns eagerly to

her lover in Denmark, who is so very “akklimatiseret” [acclimatized], with whom she had initially become bored (hence her trip on the high seas), and whose person she now sees as a fascinating riddle that she cannot solve entirely (Svendsen 1998: 256).

At first sight Svendsen’s novel doesn’t seem very helpful, because Svendsen, like Andersen and Ibsen for that matter, refuses to tell you outright what to think. Like all good writers, she wants her readers to participate and work through the text themselves. After much pondering, I have come to the conclusion that Svendsen’s writer-narrator initially misunderstood Ibsen, as I also must have misunderstood him, for I always thought that the so-called “great choice” at the end of the play was an Ibsenesque ruse for errant bad girls: “Give the bad girls a sweet lollipop that you euphemistically call free choice, and they will instantly become good girls and behave themselves; no more running off with outlaws or exotic sailors; no more fun for bored girls.”

Ibsen is of course much more sophisticated than that and, I must admit, rather progressive and not just practical and patriarchal when he has Ellida choose to stay with the dull doctor. My error—which I shared with Svendsen’s narrator—was to equate the Stranger with the Other vis-à-vis Ellida’s Self. I mistakenly thought that Ellida yearned for the Other, the wild, dangerous, and unpredictable water element. What she really desires, I see now, is to drown herself in her self-induced fantasies, which are completely separated from real life and from relationships with others. She has entered into a monological discourse with her Self—which goes under the name of self-realization—in her private bower in Wangel’s backyard with no interest in the daily activities of the Wangel household or the life of the town. She is obviously severely depressed, hallucinating from Wangel’s drugs and caught in her own faint memories of an adolescent incident, blended in with Lyngstrand’s stories of the American sailor and Ballested’s evolving art work about “The Dying Mermaid.” She has completely lost her head and lives in a closed world of mythos. This isolation from family and community makes her in fact very self-centred and self-consuming and expresses a latent wish for death or oblivion; when Wangel at the end says to her in despair, “Kravet på det grenseløse og endeløse—og på det uopnåelige,—det vil drive ditt sinn helt inn i nattemørket til slut” [This hunger for the boundless, the infinite—the unattainable—will finally drive your mind out completely into darkness], she answers, “Å ja, ja,—jeg føler det—som sorte lydløse vinger over meg!” (Ibsen 1978a: 380) [Oh, yes, yes—I feel it—like black, soundless wings

hanging over me!] (Ibsen 1978b: 685).<sup>6</sup> Her sense of identity is turned inward and fed by the myth of her alleged mermaid essence, which everyone around her has bestowed upon her. Hence, her choices in the final act would at first glance seem to be between on the one hand a return to the sea and her “true nature,” which is inherently “spennende” [thrilling], as Hilde would say,<sup>7</sup> and on the other hand a lukewarm, bourgeois, boring world characterized by compromise and adaptation. At second glance, though, her choices are really between a monological self-realization that leads to self-indulgence, stagnation, and subjectivism, and on the other hand an identity that is not static at all, but has the potential for growth as a result of dialogical relationships, of what Svendsen’s Mrs. Tobel calls “handling og nærvær” [action and presence of mind] (Svendsen 1998: 85), as exemplified by the latter’s de-centred self and her talent for interacting and creating interpersonal relationships. To stay with the doctor is not only the more rational choice for Ellida Wangel, but also the one that would be in keeping with an “authentic self,” as opposed to a so-called “inner nature.”

To examine what is meant by “authenticity” I will briefly turn to the writing of Charles Taylor and his discussion of the sources of the self in the western world. In pre-enlightenment Europe secular people “were” what their social station in life dictated, period. Christians would of course somehow relate their worth to God, and attain a moral essence through faith. So when Andersen’s Little Mermaid, for instance, wants more than anything to have a “soul,” Andersen is really saying that she wants to create a new identity that is based on the Christian faith—which is usually symbolized in the baptismal rite. But the Mermaid is not just a wannabe Christian, she is also a daughter of Romanticism who listens to her Romantic “soul,” which is quite a different matter. To use Taylor’s terminology, the Mermaid wants to pursue “the goals of self-fulfillment and self-realization,” in which the ideals of originality, uniqueness, and an inner nature are “usually couched” (Taylor 1994: 30–31). Although she loses her Prince, she does gain her twofold soul, as she remains faithful to both her Christian ideals and her Romantic project. In Christian and Romantic terms, she has found her Self.

Ibsen’s Ellida follows the same path, but Ibsen is no Romantic and is not satisfied with Ellida’s Romantic self-fulfillment, although individualism as such is an important part of western idealism, which Ibsen clearly adheres to. Ibsen is a modern humanist thinker, not a postmodernist one to be sure (more on this later) but someone who values the ideal of free agency

greatly: to have the freedom to choose and be responsible, as Doctor Wangel reiterates at the end of the play.

However, I believe that Ibsen goes a step further, and this I gathered from reading Charles Taylor and Hanne Marie Svendsen. When Taylor explains the value of free choice, he makes it clear that in and for itself choice is insignificant, and does not necessarily “confer worth” or lead to an “authenticity” of the self (Taylor 1999: 37). In Ibsen’s play, Ellida doesn’t understand this. Just as she fell in love with her own “inner nature,” she falls in love with the “idea” that she can choose freely. What is important, though, is Ibsen’s subtle introduction to what Taylor would call a “horizon of significance,” a background of intelligibility (Taylor 1999: 37) against which the choice makes sense. The readers are well aware of this horizon, which becomes part and parcel of Ellida’s potential new life after the crisis. The horizon of significance upon which her choice should be seen includes Dialogical Relationships with the world, where Dialogue and Relationships are spelled with capital letters. By choosing Wangel over the outlawed Stranger, she also chooses community, caretaking, self-development (as opposed to self-indulgence), and reciprocal love for Hilde and Bolette. She will never become a Sofie Tobel, who disturbs the routines of the status quo and who effects changes through her dialogical interferences, nor will she be a future student and somewhat emancipated woman, as Bolette most likely will become, with Arnholm’s help. Still, Ibsen gives her a small window of opportunity to develop an “authentic” self that will turn her attention away from the ruse of self-indulgence that is confused with a desire to find one’s “true nature.”

Perhaps my defence of Ellida’s choice sounds like an apologia for a conservative agenda that would have women return to domesticity and find contentment in the dullness of small-town society. This is not the interpretation I intended. It is remarkable, however, that Ellida stands out as a survivor, with a dead mermaid in the shape of Rebecca West on her one side and a dead aristocrat, Hedda Gabler, on the other. Neither of these women had a chance to develop or even glimpse a sense of “authenticity” for themselves within social life, and as a result they found death to be the only alternative.<sup>8</sup>

But what can Ellida do in Moldefjord to fulfil her authentic Self, one may ask? For one thing, she has to learn to love and explore the Other and not just her Self, and she has to learn to stop holding on to “images” and “stories” that keep her in bondage to a self-centred fantasy life. She will have to explore the hidden mysteries of her husband, find out what makes

him tick. She will have to begin to engage in the lives of her stepdaughters, and when Bolette moves away she will have to keep in touch and begin to read the books that Bolette will send her. Perhaps she could learn about Others and the world at large in a dialogical way instead of focussing on her so-called “inner nature” through monologues. Mrs. Alving was able to do it in *Ghosts* seven years earlier, and Gina Ekdal in *The Wild Duck*, four years before Ellida’s crisis, is rather heroic in her small sensible way.<sup>9</sup>

What about the idea of “ac-cli-matization,” as Ballested would have it? Isn’t that a reasonable alternative? Fit in, go with the flow, don’t make waves—so to speak—make the best of the situation? I think not. Looking at Ballested one would have to reject the possibility as an ideal. Ballested, the jack-of-all-trades, barber, hairdresser, dance instructor, painter, director of a wind ensemble, and poly-pidgin tourist guide, is a parody of an “authentic” subject. Where Ellida the mermaid is initially a representative of mythological thinking, of an ontologically closed system that turns in upon itself, Ballested is a postmodernist shapeshifter whose centre is everywhere and nowhere. He is a survivor all right, but in an opportunistic way that only serves the inauthentic and superficial tourist trade, where individuals and the development of individuals have no place. The idea of a core is also foreign to him. He is a man of tomorrow in a world that has lost its “horizons of significance.”

In a way, *Fruen fra havet* is a prophetic play, in its dramatization of two schools of thought so prevalent now, more than a hundred years later. At one extreme we have the school of “anything goes,” which trivializes the ideals of individual freedom and to some thinkers epitomizes advanced capitalism and consumerism. Ballested holds the banner for this extreme position. At the other extreme we have a New Age movement that has returned to early Romantic ideals and trivialized ideas articulated by eighteenth-century thinkers such as Rousseau and Herder. In between we have the position of the progressive humanist, which stresses “authenticity of the self,” a self which cannot exist outside community and without the reciprocal recognition of others. It is important to understand that the “politics of recognition” goes two ways (Taylor 1994: 32–33), “for we are, in some measure, what others believe us to be,” as the English novelist Rose Tremain has expressed it (Tremain 1999: 87). In the case of Ellida, she is being recognized by all as an exotic northern anomaly, a dysfunctional, aloof wife and mother, and by the doctor as a psychiatric patient who needs a cure.

I believe that it is within this particular framework that Ibsen forges his characters, at least during the 1880s, that is, within the framework of

progressive humanism, which includes the “politics of recognition,” and the ideal of an “authentic self” that comes about as a result of “dialogism.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Ibsen is Nietzschean and pre-Freudian in his treatment of Hedda and Rebecca, respectively, but it seems to me that the tragedies of these two women are due not so much to the eclipse or loss of their potential “wild,” “libidinous,” and “Dionysian” nature, but to their inability to connect with “significant others”<sup>11</sup> in the sense of community. That bourgeois society dominated by patriarchal chauvinism and humdrum mediocrity is largely to blame for this inability is of course true, but the therapeutic alternative that encourages monological self-discovery seems to be a dead end, literally. “Frels meg for meg selv!” (Ibsen 1978a: 360) [Save me from my self!] (Ibsen 1978b: 648), says Ellida at the end of Act III, which Ibsen does in his quiet, reasonable way, unlike Apollonius in Keats’s poem, who uses cruel methods to still Lamia’s conjurations.

In short, Ibsen, as well as Svendsen, clearly distances himself from the mermaid cult and suggests that losing one’s head is altogether a fruitless act. For his part, Andersen is more ambivalent. On the one hand, he fully understands and sympathizes with the yearning and passionate mermaid who loses both her head and her tail, but in the final analysis Andersen rewards the woman who thinks of others before herself. To be sure, the reward is not marriage and a long life on land, but it is a reward nevertheless: it gives the former mermaid a sense of hope for a potential afterlife.

When someone decapitated Edvard Eriksen’s statue of the Little Mermaid on the night of the 24th of April, 1964, he wasn’t just vandalizing a cultural icon at random. The vandal turned out to be the Danish artist-activist and enfant terrible Jørgen Nash, who wanted to make a critical 1960s statement in the form of a political happening. This much he evidently admitted in 1998 (Hessellund 1999: 24). What the statement was meant to say, exactly, is anyone’s guess; mine is that he first of all wanted to protest the “inauthentic” tourist industry associated with the cult of the Little Mermaid and all the constructed Danishness that amounts to iconolatry. Secondly, the iconoclast perhaps also wanted to suggest that the Romantic Mermaid “get a life”—preferably an “authentic” one—beyond yearning and suffering. Nash’s act was of course adolescent and disloyal to Hans Christian Andersen’s story of salvation, but I can only sympathize with the rebellious dis/ruption of mermaidian self-indulgence, a dis/ruption that Hanne Marie Svendsen’s “little-old-lady” character Sofie Tobel accomplishes so admirably, albeit it in a less violent manner. To me the statue is very dear, but I feel that she stands as a warning rather than an ideal to women of all ages.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For encyclopedic articles on the mermaid topos, see Bloch, Kofod, and Maple.

<sup>2</sup>The character Ballested repeats this phrase several times during Ibsen's play, most notably in Act I and Act V.

<sup>3</sup>All translated passages from Hanne Marie Svendsen's *Rejsen med Emma* are mine.

<sup>4</sup>In the following discussion, I will only refer to the shorter and more recent volumes by Charles Taylor (1994, 1999).

<sup>5</sup>The terms "authentic self," "authenticity," "horizons of significance," and "the politics of recognition" are used throughout this article and have been borrowed from Charles Taylor's political philosophy, as outlined in his Massey Lectures *The Malaise of Modernity* (1999).

<sup>6</sup>All translated passages of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* are from Rolf Fjelde's translation.

<sup>7</sup>The character Hilde Wangel repeats this phrase several times during the play, most notably in Acts II, III, and V.

<sup>8</sup>In her article on Ibsen's middle plays, Janet Garton argues convincingly that Ellida, like Rebecca and Hedda, loses more than she gains in her marriage and that the ending of *Fruen fra havet* presents us with an unhappy compromise, "a renunciation of passion in favour of affection" (Garton 1994: 119). However, I will argue that Ibsen had a second look at the potential fruitfulness of wild passion and found it lacking in "authenticity."

<sup>9</sup>See Templeton, "Sense and Sensibility: Women and Men in *Vildanden*," *Scandinavian Studies* 63 (1991): 415–31.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Taylor borrows the term "dialogism" from M.M. Bakhtin, especially from his seminal work *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984).

<sup>11</sup>The concept of "significant others" was coined by George Herbert Mead in *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1934); see Charles Taylor 1994: 32.

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# Revolution and Innovation in Icelandic Art Since 1980

## The Poetry, Fiction, and Film Writing of Einar Már Guðmundsson

JOE ALLARD

**ABSTRACT:** This essay offers a general overview of Icelandic literary history, especially that of the twentieth century, as a background against which to discuss the poetry, novels, and film writing of Einar Már Guðmundsson. Since 1981 Einar Már has published a series of volumes of poetry and novels, as well as three film scripts with director Friðrik Þór Friðriksson. The essay suggests that Einar Már's work is innovative as the first purely urban voice in Icelandic literary history. His work is also the first fully to reflect the international realities since the sixties, which include Hollywood cinema, Walt Disney, rock music, and the like. At the same time his work can be seen to be in a direct and intelligent discourse with the centuries of Icelandic writers who precede him. His revolution is, equally, an affirmation of what makes Icelandic literature unique on the international stage.

**RÉSUMÉ:** Cet essai offre une vue d'ensemble de l'histoire littéraire islandaise, surtout celle du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, pour servir de fond à une discussion de la poésie, des romans, et des scénarios de film d'Einar Már Guðmundsson. Depuis 1981, Einar Már a publié une série de volumes de poésie et de romans, ainsi que trois scénarios en collaboration avec le réalisateur Friðrik Þór Friðriksson. L'essai suggère que l'oeuvre d'Einar Már innove en tant que la première voix purement urbaine de l'histoire littéraire islandaise. Elle est également la première à refléter les réalités internationales que l'on connaît depuis les années soixante, dont le cinéma d'Hollywood, Walt Disney, la musique rock et ainsi de suite. En même temps, on peut considérer que son oeuvre participe à un discours direct et intelligent avec les siècles d'écrivains islandais qui le précèdent. Sa révolution représente également une affirmation de ce qui rend unique la littérature islandaise sur la scène internationale.

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Iceland has been the most literary European country virtually since the Norse/Celt settlement, which began in 874. For centuries most of the Northern court poets were Icelanders. Egil Skallagrimsson, Europe's greatest tenth-century poet, was born in Iceland around 910. The greatest medieval literary phenomenon, of course, is the period from around 1200 to the early fifteenth century, when the Eddas and Sagas were recorded and composed. That the saga writers remain anonymous should not mislead us to think that the movement was anything other than informed, self-conscious, and "literary." That there are vestiges of an oral tradition behind the sagas and the poems they contain is beyond question, but the sagas are much more than a mere recording of remembered tales and verses.

Although the family saga movement was played out by the early fifteenth century (sagas of bishops, medieval romances of the English and continental types, and hagiography continued to flourish), the poetic tradition remained central to the Icelandic psyche—and this is true of everyone, not just an educated or monastic elite. The old verse forms, *dróttkvæði* and, later, *rímur*, are dense and difficult alliterative forms employing "kennings," which have been so fully revealed to us in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*. Well into this century poetry of this ancient type held pride of place in the Icelandic consciousness.<sup>1</sup> As Páll Valsson remarks,

Even during the periods of greatest degradation, the eras of oppression and subjugation by Danish colonial rulers, of volcanic eruptions, famines and plagues, the Icelanders went off to tend their sheep armed with the head-staves and alliteration of their classical verse, and entwined their thoughts into complex prosody—what is called in Icelandic "precious rhyme." (1994: xi)

Old traditions are fiercely defended in Iceland, but that is not to say that there have been no periods of innovation and development. More than one literary "revolution" has realigned and reinvigorated Icelandic culture and tradition. One need only recall the genesis and evolution within the saga tradition itself—comparing, say, the early *Kormák's Saga* with the very late *Grettir's Saga*. Another "revolution" might be seen in the coming of the hymn with the Reformation in the sixteenth century, which bore such rich fruit in the *Passíusálmur* [Passion Hymns] of Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674), the great seventeenth-century devotional poet, printed in 1666. Another seventeenth-century development was the first recording of the ancient Scandinavian (and more broadly European) ballad (*fornkvæði*). Icelandic

ballads (*sagnadansar*) were part of a genre that was common property to the whole of Scandinavia and even farther afield. For it to work well in Icelandic quite drastic adaptation was necessary. For example, there are many Danicisms in the vocabulary. Metres differed from traditional forms and, perhaps most significantly, alliteration is largely dispensed with and end rhyme, sometimes irregular, replaces internal rhyming. One can imagine the dismay of contemporary poetic purists. As Jónas Kristjánsson observes,

Some scholars fancy—and not implausibly—that in the ballads' heyday people who were accustomed to the strict skaldic measures were not much impressed by the loose form and foreign sounding diction of the new poems. But it remains true that poetic feeling and inspiration have greater play in the free-flowing garb of the ballads than in the tight-fitting uniform of *dróttkvæði* and *rímur*. In modern times ballads and popular verse of related kinds have been a constant source of renewal for Icelandic lyric poetry. (1992: 377)

A more recent example of a “revolution” that reinvigorates an ancient tradition is the work of Halldor Laxness, of which more in due course. However, as for everyone, the past fifty years have been testing times. With the development of international air travel, mass communication, pop music, cinema, and, more recently, satellites and computers,<sup>2</sup> the conservative fear has concerned the loss of both traditional culture and a unique language. Central to this, in many ways, has been the U.S.-dominated NATO base in Keflavík—an object of deep contention since its establishment in 1949.

Icelandic poetry and prose fiction were arguably “Romantic” from 1800 to 1950. This tradition in poetry, as it had solidified in the nineteenth century, had roots that went back into Old Icelandic poetry. Its outward formal features include alliteration, steadfast rhythm, rhyme, and a firmly coherent length of line and stanza. The old mythology and medieval literature inform the imagery. Traditional concerns such as Icelandic rural society and patriotism inform the subject matters. Popular poets in the mid-twentieth century include Snorri Hjartason (1906–1986), Davið Stefánsson (1895–1964), Tómas Guðmundsson (1901–1983), and Jóhannes úr Kötlum (1899–1972). Hulda (Unnur Benediktsdóttir [1881–1946]) might be considered the fifth of this group, which celebrates the pastoral and rural as central to the Icelandic consciousness.

This traditional poetry was challenged, in mid-century, from two directions. The first challenges were the modernist poems of Steinn Steinarr (1908–1958) and Jón úr Vör (1917–2000). Steinn rejected the ideological

premises of the prevailing mode; he opted for existential ideas, although purporting to abide by technical “laws” of poetic composition. Jón broke with metrical forms as well, with an exalted lyricism. The second challenge came, in the early fifties, with the group dismissively nicknamed “Atom Poets,” the nucleus of which was Stefán Hörður Grímsson (b. 1920), Einar Bragi (b. 1921), Hannes Sigfússon (b. 1922), and Sigfús Daðasson (b. 1928). Their most significant “revolution” was to introduce new sorts of imagery drawn from more modern and international sources. The fierce debates about whether they wrote poetry at all seem rather exaggerated today. Indeed, they wrote about the arms race, the fate of colonized and repressed peoples, and other forms of injustice in a worldwide context; but they also used most aspects of traditional poetry, including its “pure” metrical forms, when it suited them. They also manifested close ties to the culture, history, and language of the nation.

A new generation of poets emerged in the late fifties and the sixties that further altered the language and subject matter of poetry, introducing once taboo elements, altering in turn vocabulary and style. Three prominent poets of this generation are Hannes Pétursson (b. 1930), Matthías Johannessen (b. 1930), and Thorsteinn frá Hamri (b. 1938). Although their poetry is varied, they share a flexibility of form and metre, which they take from the previous modernists poets, an ease with speaking about social issues, and a sense of the urban, rather than the more traditional tensions between the rural ideal and the urban threat. They also push modernist poetry toward the language of everyday speech. The poetry of this era, however, continues to pay its respects to two major elements of Icelandic literary tradition: nature as the frame of experience and language as a historical foundation.

The art of prose fiction in the mid-twentieth century is dominated by the genius of Halldor Laxness (1902–1998). His trilogy *Íslandsklukkan* [The Bell of Iceland] (1943–1946) can be seen as a powerful response to perceived threats to national identity and cultural integrity, both of which were so closely tied to the literary heritage. The threats were palpable: the nation’s independence from Denmark was declared in 1944, ironically at a time when Iceland was occupied by first British, then American and Canadian armed forces. *The Bell of Iceland* is a historical novel set in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that traces the fates of its three main characters: a poor peasant under sentence of death for killing one of the king’s henchmen; his protector Arnas Arnæs, based on Árni Magnússon (1663–1730), the great Icelandic philologist and collector of manuscripts; and a noblewoman, Snæfríður, whose love Arnas betrays in order to devote himself to saving the

manuscripts of the Old Norse sagas, poetry, and mythology. The novel portrays a class-divided people usurped by Danish post-Reformation rule, searching for meaning through both its literary heritage and its struggle for justice; indeed, seeking to justify its existence as a nation in its own right. The novel strives to prove that remembering one's past is a crucial element in bringing about a better future.

The novel had real political reverberations for a people who had just achieved independence from Denmark but now had to cope with the presence of a world superpower on the island. This is, of course, the subject of Laxness's next novel, *Atómstöðin* [The Atom Station] (1948), a work satirically critical of the way in which Iceland had been "sold" to the United States. By 1955, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, Laxness was an institution in his own right. The importance of his novels of the 1930s, *Salka Valka* (1931–1932), *Sjálfstætt fólk* [Independent People] (1934–1935), and *Heimsljós* [World Light] (1937–1940) rests on the fact that with them Laxness helped make the novel a significant genre in Iceland. He became the champion of national epic identity, which was defined by history but rejuvenated through his modern, realist narrative. The prose writers of Iceland had been living in "the shadow of the saga tradition," but now there was among them a literary craftsman who managed to draw energy from the sagas while creating realist narrative on his own terms. In the next three decades this creates the "shadow of Laxness."

The novel, and its sister forms biography and autobiography, were the dominant prose forms through the 1970s. Almost all confirm and elaborate manifestations of Icelandic national identity in a rural discourse that combines realistic and (neo-)romantic features in its portrayal of Icelandic nature and the rural community. But this rural discourse comes under increasing stress as traditional perceptions of rural life clash more and more with an eagerness to explore culture in modern terms. Of course traditionally the alternative to the rural is the debased society of the town. A central concern of the Icelandic novel before 1980 is the socio-cultural opposition between rural and urban life. The ultimate antithesis is between the farmstead and Reykjavík: the farmstead and countryside had been instrumental in preserving both the Icelandic language and an "authentic" way of life, whereas the trading centres were dominated by an "alien" presence.

The novel was in a sort of hiatus in the early 1960s, a lethargy induced by the limitations of the realist mode and the rural subject matter. The eventual modernist breakthrough has come to be associated with the 1966 novel *Tómas Jónsson metsölubók* [Tomas Jonsson Bestseller], by Guðbergur

Bergsson (b. 1932). It was not, strictly speaking, the first modernist novel in Icelandic, but it marks the beginning of a revolt that would continue. It opens up the form and structure of the novel and raises questions about virtually all the laws of the epic tradition. There is a carnivalesque attention paid to bodily functions and a chaos in the flow of thoughts of Tómas, the protagonist, who, while writing his autobiography, is exposed to a profusion of texts, voices, fantasies, and observations. Another important modernist novelist from the 1960s is Thor Vilhjálmsson (b. 1925), already well established as a modernist poet and travel writer, whose first novel, *Fljótt fljótt sagði fuglinn* [Quick Quick Said the Bird] (1968), has come to stand next to *Tómas Jónsson metsölubók* as a work anchoring the modernist paradigm in the Icelandic novel. The radical metaphoric shifts between different narrative and temporal levels, which are inherent in the author's aesthetic, result from the way his narrators and characters quest for ways of expressing or capturing emotion. An image, a memory, or a dream arises, or some detail or person in the environment catches the eye and becomes somehow linked with a state of mind, and this perception may come alive in its own terms, sometimes on a grand symphonic scale, sometimes with meticulous attention to detail. Calling his style lyrical tells only part of the story, important as it is to acknowledge that his descriptive prose is, almost without exception, also poetry.

