"The Immensity of the Conscious Experience of Age"
Exploring the Representations of Age in Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and Jon Fosse's *Suzannah*

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores multiple expressions of age as they are made available through close reading of two Norwegian plays, *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah,* performance analysis of three productions of the plays (two of *Peer Gynt* and one of *Suzannah*), and a phenomenological study of volunteers associated with one of the productions of *Peer Gynt*. I conclude with an ethnodrama approach (a playscript) to report the findings of this study. The phrase "the immensity of the conscious experience of age" (Fuchs 2014) provides a framework for showing how these plays and their productions interrogate clichés about aging. Age theory has seldom been applied to Norwegian dramatic literature, but scholars of anglophonic drama argue that such attention can expand awareness of multiple narratives of aging on the part of theater professionals, scholars, and audience members. My hope is that this dissertation opens the door for additional age-theory-inflected scholarship of Norwegian drama, and that it encourages readers to create unique and diverse narratives about their own ages.

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CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this dissertation I peruse two Norwegian plays, Henrik Ibsen's classic *Peer Gynt* and contemporary playwright Jon Fosse's *Suzannah*, to explore the complexities and configurations of old age. As David W. Plath posits in *What Does It Mean to Grow Old?*, "literature provides a vast phenomenology of the sometimes startling forms that aging can take" (163). How do we envision old age? What does it feel like? How do we respond to the losses that accrue, whether in the physical, mental, or social realms? Are there unique and felicitous potentials inherent in old age? This dissertation finds diverse answers to such questions in its review of age theory, age-inflected drama scholarship, and close readings and viewings of these plays and their productions. The literature review reflects the multi-disciplinarity of my research, drawing as it does from anthropology, sociology, and psychology (as foundations for age theory), and drama, performance, literary, and folklore studies. The iconic epic of *Peer Gynt* (published in 1867) and the post-modern memory play *Suzannah* (broadcast in 2004) appear at first glance to be vastly dissimilar, but closer scrutiny reveals common themes, or perspectives. These perspectives are as follows: the physicality of age, gendered attitudes and beliefs about age, the mystery of time's passing, making sense of a life, and setting. I use the first four perspectives to structure my text analysis in Chapter Two. Setting and the physicality of age take center stage in Chapter Three's performance analysis.[1] Chapter Four is a phenomenological study of the draw exerted by the Peer Gynt Festival's annual touristic production for both volunteers and the viewing public. In this chapter I explore how age hides in plain sight as it becomes integrated into the breadth of

[1]Of the 2016 touristic production of *Peer Gynt* in the area of its setting, the 2008 film of *Peer Gynt's* fifth act, and a 2004 Norwegian national television (NRK) production of *Suzannah.*

certain volunteers' lived experience, rather than being a (perhaps limiting) separate entity. Most of the latter half of this chapter takes an arts-based research approach, that is, the writing of a short playscript. The script is based on my interviews with three older volunteers and also draws from personal observation and casual communications during my own time as a volunteer. My purpose is to express—in an entertaining, dramatic form—the volunteers' experiences and the Festival phenomenon as a whole. Questions of age recede into the background but occasionally emerge from the subtext to become fully explicit.

The use of age theory as a framework for the study of drama is a relatively new line of inquiry. In the anglophonic world (which I explore in more detail later in this chapter), it began in the late 1990s and took off beginning in 2010. It has rarely been applied to Norwegian drama, with the notable exception of Elinor Fuchs's 2014 article, "Estragement: Towards an 'age theory' theatre criticism." This article serves as inspiration and a guiding light for my exploration of the representation of age and aging in *Peer Gynt*[2] and *Suzannah.*[3] In the article, Fuchs discusses the cultural construction of age in relation to three of Henrik Ibsen's plays, *The Master Builder* (1892), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899). She writes that these three plays "can be read together as an evolving debate between Ibsen and himself on the respective values represented by or assignable to youth and age, their mutual conflict and the way to live in the face of approaching death" (73). Immediately, the question of values, conflict between generations, and approaching death focus our attention on specific themes investigated in age studies. Although *Peer Gynt* precedes these three later works by two to three decades,

[2]My close reading of *Peer Gynt* is based on four versions: (1) the 1867 text as downloaded from the University of Oslo's website, *Henrik Ibsens Skrifter* (https://ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT-PG%7CPGht.xhtml); (2) the 1980 translation by Rolf Fjelde; and (3) the 1998 translation by Christopher Fry and Johan Fillinger; and (4) the 2016 translation by Geoffrey Hill.
[3]My reading of *Suzannah* is from *Lilla; Suzannah: To Skodespel* (2004). All translations of this work are my own.