It remained for the next generation to bring Icelandic poetry fully into alignment with the post-modern and international realities of late twentieth-century Europe and the United States. Einar Már Guðmundsson (born in Reykjavík, 1954) burst onto the literary stage in 1980 and 1981 with the publication of three volumes of poetry, *Er nokkur í kórónafötum hér inni?* [Is Anyone Here Wearing the Korona Line?] (1980), *Sendisveinninn er einmana* [The Delivery Boy Is Lonely] (1981), and *Róbinson Krúsó snýr aftur* [Robinson Crusoe Returns] (1981). These collections heralded a radical change—in theme, subject matter, and vocabulary, as well as form—from both the more traditional and the modernist poets who preceded him. His is arguably the first purely urban generation in Iceland's history. His concern is everyday urban life: the youth culture, pop music, movies, and the daily realities of one of the most travelled peoples of Europe (in spite of the expense, nearly 25 percent of the population travels abroad every year). Einar Már clearly states his generation's poetic problem with Iceland's long literary tradition in a dialogue between the maker and his verse:

en ég er orðinn leiður á fegurðinni  
sólin vorið og jöklarnir mega vera í friði

dýr og jurtir hef ég aðeins séð í  
frystihólfum stórverslana

...

en ég er orðinn leiður  
á jóhannesi úr kötlum á þjóðlegum  
kvæðum um fjöll og firði  
á þessum eilífu bænastundum með  
réttlætínu (1996: 109)

[But I'm bored with beauty  
let the sun, the spring and the glaciers be left in peace  
animals and plants I've seen only in  
supermarket freezers

...

I'm bored with  
Jóhannes úr Kötlum's nationalist  
poetry about mountains and fjords  
those eternal prayer meetings with  
justice] (my translation)

This seeming revolution heralded the volatile and vigorous cultural scene, which includes poetry, prose fiction, pop music, cinema, theatre, and the visual arts, of the last two decades in Reykjavík,<sup>3</sup> which has richly broadened both the stylistic and the thematic flexibility of the arts in general, while retaining, indeed reinigorating, the language.

These poems are as heavily influenced by Bob Dylan, the “beat” poets, David Bowie, the Beatles, rock music, and Hollywood as by traditional Icelandic literary culture. In retrospect this might be seen as the first fruit of the generation in Iceland that had grown up through the heady political and philosophical turmoil of the sixties and seventies in the United States and Europe. And this was a turmoil that, like it or not, Iceland had been a part of since joining NATO in 1949. Einar Már’s poetry is ironic, self-mocking, and filled with a brash colloquial language that owes as much to MGM and Walt Disney as it does to Snorri Sturluson. His imagery is drawn as much from records, glossy U.S. magazines, and Hollywood as it is from earlier Icelandic and other European literatures. Take, for example, a passage from his lover’s lament *ég hugsa um þig*:

ég hugsa um þig  
 sem snerist gegnum lífið  
 ásjötuogáttasnúningahraða  
 svo drusluleg  
 að dagarnir pass'ekki lengur á þig  
     frekar en litlu úlpurnar  
 frá því á róluvellinum  
 ég hugsa um þig  
 ...  
 þegar sandkassinn var hollívúdd  
 og litlu plastbílarnir í fullri alvöru draumsins  
 keyrð'okkur inná snotur heimili  
 úr upplýstum auglýsingum tímaritanna  
 sem tannlæknirinn geymdi á biðstofunni  
     ég átti  
 appelsínugula einbýlishúsið á snobhill ... (1996: 122)

[I think of you  
 revolving through life  
 at 78 rpm  
 so scruffy  
 that the days no longer fit you  
     any more than the little anoraks  
 from our times at the swings  
 I think of you  
 ...  
 when the sandpit was Hollywood  
 and the little plastic cars in the solemnity of a dream  
 drove us to the smart houses  
 from the glossy magazine advertisements  
 that the dentist kept in his waiting room  
     I owned  
 the orange villa on snob hill ... ] (Valsson 1994: 5 [trans. Scudder])

Einar Már's best-selling poetic debut was followed, in 1982, with his first novel, *Riddarar hringstigans* [The Knights of the Spiral Stairs]. The novel tracks the dramatic events of a couple of days in the life of the narrator Jóhann Pétursson, a precocious six-year-old growing up in the emerging suburbia of Reykjavík. The evocation of childhood is stunning, and universal.

Although the setting is clearly Icelandic in a hundred different ways, the thoughts, experiences, and adventures of the knights (five six- and seven-year-olds) could occur in suburban Copenhagen, New York, London—indeed, anywhere in the West in the early sixties—were it not, perhaps, for the spontaneity, almost a healthy instinctiveness, that underlies all the aggression, plotting, mythologizing, and pranks of the young main characters. The stylistic and structural space of the novel is international, with literary affinities not only with the saga tradition, of which there are many, but also with the work of Günther Grass, or of Ian McEwan (two of whose novels, including *Cement Garden*, Einar Már has since translated into Icelandic). It is notable, however, that the reader is invited to engage with the action of the children with none of the distanced reproof demanded by a work such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Einar Már also avoids the example of Scandinavian-style social realism of the seventies in Icelandic fiction. In *Riddarar hringstigans* the family is a source of protection and security, not of tension and apology. The novel is an invitation to participate in a baroque and private cosmos.

The iconography of the world inhabited by the boys is sixties Western, from the Elvis Presley quiff, urgently brilliantined back into shape in a car's wing mirror, to the plastic toy jazz band featuring Huey, Dewey, and Louey, the bottle of Libby's tomato ketchup, and the bright red Matchbox fire engine. In the ultimate adventure of the novel, the knights are on the spiral stairs of a partly constructed house on a building site in their neighbourhood. Young Gardar is sleepy and has had enough:

Á bak við mig er Garðar byrjaður að geispa. Ég finn að hann langar heim. Ég finn það með bakinu. Ég veit hann vill ekki labba lengra upp en þorir ekki aleinn niður. Höfuð hans ranglar fram og tilbaka, út til hliðanna. Það dattar á milli trappanna og lappir hans ganga eins og tvær sjálfstæðar verur. Heima hjá sér væri Garðar löngu sofnaður út frá kiðlingasögu af vörum mömmu sinnar. Nema pabbi hans í grænbláa silkisloppnum hefði sagt honum eina af dæmisögum Esóps.

En Garðar legði aleinn af stað niður stigann gegnum myrkur fokhelda hússins veit ég að á leiðinni niður mundi hann mæta eldgulu tígrisdýri. Ég skal nefnilega segja ykkur það að tígrisdýrin úr tarsanmyndunum hafa næstum því algjörlega leyst íslenskar afturgöngur af hólmí síðan þrjúsyningar í bíó urður fastur liður í lífi reykvavískra barna. Þau ganga laus í vitund okkar. Að minnsta kosti mætir Garðar alltaf tígrisdýri ef hann er aleinn í dimmum stiga. (1982: 146)

[Behind me Gardar's started yawning. I can tell he wants to go home. I can feel it with my back. I know he doesn't want to go any higher up but doesn't dare go down by himself either. His head dangles back, forth, and to the sides. It's nodding between the steps and his legs are moving like two independent beings. At home, Gardar would be asleep long ago, lulled by a story about little goats from his mother's lips. Unless his father in his bottle-green silk kimono had told him one of Aesop's fables.

If Gardar set off alone down the steps, I know he'd meet a fiery-yellow tiger on the way. I can tell you for a fact, Tarzan film tigers have almost completely replaced Icelandic ghosts ever since Saturday morning pictures became a regular fixture in the life of Reykjavík children. They roam at large in our consciousness. At least, Gardar always meets a tiger if he's alone on dark stairs.] (unpublished trans. by Scudder)

It is the Saturday morning pictures especially that so inform the consciousness of both the knights themselves and, one imagines, their contemporaries in 1960, Einar Már and Friðrik Þór Friðriksson. Friðrik Þór's 1993 film, *Bíó dagar* [Movie Days], co-written with Einar Már, begins with a brilliant evocation of the centrality of the cinema in the early lives of their generation. In the film, 1960s Reykjavík is rising like a muddy building site. The narrow streets are filled with anti-NATO marches to Keflavík, military base contraband from Keflavík, early, almost communal, television, and, overwhelming all else, the movies from Hollywood.

*Riddarar hringstigans* is the first volume of a trilogy, which goes on to include *Vængjasláttur í þakrennum* [Wingbeats on the Rooftops] (1983), which charts, among other things, the crazes of Beatlemania and pigeon breeding that swept suburban Reykjavík in the sixties, and *Eftirmáli regndropanna* [Epilogue of the Raindrops] (1986). The stylistic nature of the trilogy seems, on first reading, to share qualities with the international movement described as "magic realism," which includes such diverse figures as Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, and Ben Okri. While this comparison is suggestive in some ways, and reflects certain of Einar Már's acknowledged tastes in reading (Márquez and Rushdie in this example), what is called "magic realism" surely differs not much at all from certain qualities in the Icelandic sagas. Einar Már's prose and imagery are almost baroque in their intensity and floridity in the trilogy, but at root the novels are about storytelling and the delight he takes in it.

For example, early in *Eftirmáli regndropanna* fourteen fishermen, farmer Einar, and his dog meet in the old saddlemaker's workshop, in a very old

quarter of Reykjavík, to listen to the saddlemaker's stories and drink home-brewed beer and spirits:

Ha eru það ekki kerlingar af báðum kynjum sem með bragðdaufu röfli frammiköllum og stælum reyna að eyðileggja allar góðar sögur?

Þannig er söðlasmiðurinn vanur að spyrja.

En hér þarf hann ekki að hafa áhyggjur af neinu slíku, hvorki af bragðdaufu röfli, frammiköllum né stælum.

Þess vegna gæti hann tekið bjölluna niður og hengt hana á trýni einhvers af refshöfðunum eða leyft hundinum að leika sér með hana.

Því hér eru aðeins staddir valinkunnir sómamenn, mínir bestu vinir, trillukarlarnir og Gunnar, já valinkunnir sómamenn sem jafnframt því að vera valinkunnir sómamenn og öðlingar ljúfir eru bæði vínbærskir og drykkjutröll.

Að minnsa kosti svolgrarar af guðs náð, engir gasprarar og frammkallarar eða lúðratrantar með hausinn fullan af kynórum eða einhverri viðlíka vitleysu.

Nei hér kunna allir að meta sögur.

Allir nema kannski hundurinn.

Enda engin sagnahefð á meðal hunda.

En hundurinn, hann sefur nú hvort eð er einsog rotaður selur.

Já ég verð að segja það alveg einsog það er: að því leytinu finnast mér hundar vera einsog bindindismenn að það er hvorki hægt að tala við þá né drekka með þeim. (1986: 29–30)

[Old women of both sexes—aren't they always trying to ruin all good stories with their whinging mumbles, heckling and play-acting?

That's the saddlemaker's usual retort.

But here he need not have any such worries, neither of whinging mumbles, nor heckling nor play-acting.

He could even take down the bell and hang it on the snout of one of the fox heads or give it to the dog to play with.

Because here are present none but good men and true, my best friends, the fishermen and Gunnar, yes, good men and true, who, as well as being good men and true and dear souls of repute, are also Vikings for wine and trolls for drink.

At least quaffers by the grace of God, not blabbers and hecklers or trumpet blowers with their heads full of erotic fantasies or that kind of hanky-panky.

Everyone here likes stories.

Everyone except perhaps the dog.

After all, dogs lack a narrative tradition.

But the dog's sleeping anyway like a clubbed seal.

To tell it just the way it is: dogs resemble teetotallers in so far as you can neither talk to them nor drink with them.] (1995: 13–14)

*Eftirmáli regndropanna* is an absorbing and bizarre narrative, filled with drowned ship's crews, *huldufólk* (elves), and rock and roll, but it is also, perhaps primarily, a celebration of storytelling in a mode of self-conscious fictionality reminiscent of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

*Rauðir dagar* [*Red Days*] (1990) is a love story set in Reykjavík in 1970, ten years after the various events of the trilogy. Ranghildur, a young girl from the north, feels constrained by her country village and leaves home to seek adventure and an independent life in the capital. Here she discovers unemployment, exile, a housing shortage, radicalism, and insurrection. The portrait of Reykjavík in the early 1970s is as lively and sharp as that of the early 1960s in the trilogy. The more traditional twentieth-century Icelandic concerns about the polarities between rural and urban are in evidence here, as they are in the film he was writing in 1990 with Friðrik Þór. *Börn náttúrunnar* (*Children of Nature*, 1991), nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Film category, tracks the adventures of an old man who leaves farming in the countryside to stay with his daughter and family in Reykjavík. Domestic life doesn't work out and the family put him in an old people's home. There he meets a childhood sweetheart, who is desperate to escape back to the country. Together they steal a jeep and make good their getaway. What follows is a quite unconventional road movie, which follows the old people in their pilgrimage back into nature and the past. The rural/urban polarity is also developed in *Bíó dagar*, when the young protagonist is sent to stay with family in the country for the summer.

*Englar alheimsins* (*Angels of the Universe*, 1993) is Einar Már's fifth novel. It is the first-person account of the descent into schizophrenia, madness, and suicide of Paul Olafsson—based on the life of Einar Már's brother Pálmi Örn (1949–1992). The setting here is entirely Reykjavík; the time frame is 1949 to 1992, although the later, and climactic, events are set in the underbelly of the city in the late 1980s. The narrative is almost classical in its clarity, an interesting shift from the baroque intensities of the trilogy. Although the story is tragic in the extreme, and deeply questioning about both mental illness itself and our ways and means of responding to it and treating it, the narrative is at once humane, witty, and, often, ironically very funny. There is also a regular engagement with earlier Icelandic literature, both medieval and more modern. On autobiography, genealogy, and generations, for example:

Mér er auðvitað fullkunnugt um þá kenningu marga að ekki sé hægt að segja ævisögu sína nema maður hafi ömmur sínar með og helst langömmur líka. Þannig er ekki óalgengt að menn skrifi ævisögur sínar í mörgum bindum og séu sjálfir ekki fæddir fyrr en í öðru eða þriðja bindinu.

Ég myndi frekar segja að enginn ætti að skrifa ævisögu sína fyrr en ævi hans er öll.

Ég kann því ekki að meta þá gerð ævisagna, sem algengust er hér á landi, þar sem söguhetjurnar eru sprell-lifandi í sögulok og arka, einsog rígmontir hreppstjórar, út af sviðinu.

Það er líka blekking að áhugi þessarar þjóðar á ættum og ættfræði stafi af eðlislægum áhuga á eigin uppruna og annarra högum.

Ég rek ættfræðiáhugann til trjáskortsins í landinu. Út af fábrotnum trjágróðrinum halla menn sér að ættartjám og finna sitt skóglendi í forfeðrunum. (1993 [*Englar*]: 15)

[I am of course well aware of the common theory that it is impossible to tell the story of one's life without including one's grandmother and preferably great-grandmothers, too.

Thus it is not uncommon for people to write their biographies in many volumes, and not be born themselves until the second or the third. I would prefer to say that no one should write his biography until his life is over.

Consequently I am not fond of the commonest form of biography in Iceland, in which the heroes are alive and kicking at the end of the book and strut off stage like vainglorious parish council chairmen.

It is also an illusion that the Icelanders' interest in family backgrounds and genealogy is the product of an instinctive interest in their own origins and other people's circumstances.

I trace the interest in genealogy in Iceland to the lack of trees. Because of the sparsity of trees, people opt for family trees and find themselves forests among their forebears.] (1995 [*Angels*]: 6–7)

The welding of poems with stories in a coherent narrative is a technique as old as the sagas, of course, but it is also a feature of the twentieth-century Icelandic prose of Halldor Laxness and very much a feature of the fiction of Thor Vilhjálmsson. Einar Már, who himself does not distinguish, in interview and essay, between prose and poetry, will often add a lyric sub-chapter that echoes and reflects the “story” of the decline and death of Paul:

Þegar ég hugsa um sumarið sé ég ótal fiðrildi flögra um húsin, göldrótt reiðhjól renna um götur og geislana glampa á vængjum fugla. (1993 [*Englar*]: 37)

[When I think about the summer I see countless butterflies fluttering around the houses, magical bicycles rolling down the streets and sunbeams glittering on birds' wings.] (1995 [*Angels*]: 23)

OR

Þegar fjöllin fara úr hvítu sloppunum koma fuglarnir í heimsókn. Læknirinn tekur myrkrið og hellir því í bolla, hverfur svo inn í skammdegið á skrifstofunni.

Úti svífur vængjaður tími, frá gegnsæjum bláma að myrkvaðri strönd. Snjórinn í hlíðunum vaknar af svefni. Þegar fuglarnir fara verður dreggjunum skvett.

Útlægur blámi bankar á glugga.

Í sortá sofa þögul tré. (1993 [*Englar*]: 221)

[When the mountains take off their white coats, the birds pay their visits. The doctor takes the darkness and pours it into a cup, then disappears into the long dark night in his office.

Outside, winged time hovers, from a transparent blueness towards a darkened shore. The snow in the mountainsides awakens from its sleep. When the birds leave, the dregs will be poured away,

An exiled blueness knocks on the window.

In the blackness, silent trees sleep.] (1995 [*Angels*]: 162)

Perhaps the best example in *Englar alheimsins* of the melding of poetry and prose, and of the Icelandic sense of storytelling, the past, and mystery appears toward the end of Section I. This evokes not just elements of the saga method, but also memories of passages from Halldor Laxness, to whom Einar Már regularly acknowledges his debt and gratitude:<sup>4</sup>

Hjá vöggu minni mamma söng  
í myrkum næturskugga,  
Þau kvæðin voru ljúf og löng  
og lagnust mig að hugga.

...

María, amma mín, sveimar með mig í fanginu um gólfíð og syngur  
vögguvísur.

Allur heimurinn ómar af söng, angurværð ljóða og orða.

Amma kann hafsjó af sögum, ljóðum og vísum, ekki aðeins eftir skáldin  
sem allir þekkja, heldur einnig ýmsan kveðskap sem hún nam af vörum blindrar  
konu er dvaldi á heimili hennar að Ljósalandi í Hraungerðisdal. (1993 [*Englar*]:  
29)

[By my cradle mother sang  
in the shadow of the night  
lullabies both sweet and long  
that soothed me into sleep so tight

...

Maria, my grandmother, was swirling around the floor with me in her  
arms, singing lullabies.

The whole world resounded with song, the melancholy of poetry  
and words.

Grandmother knew legions of stories, poems, and verses, not only by poets  
that everyone knows but various others that she had learned from the lips of a  
blind woman who was living at her home in north Iceland, the farm Ljósaland  
in the valley of Hraungerdisdalur.] (1995 [*Angels*]: 16–17)

A final example of Einar Már's recourse to, and use of, earlier literatures  
and their continuing vitality comes in an episode when Paul gets in trouble  
again, this time with his friends Rognvald and Arnor. In this example the  
immediacy of the old literature (and the more recent) to the young men is  
manifest. Rognvald's imaginative world is dominated by his ancestry, which  
he traces to the settings of *Njal's Saga* and *Egil's Saga*. His international  
aesthetic is futurist but his memory is profoundly Icelandic. He knows by heart  
the sagas of his ancestors but also most of two novels by Halldor Laxness. It  
is especially funny, and apt, that, when challenged by the policeman about the  
pickaxe, he responds with a quotation from an early strophe of Egil's, "Höggva  
mann og annan" [Kill one man and another] (this is the saga's seventh  
strophe, in Chapter 40 of the original). Note especially the fluidity of the  
narrative, the ease with which ancient work is incorporated and made vital,  
and, finally, the wit of the policeman's knowing (and weary) response at the  
end. One doesn't really need the sagas in an Iceland inhabited by the likes of  
Rognvald and his friends:

Rögnvaldur var úr Borgarfirðinum, sonur bóndans á Miklastöðum, en mamma hans var ættuð úr Landeyjunum, af Njáluslóðum, enda voru fornritin tvö, Eglu og Njála, hans bækur á meðan Arnór var meira gefinn fyrir nútímaskáldskap ...

Róttækni Rögnvalds var líka fremur fólgin í því að hrella samborgara sína á götum úti en að sitja á fundum og ræða kennisetningar. Hann var fútúristi í eðli sínu, einsog Majakovskí og skáldin í rússnesku byltingunni. Hann vísaði aldrei í Marx eða Mao heldur vitnaði í sveitunga sinn Egil Skallagrímsson; og var hann mælikvarði alls, hluta og athafna.

Ef talið barst að bók skipti það hann engu máli hvað ritdómarar sögðu um hana eða allur þorri almennings, heldur velti hann því fyrir sér hvernig Agli Skallagrímssyni myndi hafa líkað hún.

Um þessi mál gátu þeir Arnór og Rögnvaldur deilt lengi, en þá voru gjarnan áfengir drykkir með í spilinum, enda Egill Skallagrímsson drykkjumaður frá sex ára aldri.

Hrífning Rögnvalds af Agli Skallagrímssyni tengdist einnig því að hann taldi sig afkomanda hans í beinan karlegg og kunni öll ljóð hans utanbókar svo og sögu hans, Eglu, og einnig Njálu, og hann kunni Heimsljós eftir Halldór Laxness út að blaðsíðu þrjú hundruð og allan Vefarann mikla frá Kasmír.

Einhvern tíma höfðum við Rögnvaldur og Arnór verið að drekka í húsi inni í Hlíðum. Á leiðinni niður í bæ, nálægt vinnuskúr við Miklators, fundum við haka. Hakinn stóð fastur í hálfrosinni moldarhrúgu og það hafði greinilega gleymst að láta hann ofan í verkfærakistuna sem einnig stóð þarna. Losaði Rögnvaldur þá hakann og gekk með hann á annarri öxlinni.

Þannig gengum við niður í bæ og við hljótum á einhvern hátt að hafa verið skuggalegir að sjá, svona þrír vinir og einn með haka, og Arnór auk þess yfir tveir metrar á hæð, en við hornið á Lækjargötu og Bankastræti vorum við stöðvaðir af lögreglunni.

„Og hvað ætlastu fyrir með þennan haka?“ segir lögregluþjónn sem vindur sér að Rögnvaldi.

„Höggva mann og annan,“ svarar Rögnvaldur, illskeyttur í málrómnunum.

Eitthvað tók lögregluþjónninn þessa annars einföldu tilvísun í Egils-sögu bókstaflega, því hann réðst að Rögnvaldi og tóku þeir nú að stimpast um hakann.

Simpuðust þeir í dágóða stund og fór svo að við þrír, ég, Rögnvaldur og Arnór, vorum allir teknir inn í lögregubíllinn og sömu leið fór hakinn.

Á leiðinni upp á stöð sagði Rögnvaldur við lögregluþjónana: „Þið ættuð að drulla ykkur heim og lesa Íslendingasögurnar.“

„Þess gerist nú varla þörf,” sagði lögregluþjónninn. (1993 [*Englar*]: 122–125)

[Rognvald was from Borgarfjord, a farmer's son, while his mother came from the south, in the territory where *Njal's Saga* was set. And *Egil's Saga* and *Njal's Saga*, from the places of his ancestry, were his favourite books, while Arnor was fonder of modern fiction ...

And Rognvald's radicalism took the form of outraging his fellow citizens on the streets rather more than going to meetings and discussing ideologies. He was a futurist by nature, like Mayakovsky and the poets of the Russian Revolution. He never referred to Marx or Mao, but would quote his neighbour from ten centuries before, Egil Skallagrimsson, who was the measure of all things and deeds.

In discussing books, he was indifferent to what reviews or public opinion said about them; he would wonder whether the saga hero Egil Skallagrimsson would have enjoyed them.

Rognvald and Arnor were capable of arguing about these matters for hours on end, typically when drinking; after all, Egil Skallagrimsson was a boozier from the age of six.

Rognvald's admiration for Egil Skallagrimsson was also connected to his claim to be directly descended from him through an unbroken male line, and he knew all his poetry by heart, along with the saga about him, *Egil's Saga*, and *Njal's Saga* as well, and he could recite *World Light* by Halldor Laxness up to page 300, and the whole of his *Great Weaver of Kashmir*.