Ibsen explicitly engages in the debate about age-related values and conflicts in *Peer Gynt.* By using a five-act structure—in which Peer is a youth in Acts One through Three, a middle-aged man in Act Four, and an old man in Act Five—Ibsen paints a picture of similarities and disparities within the character of Peer himself, as well as in his relationships with the other characters. Similarly, in a non-dialogic, circular way, Fosse constructs a lyrical and nuanced comparison of how his Suzannahs (Old, Young, and Middle-Aged)—as fictionalized versions of the historical wife of Ibsen—speak to their respective values, disagreements, and behavior after the loss of their lifelong partner, Henrik Ibsen.

I find Fuchs's concluding comments particularly evocative, as they point toward emerging possibilities for reading, producing, and viewing drama. In each of the plays, she identifies the heights—whether the top of a tower in *The Master Builder* or a mountain in *John Gabriel Borkman* and *When We Dead Awaken*—as a metaphor for the characters' responses to the challenges they face at the end of life with the fading of its earlier ambitions. However, despite physical, mental, or social diminishment, Fuchs suggests emerging possibilities for our own old age as we read, produce, or critique drama:

> Here the limitations of age may terrify, yet a new horizon of old age may open . . . . These places [the heights] . . . suggest to me an immensity of the conscious experience of age barely glimpsed in the discourse of normative life, where the failing body-as-decline numbly presides. These places and their developmental import, unimagined by the characters' earlier selves, have frequently been missed by actors, directors, spectators and critics alike . . . . This dimension has perhaps been awaiting our own age of longevity for a fuller understanding, both in art and in life (77).

In teasing apart this paragraph, I find further inspiration for my study of *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah*, even though only Ibsen literally employs mountainous heights, in Acts One through Three and again in Act Five. Instead of frightening heights, Fosse creates a somewhat claustrophobic setting, the Suzannah's apartment, but this serves to expand Old Suzannah's inner world, as revealed through her reminiscences. First, Fuchs acknowledges that there is scant possibility, if one lives long enough, of denying the terror or dread one may feel of approaching physical or mental decline or death. How important is physical or mental decline or imminent death to the eponymous characters in these plays? If present, do we find this fear rendered explicitly or implicitly? Whether explicit or implicit, how is fear performed in the productions in question? Second, and most importantly for this dissertation, Fuchs makes another point, that there is an *immensity* inherent in old age, which is unavailable to the individual at an earlier age but becomes accessible to those willing to consciously engage with their experience of old age. At the end of Act Five, 80-year-old Peer returns to his beloved Solveig after having climbed up from the valley. During the climb, he re-encounters characters and scenes from his youth. Both the vision of a mountain and the revisiting opens us (if not Peer) to the immensity of his life's journey. Meanwhile, Suzannah's immensity takes an inward turn as Old Suzannah conjures younger versions of herself onto the stage as all three recall and/or enact certain memories of their past. Third, this *immensity* may fail to be acknowledged by theater professionals and their audiences, whether through ignorance, lack of understanding, habitual modes of interpreting age, etc., to our detriment. Although Fuchs's *immensity* may not be available to the characters in the plays, perhaps this dissertation will contribute to our collective opportunity to appreciate old age's immensities more fully.

Why juxtapose such outwardly dissimilar plays? First, there is the obvious convenience of their structural forms. *Peer Gynt* recounts three ages of Peer: youth in Acts One through Three, middle age in Act Four, and old age in Act Five. *Suzannah* divides Fosse's fictionalized version of the historic Suzannah Ibsen into three characters, Old Suzannah, Young Suzannah, and Middle-Aged Suzannah, who appear on stage simultaneously, but they never interact, and they speak only in monologues. Second, there is the coincidence that both playwrights got their start in Bergen at the Norwegian Theater/National Stage. But more important than either of these points is to ask how is it that setting them side-by-side adds to a more nuanced understanding of age and aging? Is there something about the span of time between them that further illuminates our understanding of "the immensity of the conscious experience of age" (Fuchs 2014, 77)? The title of an Asbjørn Aarseth article, "Har vi en norsk samtids-dramatikk? eller Den korte Ibsens lange skygge" ("Do we have a contemporary Norwegian drama? or The short Ibsen's long shadow") (73, 78ff.), offers a clue. As Aarseth reports, in 1986 several literary authors were invited by artistic director of the National Stage, Tom Remlov, to attend a seminar/theater workshop known as the Bergen Project (*Bergensprosjekt*). According to Cecilie N. Seiness, writing in *Jon Fosse: Poet på Guds jord* (*Jon Fosse: Poet on God's Earth*; my trans.), Fosse was initially reluctant to join the project, but Kai Johnsen finally convinced Fosse to write for the theater, which he began to do in 1993. Fosse went on to become the most highly produced Norwegian playwright, after Ibsen, on the international scene. In writing a fictionalized version of Ibsen's wife, Fosse seems to tempt us to reconsider his relationship with Ibsen's long shadow. Issues discussed in contemporary age theory were of course unread by Ibsen, and I have found no evidence of such reading in Fosse's interviews and essays. Without benefit of a theoretical background, the playwrights nevertheless explore aging in enormous detail and with great