Once I had been drinking with Rognvald and Arnor in the east of the city. On our way down to the town centre afterwards, by a building workers' shed on Miklatorg, we found a pickaxe. It was stuck in a half-frozen heap of earth and had clearly been forgotten when the tools were put away in the chest that stood beside it. Rognvald freed the pickaxe and walked along carrying it over one shoulder.

We walked down into town like this and must have made a fairly sinister impression, the three of us, one carrying a pickaxe, and Arnor seven feet tall to boot. On the corner of Laekjargata and Bankstraeti, we were stopped by the police.

“And just what are you going to do with that pickaxe?” asked one of the policemen, turning to Rognvald.

“Kill one man and another,” quoted Rognvald, in a malicious tone of voice.

The police officer must have taken this otherwise innocent quotation from

*Egil's Saga* somewhat literally, because he jumped on Rognvald and they began fighting over the pickaxe.

After they had skirmished for a good while, the three of us, Rognvald, Arnor and I, were put in the back of the police van, and the pickaxe followed.

On the way to the station, Rognvald said to the policemen, "You lot ought to piss off home and read the Sagas."

"There's not really any need," said one of the officers.] (1995 [*Angels*]: 87–90)

Einar Már's most recent novel is *Fótspor á himnum* [Footprints on the Heavens] (1997), in which he traces his family's history from the late nineteenth century, when his grandmother, Ingibjargur Gísladóttir, moved from the countryside to Reykjavík. It develops a host of memorable characters up to the mid-1940s. Fundamental to the narrative is the development of the capital. There are interesting, and unsurprising, parallels with novels like Laxness's *Atómstöðin* in its realistic and gritty portrayal of some of the urban hardships earlier in the century. Basic to the book's fabric are the ancestors:

Í gamla kirkjugarðinum við Suðurgötu hvílir undirstaða Reykjavíkurborgar, fólkið sem byggði þennan bæ. (1997: 12)

[In the old cemetery on Sudurgata rest the foundations of the city of Reykjavík, the people who first lived here.] (unpublished trans. Scudder and Allard)

It is interesting to note that the novel begins by citing the poem "Í dag hef ég kannað hin sannfróðu svið" [Today I have explored the truly wise spheres], by Jóhannes úr Kötlum, the poet and the sort of poetry that Einar Már had seemed to reject in "*heimsókn*" in 1981.

Einar Már's novels and poems are successful, moving, vibrant, funny, and apt, even if you lack access to the old literature and its more recent developments, but even more vital if you have it. The same applies to Halldor Laxness and most other twentieth-century poets and novelists. Einar Már's achievement, so far, has been to create a series of poems and fictions that are at once international in form and tone, and the best and most ample portrait of urban Iceland in the century. With *Fótspor* the portrait now extends, in vivid detail, from the turn of the century to the 1990s.

Iceland has always been, and will remain, a nation of storytellers and poets in an unbroken dialogue with themselves. Einar Már is innovative as the

first mature Icelandic voice that is, at first, purely urban. Each of his novels is based in Reykjavík, and looming large in the background of each is a vivid portrait of this fluid and developing city. His work is also the first in Iceland fully to incorporate the international realities of the post-modern world—cinema, Disney, rock music, and the rest of it.

In other respects his poetry, prose, and film writing since 1980 can be seen as deeply rooted in many Icelandic conventions, some as old as the Sagas. His literary point of view is comprehensive and international. As he remarks in his acceptance speech for the 1995 Nordic Prize for Literature for *Englar alheimsins*, “In literature there are only a few steps between the centuries. The past is no further away than the hairdresser on the corner” (my translation). The primacy of narrative, of storytelling, to Einar Már, but also to Iceland itself, is best captured in this extract from his poem *Sagnaþulurinn Hómer* [Homer the Singer of Tales], from his 1991 poetry collection *Klettur í hafí* [A Rock in the Ocean], with paintings by Tolli:

Eitt regnþungt síðdegi  
 á skipi úr víðförlum draumi  
 kom sagnaþulurinn Hómer til Reykjavíkur.  
 Hann gekk frá hafnarbakkanum  
 og tók leigubíl sem ók með hann  
 eftir regngráum götum  
 þar sem dapurleg hús liðu hjá.

Við gatnamót sneri sagnaþulurinn Hómer  
 sér að bílstjóranum og sagði:  
 „Hvernig er hægt að ímynda sér  
 að hér í þessu regngráa  
 tilbreytingarleysi búi söguþjóð?”  
 „Það er einmitt ástæðan,” svaraði bílstjórnin,  
 „aldrei langar mann jafn mikið  
 að heyra góða sögu og þegar droparnir  
 lemja rúðurnar.” ... (1991: 83–85)

[One rainy afternoon  
 on a ship from a much travelled dream,  
 Homer the singer of tales arrived in Reykjavik.  
 He walked from the quayside  
 and took a cab that drove him

along rain-grey streets  
where sorry houses passed by.

At the crossroads Homer the singer of tales turned  
to the driver and said:

“How can it be imagined  
that here in this rain-grey  
monotony lives a nation of story-tellers?”  
“That’s exactly why,” answered the cab driver,  
“you never want to hear  
a good tale as much as when the drops  
beat on the windows.”] (Valsson 1994: 10–11 [trans. Scudder])

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This poetic tradition remained coherent and popular for over six hundred years. It has finally, probably, reached its end. There remain available examples of *rímur*, *sagnadansar*, *drykkjuvísur*, and *þulur* recorded between 1903 and 1973 in the archives of the Árni Magnússon Institute. They were released recently on CD as “*Raddir*,” Höfundar, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, RÚV og Þjóðminjasafn Íslands.

This is the sort of poetry so important to the wretched peasant Sigmundur in the early twentieth-century short story *Á fjörinni* [On the Beach], by Jón Trausti (pen name of Guðmundur Magnússon [1873–1918]), or to Bjartur of Summerhouses in Halldor Laxness’s *Sjálfstætt fólk* [Independent People] (1934–1935).

<sup>2</sup>The 1999 UN Human Development Report shows that Iceland has the highest rate of computer use on earth (at nearly 40%, compared with 26% in the U. S. and only 10% in the U.K.), as reported in *The Observer*, 11 July 1999. In the absence of an industrial revolution or any previous urbanization, Icelanders seem to find it easier to adopt and adapt to recent electronic technologies than others do.

<sup>3</sup>There have been notable efforts to support a similar cultural initiative in Akureyri in the last fifteen years, most notably the development of the *listagil* (art canyon). There is a lot of lively activity in Egilsstaðir and Isafjörður. The aspiration of most writers and artists, however vital the regional scene, is to emigrate to the capital. For reasons of efficiency, when I refer to Reykjavík I mean the capital region, including Kópavogur, Garðabær, and Hafnarfjörður.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, the interview with Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir: “Viðtal við Einar Má Guðmundsson rithöfund,” first published in *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, May 1995. Available at <<http://www.mm.is/Tmm/1995/einarmg.htm>>.

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# Damned with Faint Praise

## The Reception of Laura Goodman Salverson's Works by the Icelandic-Canadian Community<sup>1</sup>

DAISY NEIJMANN

ABSTRACT: Laura Goodman Salverson (1890–1970) was the first Icelandic-Canadian author to write the Icelandic immigrant experience in Canada into Anglo-Canadian fiction. Although her first novel, *The Viking Heart* (1920), brought her instant popularity and fame, Salverson later claimed in her autobiography and letters that she and all her works had been repudiated by her own community, while her ethnic background proved an obstacle to serious recognition by the Anglo-Canadian literary establishment. Intriguingly, this claim does not appear to be substantiated by any printed evidence, although there are indications that the reception of Salverson's work was not unproblematic. As an author dealing with ethnic subject-matter, she became caught up in a nationalist and ethnic struggle of identity construction and cultural self-validation.

RÉSUMÉ: Laura Goodman Salverson (1890–1970) a été la première auteure canadienne d'origine islandaise à décrire l'expérience des immigrants islandais pour la littérature anglo-canadienne. Si son premier roman, *The Viking Heart* (1920) lui a apporté une popularité et une célébrité instantanées, Salverson a prétendu par la suite dans son autobiographie et dans ses lettres qu'elle et toute son œuvre avaient été reniées par sa propre communauté, et qu'en même temps son origine ethnique s'était avérée un obstacle à une reconnaissance sérieuse au sein de l'establishment littéraire anglo-canadien. Curieusement, cette affirmation ne semble pas être corroborée par des preuves écrites, même s'il semble que la réception de l'œuvre de Salverson a été quelque peu problématique. En tant qu'auteure traitant d'un sujet ethnique, elle a été prise dans une lutte nationaliste et ethnique pour la construction d'une identité et pour une validation de sa propre culture.

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he work of Laura Goodman Salverson has most commonly been considered in terms of the “other,” of what made her different. Canadian critics have tended to focus on her Icelandic background and the ways in which she expressed that cultural background in Canadian literature, whereas Icelandic Canadians have associated her with the Canadian aspects of her writing, notably her choice of language and the way her writing was evaluated by Canadians. More recently, after several decades of critical neglect, Salverson’s work has been studied by feminist critics in the light of her womanhood.

This focus on her “deviance,” her “otherness,” I believe played a very important, complex and pervasive role in Salverson’s authorship. Salverson, a child of immigrants, wrote in a cultural vacuum: she was a writer of two worlds who felt alienated from both those worlds (Neijmann 1995; 1997). This is a situation not at all untypical of what is generally known as “the second generation,” symbolized in much minority writing by a “marginal” protagonist, uprooted and caught between the impulses of preservation and synthesis (Palmer 1987: 67). Salverson’s marginalization by both the Icelandic and the Canadian literary tradition, however, seems to have been a two-way process, something that she caused, even invented, herself, as much as it was an actual reality.

The duality embedded in Salverson’s position is echoed in the ambiguity with which she approached her Icelandic background, her Canadian nationality, and her womanhood, all those aspects that made her “other.” She was, as she once said herself, “inseparable” from her Icelandic background, yet she also regarded it as the main obstacle to social status, achievement, and success; she was immensely proud of Canada and dearly loved her country, while at the same time regarding it as a cultural backwater that wallowed in puritanism and materialism and refused to recognize any serious form of art; she strongly advocated equality for women, but she also suppressed the female voice and experience in her writing because she felt it had no place in serious writing (Powell 1992; Buss 1993).

Salverson ends her autobiography, *Confessions of an Immigrant’s Daughter* (1939), with a powerful description of how her works have been rejected by the Icelandic community since the publication of her first novel, *The Viking Heart*, in 1923. Considering the immense popularity that befell *The Viking Heart* and its author, however, and the fact that it put the Icelandic community on the literary map of Canada, as well as the immense pride Icelandic Canadians tended to take in their literary culture and in every achievement attained in their new homeland by one of their own, this statement invites

closer scrutiny. In this paper I therefore intend to explore in more detail the reception of Salverson's works by the Icelandic community, in order to shed more light on its implications for Salverson's authorship and what might have motivated her to arrive at this bitter conclusion to what would otherwise seem to be her success story as an Icelandic-Canadian writer.

After several early flings at literature, which she describes in *Confessions*, Salverson seriously embarked on a literary career in the early 1920s. Before the publication of *The Viking Heart*, she had some poetry and short stories published in local newspapers and magazines. This is also the time when Icelandic immigrant literature had reached the peak of its development: Stephan G. Stephansson had firmly established his reputation as an exceptional poet by then, and had just launched a bombshell with the publication of his anti-War poems in *Vígslóði* [Trail of War] (1920); Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason's last instalments of the serial *Í Rauðárdalnum* [In the Red River Valley], later to be published as a novel, were appearing in the magazine *Syrpa* (1914–1918; rpt. as *Í Rauðárdalnum*, 1942); Guðrún H. Finnsdóttir had just made her debut as a short story writer with "Landskuld" [Land Debt], published in 1920 (rpt. in *Hillingalönd*, 1938), the same year in which Guttormur J. Guttormsson's second volume of poetry, *Bóndadóttir* [Farmer's Daughter], came out.

There can be little doubt that Salverson benefitted from this active literary environment.<sup>2</sup> In *Confessions*, she describes how literature was a frequent topic of conversation when she was growing up. Her parents both read the Icelandic newspapers, and her father contributed essays to the papers that bear testimony to the fact that he read and closely followed the development of Western Icelandic (i.e., North American Icelandic) writers. Although she does not mention Western Icelandic literature in her work but focusses on older Icelandic literature instead, Salverson was undoubtedly aware of the literary activities of fellow Icelanders and heard them discussed. In her notes and correspondence, there are references to writers like Stephansson (Salverson, Correspondence box 30, f.2, undated) and Margrét Benedictsson (Salverson, Laura Goodman Salverson Papers [LGSP] box 7, f.37, notes), and when I asked her son whether she had read any Icelandic immigrant authors he replied, "Oh yes, she knew all of those."

Salverson herself always credited, and sometimes cursed, her Icelandic background for her writing ambitions, calling it a "hereditary incubus" ("The Funny Side of Failure" [FSF] 62/56). She grew up in an Icelandic-speaking environment, began to learn English when she was ten, and had only a few years of formal schooling. These circumstances alone would have proved strong deterrents if not insurmountable obstacles for a writing career in

Canada, where literature was still largely the domain of a small cultural elite, never mind the ambition to write the immigrant experience from a minority point of view. For someone with an Icelandic background, however, it was not unique at all. Laura Salverson, like many Icelanders, was brought up with a great love and respect for writers and literature. As she explains in her unfinished autobiography, "I was taught to love books and to look upon writing as a normal function of existence," and "to me, as a child, writers were what jet pilots are to little boys today" (FSF 12/13). Many writers in the Icelandic community had few worldly possessions and little or no formal schooling, among them Stephan G. Stephansson, K.N., and Guttormur J. Guttormsson, yet they had succeeded in creating literature that dealt with the Icelandic immigrant experience in various and innovative ways. In other words, Salverson had models and a literary tradition to base herself on. Her ambition was to take these examples one step further by writing in English.

The contribution of a writer of Icelandic descent to Canadian literature in English had been a long-anticipated and long-debated event. Ideologically, literature was the field where Icelandic Canadians wanted to make their most important contribution to Canadian culture, and it was an extremely contentious issue. Ideally, this envisaged masterpiece had to both carry over the Icelandic literary tradition into Canadian culture and gain recognition among Canadians; in other words, it had to succeed on Icelandic as well as on Canadian terms. The large amount of Western Icelandic amateur writing had generated disdain and ridicule in Iceland, and the Icelanders in Canada were therefore highly sensitive concerning the quality of their literature.<sup>3</sup> They were eager to prove their excellence in the field of literature to their Canadian compatriots, and expectations were very high.

Exactly how the feat was to be accomplished or by whom was less clear. There appears to have been agreement on the fact that any literature in English would belong to Canadian literature, and that the ultimate judgment would be passed by Canadians. General interest in Canadian literature, however, was minimal, and many Icelanders were unfamiliar with it, as indeed were most Canadians. In his article on "Icelandic and Other Foreign Literatures in Canada," Guðmundur Árnason points to the fact that Canadian literature had not yet reached maturity, which he attributes as much to the general domination of material interest in Canada and the literary apathy among the people as to the often cited lack of history and national feeling. Also, very little had been written in Icelandic on Canadian literature, and in Árnason's view Canadian writing had exerted virtually no influence on Icelandic-Canadian authors. He ends the article with the following plea: "When will a true author

rise up among West Icelanders who writes in the English language? Such an author has yet to appear” [En hvenær rís upp eitthvert góðskáld meðal Vestur-Íslendinga, sem yrkir á enskri tungu? Enn hefir ekkert slíkt skáld fram komið] (1940: 38–39). Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson waxes more poetic in an article on the future of Icelandic-Canadian literature:

Er það ekki líklegt,... að afkomendur vorir—þriðja kynslóðin hér í álfu, íslensk nútíðar æska, erfi bókmentagáfu forfeðra sinna og verði ritfært fólk í stórum stíl og glæsilegum meðal þjóða Vesturálfunnar á enska tungu? Og er það ekki jafnlíklegt að afkomendur vorir vekji upp bókmenta öldu hér þegar minnst varir? (1951: 88)

[Is it not probable ... that our descendants—the third generation in this hemisphere, the Icelandic youths of today, will inherit the literary talent of their ancestors and become prominent in numbers as well as in excellence among the authors of the western hemisphere who write in the English language? And is it not just as probable that our descendants will produce a new literary wave before long?]

Jóhannesson points out that while Icelanders are often too hard on their new writers, nipping their first attempts in the bud with unrelenting criticism, writers do have the responsibility to introduce into the English-speaking literary world only those works that will enhance the reputation of Icelanders: “beware of deformity” [varist vanskapninginn], he calls this paragraph in his article (95). Authors of Icelandic descent, in other words, wrote with a heavy burden on their shoulders. Salverson uses the metaphor of the “august ancestors” in *Confessions* to describe this burden, thereby moving its weight from the Western Icelandic community to her Icelandic background. This is interesting considering the fact that, in *Confessions*, Salverson relates how her first novel, *The Viking Heart*, caused great indignation among her fellow Icelanders because of a geographical misnomer. Since then, Salverson writes, “I and all my works have been tacitly repudiated by my own people, with but few exceptions” (1939: 408). She adds, however, that this has not changed her own affection: “There are no losses, except they rob the heart.” By making the burden an ancestral rather than a communal one, she reduces her responsibility to her heritage to an individual level: her affection and loyalty toward her background are to be judged only by ancestral standards as she perceives them, not by those of her “own people.”

The issue of the reception of her work by the Western Icelandic community that Salverson raises here is intriguing. Throughout her articles and speeches as well as her fiction and autobiographies, Salverson makes her ethnic affiliation crystal clear: she loves Iceland and its cultural heritage, she is proud of being a Canadian of Icelandic descent, and she is determined to write Icelandic culture and the Icelandic contribution to Canada into Canadian literature. At the same time, she notes how her Icelandic background stands in her way: if it had not been for the encouragement of Canadian people, we read in *Confessions*, Salverson would never have dared venture out into the literary world, even though this had been her dream for years, because of Icelandic censorship of “bad” writing: “But to dream and act are not quite the same. I had yet to conquer my self-mistrust, my fear of ridicule upon the ultimate discovery that I was just what papa would call another miscreant of letters” (1939: 398). When *The Viking Heart* is published, Salverson writes that “an unpopular author was about to dawn upon the horizon” (1939: 409), and goes on to explain that the views and loyalties she was brought up with and that she calls “Icelandic” prevented her from writing the kind of fiction that would have made her a popular Canadian author, while her interpretation and fictionalization of “Icelandic” caused her repudiation by the Icelandic immigrant community.

As it turns out, *The Viking Heart* did make her a popular Canadian author, one of the most popular authors of her time as a matter of fact. However, popularity in Canada as a writer was not the same kind of popularity as Salverson may have been led to expect, given what it meant within an Icelandic community, where writers were widely read, respected, and criticized. Salverson’s work received no serious criticism, literature enjoyed little respect in Canada, and she never succeeded in writing a best-seller, because the readership for serious Canadian literature was simply too small (Parker 1985). But if her statement about her “unpopularity” as an author is not quite correct and needs modification, how are we to interpret her alleged repudiation by the Icelandic community?

When one examines what has been published both on Salverson’s work and on her relations with the community, one must come to the same conclusion: her interpretation of events needs qualification. Although Salverson had been away from the centre of the Icelandic community since her marriage to the Norwegian immigrants’ son George Salverson, whose work took him all over western Canada, poetry by her began to appear in the Icelandic weekly *Heimskringla* as early as 1920. From then on, her poems (in English) were published regularly in this paper, and on 29 June 1922, an

announcement appears in the *Lögberg*, the other Icelandic weekly, that Salverson has won a prize for her short story “Hidden Fire” (“Úr bænum”). The article contains some mistakes and unclarity, which are rectified by her father (Goodman 20 July 1922). That same summer Salverson visits several prominent community members, including Sigtryggur Jónasson and Rögnvaldur Pétursson, to discuss her writing and, possibly, to gather material for *The Viking Heart*. She repeated her visit in September of that year with the same purpose (“Úr bænum” 14 Sept. 1922: 8; Goodman 2 Nov. 1922). She may well also have visited Guttormsson, who was not far from Arborg, where her father was living at the time, for a translation of one of her poems by Guttormsson appears in *Lögberg* on 9 November 1922. Indeed, Salverson’s poems (in English) and short stories (translated into Icelandic) become a fairly regular feature in the Icelandic papers. Goodman mentions the support that Jóhannes P. Pálsson, a writer from Elfrós, has given Salverson (20 July 1922; 2 Nov. 1922; 30 Aug. 1923). Her sister’s family lived in Elfrós, and Salverson spent quite some time with them, as she relates in *Confessions* (her brother-in-law stood model for Bjorn Lindal’s character in *The Viking Heart*). Bjarnason also lived in Elfrós, and there can be little doubt that Salverson knew him and discussed literature with him, since he was an established name in the Icelandic community by then.

The development of *The Viking Heart*—its acceptance for publication by McClelland & Stewart, the book-launching by the publisher, and, finally, the appearance of the novel on the market—was monitored closely and eagerly by the papers. This is, of course, where *Confessions*, the autobiography of a budding writer, ends, leaving us with the impression that Salverson had failed but that the intentions underlying her authorship would live on. In actual fact, however, *The Viking Heart* was extremely well received by the Icelandic papers, and also, apparently, by many members of the community. Several glowing reviews and advertisements appeared, people were urged to buy the novel, and receptions were organized to honour Salverson and to celebrate her achievement.<sup>4</sup> Richard Beck even wrote a long and laudatory review for *Morgunblaðið*, the largest daily newspaper in Iceland, which he ends by saying how much Salverson has done to enhance the reputation of Icelanders with this novel, and that they owe her their gratitude for this feat (28 March 1924: 4). Rögnvaldur Pétursson devoted a two-page article to Salverson in the 1923 issue of the Journal of the Icelandic National League in North America, which gives some background information on Salverson and her writing career and discusses *The Viking Heart* and its reception in Canada. He praises the novel, calling it not only a *skáldsaga* [novel] but a chapter from a *menningarsaga*, a

cultural history, and, remarkably, refers to the supposedly contentious prologue in the following words: “It is well written and the descriptions are surprisingly precise and fine” [Er þar vel að orði komist og lýsingar furðu nákvæmar og góðar] (1923: 110). The character descriptions and the portrayal of Icelandic customs and characteristics are considered quite good, and Salverson receives particular praise for the way in which she has succeeded in capturing Icelandic proverbs and sayings and the Icelandic way of speaking in English. This review is especially interesting because this was a journal of much higher quality than the weeklies, and Pétursson was a respected, well-educated, and well-read man who was very active in the field of Icelandic-Canadian culture.<sup>5</sup>

If we can believe the papers, Salverson was “the toast of the town” after *The Viking Heart* came out. Where, then, does Salverson’s claim that the Icelandic people were “so indignant” come from? Very few indications have survived, at least in print, to substantiate her story that her geographical “error” in the prologue caused such indignation. It is true that the poets Jakobina Johnson, Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson, and Stephan G. Stephansson exchanged comments about the book that were not very positive. Johnson’s main objection, voiced in letters to Stephansson, concerns the way Salverson portrays Icelandic culture and customs, demonstrating how debatable and sensitive the issue of a re-invented ethnic identity is (*Bréf til Stephans G. Stephanssonar* 3: 30–36). It indicates a clash between those who were born in the “old country” and still had a sense of an “authentic” or “national” culture they had left behind, and those born in the New World, like Salverson, for whom the inherited culture is a “reconstruction,” a symbol open to negotiation and re-interpretation to make it applicable in a larger Canadian context. This clash is even more obvious from a review by Jóhannesson that appeared several months after publication (3 Apr. 1924). His motives in writing the review, as he explains, are not to discourage Salverson or any other young writer, but to show her where she strayed so that she may improve rather than continue to make the same mistakes over and over, since all reviews so far have only pointed out the novel’s good points.<sup>6</sup> He finds that the author is certainly talented, and that *The Viking Heart* has much going for it, but there are certain aspects he finds disagreeable (*óviðkunnanleg*). These include the unlikelihood that any Icelandic girl would be as evil as Ninna is, or any Icelandic woman as stupid (*sauðheimsk*) as Finna, or any man as vicious as Loki; that any Icelanders would have left poor Anna Fjalsted, who goes mad at the cruelty of her husband, to her own devices for five years; or that an Icelandic bride would be as demanding as Borga, who insists that she would

not set up a household without having all the necessary amenities. If such characters and events are based on reality at all, he claims, then they occur rarely and can only serve to denigrate Icelanders in the eyes of other peoples. Elizabeth and Sjera Bjarni, on the other hand, he finds to be excellently drawn characters who represent the “true nature” of Icelanders.