subtlety. Their observations of human behavior show us that age is layered with diverse meanings irrespective of the century. It is as if 150 years provide a bridge, rather than a gap, between Ibsen and Fosse, even as the gap lends its own sense of "immensity."

Before delving further into age theory, I wish to acknowledge the perspectives which influence my discussion. The first is that as I enter the final stages of writing this dissertation, I have just begun the eighth decade of my life, continuing to define myself as middle-aged, or what Anne Davis Basting, in *The Stages of Age: Performing Age in Contemporary American Culture,* calls "mature, vital adulthood" (18). I find this a liberating phrase in that it takes us out of a chronological definition of middle-age into one based more on function. Basting derives this concept from the work of Bernice Neugarten who was very early to point out the shifting timetable of life course signifiers, whether chronological, social, psychological, or health related. In discourse from North American settler and Western Europe cultures, labels that were once firmly assigned to a certain age are now seen as fluidly dependent on any one individual's life course and cultural circumstances. Second, throughout my life I have had the good fortune to encounter many individuals who were thriving in their later years. For example, during my early 20s I studied with teachers who were in their prime teaching years in their 70s and beyond.[4] Later, as I began my chiropractic practice, I had (and continue to have) patients, who in their 80s or 90s, exemplify the curiosity and *joie de vivre* that I hope to enjoy as an old(er) person. These experiences led to my fascination with cultures in which good physical and mental health are expected to be maintained well into old age. Meanwhile, I have become increasingly enraged by the American system of biomedicine which mostly ignores the environmental and

[4]Specifically, the head of the drama department at my undergraduate college, who took up trapeze work in her 70s; a highly influential teacher of the Alexander Technique, whose teaching flourished in her 70s, 80s, and even into her 90s; and a former dancer with the San Francisco Ballet who—when we were apartment mates in New York City—was still doing her barre work in her 60s.

social/economic/political determinants of health, leading to our dismal placement in the hierarchy of national health statistics. As psychiatrist Lewis Mehl-Madrona, in a lecture in the University of Maine's Graduate Certificate Program in the Medical Humanities stated, "we have the best medical system in the world—at making money."[5] He believes that this system is unsustainable, because physicians are miserable. A student in the class, in her gap year between her undergraduate education and medical school, told me, just before the rest of the class joined the Zoom meeting, that she had interviewed a number of medical doctors, all of whom reported that if they had to do it over again, they would become osteopaths, not medical doctors. This state of affairs is in marked contrast to the holistic perspective of Nordic models of health promotion (detailed in my master's thesis) in which the use of the creative arts is intrinsic to their approach to health and well-being. Inspired by cultures with better statistics than our own, I embrace the possibility of healthful aging, by which I mean optimal "physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO). Although the WHO's definition of health uses the adjective "perfect," rather than "optimal," I prefer the flexibility of the latter word, as it allows for a personally defined take on this wholistic concept. At the same time, I recognize the dismay expressed by Barbara Ehrenreich in *Natural Causes* where she questions any dogmatic adherence to so-called "'active aging,' healthy aging,' productive aging,' 'vital aging,' 'anti-aging,' and 'aging well'" (164) as she so emphatically puts it in her chapter, "Successful Aging." (I will return to problems inherent in positivist dogmas of aging later in this chapter.) So, in consideration of my many personal and professional encounters with exemplars of "successful aging," cognizance of the pitfalls of positivist aging dogma, awareness of our current existential crises, and remaining a steadfast cheerleader for doing better, I feel compelled

[5]Lecture notes, IMD 650, March 3, 2022.

to write this dissertation with some elements of public-facing scholarship and arts-based research (the latter to be used for Chapter 4).

Age Theory

Leading theorist Margaret Morganroth Gullette, writing in *Declining to Decline*, aptly and pithily provides a general definition of age theory, "let's start by calling age theory an educated sensitivity to age-related cultural clues" (204). By "cultural clues" she refers to oft-repeated phrases and behaviors that reinforces normative clichés of aging that distinguish positive attributes of youth such as "exciting, novel . . . fun" (203) from old age's "loss and dislocation" (204). We have already encountered this "master narrative" (204) of aging in Fuchs, as she hopes for a world in which the "discourse of normative life, where the failing body-as-decline numbly presides" (2014 77) no longer dominates our perceptions. Of course, the casual observer of popular media will easily identify the operation of these clichés of decline in daily life. The elderly have a multitude of stories to tell, given someone willing to listen. We dismiss or ignore them at our loss. When Bernice Neugarten, in *The Meanings of* Age, asked her students to find and interview a family of three to four living generations, the consensus among her students was that the oldest member of the family was the most fascinating, because they had stories from having lived long and varied lives (122). Even when short term memory becomes unreliable, old people recall (and retell and retell) significant episodes from the past, as if they are constructing their own unique master narrative. And even when older people experience failures of their physical selves, Fuchs suggests that other possibilities for immensity reside in our psyches. She quotes Florida Scott-Maxwell's *The Measure of My Days*, who advises, as an octogenarian, "know that age is more than a disability. It is an intense and varied experience, almost beyond our capacity at times" (5). Scott-Maxwell also observes that "though drab

outside—wreckage to the eye, mirrors a mortification—inside we flame with a wild life that is almost incommunicable" (32). Later she describes her attempts to dampen the flame as frailty increases, but "I have to be a miracle of quiet to make the flame in my heart burn low, and on some good days I am a miracle of quiet. But I cannot conceive of how age and tranquility came to be synonymous" (131). This wild inner life may be nearly incommunicable, but dramatists do attempt to capture such a state of being in dialogue and action, awaiting our ability to discern it. I would like to call this wonder at what older people experience *enchantment*, a sort of secret treasure known only to the aged but worthy of being shared in memoire or conversations. How rarely we see or read about such wonder at the felicities of old age in popular culture, but *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah* reveal these dimensions available in (and perhaps only in) old age.

I find it all too easy to position these narratives as polar opposites. However, Gullette cautions us that "setting 'progress' against 'decline' constitutes a terrible, isolated, oscillating emotional impasse" (67). This impasse deprives us of nuanced expressions of aging, both individually and collectively. It may narrow our perceptions along a thin line, rather than expanding into the possibility of multiple, overlapping narratives that ebb and flow throughout our lives, with many troublesome detours and scenic byways along the life course. Although I am not entirely able to avoid the polarity of these two discourses, I find that setting them at opposite ends of a continuum impedes the possibilities for the diversity of stories that we could tell ourselves and each other about old age. Fortunately, reading *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah*, individually and in juxtaposition, provides a subtler understanding of aging and the possibility of escaping the pitfalls of polarity thinking. Despite these cautions, and in order to fairly represent age theory discourse, I describe the development and use of the two prime (and seemingly opposed) narratives. First, *peak-and-decline,* which is articulated as far back as classical times

and continues through the Middle Ages to our present era, as previewed in the foregoing discussion, and a more recently articulated narrative, *creativity-across-the-life-course*.

The peak-and-decline narrative postulates that the experience of life's enjoyment, capabilities, functions, etc., peaks at a certain relative early point in life, let us say 40, and then steadily, or precipitously, declines thereafter toward death. Like Fuchs, Gullette warns against being constrained by peak-and-decline thinking. She writes, "ultimately I am moving toward the conclusion that the master narrative of midlife aging, as long as it remains dominant, needs to be treated with suspicion as a pressure on us to tell unreliable and misleading or even false narratives" (174). Even though Gullette is writing about midlife, I find her insights equally applicable to old age. Weekly walks with fellow septuagenarians alert me to our tendency to focus on health concerns even though these problems do not prevent us from engaging in our various interests. Are we not telling ourselves an incomplete and misleading, if not exactly false, story about our lives? I wonder whether we are adhering to the peak-and-decline narrative simply because we have reached a certain age. Another friend, a decade younger, hardly mentions incipient signs of aging such as her gray hair. I want to quote Gullette to my older friends, when she writes in *Ending Ageism, or How Not to Shoot Old People*, ". . . people past youth need not feel obliged to identify willy-nilly with age as their primary identity . . . . Why should we give this . . . imposed identity first place, given the hostile world we inhabit?" (50). Despite Gullette's plea, the ancient roots of this narrative seem to have penetrated so deeply into our psyches that it is almost impossible to eliminate them from our unconscious habits—as difficult as trying to dig out invasive and creeping buttercups from my backyard *fleur de lawn*—whether that applies to personal anecdotes or public policy.