Stephansson’s comments about the novel are noteworthy, even if they raise more questions than they answer (1938: 3: 117, 162, 230). In a letter to Grímur Grímsson (1938: 3: 140), he mentions that he had been contacted by Winifred Reeve, Canadian author and head of the CAA branch in Calgary, who wanted to know his honest opinion on *The Viking Heart*. Stephansson was reluctant to answer her, for he thought the book of mediocre quality. Also, Reeve informed him that some “trouble” had arisen between her and Salverson over the novel, which Stephansson did not want to involve himself in. Since she had continued to press him with questions, however, he had added that he did not think Canadian literature in general was anything to write home about either.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, Stephansson gives no further details about his opinion of the novel.<sup>8</sup> The main thrust of his negative reaction very likely found its basis in Salverson’s criticisms of the poet’s stance on the issue of the First World War that are embedded in her narrative (Guðsteins 1997). That Stephansson did not take to *The Viking Heart* should thus hardly have surprised Salverson. But Stephansson’s reaction also appears to point to a gap between those people in the Icelandic community who were most concerned with the “ethnic” aspect of the novel, that is, how the Icelanders were interpreted and its reception among Canadians, and those who judged the novel on its literary merits, where, at least according to Stephansson, it appears to have fallen short, like most Canadian literature.

Again, these reactions are most revealing in their demonstration of how sensitive the interpretation of Icelandic culture was, and the role it played in the evaluation of Icelandic-Canadian literature in relation to the larger Canadian society. They also give us an indication of the kind of criticism that Salverson faced and that may have been the very type of criticism she describes in *Confessions*. In fact, most Icelandic reviews only allow themselves to comment on Salverson’s interpretation and portrayal of Icelanders and Icelandic culture to the larger Canadian society; the artistic and final judgment they appear to leave completely to Canadian critics, whose praise is profusely quoted.

Poems and short stories by Salverson continued to appear at regular intervals during the following years, and when her next novel, *When Sparrows*

*Fall*, was published in 1925, it, too, received much attention and several favourable reviews. The papers dutifully follow her comings and goings: *Heimskringla* prints a brief interview (“Frú Laura Goodman Salverson”), and Salverson’s appearance at a Lawn Social is announced in *Lögberg* with the following words:

en það sem mest varðar af öllu er það, að hin goðfræga íslenzka skáldkona, Mrs Laura Goodman Salverson flýtur þar erindi um nýju bókina sína. Mörgum verður óefað forvitni á að heyra um þetta efni. Mrs Salverson verðskuldar það fyrir þann ljóma sem hún hefir, með ritum sínum varpað á Íslendingnafnið í Canada, að menn fjölmenni. Þar að auki er hún mjög áheyrileg ræðukona, talar með tilfinningu og áhuga, ræðir skipulega og segir vel frá. (“Lawn Social”)

[What is of greatest importance is that the highly reputed Icelandic writer, Mrs. Laura Goodman Salverson, will speak about her new book. Many will undoubtedly be curious to hear about this subject. Mrs. Salverson deserves to receive a large crowd for the light she has cast on the reputation of Icelanders in Canada. In addition, she is a very eloquent speaker, who speaks with passion and interest and is a skilled and organized narrator.]

These do not sound like words from a community that has repudiated Salverson and her works, even if some people may have voiced some criticisms in person. Although the main focus is again on the way in which Salverson portrays Icelanders and enhances their reputation along with her own in the field of Canadian literature, at least one of the reviews actually deals with the book itself (“When Sparrows Fall” 12 Nov. 1925). The Icelandic reviews are also among the very few the novel received on the whole; I have not been able to find a single review in the Canadian media, possibly because the book has an American rather than a Canadian setting.

After the reception of *When Sparrows Fall*, it does become a little more quiet around Salverson, but whenever she comes to Winnipeg the papers make mention of it. In 1927, *Lord of the Silver Dragon*, a novel that dealt with Leif Eiriksson and his voyage to North America, was published. This was, perhaps, a rather risky venture on Salverson’s part, because it constituted a move away from the contemporary scene to the historical, and she used the sagas, the “sacred texts” of the Icelanders on which their ethnic identity in Canada was largely based, as her source. As she explained to William Arthur Deacon, she did not want to “write sex stuff nor do a series of *Viking Hearts*” (Deacon 1988: 66). It had always been her desire to write historical novels:

I wanted to write about people in a framework of the past. For the past had jelled, as a moth in amber, and could be studied and interpreted within its particular pattern of fateful events. I wanted to write historical novels based on honest research, not slick yarns dubbed against a backdrop of garbled history. This may have been sheer vanity, or an infantile desire to identify myself with an heroic period; if so, the present gave me little quarter. (FSF 66)

With her contemporary subject-matter, Salverson had been able to move in practically virgin territory as far as Canadians were concerned, and she had been able to use Icelandic immigrant fiction as models. However, her tendency for verbosity, baroque language, and romance, earlier kept in check by her intimate knowledge of the reality of the immigrant experience, had free rein dealing with the past, and the result was not to everyone's taste.

The book was announced in *Lögberg* ("Úr bænum" 1 Dec. 1927), where it was praised for its design, but nothing could be said yet about the contents, for the editor had not had the chance to read it. No review ever appeared. It was reviewed fairly extensively in *Heimskringla* (14 Dec. 1927), however. The reviewer, one "L.F.," admits that Salverson has taken on a very difficult task, and is sorry to have to also admit she did not succeed: "Lord of the Silver Dragon' is a readable love story, but that is about all" ["Lord of the Silver Dragon' er læsileg ástarsaga; en þar með er líka mest sagt] (4). The review is quite fair in tone, stating that, in the main, the story remains true to the original as far as events are concerned. The reviewer also shows an understanding that in order to make the book sufficiently interesting to sell, the author had to "spice up" the skeleton saga narrative somewhat. The main objection is to the novel's style, which the reviewer admits is simply not to his personal taste, as it is too wordy and overstated.

Interestingly, the review is preceded by a note from the editor that reads:

Til þess að fyrirbyggja misskilning, vildi ég strax taka það fram, að eftirfylgjandi mat á skáldsögu Mrs. Salverson er persónulegt álit eingöngu, er fellur ekki endilega í faðma við álit blaðsins, þótt þetta sé skrifað að beiðni ritstjórans. Hann ber því ekki ekki ábyrgð á þeim skoðunum, er hér koma fram, fremur en hann sjálfur vill.

[In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I would like to state right here that the following evaluation of Mrs. Salverson's novel is purely a personal opinion, which is not necessarily embraced by the paper, although this has been written at the request of the editor. He therefore

does not bear any responsibility for the views presented here other than he himself is willing to assume.]

Obviously the editor is uncomfortable with the criticism uttered against the book, and even the reviewer feels he has to justify himself. This he does by saying that, since Salverson is the foremost of Icelandic authors in Canada who write in English and thus their main representative in the field of literature, she should be aware of her responsibility, especially in view of her choice of topic, which involves the portrayal of her Icelandic ancestors for an audience that is largely unfamiliar with the subject and so cannot tell fact from fiction. Although the reception in this case, then, is not really positive, the book is not ignored or even repudiated, and if opinion against Salverson's way of portraying Icelanders were widespread in the community, surely the reviewer and editor would not have thought it necessary to justify the criticism expressed.

After *Lord of the Silver Dragon*, however, Salverson does disappear from the pages of the Icelandic papers. Her next novel, *The Dove* (1933), also a historical novel, receives no mention at all, nor does *The Dark Weaver* (1937) initially, until it wins the Governor General's Award, of which brief mention is made on the front pages of both *Lögberg* ("Bókmentaverðlaun veitt" 10 Nov. 1938) and *Heimskringla* ("Bóka-vika" 9 Nov. 1938). There is also an interesting two-page article in *Baldursbrá*, the Icelandic children's journal edited by Jóhannesson. It discusses Salverson as an example of how one can succeed in making one's dreams come true with determination and hard work. Included in the article is the following passage:

Og hún var fátæk kona og þurfti að leggja mikið á sig miklar vökur og mikið erfiði, til þess að skrifa sögurnar sínar í hjáverkum frá öðrum störfum.

Og svo var stundum talað illa um sögurnar hennar og menn sögðu að þær væru gallaðar o.s.frv.

En þessi kona hélt áfram og lét ekkert og engan taka frá sér kjarkinn. Og ein sagan varð annari betri. ...

Og nú hefir þessi kona hitt á óskastundina. Hún fékk nýlega verðlaun, sem komið hafa út á árinu í þessu landi. Það er mikill heiður bæði fyrir konuna sjálfa og fyrir Íslendinga, af því hún er íslenzk. (Jóhannesson 17 Nov. 1938)

[And she was a poor woman and had to exert herself, sacrifice sleep and work very hard, to write her stories in her spare time from other jobs.

And sometimes people spoke badly of her stories, and said they were flawed and so on.

But this woman continued and let no-one rob her of her courage. And she improved with every story...

And now this woman has seen her dream come true. She recently received a prize which has been instated in Canada this year. It is a great honour both for the woman herself and for Icelanders as well, because she is Icelandic.]

Obviously, Jóhannesson thought Salverson had improved after her first publication, holding up her determination and achievements as an example for young Canadians of Icelandic descent. More importantly, however, we finally have a reference from someone other than Salverson herself that indeed some negative criticism had been circulating by word of mouth.

Salverson had not spent much time in Winnipeg during the years separating *The Lord* from *The Weaver*, and part of the reason that neither of her books published during those years was mentioned by the Icelandic papers may also have been that she had faded into the background. When she and her husband moved back to Winnipeg in 1939, with a Governor General's Award and a Gold Medal she received from the Institute of Arts and Letters in Paris for her next novel, *Black Lace* (1938), she was back in the spotlight. *Lögberg* welcomed the couple back on the front page with a photograph showing the caption: "We Icelanders may truly take pride in this Icelandic author" [Vér Íslendingar megum vissulega finna til metnaðar vegna þessarar íslenzku skáldkonu] (3 Aug. 1939).

After her return to Winnipeg, Salverson's activities are regular news items again, she is frequently invited as a guest speaker at festive occasions and community events, and her autobiography is eagerly awaited. Salverson herself, however, wrote to Lorne Pierce, her editor and confidant at Ryerson Press, on 27 October 1939:

Also, now that I am back amongst my own people I have made up my mind to salve their wounds. As a start I have promised to speak for them at a dinner and dance, Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>, which day celebrates Icelandic independence. If there are any books available by that time it might be a good idea to have them here. I feel sure that many Icelanders will buy this particular book if no other. (Correspondence box 7, f.7)

Salverson neglects to mention the ado the papers made about her return, and it does also seem rather curious that she would expect to salve any wounds with a book that tells the world about her repudiation by her own people. *Confessions*, which was very well received throughout the English-speaking

world,<sup>9</sup> is elaborately introduced in *Heimskringla*, including a quotation from the *London Times* review of the book (“P.M.P.” 13 Dec. 1939). Two weeks later, the paper announces a “Recital” by Salverson where she will, for the first time, discuss her own writing. The following statement is included:

Sigur eins Íslendinga ætti að vera sigur allra Íslendinga, og heiður og viðurkenning Mrs. Salverson er metnaðarspursmál og tilefni fyrir alla Íslendinga að gleðjast yfir, og ætti að vera hvöt fyrir aðra sem hafa skáldskapar gáfuna í sögu eða kvæði, að skrifa á hérlendu máli. (“Fjær og Nær” 27 Dec. 1939).

[The victory of one Icelander should be regarded as the victory of all Icelanders, and the honour and recognition Mrs. Salverson has received are a matter of honour and an occasion for all Icelanders to rejoice in, and should stimulate others with writing talents, in prose or in poetry, to write in English.]

No review proper of *Confessions* appears, however, and on 3 May 1940 Salverson writes to Lorne Pierce:

Some of my relatives are *furious* over the book. Imagine I said nothing about the *fine relations* & shouted off the rooftops that we were so sinfully poor! I didn't list & name all the Bishops, Lawyers, Knights & Goodness knows what—in fact I'm a bad egg & they'd like to tar me. (Correspondence box 8, f.2)

During her earlier-mentioned “Recital,” Salverson may have been faced with criticism from the audience. At the same time, however, it is worth noting the words “some” and “relatives”: it is, after all, not uncommon for autobiographies to run into emotional reactions from people represented there, and it seems rather naive of Salverson to have expected a unanimously positive reception of her particular version of the Icelandic immigrant era in North America.

If we look at the critical evaluation of Salverson's work in surveys of Icelandic-Canadian literature, a similar picture emerges. Stefán Einarsson does not include Salverson in his histories on Icelandic literature, although both the English (1957) and the Icelandic (1961) version contain a chapter on North American writers. This is, however, probably due to language: Salverson is not considered part of Icelandic literary history because she wrote in English. Einarsson does include Salverson in his surveys of Icelandic prose writers, and there we note an interesting difference between the English version (1948) and the Icelandic (1951). In the former, the tone is on the whole laudatory:

Salverson is praised for her achievement and described as generally successful at her writing. Einarsson agrees with the contemporary critical assessment of *The Viking Heart* as a “Canadian Epic,” although “[h]er imaginary and symbolic chapter may reveal some uncertainties about conditions in Iceland” (253). About *Lord of the Silver Dragon* Einarsson observes that, although it was well liked by the Norwegian Americans, it was “less so by her critical countrymen, still too near to the Saga to appreciate the romance. And it must be admitted that it is not one of her best” (254). *The Dove* he considers a “more successful romance,” and *The Dark Weaver* he calls “her best book.” Of *Black Lace* and *Confessions* he makes only brief mention. His conclusion is that Salverson is “a romantic,” in which she differs from Rølvaag and her ancestors, and that “[h]er failings, if any, are on the side of verbosity” (254).

In the Icelandic survey, Einarsson follows his original assessment in English, except he now describes what he considers her main failing as follows: “If there is anything to criticize about her style, it would be that she tends toward woman’s original weakness and becomes rather verbose” [Ef að skyldi fundið rithætti hennar, þá væri það helst, að henni hætti til að falla í erfðasynd kynsystra sinna og gerist heldur fjölorð] (37).<sup>10</sup> To his comparison of Salverson with Rølvaag and the writers of the sagas he now adds: “And therefore she is not quite the equal of these great tragic authors in strength and power” [Og þessvegna er hún heldur ekki jafnoki þessara miklu harmleikaskálda að styrk og krafti]. Although the differences are subtle, they do change the original laudatory tone, making Einarsson’s ultimate evaluation of her more dismissive. Richard Beck briefly discusses Salverson’s work in “Bókmentaiðja Íslendinga í Vesturheimi” (1928: 329–30), mentioning the praise she received in Canada for *The Viking Heart*, adding “which she generally deserves” [og á hún það yfirleitt skilið]. Brief sections on Salverson also appear in the histories of Icelanders in Canada by Will Kristjanson (1965) and Walter Lindal (1967), but they are descriptive summaries and do not contain a critical evaluation of her work.

A close examination of the Western Icelandic reception of Salverson and her work as it appeared in print thus does not substantiate Salverson’s statement in *Confessions* that she or her works have been “tacitly repudiated” by her own people. On the contrary, most of the reviews of her work were positive, and her contribution to Canadian literature was frequently praised. However, there are indications that the reception was not unproblematic. Some of Salverson’s books did not receive any attention at all, and, if we may believe the reviewer of *Lord of the Silver Dragon* in *Heimskringla*, who mentions that a custom had developed among reviewers to be silent rather

than scold [“venjan er sú, að láta fremur kyrrt liggja en ávíta”], then silence could be interpreted as a token of negative criticism. Indeed, viewed in this light, the statement made by Lárus Goodman, Salverson’s father, in one of his newspaper articles, that “[t]he silent contempt of our people for doggerel would be the best way to get rid of all worthless versifiers” takes on a whole new and painfully ironic dimension (28 Apr. 1904). In addition, many reviews were not serious critical evaluations of her work at all, but were mostly concerned with such non-literary matters as how her work represented and reflected on the reputation of the Icelanders, and often consisted of literal quotations from Canadian reviews. This of course is understandable from a sociological point of view: the Icelandic community in Canada was eager to prove its worth to the Canadian majority. However, the state of Canadian criticism at the time hardly provided a literary standard to go by: the general interest in Canadian literature, or any literature for that matter, was minimal, and those who did take an interest went to rather unfortunate lengths to boost it, so that practically any Canadian novel that did not violate existing taboos tended to be praised to excess.<sup>11</sup> Stephansson’s reaction when asked about his opinion on the novel certainly reflects this situation. Jóhannesson’s brief comment in his review of *The Dark Weaver* provides an indication that indeed there may also have been negative criticism of Salverson’s work that was not printed. However, as Lindal points out in his obituary for Salverson (Autumn 1970: 18), she certainly also entertained good relations with people in the Icelandic community, and even acted as a mentor for many budding artists of Icelandic descent, including Baldur Jónsson, Rev. Rúnolfur Fjølsted, and Rev. Robert Jack (letter to Laura Salverson, LGSP, box 1, file 4, 27 Jan. 1955).

What made Salverson use such strong words in *Confessions* and in her letters to Lorne Pierce leaves much to the power of interpretation. She may well have been frustrated and disappointed, even bitter, about the fact that she felt she never received serious recognition, but instead became caught up in a nationalist and ethnic struggle of identity construction and cultural self-validation. Her achievements in literature became important for symbolic reasons, and her works were praised on non-literary grounds. For someone with her background, brought up with great love and respect for literature in a community that boasted many who vigorously read and debated it, that must have been rather galling. In addition, attention to her work and career may not have proportionally translated into sales figures. When I asked George Jr., Salverson’s son, if he remembered how his mother felt about the reception of her works, he replied that she regretted that she

had never succeeded in writing a best-seller. In her correspondence with Lorne Pierce, she complained about the fact that the people who liked her works got them from the library (Correspondence box 8, f.2, 20 Apr. 1940), and she admitted to breaking down in tears when she received the royalties for *Confessions*: “three dollars and some cents.... It seemed a shoddy estimate of my life” (box 24, f.9, 21 July 1955). If Salverson felt she had not achieved recognition on either literary or commercial grounds, then her popularity must indeed have seemed rather empty.

The Icelandic community in North America constituted an important support structure with its traditional interest in writing and its ideological aspiration to make its most important cultural contribution to the new country in the literary field, but these ideological underpinnings also produced a climate in which literary achievement was judged largely on non-literary grounds. In addition, the social and cultural climate in Iceland that had supported widespread literary activity did not exist in Canada, and Salverson appears to have found it hard to sell her books in significant numbers, regardless of how much praise they received on symbolic grounds.

Laura Goodman Salverson, it would seem, was caught between a rock and a hard place. While her Icelandic background was her inspirational mainspring, it also harboured the main obstacles to the success and recognition she craved. It was a situation that must have been hard to accept, and until the day she died Salverson was haunted by the idea of her failure as a writer, an idea that also importantly informs her two autobiographies. After all, as she once explained to Lorne Pierce, it was the only part of her life that really mattered to her (box 25, f.6, 22 Jan. 1956). Although her representation of this sense of failure, clothed in a supposed repudiation of herself and her works by her own people, is not substantiated by the evidence as it exists today, it nevertheless constitutes important testimony to the complexities inherent in the relations between minority writers and their community audiences.

#### NOTES

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improvements.

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed discussion of the development of Icelandic immigrant literature see Neijmann (1997).

<sup>3</sup>In his account of the Versifiers Society in Winnipeg, the poet Guttormur J. Guttormsson quotes the reference of an Icelandic journalist to the Icelandic community in North America as the “Eldorado of Bad Poets” (Neijmann 1997: 106).

<sup>4</sup>Early reviews of the novel in the Icelandic weeklies include *Bíldfell*, “The Vikings Heart,” *Lögberg* 12 July 1923: 4; “The Viking Heart,” *Lögberg* 8 Nov. 1923: 4; P.J. Ísdal, “The Viking Heart,” *Heimskringla* 27 Feb. 1924: 2–3.

<sup>5</sup>He was, for example, one of the people responsible for the publication of the *Andvökur* collection of Stephansson’s poetry.

<sup>6</sup>Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson’s pacifist views and actions during the First World War are, together with Stephansson’s, subjected to criticism in *The Viking Heart*, as Guðsteins has demonstrated elsewhere, and his evaluation of the novel should be regarded in this light, if only to note that he is remarkably moderate and fair in his critique.

<sup>7</sup>The “trouble” most probably refers to a confrontation that appears to have arisen between Reeve and Salverson: Reeve wrote a laudatory review of *The Viking Heart* in the *The Calgary Albertan* (13 Nov. 1923), but then, in the following March issue of *The Canadian Bookman*, published “A Protest,” in which she accuses an author who remains unnamed, but is obviously Laura Goodman Salverson, of having paid a certain critic (Austin Bothwell, to whom *The Viking Heart* is dedicated) to publish favourable reviews of her novel (March 1924: 72). The accusation aroused great indignation, not least on Salverson’s part, and Reeve wrote a “Statement” in the May issue in which she withdrew her accusation, explaining that she had written the protest when “smarting under a sense of personal injury and hurt”: “I was a veteran author, and should have assisted and protected the new young writer coming with her first work, a brilliant production on which I had myself expended unstinted praise. I should not have allowed what I thought was an unkind and ungrateful act on her part toward me to have hurt me. Few of us can rise above our personalities” (May 1924: 118). The following issue contains a copy of a sworn affidavit from Bothwell that he had never been engaged by any author to write reviews (“Clears Mrs. Salverson” June 1924). For Salverson’s reaction to this event, see her letter to William Arthur Deacon (Deacon 1988: 40–41).

<sup>8</sup>Stephansson continued his comments as follows: “I cannot give you more details now, but if the old girl tells the truth about Laura, then that ‘lady’ surely is Lárus’ daughter! And some I can hardly doubt is true” [Ég get ekki sagt þér þetta nákvæmar nú, en segi ‘kella’ allt satt um Láru, þá er sú ‘frú’ víst Lárusdóttir! og sumt get ég ekki efað, að satt muni vera]. We can only speculate as to Stephansson’s and Reeve’s references to her temper, inherited from her father, and the role it may have played in the “unofficial”

reception of her work. Salverson herself made the following reference to her temper in a letter to Lorne Pierce: "I suppose the real facts of the case are that I'm a bit of a satirist with a tender heart, which as you know is a frightful combination. I long to slay people for their stupidities & find the steel edging my tongue & then I feel sorry for the poor fools & shut up. The same thing happens on paper." (Lorne Pierce Papers, Queen's University Archives, box 7, f.3, 25 Oct. [1938]). Nellie McClung wrote in a note to Dorothy Dumbrille: "Laura can write & has done very good work, but she has never been well, and she gets a bit edgy at times" (Dorothy Dumbrille papers, Queen's University Archives, box 1, f.11, 13 May n.y.). To be fair, McClung adds, "However, I will always admire her gallantry of spirit."

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, *Times Literary Supplement* 21 Oct. 1939: 610. Other enthusiastic reviews appeared in such papers as *The Dublin Sunday Independent* 10 Dec. 1939; *The Manchester Evening News* 10 Nov. 1939; *The Melbourne Australasian* 6 Jan. 1949; and *The Perthshire Constitutional* 2 Feb. 1940.

<sup>10</sup>This sexist observation reflects the added complication of gender in the reception of Salverson's work. This aspect has been more elaborately discussed by Wolf (1991; in an Icelandic-Canadian context) and Gerson (1990, 1991; in a larger Canadian context).

<sup>11</sup>There was also a small group of writers and academics at the time who did try to stay clear of the boosterism of the Canadian literary nationalists and attempted to draw attention to the sad state of the complete Canadian literary climate, including the lack of serious Canadian criticism, of which A.J.M. Klein's "Wanted: Canadian Criticism" is a classic example. However, this group consisted mostly of a higher-educated Anglo-Canadian elite, which hailed from Canada's heartland (Ontario and Québec) and was influenced by the modernist movement in Europe, a movement that was based in imperial centres with a long cultural history and that, arguably, was of little relevance to early twentieth-century Canadian social and cultural reality. Certainly a writer like Laura Salverson would have had little affinity with this movement or it with her, considering her ethnic background, regional affiliation and lack of higher education. See also Neijmann (1999).

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# Waging War on Three Feminist Fronts

## Ester Lindin's Campaign for Women's Emancipation in *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!*

FREDERICK HALE

ABSTRACT: Since the nineteenth century a substantial number of Swedish *littérateurs* have created fictional reconstructions of various aspects of the movement for women's liberation in their society. Most scholarly attention has been fixed on a small number of these authors, such as Fredrika Bremer. Among the overlooked writers is Ester Lindin, whose prize-winning first-person novel of 1940, *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!*, broke new ground by exploring the predicament of an unmarried female teacher in a rural parish who, as the consequence of a sexual involvement with the local pastor, becomes an unwed mother. In this debut novel, which provided the basis for a film with the same title, Lindin advocates the necessity of feminist solidarity in the realms of Christian spiritual life, employment, and romantic relationships with men. In the present article, her treatment of these issues is discussed in the context of Swedish social and religious history.

RÉSUMÉ: Depuis le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, un nombre relativement important de littérateurs suédois ont créé des reconstructions fictives de divers aspects du mouvement pour la libération des femmes dans leur société. Une grande partie de l'attention des chercheurs s'est concentrée sur un petit nombre de ces auteurs, tels que Frederika Bremer. Parmi les écrivaines négligées se trouve Ester Lindin, dont le roman lauréat de 1940, écrit à la première personne, *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!*, a innové en explorant la situation difficile d'une institutrice non mariée dans une paroisse rurale qui a des rapports sexuels avec le pasteur local et devient, par conséquent, fille-mère. Dans ce premier roman, qui a servi de base à un film du même nom, Lindin prône la nécessité de solidarité féministe dans les domaines de la vie spirituelle chrétienne, de l'emploi et des relations sentimentales avec les hommes. Dans le présent article, on discute sa façon de traiter ces questions dans le contexte de l'histoire sociale et religieuse de la Suède.

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In the annals of Swedish literary history one can point to many women, and, for that matter, a considerable number of men, since the time of Fredrika Bremer (1801–1865) who have waged verbal battles on behalf of female equality in society. They have fought for this dimension of modernization in many arenas, taking up the verbal cudgels for women's suffrage, equality of remuneration in employment, the formation of women's trade unions, the ordination of women in the Church of Sweden, and other causes. Few, however, have thrust their rapiers at more targets between the covers of a single novel than did Ester Lindin (1890–1991) in her first published fictional work, *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!*<sup>1</sup> This novel, which its author, then some two decades into a career as a primary school teacher in her native Norrköping, submitted in a competition for works about problems confronting working women in Sweden, was published concurrently in that country, Denmark, and Norway in 1940. Before the end of the 1940s it had also been translated into Dutch, Czech, Finnish, and German. Within months of its initial publication Swedish distributors had sold nearly 50,000 copies of Lindin's prize-winning book, whose frank (and, in the eyes of some critics, approving) discussion of extramarital sexual intimacy caused a minor public furore. Some reviewers used artistic touchstones to assay the novel and pointed out certain undeniable Achilles' heels in her text.<sup>2</sup> On the whole, however, critical judgment was positive with regard to its historic significance. Representative was the review by Margareta von Konow, then editor of *Hertha*, the monthly journal of the Fredrika-Bremer-Förbund, who found in *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* a ground-breaking fictional contribution to the Swedish women's movement. "Aldrig förr har väl den ensamboende lärarinns många olösta problem rullats upp så levande och övertygande som i denna bok" [Probably never before has the single teacher's many unsolved problems been presented so vividly and convincingly as in this book], declared this journalist, whose grasp of contemporary women's issues in Sweden may have been unsurpassed at that time. She further noted the breadth of Lindin's thematic palette and her captivating literary style: "Boken vimlar av aktuella problem och fyndiga iakttagelser, och man lägger den ej ifrån sig, förrän man slutat den sista sidan" [The book is teeming with current problems and keen observations, and one does not put it down before reaching the final page].<sup>3</sup> Capitalizing on the extensive public attention which the novel received, Film AB Lux promptly created a film with the same title, which premiered in Stockholm in December 1941 with Viveca Lindfors (1920–1995), then a newcomer to the silver screen, in the lead role, playing opposite the established Georg Rydeberg (1907–1983).

*Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* was not the only Swedish novel published in 1940 dealing with the struggles faced by a female rural schoolteacher. Several months earlier, critics had warmly received Harry Blomberg's *Hon hette Eva*, which deals with such an individual in northern Sweden many years earlier and as such is a markedly less tendentious piece than that at hand. Nor did Lindin's literary debut add a permanently influential volume to the canon of Swedish literature, although it was published several more times in Sweden during the next three decades. Perhaps because of preoccupation with the ravages of the Second World War and, subsequently, the evolution of what was becoming known as the "social welfare state," including many victories for the women's movement, Lindin's book faded into virtual oblivion in Sweden. One searches surveys of Swedish literary history in vain for more than the scantest mention of this once-controversial work. Moreover, Lindin's name is almost completely absent from the rich historiographical literature of the Swedish women's movement.<sup>4</sup> It is the purpose of the present article to take steps toward filling this *lacuna* in the scholarly literature by analyzing how in *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* Lindin sought to call attention to the need for Swedish women to close ranks in order to attain independence in matters concerning spirituality, employment, and romantic relationships with men.

Lindin's first-person narrator, Eva Örn, is a professionally and sexually unseasoned female teacher in her upper twenties from a city approximately an hour and a half by train from Stockholm that may well be Norrköping, who describes the first few years of her career as a primary school teacher in the fictitious Småland village of Vikarlunda during the mid-1930s. Eva's life up to this point has been economically deprived but emotionally secure, in part because of the fidelity and devotion of her no-nonsense parents. One blight on the family's pride, however, is her younger sister Karin's pregnancy as an unwed teenager, an incident that apparently has shamed and scarred their morally inflexible mother. Eva's transplantation from a protective, pietistic family in the urban working class to life in the fishbowl of an impoverished rural region where pietism is equally dominant proves emotionally challenging. She is compelled to live in a primitive room attached to the school in which she instructs children simultaneously in six grades. The first family with whom she comes into contact are the Perssons, against whose intensive pietism she immediately reacts and whose unmarried adult daughter, Helga, partially alienates her with her blunt manner of speaking. Shortly thereafter Eva meets the emphatically more sympathetic family of Knut and Greta Knutsson, who own the largest farm in the parish and who, in contrast to many of their

neighbours, are not latter-day manifestations of nineteenth-century Lutheran pietism. Living on a shoe-string, the lonely Eva becomes gradually romantically attracted to and emotionally dependent on this respected farmer, although their friendly and mutually respectful relationship never evolves into one of sexual intimacy. She also becomes acquainted with the village shopkeeper, Albert Sundström, a physically unappealing but financially secure bachelor who does not mask his interest in her and whose romantic relationship with her predecessor at the school, she is told, contributed to the decline of her mental health and to her necessary resignation. The introverted local pastor, Ingvar Hagson, has served Vikarlunda for two decades, but when Eva arrives there he is on leave completing a doctorate at the University of Lund. When he returns to the parish, the two gradually develop a friendship that quickly becomes a clandestine sexual relationship. In the meantime, a lay preacher has begun to hold revival meetings at the Perssons' home, where he temporarily resides during his one-man crusade and where he has befriended Helga. She conceals her resulting pregnancy and drowns the baby to whom she gives birth two months prematurely. Eventually her infanticide is somehow discovered; her conviction and ensuing one-year imprisonment in Växjö crush her shamed parents, who both die before she is released. Eva's careless and unprotected liaison with Hagson also brings about a pregnancy, although by the time the sexually naive young teacher understands her condition her relationship with him has essentially ended. In the meantime, this pastor's conscience has burdened him to the point that he has chosen to retreat into a quasi-reclusive existence in which he neglects some of his ministerial duties. He cannot deny his paternity when Eva eventually confronts him, but he refuses to marry her, choosing instead to leave the area after giving his erstwhile paramour 5,000 *kronor* and eliciting a promise from Knut Knutsson to assist Eva and the child. In his guilt and despair, Hagson commits suicide in Stockholm before his son is born. The headstrong young teacher defies what Lindin repeatedly refers to as "Almänna Opinionen" [Public Opinion] by remaining in her position through the second trimester of her pregnancy, after which she temporarily leaves Vikarlunda to enter a dreary and exploitative home for unwed mothers in Skåne. There her son, Christer, is born on 4 March 1937. Eva defiantly refuses to give him up for adoption and works for a few months as a housekeeper in Malmö before returning to Vikarlunda, where, to her pleasant surprise, many of the parishioners, especially women who confess that they had married under the duress of unplanned pregnancy, accept her, although in the eyes of others, especially the Perssons and Hagson's successor in the pulpit, she remains a pariah. Eva's own family of origin, particularly her

devoted mother, also accepts her, although she is not welcome to bring her son to her hometown. As an unwed mother, Eva rejects marriage proposals from Albert Sundström and an opportunity to give Christer to the bereaved Knutssons (whose only child has died) and accept either of two teaching posts elsewhere, choosing instead to remain in the locale where her son has his roots and where she strives to maintain her personal maternal dignity.

Underlying the challenges facing Eva throughout *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* is the legalism of Lutheran pietism in the tradition of Carl Olof Rosenius (1816–1868).<sup>5</sup> Lindin mentions by name, but does not identify, this key nineteenth-century figure in Swedish ecclesiastical history, a layman who, through his decades of evangelization, his rôle in founding the *Evangeliska fosterlandsstiftelse* in 1856, and his quarter-century at the editorial desk of the periodical *Pietisten*, exercised an almost unsurpassed influence on broad sections of the laity within the Church of Sweden. Rosenius's devotional book *Dagbetraktelsen* enjoyed immense popularity in several regions of Sweden until well into the twentieth century, and indeed that volume also crops up in Lindin's novel. From the outset, its strictures and its use for undergirding a conservative social order, not least with regard to the subordinate position of women in society, rub Lindin's quasi-liberated fur the wrong way. While a dinner guest at the Perssons' farm on her first day in Vikarlunda, the young teacher notices to her dismay that this volume, which she instantly recognizes from its place of prominence in her parents' home, is the centrepiece of that farm family's spiritual life. On a detached intellectual level the politically unengaged Eva respects *Dagbetraktelsen*: "Den är något för sig, ty den har tröstat tusenden som ingenting fått av denna världens goda och givit dem kraft att med ögonen fyllda av himmelens härlighet unna de andra gods, guld och livets glada dagar" [It is something remarkable, for it has consoled thousands who have not received any of this world's benefits and given them the power, with their eyes fixed on the glory of heaven, not to begrudge others their property, their gold, and their happy days of life] (16). After dinner Persson leads the family devotion by reading aloud the already antiquated Swedish translation of Colossians 3:18 ("I hustrur, varen edra män underdåniga, såsom tillbörligt är i Herren!") [Wives, obey your husbands, as is appropriate to the Lord!]) and Rosenius's commentary on this Pauline text, which opponents of gender equality had long marshalled as a weapon for countering the struggle for women's liberation. This reading sets the tone for that spiritually conservative family's subsequent relationship to Eva.

Despite the initial focus on male lay pietism, Lindin takes pains to emphasize that a judgmental attitude is not the exclusive domain of either

gender in Vikarlunda. After two years there, Eva generalizes about the married women in the parish, “De är litet inknipna i sig själva och sin egen förträffliga karaktär, lätta att påverka av predikanter, som kan sin sak, världsförnekande och dömande” [They are a little taken up with themselves and their own excellent character, easily influenced by preachers who know what they are doing, world-denying, and judgmental] (27).

Late in the plot her experiences confirm that this judgmental attitude is by no means limited to Vikarlunda. Hagson’s successor as the pastor of that parish, who has come from an island in the archipelago off the west coast of Sweden, and his wife never come to terms with Eva and, despite her prominent position as the local teacher, conspicuously refuse to invite her to the reception they arrange to meet their parishioners. The unwed mother defiantly invites herself and belatedly learns that the unwillingness to include her on the guest list was not merely the fault of her new pastor, who had turned to his bishop for advice in the matter: “Då hade biskopen svarat, att han efter moget övervägande kommit till den slutsatsen, att jag inte borde bjudas, ty jag kunde lätt bli en förgälselklippa i församlingen, då de flesta skulle minnas Ingvar Hagson, och deras själ skulle fyllas av misstro till kyrkans män på denna heliga dag” [Then the bishop had replied that after mature consideration he had decided that I should not be invited, as I easily could become a source of scandal in the church, because most would remember Ingvar Hagson, and their souls would be filled with mistrust of the men of the church on this holy day] (234). Again, the objective Gospel of forgiveness has been sacrificed on the altar of popular opinion in an intensely subjective, pietistic environment.

To the relatively well-educated Eva, not only pietism but also the simple-minded Biblical literalism of the local populace lies at the heart of their tendency to focus on individual sins rather than on grace and forgiveness. She herself is forced into this mould on one occasion when the pastor who is Hagson’s substitute during his study leave arrives without notice at the school to inspect her adroitness in religious education. “Eftersom det är bäst att hålla sig till bokstaven i Vikarlunda, delade jag upp mänskligheten i får och getter och predikade, att det finns onda och det finns goda, och de onda var getterna, som stod på vänstra sidan, men de goda var fåren, som stod på högra” [Since it is best to adhere to the letter in Vikarlunda, I divided humanity into sheep and goats and preached that there are good and bad people, that the bad ones were the goats, who stood to the left, while the good ones were the sheep, who stood to the right] (41) is her disingenuous way of meeting this challenge. Eva’s experiences in Vikarlunda were already enlightening her to the moral

ambiguities of its residents' behaviour and their never-ending *skenhelighet* [sanctimoniouness], observations that had convinced her of the untenability of a literal acceptance of the twofold sheep-and-goats model set forth in Matthew 25: 31–46.

To be sure, not all the Christians at Vikarlunda exercise their faith in the shadow of Rosenius. The Knutssons, among others, are moulded from more malleable religious clay, as is Ingvar Hagson, who, Lindin emphasizes, delivers a local lecture about the late Archbishop of Uppsala and pioneer in interfaith dialogue, Professor Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931), whose latitudinarian ecumenical spirit and respect for non-Christian religious traditions clashed with the exclusivist mentality of the pietists (129). Furthermore, in contrast to the supposedly dismal emphasis on judgment and personal moral strictures that were popularly associated with the faith of the pietists, Hagson proclaims a Christianity emphasizing divine love and forgiveness: “Det var ingenting alls av blod och sår. Han förde oss alla ... in i Kristi förlåtande famn och sade, att Herren Kristus tog emot oss med öppna armar och ett hjärta fyllt av kärlek” [There was nothing about blood and wounds. He led us all into the forgiving embrace of Christ and said that the Lord Christ accepted us with open arms and a heart full of love] (104). It is neither Hagson's theology nor his homiletical style, however, that attracts Eva to her pastor, but first and foremost her need for intimacy and his willingness to take the initiative in providing it. Knut Knutsson is also cut from a different bolt of spiritual cloth. “Jorden är hans evangelium och sängen hans predikstol” [The earth is his gospel and the bed his pulpit], she declares of this down-to-earth and sympathetic friend (30). Again, however, it is not his religious composition that Eva finds attractive in him, but his non-judgmental spirituality, which prevents him from becoming alienated from her.

Lindin emphasizes that the line of demarcation separating the holy from the sinful is indeed fuzzy in Vikarlunda, and that religious life and extramarital sexual relations are anything but mutually exclusive in that community. One can hardly overlook the fact that it is on a Sunday that Hagson visits Eva and readily seduces this morally compliant woman (132–133). Moreover, the seemingly pious Sundström's conduct toward Eva is at times lecherous, and even Knut Knutsson's support of Eva, though initially unselfish, eventually evolves into a proposal—which she declines—that the two enter into an adulterous relationship. The most blatant example of sexual misconduct by a religious figure, however, is the case of the itinerant evangelist Johannes, who not only impregnates Helga Persson but also attempts to exploit Eva during a disparagingly described revival meeting in the Persson farmhouse: he suggests

that “Djävulen är kvar!” [The Devil is still here!] when she alone remains sitting in a chair after he has demanded that all who are already saved should take to the floor (154–155).

Despite these disillusioning episodes and her candid narrative admission that she does not believe in the power of prayer (225), Eva retains some measure of respect for Christianity as such. She remains marginally active in the congregation at Vikarlunda and believes that the basic faith ostensibly imparted to Swedish children as religious education may have been a valuable dimension of the public school curriculum. “Eller har vi gjort dem en björntjänst, vi som minskat kristendomsundervisningen från sex till två timmar?” [Or have we done them a disservice, we who reduced Christian religious instruction from six to two hours?] she asks. Even Eva’s scepticism of the pietistic tradition that has proven so vexing in her life is qualified by the palpable support it has lent people in their personal tribulations. She quotes at length Rosenius’s consoling words about redemptive suffering and remembers their positive effect on two women in her life: “Jag vet, att Rosenius har räddat min mor, när bördorna blir för stora, och jag såg med egna ögon, att han räddade Helgas mor från undergång” [I know that Rosenius has saved my mother when her burdens have become too great, and I saw with my own eyes that he saved Helga’s mother from destruction] (180).

Throughout *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* Lindin argues that the subordination of women in the Swedish economy was also having ripple effects that lowered their self-esteem, allowed sexual exploitation, and contributed to a myriad of other woes. That this primary school teacher would focus on this theme is hardly surprising, of course, given the fact that her initial novel was written in response to an announced competition for works about working women in Sweden. Indeed, this work can be read *inter alia* as from cover to cover a cry of protest against male domination of economic, and hence social, relationships in that country during the 1930s. The aspects of the text that relate to this theme are fully in harmony with the main contours of the long-standing movement for women’s liberation in Scandinavia, and the economy that Lindin portrays is almost completely dominated by men.

That said, it should be emphasized that there is apparently a low ceiling on Eva’s thoughts concerning social and economic reforms. At no time does she advocate such socialistic measures as the nationalization of basic industries. Her family of origin is decidedly proletarian and inhabits a tiny apartment with exceedingly few material comforts. Nevertheless, Eva’s father, a watchman at a factory, votes conservative. When the unspoiled young teacher moves to Vikarlunda, she does not grouse about the modest living quarters that are

provided for her, although she wishes that they were better. It is in her narrative, not in her conversations with other characters, that Eva expresses her displeasure with the inadequate compensation she receives as a teacher. She muses that most people in Vikarlunda do not understand how she, as an unmarried woman without children to support, cannot readily make ends meet on her salary, the size of which they all know. Her principal financial burden is the need to repay the debt she incurred during her four years at a teachers' training college. On the other hand, Eva acknowledges that they realize that her income is modest and that from time to time the villagers therefore bring her food as a means of supplementing it *in natura* (37–38). Nevertheless, she looks forward to the implementation of the equality of salaries for primary school teachers statute, which the *Riksdag* passed in 1937.

Eva is keenly aware that her low economic status as a woman is not at all unique in Vikarlunda, where most people live in poverty. With few exceptions—such as Greta Knutsson and the wife of the pastor who succeeds Ingvar Hagson—the women of the parish are a downtrodden lot. This observation comes to the fore during the revival meeting at the Persson farmhouse: “De flesta hade ingenting av denna världens goda, det var torpare och statare och utslitna kvinnfolk med barn i stugan och barn under hjärtat, arbetsdjur på dagen och äktenskapsök på natten, modlösa, uttråkade, med en millionarmé av försakelser i hälarerna” [Most possessed none of this world's goods; they were cotters and farm labourers with children at home and on the way, draft animals by day and beasts of burden in marriage by night, dispirited and bored, with an army of a million privations at their heels] (153). The women of Vikarlunda have exacerbated their own lot by allowing themselves to become frozen in a seemingly immutable social hierarchy. In the absence of a pastor's wife, Greta Knutsson, as the spouse of a relatively wealthy farmer, is the “första fru i socknen” [First Lady of the parish], while Eva, as the local teacher, and the pastor's housekeeper and hostess also rank high in this pecking order. “Sedan kommer de andra kvinnor i en ordning, som är svår att förstå för den oinvidge, men ordning är det” [Then came the other women in an order that is difficult for the uninitiated to understand, but it was nevertheless an order], Lindin insists. “Det är bara lärarinnan, som slipper fram, och fröken Ekeberger [the housekeeper at the manse], som så att säga indirekt hör till den andliga ståndet” [It is only the teacher who is spared, and Miss Ekeberger, who so to speak belongs to the ecclesiastical class] (54). There is consequently a dearth of female solidarity in Vikarlunda, although Lindin does not exploit this aspect of local society to a noteworthy degree in her plot.

Instead, and in full harmony with the purpose of the competition to which she submitted *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!*, Lindin emphasizes through Eva's musings the vulnerability of young women whose incomes are inadequate to give them an appreciable measure of financial independence. Referring to her predecessor Anna Andersson's economic dependence on Sundström and the mental health problems that were an indirect consequence of that relationship of dependency, the poorly remunerated Eva reasons, "Det är förfärligt att dåliga kvinnolöner frambringat denna typ bland oss. Ty det är ingen skam att sälja sig för pengar genom ett giftermål. Unga kvinnor låter ju gubbar njuta av deras ungdom, prästen viger och samhället tiger och samtycker" [It is terrible that poor salaries for women produce this kind amongst us. For it is not a shame to sell oneself for money by marrying. Young women allow old men to enjoy their youth; the pastor marries them, and society remains silent and consents]. She does not pull any punches in declaring that public toleration of this is utterly lamentable, and she indirectly challenges other Swedish women to protest against it: "Det är handel med kvinnor i sin mest beslöjade form, men så länge mödrarna beställer brudklänningen till dottern i stället för att protestera, så länge är det inget att göra" [It is trafficking in women in its most veiled form, but so long as mothers order bridal dresses for their daughters instead of protesting, nothing can be done about it]. Her scepticism about modern marriage extends to her perception of her own future, which she believes will happily involve extramarital love: "Min kärlek måste vara friare och stoltare. Den skall inte ha något att göra med fördelar och pengar, med ärad ställning och frutitel. Den skall leva sitt eget liv, och den skall bära mig hän över vardagens Getsemane till mogenhet och livsansvar" [My love must be more free and more proud. It shall not have anything to do with advantages and money, with privilege and the title of "Mrs." It will live its own life, and it will carry me across the Gethsemane of everyday life to maturity and personal responsibility], insists this unmarried teacher (60).

Early on in Vikarlunda she experiences first-hand how her meagre income places her in a vulnerable position *vis-à-vis* Sundström. Before receiving her first pay cheque, she is forced to purchase food from him on credit. He makes his first romantic advance on that occasion by placing a hand on her knee. Eva observes that if she had paid for her purchases with cash, this unwelcome gesture probably would not have occurred (25).

Eva's other remunerative employment, brief though it is, gives Lindin a second opportunity to portray the niggardly conditions under which working women in Sweden toiled during the 1930s. When she answers an advertisement for a housekeeper in Malmö, this young mother discovers that her salary

is to be a mere twenty *kronor* per month in addition to a room in her employer's apartment. To earn this, Eva must prepare three meals daily as well as maintain his clothing and clean the dwelling. The weekly budget that he gives her to feed him, her son, and herself is a paltry fifteen *kronor*. This, of course, soon proves inadequate, despite her frugality, and contributes to her decision to leave that position sooner rather than later (214–217). One vital difference between Eva's situation in Vikarlunda and that in Malmö is that her miserly employer in the latter city does not attempt to exploit her economic vulnerability sexually, and in fact shows no interest in her as a woman whatsoever.

Relationships between men and women, especially those of a romantic sort, intersect with and naturally flow from these pervasive themes in *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* in Lindin's catalogue of feminist concerns. That romance and genuinely harmonious relations can exist between the sexes is in itself noteworthy in Lindin's fiction. Nowhere in *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* does she fully or systematically explain why she believes that an essentially antagonistic relationship exists between men and women, although this conviction unquestionably underlies her writing. After Eva one evening discovers an inebriated man lying on her doorstep and seeks help from the Perssons, she ponders "kvinnans urgamla skräck för mannen i blodet, mannen som är faran, underkastelsen och skammen" [woman's primeval fear of man in her blood, man who is danger, subordination and shame] (118). Apparently she considered that this hostility between the genders is an inherent trait in the human species, that it consequently permeates social life, and that where mutual respect and love exist they are little more than a veneer masking a darker reality.

Accordingly, before Eva launches her pedagogical career in Vikarlunda she has decided to influence the minds of her female pupils to be more self-reliant and concomitantly less dependent on men. She recalls that as a child the only secular book in her home was a volume titled *Arbetarens vän*, a volume to whose condescending image of girls she had reacted negatively:

När jag tänker på den berättelsen och på hundratals andra likadana, hetter det i mig. Det är lektyr för tusende och åter tusende unga flickor, som skall ut i världen och försörja sig själva. Är hon icke förtjusande dum, så är hon förtjusande vacker, och blir därför i hundratals historier gift med en greve eller en fin gammal man, som är rik nog att sätta henne i förgylld ram. Så framställles kvinnor i otaliga böcker och filmer. Hon är söt och rosig, och morgonrocken förhöjer hennes charm. Hon har vita händer och vackert hår, och hon begriper inte av sig själv att en liten gris blir en stor gris, om han får leva och ha hälsan.

I alla dessa söndagsskolberättelser kommer mannen som en räddande ängel. Han är alltid frisk och stark, utom när han måste bort från arenan för att unga frun skall få sin ungdoms älskade och fortsätta att leva på hans pengar, som han fått den stora glädjen att ge henne, innan han lade sig ned för att dö.

[When I think about that story and hundreds of others like it, I feel incensed. They are the reading material for thousands and thousands of young girls who have to go out into the world and provide for themselves. If she is not charmingly stupid, then she is charmingly beautiful, so in hundreds of stories she marries a count or a fine old man who is rich enough to mount her in a golden frame. She is sweet and rosy, and her dressing-gown only heightens her charm. She has white hands and beautiful hair, and she cannot understand that a piglet will become a big pig if it is allowed to live and enjoys good health.

In all of these Sunday school stories the man appears as a saviour. He is always healthy and strong, except when he must give up the ghost so that the young wife can get the beloved of her youth and continue to live on his money, which he has the great joy of giving her before he lies down to die.]

Eva vows that the books she will collect to form a school library in Vikarlunda will be of a different stripe and that they will promote a spirit of self-sufficiency among the girls there. The volumes to which she anticipates exposing her female pupils will give them “en bättre och säkrare väg: arbetets väg” [a better and more secure way: that of employment] (33–34).

It is particularly with regard to unplanned, extramarital pregnancies that the vulnerability of women stands out in bold relief in *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* Lindin’s treatment of this problematical phenomenon is only partially linked to her theme—and that of the competition from which she emerged victorious—of the difficulties confronting working women. Eva’s employment as a teacher is not secure; she is granted a leave of absence from her teaching post beginning some three months before she is to give birth, but she is able to resume her career in Vikarlunda only because some influential people, perhaps influenced by their knowledge that the respected and deceased Hagson is the father of her child, consent to her resuming her duties there. Lindin’s awareness that unwed maternity posed great challenges to women regardless of their employment status is indicated by her treatment of Eva’s younger sister, Karin, whose pregnancy as a teenager caused her family of origin considerable shame.

Any detailed assessment of this theme in Lindin’s first novel must be made against the backdrop of the state of reproductive policies in Sweden during the

1930s. A lengthy consideration of that subject obviously lies outside the parameters of the present article. It should be noted, however, that at the time that the plot of *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* unfolds Sweden was in some respects a country in which public sexual education was still in its infancy and access to means of birth control was legally limited. It is symptomatic of the state of affairs that then obtained that a law enacted in 1910 restricting the sale of condoms through the post was not abrogated until 1938. In the meantime, the Norwegian dentist Elise Ottesen-Jensen (1886–1973) had succeeded in 1933 in establishing the *Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning*, which—despite strong resistance in some quarters—propagated knowledge about birth control and venereal diseases. Its agitation was one factor that led Sweden to become in the 1950s the first country to make sexual education a mandatory component of its schools' curricula. That development, however, occurred in an era quite different from the one in which Eva Örn struggles with her sexuality. The RFSU did not open its first information office until 1939.

Indeed, seen from a later perspective, her naïveté, or in any case the superficiality of her understanding of matters concerning birth control and pregnancy, seems nearly incredible. Only after she has had intercourse with Hagson several times does this woman whose calling is to educate Swedish children even consider the possible consequences of their tryst. “Jag har glömt bort det, ty nog har jag hört det någon gång” [I had forgotten that, although at some point I had no doubt heard about it], she admits. “Jag har till och med hört, att det är mycket sannolikt, att man får barn, om man inte vidtager några särskilda försiktighetsmått, och de där försiktighetsmåtten är visst inte fullkomligt säkra de heller” [I had even heard that it is highly probable that one will fall pregnant if one does not take special precautions, and even those precautions are not completely safe], she recalls. “Som modern ung kvinna visste jag det, men jag hade glömt det” [As a modern young woman I had known that, but I had forgotten it] (146). Eva becomes pregnant in late May 1936 (169). Not until September, however, does she suspect that she is pregnant, and her suspicions do not arise from an observed irregularity in her menstrual cycle or other typical early signs, but from nocturnal movements of the foetus (184–185).<sup>6</sup>

Lindin rejects the stigma attached to pregnancy and maternity outside marriage, and she also suggests that extramarital sexual relations are not necessarily sinful. One root of her argument for the latter attitude lies in her belief that some such liaisons are actually an area in which men and women can be equal, notwithstanding her previously mentioned cognizance that economically disadvantaged women are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Eva's initially loving tryst with Hagson is not such a case, and accordingly the young teacher does not feel used, "ty givandet och tagandet var likvärdiga hos oss båda" [for the giving and the taking were equal for both of us]. Her positive personal attitude toward the surrendering of her virginity thus overrides whatever moral scruples her upbringing in a pietistic family may otherwise have given her: "Det var nyfött, daggfriskt och helgjutet. Men med ordet synd hade det ingenting gemensamt" [It was newborn, fresh as dew, and complete. It had nothing in common with the word "sin"] (135).

Lindin reiterates this point repeatedly and in so doing directly engages longstanding religious tradition in this debate. To be sure, she voices her position through Eva's thoughts during moments of sexual intimacy. "Var det möjligtvis inledningen till det vi nämner synd, när vi har kristendomslektion[?]" [Was it possibly the entré to that which we call sin when we have Christian religious instruction?] this teacher asks herself while lying in bed with Hagson. "Var det inledningen till något som de flesta förbinder med ordet synd? Är det särskilt denna synd som prästerna varnar oss för, när de predikar[?] Är detta synden över alla synder, när man inte är gift?" [Was it the entré to something that most people associate with the word "sin"? Is it especially this sin against which pastors warn us when they preach?] (134). In stark contrast to both Helga and Hagson, she subsequently feels little compunction about being pregnant without being married and, more surprisingly, reveals no regrets about engaging in sexual intercourse without taking any steps to prevent conception. With regard to what were still in popular parlance referred to as "oäkta" [illegitimate] children, not least in conservative rural parishes, Eva understands fully that there is no unanimity of attitudes in Sweden and that a variety of motives underlies popular condemnation of sexual relations between unmarried couples: "Den Allmänna Opinionsen fordrar våra skalper, även om Sveriges riksdag sagt ifrån på den punkten. De ogifta 'anständiga' fordrar den, eftersom vi tagit oss kärlek i hemlighet, och de gifta fordrar den, eftersom vi fuskat i deras rättigheter" [Public Opinion was after our scalps, even though the Swedish Parliament had ruled on that matter. Unmarried people demand it, because we have taken love in secret, and married people demand it, because we have cheated with their rights] (165). As she prepares to give birth to Christer, Eva resents the fact that her unwed maternity will compel her to bear a personal stigma, and she responds by thinking that "det är skandal att det är skandal, och många har lidit skeppsbrott genom det" [it is a scandal that it is a scandal, and many people have been ruined because of this], including some women who are economically and otherwise well-positioned to raise children (191). Possibly reflecting the fact that Lindin spent many years teaching children in a relatively poor section of

Norrköping, Eva observes that unwed maternity is not perceived with the same eyes by all of Sweden's social classes. "Eftersom de flesta proletärfamiljer har en liten skandalunge inom sina egna väggar eller, om de inte har den, snart får den, när spriten blir dyrare eller barnen slutat skolan, bryr de sig inte om snedsprången inom sin egen klass på samma sätt som medelklassen gör" [Since most proletarian families have a little scandal child in their own homes or, if they do not have one, will soon get one when liquor becomes more expensive and the children have left school, they do not care about moral lapses within their own class in the same way that the middle class does], Eva generalizes when her working-class neighbours in Malmö pay no special attention to her and Christer in the obvious absence of a husband and father (217).

Without significant allies, therefore, women have little hope of winning their struggle for equality and dignity unless they join hands in solidarity. In one of her most blatant homiletical intrusions, Lindin asks, "Varför står inte kvinnorna tillsammans som en kvinna och ropar ut över en galen värld, att mitt barn är like äkta som ditt barn och någon skam låder icke vid det[?]" [Why don't women stand united as one woman and cry out to a crazy world that my child is just as legitimate as your child and that there is no shame in that?] (192). But this unity, Eva learns to her bitter disappointment, is utterly lacking among the women of Vikarlunda and environs when she returns with Christer. Some accept her as she is, but support from her colleagues at other rural schools is nearly absent. Before going on maternity leave, Eva has befriended—if only superficially—three such teachers. Upon her return, one of them welcomes her warmly and wishes that she had come back sooner. This well-disposed and nearly indigent colleague, whose husband is chronically unemployed, thus reacts in accord with Eva's observations of the Swedish working class. The other two, however, will have nothing to do with the unwed mother. Precisely why they reject their erstwhile friend is not disclosed (223).

Lindin broaches one other aspect of unwed motherhood without integrating it carefully into her text, namely that of female titles. "Samhället har i dessa yttersta dagar byggt upp några få smala broar att balansera fram på för de ogifta mödrarna. De broarna heter barnavårdsnämnder och mödrahjälp, spädbarnshem och förlossningshem" [Society has in these most recent times built a few narrow bridges on which unwed mothers can cross. Those bridges are children's welfare agencies, maternal benefits, homes for infants, and maternity clinics], she reports gratefully. "Men så länge det finns två titlar som anger kvinnans förhållande till mannen, så länge är det en viktig bro som saknas" [But so long as there are two different titles that reflect women's

relationship to men, an important bridge is missing] (202). Eva repeatedly finds it burdensome to be referred to as “fröken Örn,” especially after she falls pregnant, and is relieved to be called “fru” in Malmö, where she is spared the humiliation that she suffers in Vikarlunda.

It is impossible to gauge what impact, if any, *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* made on either public policy or popular attitudes in Sweden. As literary art it is patently the work of an inexperienced author whose command of fictional technique did not match her burning desire to contribute to the women’s movement there. One might add that the film that it inspired and that appeared with the same title a year after the novel did not receive many critical accolades, chiefly because reviewers found the dialogue in its script quite banal, although some lauded Vivica Lindfors’s dynamic performance as Eva Örn. Yet in the context of the Swedish women’s movement Lindin’s first novel is a bold and assertive work, which one critic thought echoed Fredrika Bremer, Ellen Key, Kata Dalström, and Frida Stéenhoff.<sup>7</sup> In any case, *Tänk, om jag gifter mig med prästen!* is an expression of its time. In it women’s issues of the 1930s stand out in bold relief, and as such it is a book in whose lode both literary and social historians can find paydirt.<sup>8</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>All page references in the present article are to the edition published by Stockholm, Kometförlaget, 1968.

<sup>2</sup>See, for instance, H. S\_\_\_\_m, “Feministiska fantasier,” *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts-tidning*, 6 September 1940; Ragnar Ekman, “Tänk om jag gifter mig med prästen!” *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 5 September 1940; Martin Rogberg, “Kvinnokrav,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, 5 September 1940; Herbert Grevenius, “Fröken skall ha ett barn,” *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 5 September 1940.

<sup>3</sup>“Böcker,” *Hertha*, 27, 12 (December 1940): 246–247.

<sup>4</sup>Among the most useful synoptical works in the sub-genre are Alice Lyttkens, *Kvinnan finner en fölslagare. Den svenska kvinnans historia från forntid till 1700-tal* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers boktryckeri, 1973), Alice Lyttkens, *Kvinnan börjar vakna. Den svenska kvinnans historia från 1700 till 1840-talet* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers boktryckeri, 1974), Alice Lyttkens, *Kvinnan söker sin väg. Den svenska kvinnans historia från liberalismen till vår tid* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers boktryckeri, 1974), Gunnar Qvist, *Kvinnofrågan i Sverige 1809–1846. Studier rörande kvinnans näringsfrihet inom de borgerliga yrkena* (Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1960), Brita Åkerman, et al., *Vi kan, vi behövs!—kvinnorna går samman i egna föreningar* (Stockholm: Förlaget Akademilitteratur AB, 1983).

<sup>5</sup>Sven Lodin, *C.O. Rosenius. Hans liv och gärning* (Uppsala: Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsens Bokförlag, 1956) remains a reliable synopsis.

<sup>6</sup>This calls into question how well Lindin, who is not known ever to have been pregnant, was informed about pregnancy in 1940. Foetal movements in an initial pregnancy are generally not perceptible until approximately twenty weeks after conception.

<sup>7</sup>Rogberg, "Kvinnokrav"; see note 2 above.

<sup>8</sup>I wish to express my gratitude to Ms. Marita Tydén of Libris in Örebro for indispensable textual assistance while I was conducting the research for the present article.



# The Altered Forms of the Idea of Community in Contemporary Finnish Poetry

SELJA PADDON

**ABSTRACT:** The contemporary phenomenon of a fragmented self and a lost sense of community in its traditional sense can, on one level, be seen by some to affirm the absence of God, stability, and homogeneity. That does not mean, however, that the concept or idea of community, for example, no longer exists. Rather, when searching for it, we find it has attained new modes of expression in poetry while in the process it has stretched discursive boundaries. By exploring the contemporary writing of the Finnish poets Rakel Liehu and Tua Forsström, this paper aims to establish the ways in which the concepts of God, community, and communality in general are “reborn” as part of late modernism or postmodernism.

**RÉSUMÉ:** Le phénomène contemporain de la fragmentation du moi ainsi que de la perte du sens de la communauté dans son sens traditionnel témoignerait, selon certains, à un certain niveau, de l'absence de Dieu, de stabilité et d'homogénéité. Cela ne veut pas dire, cependant, que le concept ou l'idée de la communauté n'existe plus. A force de chercher cette idée nous constatons qu'elle a atteint de nouveaux modes d'expression dans la poésie et qu'au cours de ce processus elle a étendu les limites du discours. Cet article explore l'œuvre contemporaine des poètes finlandaises Rakel Liehu et Tua Forsström pour tenter d'établir les façons dont les concepts de Dieu, de communauté et de la vie collective en général “renaissent” dans le cadre du modernisme tardif ou du postmodernisme.

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The journal *Yliopisto* [University], published by the University of Helsinki, carried a critique of postmodernism that the author, Seija Kemppi, appropriately enough turns into a pastiche of quotes. Among her sources Kemppi quotes Pertti Karkama, a well-known scholar of Finnish literature. Karkama is said to decry the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of postmodernism, claiming that postmodernists have no God, no sense of responsibility, and no ethics. They are merely anxiety-ridden, fragmented, objective beings. To elaborate on the idea of the absence of a sense of responsibility, Karkama goes on to say that when people happen to have done something insane, they simply say, “I didn’t want this to happen,” the inference being that things happen to them at moments when they don’t even know what they want.<sup>1</sup>

Karkama, who is certainly not alone, but a representative of a particular school of thought, paints a bleak, if not threatening, picture of postmodern humans as societal beings. In fact, if we consider the ontological shift from modernism to late modernism or postmodernism, we are faced with the question whether the idea of society itself is now dead (in the sense that Nietzsche proclaimed God dead) or an impossibility among humans with a fragmented sense of self, humans who lack spirituality and a sense of responsibility. Given that one of the dictionary definitions of society is “an ordered community,” logic dictates that the maligned contemporary “society” is an equally maligned community; moreover, what makes a contemporary human being a dysfunctional societal being makes him or her an equally dysfunctional communal being.

If we leave aside the most obvious fallacy in the claim I have quoted above, and acknowledge that there is no one specific postmodernism any more than there ever was one specific modernism, we know that “the modern human being” was not welcomed with open arms either. The intellectual battles and critique that followed the identification of a “modern being” are well recorded. Further, we know that “the modern human being” was hardly the moral standard-bearer whose ethics and spirituality contemporary human beings have now supposedly abandoned at their peril. What *has* happened then?

Before I attempt to answer the question, I would like to emphasize that this paper is not a study of an era and its manifestations; its aim is much narrower. I will be focussing on the idea of community, and the way the concept is portrayed in contemporary Finnish poetry in particular. To put it in other words, I shall try to establish whether the idea itself has any currency any longer, or is doomed, absent, and seen as lacking relevance or significance. Similarly, I hope

to show the presence or absence of God in the poetry. To that end, I shall be looking at selective yet representative examples of the work of Rakel Liehu, who writes in Finnish, and Tua Forsström, who writes in Finland-Swedish.

Charles Altieri argues that the most significant contemporary poetry is being written by “poets who make the conditions of speaking their central thematic concern” (1984: 18). If we accept Altieri’s thesis, one of the main concerns of speaking surely has to do with an audience, the ones who are spoken to, the community of readers, whose participation in the process of meaning-making functions at varying levels of passivity or activity, depending, in large measure, on the form a given poetry takes. In the case of the so-called “language-centred” poets, among whom Rakel Liehu belongs, the general perception is of a specialized audience that allows a degree of experimentation that is considered intolerable in most lyric poetry aimed at a larger and more general audience. In Liehu’s critically acclaimed collection entitled *cubisms* she abandons the idea of a definitive structure of language; therefore her writing not only requires a shift in reader consciousness, but, more importantly, it invokes and gives importance to an interactive role played by her readers, who are called upon to complete the meaning. Liehu writes,

Mutta tänä aamuna jasmiinit  
kuin tuoksuvat kellot

Tuhannet tuoksuvat kellot,  
voisivatko  
tuoksuvat verbit kuin  
läikkyvä ilo

voisivatko  
olla muuta  
kuin maailmamme huojuvin  
mitta— (1992: 32: 6–15)

[But this morning jasmines  
like aromatic bells

Thousands of aromatic bells,  
could they  
aromatic verbs like  
a surging joy

could they  
 be anything else  
 but the most wavering measure  
 of our world—] (1999: 31: 6–15)

Liehu's writing amounts to improvisation upon language itself. She employs repetition, for example, but with a difference, applicable, in this case, to the word "aromatic" as well as the question "could they[?]." The adjective "aromatic" is first applied conventionally to flowers and subsequently unconventionally to words themselves, to the verb "surging" in particular; the same word is employed and returned as a difference. While the reader is called upon to fill in (or not) the grammatical and semantic gaps in her lines, s/he is also asked to become engaged with the problems and potentialities of language, to ponder the age-old question concerning its sufficiency, the sufficiency of words as a measure of our world. Significantly, then, the inclusive word "our" speaks to a community of readers invited to share not only the speaker's experience involving the senses, but the philosophical contemplation of the limits of language. Thus the interpretation of contemporary poetry as something in which nothing is at stake beyond the mere observation of life as a relativistic chaos is refuted in Liehu's lines. In fact, much is at stake, as the lines confront one of the most profound questions about life: do we have a language sufficient for the articulation of our world, and if not, what is the significance of its lack? Whether or not an answer exists is beside the point; what matters is the fact that the question continues to preoccupy poets as it always has. Moreover, Liehu's lines show us that, at the outset, both writing and reading are larger affairs, certainly, than our narrow notions of "communication" allow, and that, as part of contemporary dialogue between an author and an audience, they embrace a vast community of people rather than a mere fragmented self-serving narrator/subject.

In a fragment of another poem, Liehu, rather than abandoning the idea of human community, expresses concern also voiced in times past: are we perceptive enough of, or close enough to, our fellow human beings? Thus her contemporary lines reiterate Albert Camus's modern dictum that man is incomprehensible to man if no common value is found in each one. Liehu writes:

Me synnyimme—  
 olemmeko yhteydessä?

...  
 Me jotka—unohtaisinko—  
 synnyimme  
 (suutelemaan, sadattelemaan) (1992: 18: 2–3, 12–14)

[We were born—  
 are we in touch?

...  
 We who—would I forget?—  
 were born  
 (to kiss, to curse)] (1999: 19: 2–3, 13–15)

In postmodern terms, Liehu's expression suggests a change from the phenomenological dichotomy "appearance versus reality" to the post-phenomenological dialectic of "appearance versus disappearance." In the former the observable presentation of character in writing became an index of implications, that is, how we judged and read the inner lives of characters; in the latter, the character never is, but is *about-to-be*, the identity is endlessly probed, problematized, and deferred (Docherty 1996: 36–37); hence the question "are we in touch?": are we capable of recognizing a common element in each other? Although the answer may well escape us, Liehu's lines remind us that that is no justification for thinking that the idea itself no longer has any validity.

Since, in Lyotard's terms, consensus, which functioned as evidence of communal expression, has become an outmoded and suspect value (Lyotard 1988: 66), contemporary poetry often suggests a stance that does not depend on consensus, yet functions inclusive of all in a community. One might think along the lines of the street philosophy expressed in hip-hop: "You take your stereotypes, I take mine" (Potter 1995: 9). Tua Forsström's writing, which progresses vertically rather than linearly while employing conventional, rather than experimental sentence structures, speaks of a communality that works on a new and different level. To cite a fragment:

Man simmar aldrig ut i samma vatten  
 I ljuset väntar natten strax därunder  
 Man faller som ett löv genom rymden  
 av sekunder, en vind blåser  
 mörker mot din kind (1987: 7: 1–5)

[One never swims out into the same water  
 In the light night waits immediately below  
 One falls like a leaf through the space  
 of seconds, a wind blows  
 darkness against your cheek] (1990: 7: 1–5)

Aside from the obvious allusion to Heraclitus at the opening of the poem, which in the original Swedish version, “Man simmar aldrig ut i samma vatten,” is perhaps even clearer, taken together the lines speak of a world that is aporic and fragmented, where even “in the light, night waits immediately below.” Although life is an unstructured free-fall, like a leaf falling, there is an underlying suggestion that this is not a unique, isolated happening. Subsequently, the centre shifts from the unspecific “one” to the familiar, lyrical “you,” the second person subject reconstructed from its part, “your cheek” against darkness. Here it is possible to talk about a post-apocalyptic world that, rather than yearning, nostalgically, for a return to a world that used to be perceived as whole, simply acknowledges through an underlying communality between “one” and “you” that “this is the way things are.”

Forsström expresses the same ideas perhaps more clearly in a poem entitled “There is always a bit left over”:

I utsikten här med grönskuggat vatten, vassen  
 skuggad av träden, gytjtjan, syrsorna ...  
 Man måste ha en Bild at hålla kvar.  
 En håv med granna fiskar, en kvarglömd  
 bok in gräset att bläddras i  
 av vinden. En björn som dansar.  
 Man måste hålla upp sin Bild  
 emot det underjordiska dånet.  
 ...  
 I tidningen har jämnåriga börjat dö,  
 ...  
 Ack vilket fusk, Mr. Livingstone!  
 Man skriver på sin vägg: “De måste visa att  
 de varit narrar och bedrövade som vi” (1987: 27: 2–9, 13, 15–17)

[In the view here of green-shadowed water, reeds  
 shadowed by trees, the mud, the crickets ...  
 One must have an Image to retain.

A net of gaudy fishes, a forgotten  
 book in the grass for the wind  
 to leaf through. A dancing bear.  
 One must hold up one's Image  
 against the subterranean thunder.

...

In the newspaper contemporaries have begun to die,

...

Oh what cheating, Mr. Livingstone!

One writes on one's wall: "They must show that  
 they have been fools and were as miserable as we are"] (1990: 26: 2-9, 13,  
 15-17).

Here the idea of a community of human beings carries a historical dimension, as Mr. Livingstone, metonymically, becomes the signifier for a long-vanished era and the world of beliefs and values for which he stood.

Retrospectively, and while the lines speak of a paradigmatic instance of a contest between "then and now," Forsström's narrator appears to argue that people have been/are the same, only the expressions of belief have shifted and new contending voices have emerged; hence it is a question of a difference in stance rather than substance. "Livingstone," who in English language culture is referred to as Dr. rather than Mr. Livingstone, becomes in the poem what Roland Barthes calls the "connotative signified," where a number of images overlap in the reader's consciousness, in this case Dr. Livingstone the man, his life's work, and his era.

It is the spectacularized Image, however, that becomes the ultimate gatherer of a fragmented world. In imagining Dr. Livingstone with Africa in the background we are dealing with a kind of cinematism, where the image hovers between the descriptively itemized parts of the landscape and the all-gathering idea of a photographic "still" to be retained. Broadly speaking, we might see it in terms of visual art as a clash between the modern that describes the work and the postmodern that describes the event of seeing the work, the image as an event. In both cases the compositional parts are the same. The image functions as the retainable evidence of experience in the midst of chaos, or, in Forsström's words, "against the subterranean thunder."

The Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer perhaps expresses the idea best when he writes,

Det händer men sällan  
 att en av oss verkligen *ser* den andre:  
 ett ögonblick visar sig en människa  
 som på ett fotografi men klarare  
 och i bakgrunden  
 någonting som är större än hans skugga. (1980: 51: 27–28, 52: 1–4)

[It is so seldom  
 that one of us truly *sees* the other:

for a fraction of a second as in a photograph  
 a man appears but sharper  
 and behind him  
 something that is bigger than his shadow.] (1980: 30:11–16)

In Tranströmer's lines, as in the ones by Forsström and Liehu, the problem is not our unawareness of, or lack of kinship with, our fellow human beings; rather, we appear to share a lamentably limited ability to "see" each other, a tendency to observe merely the obvious. Yet, Forsström also writes,

Ja, det finns en lysande punkt  
 någonstans för oss alla där  
 trasor och masker faller.  
 ...  
 Där är vi öga i öga,  
 aska i regn. (1987: 25: 8–10, 13–14)

[Yes, there is a glowing point  
 somewhere for us all where  
 rags and masks fall.  
 ...  
 There we are eye against eye,  
 ashes against rain.] (1990: 24: 9–11, 14–15)

Thus she is suggesting that a moment will come when in our nakedness we are part of a community of equals.

In studying the ontological as well as the discursive shifts from modernism to late modernism and postmodernism, we are reminded of the fact that we work with claims made under the auspices of "Western"

aesthetics, which presumes the possibility of “correct” and “accurate” reception. Hence we are dealing with relations of power that with apparent ease deem any differences as incursions against stability and homogeneity. Nowhere is this situation more obvious than in the highly emotional ideas concerning God, good, and evil. In Liehu’s poetics, her lines call into question what has been a conventional approach, for instance, to blame. In a poem in which the setting is a café, we “listen in” on an exchange of opinions:

“Theodikea?” sinä kysyt

“Mutta ehkä puhe kärsimyksestä ja oikeudenmukaisuudesta”

...

“ehkä sellainen puhe on turha—

Voihan jumala olla esimerkiksi lapsi

Vain se on varmaa että kaikki sanat ovat auringon—” (1992: 19: 17, 18, 21–23)

[Of Theodicy?” you ask

“But perhaps talk about suffering and justice”

...

“perhaps such talk is in vain—

God could, after all, be for instance a child

The only thing certain is that all words belong to the sun—”] (1999: 20: 17–18, 21–24)

Thus, anti-postmodernist claims to the contrary, we are not encountering here the absence of God, but poetics that expand and frame new questions about power relations between the divine and the human. To intellectualize the matter comes to naught since, as Liehu points out, in the end we are left with only one certainty: without the sun there is no life, no language.

When we search for a precursor for Liehu, Emily Dickinson immediately comes to mind. Dickinson wrote,

We pray—to Heaven  
 We prate—of Heaven—  
 Relate—when Neighbors die—  
 At what o'clock to Heaven—they fled—  
 Who saw them—Wherefore fly? (1960: 235: 1–5 [poem no. 489])<sup>2</sup>

Both poets fracture the syntax of their lines, although Liehu, with her postmodern expression, stretches the borders of language more radically than Dickinson does. They do so not only as a poetic strategy, but as an emblem of their subject positions as women in a world continuously split by numerous polarities, among them self and other, and transcendence and immanence. Significantly, however, the core emphasis on Divinity and an awareness of being part of the community of humans remains.

Forsström, in turn, in her short poem “The Fieldmouse’s Prayer,” toys with the aspect of relativism in nature’s hierarchy, which is momentarily invoked and dissolved following the dictates of poetic necessity:

Fader, i Din sommars blåsande grönska,  
 Fader, i Din sommars oändligt gröna valv:  
 Hjälp mig at hinna ner in diket när Dina  
 utvalda närmar sig på vägen. (1987: 20: 1–4)

[Father, in the blowing greenery of Your summer,  
 Father, in the endlessly green vault of Your summer:  
 Help me to get down into the ditch when Your  
 elect draw near along the road.] (1990: 20: 1–4)

In the original version, the last two lines, “Hjälp mig att hinna ner i diket när Dina / utvalda närmar sig på vägen,” suggest somewhat more emphatically than the translation does the discrepancy of power between human beings and nature’s small defenseless creatures; the mouse pointedly (and one might say with a sense of irony) insists that humans are God’s chosen creatures, but not necessarily “the elect” in the eyes of other living creatures. We see Forsström’s poem lending itself to both serious and humorous reading as it breaks up the traditionally unquestioned hierarchical order in nature and identity becomes dependent on the context in which it is viewed. Although a certain coherence and structure remain, as well as the concept of an all-powerful Father, nothing is structured definitively; rather, the answer depends on how the question is formulated and from whose point of view. Once again,

then, we are dealing with a shift in the stance from a single and linear to a multiple view rather than the theological substance of the poem.

To conclude what by necessity is much too brief a look at an enormously large and complex question, I suggest, given that the contemporary or postmodern act of “creation,” while refusing fixed or progressive models of time, is based more on a reshuffling and collaging of what has gone on before than on “original” (a highly suspect word) creative thoughts and hitherto unknown concepts, it is logical to argue, as I have already suggested above, that the difference is in stance rather than substance. Moreover, because in the flux of time change is inevitable, familiar concepts take on a renewed or altered significance. The point is not that we have no God—God cannot be “had”; indeed, the search for Him goes on. As for what constitutes a human community, ideas on the subject rise and fall like the tides, but the claim that postmodernism constitutes mere sloppy relativism and nihilism is not only inaccurate but caricaturist. Here I shall let Tua Forsström have the final words:

O själens skavsår! Hjärtats  
brännblåsor! Armar om axlarna, ljusklädda  
vänner, fnittra i sena kvällen  
på gruset under kastanjerna  
Det tar tid att lära sig något.  
I blåsten en dunst av insjö, vattenväxter  
Vad du såg idag har ingen sett  
och du minns, eller glömmet.  
Men anslaget är kvar. (1987: 28: 6–14)

[O gall-sores of the soul! The heart's  
blisters! Arms around shoulders, bright-clad  
friends, giggling in the late evening  
on the gravel under the chestnut trees  
It takes time to learn something.  
In the wind a vapour of lakes and waterweed  
What you saw today no one has seen  
and you will remember, or forget.  
But the first chord remains.] (1990: 27: 1–9)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For further discussion of the subject, see Kemppi 1994. According to Karkama and Kemppi, the essence of postmodernism is the death of the individual, hence, of necessity, the death of community as a conglomerate of individuals.

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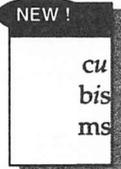
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## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Fred Karlsson. *Finnish: An Essential Grammar*. Translated by Andrew Chesterman. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 268 pages.

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Review Article by John Dingley  
York University

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KARLSSON TELLS US IN THE PREFACE to his book that "*Finnish: An Essential Grammar* is a slightly modified version of the book *Finnish Grammar* published by WSOY in Helsinki in 1983.... *Finnish Grammar* was a translation of the Finnish book *Suomen peruskielioppi* published in 1982. The original Swedish edition *Finsk grammatik* appeared in 1978." This then is the background to *Finnish: An Essential Grammar* (henceforth: *FES*). My first point, as one very well acquainted with the 1987 reprint of the 1983 *Finnish Grammar*, is that the modifications made to that version for *FES* are very slight indeed. Structurally the two books are identical, with just a few examples of specific points differing here and there. I note that *FES* omits the

very useful select Bibliography which appeared at the end of the 1983 version, which is unfortunate. I felt the lack of the Finnish alphabet replete with names in the 1983 book and, sadly, *FES* does not include it either. Something new to *FES*, however, is the inclusion of a number of URLs for web sites containing relevant information, which will prove most useful. Also in the Preface Karlsson thanks profusely Andrew Chesterman, who translated and adapted Karlsson's original work for the English-speaker. These thanks are most apt, for both Chesterman's translation and his adaptation are the work of a true professional. He does not put a foot wrong.

*FES* comprises twenty-two chapters, plus an Appendix (giving inflectional tables) and a Subject Index. The first chapter gives some basic information about Finland and the Finnish language, which is all accurate. Chapter Two is devoted to Pronunciation and Word Structure. Since Finnish has a near complete one-for-one correspondence between orthography and pronunciation, *FES* does not need to go into any linguistic niceties. The basics, e.g. long and short vowels and consonants, non-aspirated *p*, *t*, *k*, initial stress, diphthongs, etc., are all dealt with ade-

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quately. I do, however, take issue with *FES*'s treatment of Vowel Harmony (16–17). At the bottom of page 16, we have the following: "If the stem contains one or more of the vowels *u, o, a*, the ending also has to have a back vowel (*u, o, a*). If the stem has no back vowels, the ending also has to have a front vowel (*y, ö, ä*)." Although it is not explicitly spelt out, one assumes that *i* and *e* are subsumed under "no back vowels" and that they would therefore pattern with *y, ö, ä*. The truth of the matter is that *i* and *e* sometimes pattern with *y, ö, ä*, and sometimes with *u, o, a*. For instance, *mennä* ("to go") but *meno* ("the going"). This leads on occasion to minimal pairs, e.g. *silta* ("bridge") ~ *siltä* ("it, that," ablative sg), and *kelta* ("the colour yellow") ~ *keltä* ("who," ablative sg). Sometimes a certain word will permit both harmonies, e.g. both *hiljempaa* and *hiljempää* ("quieter," partitive sg) are possible. Even the diphthongs *ei* and *ie* can occur with both harmonies, e.g. *leipä* ("bread") but *keikka* ("gig" [of a band]), and *lieska* ("big flame") but *liettä* ("cooker, stove," partitive sg). In two instances the harmony even switches within the paradigm, i.e. *veri* ("blood") and *meri* ("sea"), which have front harmony everywhere, except for the partitive sg, which has back harmony, i.e. *veressä* (inessive sg) but *verta* (partitive

sg), and similarly *merestä* (relative sg.) but *merta* (partitive sg). *FES* does in fact indicate on page 48 (in the section on the Declension of Nominals) and then again on page 77 (in the section on the Partitive) that something untoward is happening with *verta* and *merta*. On page 48 to both forms have been appended (Note: *-ta*) and on page 77 *FES* designates them with an exclamation mark. However, since, in both instances, *FES* only gives *veri* : *verta* and *meri* : *merta*, there is really nothing to comment on, for, given this evidence alone, both *verta* and *merta* are forms which could be expected. It is only when one views them against the backdrop of the whole paradigm that one sees their exceptional nature. To muddy the waters yet more, the forms *vertä* and *mertä* occur frequently in dialects.

On page 41, in the section entitled Two Important Sound Alternations, there is some confusion regarding *päärynä* ("pear") and the fact that *ä* changes to *ö* before the pl *i* marker, e.g. *päärynöissä* (inessive pl). *FES* states (ibid.) that "in some three-syllable nouns *-ä* changes in the plural to *-ö* when the only vowel of the preceding syllable is *i* ...." Cited are *kynttilä* ("candle"), *kynttilöitä* (partitive pl), *tekijä* ("maker"), *tekijöitä* (partitive pl), and then *päärynä* ("pear"), *päärynöissä* (inessive pl). Clearly *päärynä* does not fit

this rule, since the vowel in question is *y* and not *i*. Actually, *FES* treats this phenomenon better on page 81, in the section on the Partitive, to which I shall come in due course.

In the chapter on the Declension of Nominals I would suggest two points could be more fully stated and exemplified. First, on page 48, for the rule which drops *e* before the partitive sg ending *-ta/-tä* in *kieli*-nominals, no examples are given for *t* occurring after *l*, *r*, *n* or after a vowel. I would add here the examples which *FES* has on page 79 (in the section on the Partitive), viz. *kansi* : *kannta* (“cover”) and *käsi* : *kättä* (“hand”). Then, in the discussion on *avain*-nominals, no mention is made and no examples given which would alert the reader to the fact that consonant gradation occurs with this type of nominal. Consequently I would add one or two such examples, e.g. *ydin* : *ytimen* (“marrow, kernel”), *sivellin* : *siveltimen* (“brush”).

Regarding Chapter Six, which deals with the Conjugation of Verbs, I wish to make some remarks about verbs with infinitive in *-Vta/-Vtä*. From the way *FES* has arranged things, it appears that all verbs with infinitive in *-ata/-ätä* and *-ota/-ötä* conjugate like *huomata* (“to notice”), i.e. *huomata* : *huomaan*, *huomaa*. On the other hand, all verbs with infinitive in *-ita/-itä* will follow the pattern of *tarvita* (“to need”),

i.e. *tarvita* : *tarvitsen*, *tarvitsee*, while all verbs with infinitive in *-eta/-etä* will go like *lämmetä* (“to get warm”), i.e. *lämmetä* : *lämpenen*, *lämpenee*. While these rules will hold true in the majority of cases, the true picture is more complicated, and I attempt to set it out below:

*-ata/-ätä* nearly all like

*huomata* : *huomaan*, *huomaa*, e.g.

*tavata* : *tapaan*, *tapaa* (“to meet”)

but a few like

*lämmetä* : *lämpenen*, *lämpenee*, e.g.

*mädätä* : *mätänen*, *mätänee* (“to putrefy”)

*-eta/-etä* nearly all like

*lämmetä* : *lämpenen*, *lämpenee*, e.g.

*paeta* : *pakenen*, *pakenee* (“to flee”)

but some like

*huomata* : *huomaan*, *huomaa*, e.g.

*todeta* : *totean*, *toteaa* (“to state”)

and a few have both possibilities, e.g.

*aueta* : *aukenen*, *aukenee* or

*aueta* : *aukean*, *aukeaa* (“to open”)

*-ota/-ötä* nearly all like

*huomata* : *huomaan*, *huomaa*, e.g.

*tarjota* : *tarjoan*, *tarjoaa* (“to offer”)

but some like

*lämmetä* : *lämpenen*, *lämpenee*, e.g.

*huonota* : *huononen*, *huononee* (“to get worse”)

and a few have both possibilities, e.g.

*viistota* : *viistoan*, *viistoa* or

*viistota* : *viistonen*, *viistonee* (“to cut off”)

-ita/-itä nearly all like  
*tarvita* : *tarvitsen, tarvitsee*, e.g.  
*ansaita* : *ansaitseen, ansaitsee* (“to  
earn”)  
but some like  
*huomata* : *huomaan, huomaa*, e.g.  
*selvitä* : *selviän, selviää* (“to become  
clear”)  
and a few have both possi-  
bilities, e.g.  
*solmita* : *solmitsen, solmitsee* or  
*solmita* : *solmian, solmiaa* (“to tie”)

With respect to the Concord of Attributes on pages 74–75, *FES* states that concord is the rule, except for a number of indeclinable adjectives or adjective-like words, e.g. *ensi kerralla* (“next time”), *viime talvena* (“last winter”). No mention is made of the many two-part collocations, where the two segments appear in different cases, e.g. *tällä kertaa* (“this time”), where the demonstrative pronoun is in the adessive and the noun in the partitive. In such collocations the noun is usually in either the partitive, e.g. *tällä erää* (“for the time being”), *pitkästä aikaa* (“for ages”), or the instructive, e.g. *millä tavoin* (“which way”), *vähissä erin* (“a little at a time”). However, other cases are possible, e.g. the genitive, as in *toiselta puolen* (“on the other hand”).

Chapter Eight is devoted to the Partitive, both its formation and its use. As alluded to earlier, *FES* once

again addresses the partitive pl of nouns of three or more syllables, with a penultimate syllable ending in a short vowel. It is pointed out on page 81 that such nouns usually have the partitive pl in *-ta/-tä*. From many of the examples on page 81 it is clear that in these words final *-a/-ä* change to *-o/-ö* before the pl marker *i*, e.g. *päärynä* (“pear”), *päärynöitä* (partitive pl). Such nouns could, theoretically, have a regular *i* pl, thereby rendering the partitive pl of *päärynä, pääryniä*. As Itkonen (1991: 57) points out, such forms, although not “wrong,” are not usual for nouns of this type. However, one must treat each noun individually. For example, *FES* gives the partitive pl of *omena* (“apple”) as both *omenoita* on page 81 and *omenia* on page 80, and in this particular case both seem to be quite normal. Nevertheless, *FES* is quite right in saying that adjectives of three or more syllables have a regular *i* pl, e.g. *typerä* (“stupid”), *typeriä* (partitive pl), *ankara* (“severe”), *ankaria* (partitive pl).

Also on page 81, *FES* explains that consonant gradation affects the partitive pl of nouns of three or more syllables ending in *-kka/-kkä*, e.g. *lusikka* (“spoon”), *lusikoita* (partitive pl). No comment is made to the effect that gradation has occurred in an abnormal environment, i.e. *-ta* should not have triggered gradation! In fact, gradation can,

and normally does, occur in all pl forms of such words which do not have the requisite environment for gradation, i.e.

partitive	<i>lusikoita</i>
genitive	<i>lusikoiden</i>
illative	<i>lusikoihin</i>
essive	<i>lusikoina</i>
comitative	<i>lusikoine(en)</i>

This phenomenon is mentioned by many scholars, e.g. Itkonen (1991: 55), but I have never seen an explanation as to why gradation happens in this context.

In the section on the use of the Partitive, *FES* states on page 84 that the object of a negative sentence is always in the partitive. Not always! In rhetorical “negative” sentences, expecting the answer “yes,” the object will be in the accusative, e.g. *Emmekö me aina jaa kaiken?* (“Don’t we always share everything?”). Karlsson’s father, Göran Karlsson, wrote perspicaciously on this topic (1957). On page 86 *FES* gives the sentence *Presidentti ampui linnun* and glosses it as “The president shot (and killed) a/the bird.” The Finnish sentence does not necessarily mean that “the bird has been killed,” as indeed neither would the English sentence “The president shot the bird.” It is true, however, that since further qualification is absent, one would most likely assume, in both Finnish and English, that the bird is

dead, but it is not necessarily so.

Chapter Nine deals with the Genitive and the Accusative. With respect to the Genitive, as far as I can see, *FES* has nothing on the *-Vin* genitive pl formation, which one sees, for instance, in *kansainvälinen* (“international”) and *Yhdysvaltain* (“The United States,” genitive pl). Although this formation is hardly ever used today for simple nominals, one will find it in compounds quite frequently, cf. my examples above. Other examples would be *vankeinhoito* (“correctional treatment”) and *hulluinhuone* (“madhouse”). A further point concerns the genitive pl in *-ten*, where an important generalization is missed. *FES* merely states on page 94 that sometimes the genitive pl is in *-ten* and that this formation is particularly common with nominals which decline like *ihminen*. This is not particularly helpful and misses the generalization that only those nominals which have a partitive sg in *-ta/-tä* can have a genitive pl in *-ten*. So, we have *kieli* (“language”), *kieltä*, *kielten*, but *ovi* (“door”), *ovea*, *ovien*. Since the partitive sg of *ovi* is not *\*ovta*, the genitive pl will not be *\*ovten*. Nearly all nominals with the partitive sg in *-ta/-tä* have the genitive pl in *-ten*, and the wind continues to blow in that direction, e.g. nominals of the type *onneton* (“unhappy”) now permit a genitive pl in *-ten*,

i.e. *onnetonten*, alongside *onnettomien*.

In the section on the Accusative, at the bottom of page 102 in the Translator's note, we are told that when a Finnish present tense is followed by an object in the accusative, then English would, in order to keep the resultative meaning, normally put the verb in the future, e.g. *Syötkö kalan?* ("Will you eat a/the fish?"). Then, in parentheses, it is claimed that Finnish has no equivalent form (i.e. no morphological future, J.D.). (However, on page 190 in the section dealing with the third infinitive in the illative, *FES* does mention in passing my point [1] below.) This is not strictly true, for in fact Finnish has at its disposal two morphological ways of rendering the English future, viz. 1) *tulla* ("to become") + the third infinitive in the illative, and 2) *olla* ("to be") + the present active participle. So *Syötkö kalan?* could be rendered in Finnish unambiguously with a future meaning as: 1) *Tuletko syömään kalan?* ("Will you eat a/the fish?"), or 2) *Oletko syövä kalan?* ("Will you eat a/the fish?"). Admittedly Finnish does not use these constructions as often as English uses "will, shall, going to," but they are used, especially the *tulla* construction.

Also in the section on the Accusative, and indeed later in the chapter on Verb Tenses, no mention is made

of Verbal Aspect in Finnish. *FES* sort of talks around the topic, using expressions such as "resultative action." The fact of the matter is that Finnish implements Verbal Aspect by the case-marking of the object. In a positive sentence, if the object is marked with the partitive case, the verb is imperfective. On the other hand, in a positive sentence, if the object is marked with the accusative case, the verb is perfective. In negative sentences, this opposition is suspended, with only the partitive case being possible. *FES* has all the relevant data in this section on the Accusative, but the term "Aspect" is never used.

In Chapter Twelve, which treats Numerals, I would like to have seen the following series included: *ykkönen* (1), *kakkonen* (2), *kolmonen* (3), *nelonen* (4), *viitonen* (5), *kuutonen* (6), *seiska* (7), *kasi* (8), *ysi* (9), *kymppi* (10). This series is widely used, e.g. in sport, for transportation, radio and television, etc., e.g. *kakkosen uutiset* ("Channel Two News"), *Kenet ehdokkaista asetat ykköseksi?* ("Which candidate are you putting as number one?"). Further, in the section on Ordinals, *FES* naturally cites *ensimmäinen* ("first") and *toinen* ("second"), but the discerning reader will notice that 11th is *yhdestoista* (not \**ensimmäinentoista*), 12th is *kahdestoista* (and not \**toinentoista*), and 20th is *kahde-*

*skymmenes* (and not *\*toinenkymmenes*). This raises the question as to how one would say 21st, 32nd, etc. *FES* is silent on this matter. Does one say for 21st *kahdeskymmenesyhdes* or *kahdeskymmenesensimmäinen*? One can say both, as indeed one can say both *kolmaskymmeneskahdes* and *kolmaskymmenestoinen*. Also in this section, reference could have been made to the much-used forms *eka* (“first”) and *toka* (“second”). Admittedly these forms are highly colloquial in nature, but they are heard all the time, especially when talking about education, e.g. *ekaloukkalainen* (“first-former, first-grader”). Indeed, *eka* and *toka* will often simply substitute for *ensimmäinen* and *toinen*, e.g. *eka(n) kerran* (“first time”).

Chapters Fourteen through Eighteen deal with the Verb. Chapter Fourteen is devoted to what *FES* labels Tenses. We are told on page 152 that Finnish has “four tenses: two simple (present and past) and two compound (perfect and pluperfect).” Really what is meant here by “tense” is “tense form,” since, for example, both the simple past and the perfect are located in past time (“time” is what “tense” means!), but they mark different “forms” of past time. These “forms” are usually called “aspects,” which is a term that *FES* does not use at all. Be that as it

may, *FES*’s categorization of the Finnish verb is the traditional one and may be justified on pedagogical grounds. On page 152 no mention is made of what is normally known as the Present Continuous in Finnish, e.g. *Pekka on kirjoittamassa kirjettä* (“Pekka is writing a/the letter”), although on page 189 in the section on the third infinitive in the inessive there is some treatment of the matter. There we are told that the inessive indicates an ongoing action or process. One of the examples given on page 189 is *Kalle ja Pekka ovat olutta ostamassa*, which is glossed “Kalle and Pekka are buying some beer.” One wonders how this sentence differs from *Kalle ja Pekka ostavat olutta*, where the simple present is used with the object in the partitive, marking the imperfective nature of the sentence. *FES* does not address this topic at all, and so it will come as a shock to the reader of this book to discover that Finnish has a continuous (progressive) form which, in its use, is very much like, but not identical to, the English continuous (progressive). Space does not allow me to go further into this topic here, but I recommend Heinämäki (1981) and Markkanen (1979: 94–109 and *passim*) for enlightenment on this subject. However, it can be noted here that the existence in Finnish of the

progressive, which unambiguously marks imperfectivity and will therefore always have the object in the partitive, often allows us to resolve the ambiguity inherent in sentences such as *Pekka ei kirjoita kirjettä*, which can mean “Pekka is not writing a/the letter” or “Pekka will not write a/the letter.” *Pekka ei ole kirjoittamassa kirjettä* can only mean “Pekka is not writing a/the letter.”

With regard to the use of the simple past and the perfect, *FES* does not explain at all how their uses differ. A number of examples are given for both forms, on pages 155–156 and 157–158 respectively, and one is, presumably, left to infer from these examples the difference in usage of the two forms. Since all examples of the Finnish simple past are glossed with the simple past in English and likewise for all the examples of the perfect, one infers that the use of the simple past and the perfect in Finnish and English is identical. Unfortunately this impression is misleading. Take the following example: *Viime yönä on satanut*, where Finnish has the perfect. English could not render this with the perfect, i.e. “\*It has rained last night” is impossible in English, which disallows the use of the perfect with adverbials denoting specific time. The English translation would be “It rained last night,” with the simple past. For further details

on this topic, I recommend Markkanen (1979: 117–131 and *passim*). Again in the section on the Perfect, *FES* gives no examples of the type *Olen asunut Hesassa viisi vuotta* (“I have lived/have been living in Helsinki for five years”), where Finnish uses the perfect in exactly the same way as English. As is well known, most European languages would use the present here, e.g. German “Ich wohne seit fünf Jahren in Helsinki.”

Chapter Sixteen treats the Finnish Passive. As is well known, the so-called Passive in Finnish is not equivalent to passives in other European languages, and a more accurate designation for it would be “impersonal.” However, the form is universally called Passive, even in Finnish, and this is something we have to live with. In point of fact Finnish does possess a “real” passive, which *FES* mentions on pages 209–210 in the section on the Agent Construction. Here is an example from page 210: *Ehdotus on Virtasen esittämä*, which is glossed as “The proposal was put forward by Virtanen.” Still, this “real” passive is little used.

Before embarking on the discussion of the Passive, *FES* warns that one should not confuse the passive with generic sentences, which express a general truth or law or state of affairs. In these generic sentences the verb appears in the third person sg with no separate

subject. Here is an example from page 172: *Siellä saa hyvää kahvia*, which is glossed as “One gets good coffee there.” In my experience it is often very hard to make a clear distinction between this generic sentence and a corresponding passive one, i.e. *Siellä saadaan hyvää kahvia* or *Siellä voidaan saada hyvää kahvia*. I have tried all three sentences out on native-speakers and have received remarkably differing interpretations, with some considering the generic and passive interchangeable.

Still in the chapter on the Passive, there is no mention here, or indeed later in the chapter on Colloquialisms, of the frequently encountered alternative forms for the perfect and pluperfect passives, i.e.

STANDARD	COLLOQUIAL
<i>on puhuttu</i>	<i>olla puhuttu</i>
	(“one has spoken”)
<i>ei ole puhuttu</i>	<i>ei olla puhuttu</i>
	(“one has not spoken”)
<i>oli puhuttu</i>	<i>oltiin puhuttu</i>
	(“one had spoken”)
<i>ei ollut puhuttu</i>	<i>ei oltu puhuttu</i>
	(“one had not spoken”)

With these colloquial forms we have, in effect, a sort of double passive. They are particularly common when the passive substitutes for the first person pl, e.g. *Me ei olla puhuttu* (for standard *Me ei ole puhuttu*) (“We have not spoken”).

Chapter Seventeen is devoted to Infinitives. One point which *FES* does not clarify is the sometimes fine distinction to be drawn between the first infinitive in the translative and the third infinitive in the illative. For instance, on page 184 we have the translative in *Lähdin Hollantiin levätäkseni* (“I went to Holland in order to rest”), and on page 191 the illative in *Matkustan maalle lepäämään* (“I’m going into the country to rest”). I see no real semantic difference between these two sentences. Perhaps the translative simply places more emphasis upon the aim or purpose? It would have been rewarding if *FES* could have thrown some light on this point.

With regard to the second infinitive in the inessive, *FES* makes no mention of its use in sentences such as *Loma kului kalastaessa* (“The summer was spent fishing”). This construction seems possible only in non-agentive sentences, for once an agent is in the scene, overtly or covertly, the third infinitive in the adessive would be used, e.g. *Loma vietettiin kalastamalla* (“We/One spent the summer fishing”). Setälä (1960: 112) touches on this point, quoting among others *Aika menee arvellessa* (“Time is passing in hesitation”).

In the discussion of the fourth infinitive (pages 192–193), I would add another instance where this

infinitive is used, viz. in a cognate construction where the fourth infinitive in the partitive sg with the possessive suffix is patterned after and follows the verb, e.g. *Tilanne huononee huononemistaan* (“The situation is going from bad to worse”).

The formation and the uses of Participles are discussed in Chapter Eighteen. With respect to the present active participle, *FES* has no examples of this participle in the essive pl with the possessive suffix following the verb *olla* (“to be”), e.g. *Pekka on työskentelevinään*, which gives the sentence a flavour such that the activity going on is not really happening but is merely feigned, i.e. “Pekka is pretending to work.” In the section on the present passive participle, *FES* notes on page 198 that this participle in the essive is used in “certain fixed expressions,” citing among others *Onko teillä huoneita vuokrattavana?* (“Do you have rooms to let?”) and *Autoja myytävänä* (“Cars for sale”). Actually the use of this formation goes way beyond fixed expressions and connotes a temporary nuance, e.g. *Potilas on sairaalassa tutkittavana* (“The patient is in the hospital to be examined”). This essive construction and that of the present passive participle in the inessive pl (also mentioned by *FES* on page 198) are very close, sometimes identical, in meaning, e.g. *Tämä puhelin on yleisön käytettävänä* / *Tämä puhelin on ylei-*

*sön käytettävissä* (“This phone is for public use”) are to all intents and purposes interchangeable.

Absent from the discussion of the uses to which the past participles are put (pages 199–200) are the following:

1. *Pekka tuli kertoneeksi asiasta*  
 (“Pekka chanced to mention the matter”)
2. *Työ tuli tehdyksi/tehtyä*  
 (“The work got done,” implying difficulty)
3. *Pekka sai työn tehdyksi/tehtyä*  
 (“Pekka got the work done,” implying difficulty)

In the treatment of the Participial Constructions, when explaining the present/past participial formation which replaces an *että* clause, *FES* tells us on page 210 that the subject of the *että* clause goes into the genitive, if it is different from that of the main clause, e.g. *Kuulimme, että lapsi huusi* > *Kuulimme lapsen huutavan* (“We heard the child shout”). This is not always so. For instance, if the subject of the *että* clause is in the partitive, it will remain in the partitive in the participial construction, e.g. *Näen, että lunta sataa* > *Näen lunta satavan* (“I see it is snowing”), and *Sanottiin, että useita miehiä hukkui mereen* > *Useita miehiä sanottiin hukkuneen mereen* (“It was said many men drowned in the sea”). The “gram-

matical” subject can even appear in the nominative/accusative, e.g. *Kerrotaan, että pojalla on kello* > *Pojalla kerrotaan olevan kello* (“It is said the boy has the watch”).

Regarding the section on Superlatives of Adjectives, I would point out that in the paradigm given for *paksuin* (“thickest”) on page 215, the partitive sg is given as *paksuimpaa*, which, although theoretically possible, is rarely used. The form *paksuinta* should be substituted. Strangely, in the paragraph immediately following this paradigm, *FES* gives *paksuinta* as the partitive sg. Also with regard to this paradigm it is debatable if the normal genitive pl would be *paksuimpien* rather than *paksuinten*, for the reasons I have stated earlier.

In the section on Adverbs in Chapter Twenty there is no mention of the adverb formation whereby an adjective is used in the genitive immediately before another adjective or an adverb, e.g. *Pirkko on erityisen kaunis* (“Pirkko is especially beautiful”), and *Pirkko laulaa erityisen kauniisti* (“Pirkko sings especially beautifully”). This formation is extremely common. As for the superlative of the adverb, *FES* draws attention on page 219 to the normal superlative of *paljon*, viz. *eniten* (*enimmin* is also possible, by the way), but there is no mention of *vähiten* (the superlative of *vähän*, and more common than

*vähimmin*) and *parhaiten* (the superlative of *hyvin*, and more common than *parhaimmin*).

In the section on Postpositions, on pages 222–225, the distribution of *luo* vs. *luokse* (“to”) is not made clear. *Luokse* must be used with a possessive suffix, e.g. *Pekka meni heidän luokseen* (“Pekka went to their place”), whereas both *luo* and *luokse* can be used with nouns, although *luo* is the more common, e.g. *Pekka meni Pirkon luo/luokse* (“Pekka went to Pirkko’s place”).

In the discussion of Conjunctions, I would have included on page 226 the very common conjunction *joten* (“so that, with the result that”), e.g. *Kelloni oli jäljessä, joten myöhästyin* (“My watch was slow so [that] I was late”).

I would like to make two observations concerning Chapter Twenty-One on Word Formation. First, although *FES* gives both *ruotsalainen* and *suomalainen* on page 233, nothing is said about the unusual *a*-vowel before the suffix *-lainen*. These forms derive from *ruotsi* and *suomi* (stem *suome-*) respectively and one would have expected *\*ruotsilainen* and *\*suomelainen*. In a similar vein, one notes *hämäläinen* (< *häme[e]*-) and *lappalainen* (< *lappi*). Second, on page 236, on the topic of the agentive noun in *-ja/-jä*, it should be noted that some verbs of the *voida* type form their agentive noun in *-tsija/-tsijä*

and not in *-ja/-jä*, e.g. *tupakoida* ("to smoke") usually has *tupakoitsija* ("smoker"), rather than *tupakoi-ja* ("smoker"), although *tupakoiija* is a possible form. Compare *seppelöidä* ("to adorn"), *seppelöitsijä* ("adornor"), and *liikennöidä* ("to operate, to ply"), *liikennöitsijä* ("traffic contractor").

In conclusion, I can say that *FES* is a fine book, a wonderful handbook of the Finnish language for English-speakers. It contains all the essential information one needs about Finnish grammar, and so lives up handsomely to its title. I have found a number of things to comment on in *FES*, but none of my comments point to gross errors, but suggest rather slight additions or modifications. As I said in my opening remarks, this work is the collaborative product of two people, neither of them a native-speaker of Finnish. Karlsson is a Swedish-speaking Finn (*suomenruotsalainen*) and Chesterman is an Englishman, and both are to be congratulated for the high standards that *FES* achieves. We in the English-speaking world are fortunate to have such a work at our disposal. Routledge has produced an attractive, uncluttered, well-arranged volume, which, as far as I can see, is totally free of misprints.

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Oiva W. Saarinen, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Historical Geography of the Finns in the Sudbury Area*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999. Illus., 328 pp.

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THIS BOOK IS AN IMPORTANT ADDITION to a small library of books on the history of Finns in Canada that have appeared in print over the past two decades. The Sudbury area, along with Thunder Bay, has attracted large numbers of Finnish settlers since the turn of the twentieth century. The big attraction was the availability of work in natural resource industries: in the case of Thunder Bay the woods industry, in that of Sudbury hardrock mining. Outside town Finns also settled on farms once they had acquired the down payment on a piece of land. Once a few Finns were established, chain migration played an important role in quickly augmenting the Finnish population. An additional advantage was that the climate and the physical landscape of both com-

munities were not unlike those of Finland. Cold, snowy winters and an abundance of forest and small lakes reminded Finns of their homeland.

Both Sudbury and Thunder Bay boasted a large number of socialists and, later, after the formation of the Communist Party of Canada, communists. Sudbury was a hotbed of radical politics as the home of the socialist/communist newspaper *Vapaus* [Freedom] and the literary weekly *Liekki* [Flame]. Not all Finns, however, were Reds; others, known as Church Finns or Whites, formed their own associations too, such as temperance societies and the Central Organization of Loyal Finns in Canada. In reality, two sets of parallel organizations came into being, one Red, the other White. This marked polarization extended to separate theatrical groups, choirs, and even athletic competitions, with the result that there was virtually no social intercourse between Reds and Whites. Saarinen is particularly adept at charting these differences, which have persisted to the present. His balanced treatment of the history of Reds and Whites is to be commended, especially in the light of previous book-length histories, which were, unfortunately, biased. This book stands in sharp contrast, for example, to Yrjö Raivio's two-volume *Kanadan Suomalaisten Historia* (Copper Cliff, 1975 and 1979), with its imbalance in favour of the

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Whites and its gross slighting of the Reds, and William Eklund's *Builders of Canada: History of the Finnish Organization of Canada, 1911–1971* (Toronto, 1987; first published in Finnish in 1983), which gave short shrift to the Whites. But, in his defence, Eklund did not claim to be writing a general history of the Finns in Canada as did Raivio.

Saarinen is quick to acknowledge the work of other historians he has drawn upon, such as Varpu Lindström, Edward Laine, Mauri Jalava, and Peter Krats, and the quality of his book as a work of synthesis is indeed praiseworthy, but special praise should be accorded his original research on Finnish settlement in the Sudbury region. One very long chapter establishes in great detail the "Geographical Pattern of Finnish Settlement in the Sudbury Area." The numerous maps, charts, and photographs are a model of local history, and they clearly reflect the author's lifelong expertise and interest in historical geography.

Chapters follow on "Finns in the Workplace," an equally detailed accounting of the occupations Sudbury Finns have taken up over the past century, and "Finnish Cultural Contributions," which underlines the "associative spirit" of the Finns, already well documented elsewhere in Canada and in the United States. The latter chapter closes with an important section on "sym-

bolic ethnicity," in which Saarinen refers to the "cultural markers of their innate Finnishness [that] have been maintained not by the use of the language [now in serious decline] or through organizational participation but rather by means of more personalized expressions" (259). These expressions are most evident when one visits the homes or cottages of Finnish-Canadians, in things such as food, rugs, dinnerware, books, records, and CDs. Bumper stickers depict the Finnish flag or proclaim "Happiness Is Being Finnish," and T-shirts speak of "Sisu" and "Finn Power."

Besides being a contribution to the history of Finns in Canada, the history of immigration and ethnic history generally (there is an opening chapter on Finnish immigration patterns to Canada), and the cultural geography of Canada, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* makes an appeal to popular history. There is a profusion of names and photographs of particular interest to Sudbury Finns. Noteworthy was the author's decision to include as side-bars 20 short biographies of prominent Finns in the Sudbury region from past and present. These range from the radical poet Aku Päiviö and William Eklund ("the voice of the FOC") to Wilf Salo (Mr. Santa Claus) and Judy Erola (the former Liberal cabinet minister). Many

halls, churches, and Finnish-run businesses are remembered in black-and-white photographs. In addition to the author's successful attempts to achieve political balance he also has attained a measure of gender balance by according Finnish women their due throughout the book.

The book concludes with a powerful retrospective chapter. In it, Saarinen acutely takes issue with Finnish scholars like Auvo Kostiainen and Reino Kero who tend in their work on Finnish migration to see no distinction between the historical experience of Finnish-Canadians and that of Finnish-Americans. They seem to conclude that whatever happened to U.S. Finns also happened in Canada on a smaller scale. Saarinen disagrees and points to four crucial differences. First, the movement of Finns into Canada began later in the nineteenth century than that into the United States, allowing the leftists more opportunity to assert their ideological hegemony in Canada. Secondly, the Americanization process was well under way by 1920, whereas the assimilation process had not yet taken hold in Canada. Finnish-Canadians were content to develop their own community institutions and even formed branches of Canadian political parties. Thirdly, the Finnish-Canadian community was considerably

renewed by the influx of Finns in the 1950s and 1960s (17,000 came in the 1950s), and consequently it was 1961 before native-born Finns in Canada exceeded those who were foreign-born, a circumstance that had occurred in the United States as early as 1920. Fourthly, the federal government policy of multiculturalism, also adopted by a number of provinces, including Ontario, provided financial and emotional support for ethnic pluralism, by which Finns and other ethnic groups benefitted. Thus the vitality of Finnish-Canadian institutions, such as newspapers like *Vapaa Sana* and *Canadian Uutiset*, and aid to Finnish language instruction persist more vigorously than is the case in the United States. Saarinen concludes this important book on a mildly optimistic note: "What is certain is that the Finnish community will continue to make its mark felt in the Sudbury community for at least another generation" (277).

Linda Donelson. *Out of Isak Dinesen in Africa: Karen Blixen's Untold Story*. Foreword by Don Mowatt. Afterword by Anne Born. Iowa City: Coulsong, 1998. Pp. xxi + 396. Illustrated (16 plates).

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LINDA DONELSON, AN AMERICAN physician, lived for two years during the late 1970s on a research farm near Nairobi, overlooking the Ngong Hills near Karen Blixen's land. As a frequent visiting tourist at Blixen's former house, Donelson evidently became interested in the story of Blixen's adventurous life in Kenya from 1914 to 1931. The fruits of her research saw the day in 1995, when her self-published book *Out of Isak Dinesen in Africa: Karen Blixen's Untold Story* appeared in Iowa City. Three years later, a revised edition was published with a foreword by Don Mowatt, a former producer for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, who in 1995 created a 90-minute radio documentary on Karen Blixen. The new edition also con-

tains an afterword by Anne Born, the translator of Blixen's *Letters From Africa: 1914–1931*, as well as an enlarged index and a new appendix that deals with Blixen's medical history. Moreover, eight laudatory quotations from various publications, such as *Publishers Weekly* and *Peace Corps Writers and Readers*, and from individuals associated with Blixen scholarship precede the title page. Only the enlarged index and the new appendix are worthwhile additions; the rest amounts to promotional material that is clearly designed to give the book some scholarly clout, which, I am sorry to say, it lacks.

However, let us begin with the useful parts of this biography written by a medical practitioner. Not surprisingly, the two appended accounts of Blixen's health problems, "On Isak Dinesen's Medical History" (349–357) and "Mercury vs Arsenic" (359–365), are among the most interesting commentaries in Donelson's book. The history deals with the syphilis that Karen Blixen contracted from her husband in 1914, which, according to Mogens Fog, a Danish neurologist, and others, was never cured and which allegedly caused many of her subsequent health problems till the end of her life. Dr. Donelson refers to a new study published in 1995 by the Danish physician Kaare Weismann, who questions the diagnosis of tabes

dorsalis, syphilis of the spine. Both Donelson and Weismann agree that Karen Blixen had been cured already in 1915, by means of experimental injections of an arsenic preparation. "Even without treatment, in possibly two thirds of such cases there is no progression of disease to late-stage syphilis," writes Dr. Donelson (351). Yet, the Danish author did clearly suffer from something. Dr. Weismann suggests that her later bouts of illness were caused by mercury poisoning, since there is evidence of her taking mercury tablets during the initial stage of the disease; Dr. Donelson, on the other hand, speculates that arsenic might have been one of the culprits, in that Blixen continued to treat herself with arsenic tonics for years in Africa. So far so good.

But this is not all. Linda Donelson is very keen on providing explanations for every symptom ascribed to Karen Blixen, and this is where the biographer runs into major trouble. She speculates that Blixen's intermittent attacks of severe abdominal pain—which were treated unsuccessfully twice with surgery—were caused by panic attacks. Major tragic events seem likely to have triggered the attacks: her sister Ea's untimely death in 1921, the failure of the coffee farm in 1931, her mother's death in 1939, and Blixen's failure to obtain the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954! Dr. Donelson

suggests that Karen Blixen perpetuated a myth about her alleged syphilis, "perhaps romantically" (356), but it seems to this reviewer that Blixen's biographer has created a new myth that is equally misleading. Blixen's complex life story, including her poor health and strong emotional life, has in Donelson's book been reduced to a contemporary tale of hysteria.

The purpose of writing *Out of Isak Dinesen in Africa* is ostensibly to right wrongs perpetrated by Blixen herself in her memoir *Out of Africa* and by the ensuing "soap opera [that her life story] has been turned into" (flyleaf), to paraphrase Anders Westenholz, Blixen's relative and the Danish translator of Donelson's book. Donelson wants her readers to know the "true story" behind all the romanticized versions, including Sidney Pollack's film from 1986; however, she falls short of her target.

The body of the text deals with the years in Kenya, 1914–1931, and does not cover any new material—save the medical guesswork—that cannot be found in other biographies, such as Judith Thurman's *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller* from 1982. Donelson traces many a known step trodden by the trio Karen Blixen, Bror Blixen, and Denys Finch Hatton during the seventeen years. Her methodology is for the most part conventional: she refers to letters

and existing biographies of the subjects and to biographies and autobiographies of other colonists of relevance. Donelson's own observations from the Ngong Hills and Nairobi add a nice personal touch, and the short summaries of colonial history sprinkled throughout the narrative provide further insight.

However, health issues, landscape descriptions, and colonial history are only of moderate importance in this "true story." It is really the love triangle that Donelson is after, and it is in her pursuit of "the truth" of Blixen's love life that the biographer once again treads on shaky ground. Little is known about Blixen's sexual activities; she was extremely private about these matters, and so was Denys Finch Hatton. Yet Donelson speculates enthusiastically that Blixen and Finch Hatton had their first sexual intercourse on a rainy day during the third weekend of August 1922 (152), which resulted in a pregnancy and subsequent miscarriage in late October (158). The point is indeed moot and has been raised before by other biographers, but without a final verdict.

It is in the nature of biographical writing to speculate a fair amount on the subject's undocumented moments and to make some educated guesses, but it is fallacious to reconstruct biographical moments on the basis of the subject's fiction writing. Yet this is exactly what

Donelson does repeatedly. Whenever she wants to describe Karen Blixen's intimate feelings for Bror and Denys during courting, separation, or parting, the biographer resorts to passages in Blixen's stories or *Out of Africa*—the latter of which she previously judged "romantic" and unreliable as documentary material—to prove her point. For example, in her reconstruction of the climactic weekend in August, 1922, Donelson quotes repeatedly from "The Old Cavalier," "The Roads Around Pisa," and "The Dreamers" to demonstrate what "may have" taken place between Karen and Denys (152–153).

The style of writing is clear and straightforward in passages dealing with medical explanations and colonial history. However, when the subject matter is romance, the rhetoric changes accordingly. On Denys's singing voice and his erotic behaviour, Donelson comments that "Karen was charmed to hear his high, sweet voice. *An evening of song might lead to something more.* Although Denys was gifted with a frank, sweet mouth, large and sensual, his embraces seem to have been diffident. (Nearly every later story by Karen contains the description of a kiss resisted.)" (157, emphasis added). The soap-operatic discourse is dangerously close to that of Pollack's film version, which the biographer wished to correct in

the first place.

Donelson is a decent chronicler but a naive literary analyst, and sometimes a careless reader. In the second chapter, "1914," she deals with Karen's honeymoon with Bror. She writes that "[a]lthough she perhaps felt 'melting tenderness' for Bror and 'groaned under his caress'—descriptions of lovemaking she later wrote to her brother—her health was not up to the strength of his ardor" (42). Neither of the two citations are referenced, but with some detective work it is not difficult to find the letter to which Donelson alludes. Addressed to Thomas Dinesen, it is dated Ngong, November 19, 1927, and contains the following sentence: "The lover groans in the beloved's arms" (*Letters from Africa: 1914–1931*. Ed. Frans Lasson. Tr. Anne Born [London: Pan Books, 1986], 322). However, the lovers referred to are hypothetical ones that Blixen invents and satirizes for the sake of an argument about erotic infatuation versus love and friendship. Later, in the chapter titled "1927," Donelson refers to the same letter and repeats her misunderstanding regarding Karen Blixen's views on erotic fondling and caressing (Donelson 253–254). In the actual letter, Karen Blixen clearly indicates her inability to take sexual relationships seriously: "I do not in the least like being caressed," she writes to her brother (*LFA* 321).

Nowhere has Karen Blixen written that she groaned under Bror's caresses. As for her "melting tenderness" for Bror, the quotation has no obvious source and remains a mystery to this reader.

Although Donelson's book is entertaining and readable, I cannot recommend it as a reliable biography. The author would have been wiser to concentrate on the actual facts pertaining to Karen Blixen's medical history instead of conjecturing wildly about her passionate love life.

The main aims of the Association for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies in Canada are to promote research and studies in Canada on all aspects of life in the Scandinavian societies, to provide a multi-disciplinary forum for the presentation and discussion of papers on all matters relevant to Scandinavian studies, and to stimulate awareness of and interest in Scandinavian studies in Canada. Membership fees are \$30 a year for regular members and \$15 for student and retired members. Institutional memberships are \$40. Fees should be sent to the Treasurer of the Association: Birgitta Wallace, Canadian Heritage, Historic Properties, Upper Water Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 1S9.

Les objectifs principaux de l'Association pour l'avancement des études scandinaves au Canada consistent à promouvoir les études et les recherches canadiennes sur tous les aspects de la vie dans les sociétés scandinaves, à fournir un forum multi-disciplinaire pour la présentation et la discussion d'articles portant sur toutes les questions essentielles aux études scandinaves, et à susciter un intérêt pour les études scandinaves au Canada. La cotisation annuelle est de 30\$ pour les membres ordinaires, de 15\$ pour les étudiants et les retraités, et de 40\$ pour les institutions. Les cotisations doivent être envoyées à la Trésorière de l'Association: Birgitta Wallace, Canadian Heritage, Historic Properties, Upper Water Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 1S9.

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