Peak-and-decline thinking has ancient roots which unfortunately have not remained in the deep past. Most readers will be familiar with the riddle of the Sphinx from Greek mythology: "What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?" Here the peak of life occurs when one is standing on two feet, and the decline is suggested by going on three feet, i.e., using a cane in old age. Michael Mangan, in *Staging Ageing: Theatre, Performance and the Narrative of Decline*, reviews the ancient Greeks' relationship with the elderly as revealed in *Oedipus at Colonus.* He establishes the importance of classical and pre-classical Greek culture on later European thought, and he goes on to give examples of how "the philosophers repeatedly point to old age as a time of misery, cynicism and negativity" (57). However, even amidst this dire state of affairs, there is another aspect of old age at play. Mangan quotes Tim G. Parkin who finds "'two extremes in attitude towards the elderly . . . that old people have a definite role to play and contribution to make, and that old people are an unwelcome burden and at best must be tolerated'" (62). Among my friends and family, I suspect that we hold both attitudes simultaneously, or that we rapidly alternate between the two. Whatever roles the ancient elderly had to play, we should avoid the temptation to idealize some previous golden age when old people served as teachers, advisors, and carriers of cultural wisdom. Even if true in some cases, this is not the overall impression of old age that the ancients give us. In "From Cicero to Cohen: Developmental Theories of Aging, From Antiquity to the Present," Mark E. Agronin begins his discussion about classical perspectives on age with ancient Rome, where the philosophical stance of Stoicism suggested to Cicero that he should "'make my exit . . . not because of the actual pain but because it's like to prove a bar to everything that makes life worthwhile'" (30). Cicero thus articulates that it is not the potential discomforts experienced in old age that are important. Rather, the primary consideration—to put it in contemporary terms—

is the extent to which such pain might decrease his quality of life. As a result, in the drama of life, in which old age is the last act, Cicero, in his collected works, recommends leaving the stage "when the play grows wearisome" (Cicero 158). He implies an association of old age with pain, decrepitude, and mental decline. On the other hand, Agronin detects a reference to *life review* (a term articulated by Robert N. Butler in 1963) when he again quotes Cicero, as follows: "'When the end comes what has passed has flowed away, and all that is left is what you have achieved by virtue and good deeds'" (31). Cicero foreshadows contemporary scholars who note that ethical choices in our younger years influence how we manifest old age. Mangan and Agronin point to the prevalence of decline narratives of old age, but this is tempered—perhaps grudgingly—by an acknowledgment that there is more to the story than mere decline. Nevertheless, decline serves as the foundation for the ancient constructions of old age. Unsurprisingly, both authors focus on male old age. I take up gender as it relates to life course scholarship and the two plays in a later section.

As Shulamith Shahar explains in the third chapter of *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, by the high and late Middle Ages, old age was linked not only with civil duties and social status, but also with "the symbolic identity of each stage in human life, and a judgement of its virtues, rather than an evaluation based on a biological or social reality" (43). Knowledge that a virtuous life had something to with old age's rewards continues to exert its influence. Depending on the context, old age was variously defined as 60 and 70, or 35, 40, 45, 50, 58, or 72. Whatever the age of old age, according to Paul Johnson, writing in the introduction to this text, the categorization was rooted in medieval legislative texts (3). It seems that officials in medieval times were as confused about just exactly where old age begins as we are today. Perhaps they viewed anything beyond youth as old, although, I hope, not deserving of death,

which both Cicero and contemporary internet trolls seem to believe. As Gullette points out in *Ending Ageism, or How Not to Shoot Old People*, certain Facebook groups denigrating older people were created by people between ages twenty and twenty-nine. One example, among many: "A gay writer and painter, David Conner, writes, from 'the other side of 35,' 'I've been told by young gay men online that I should have killed myself after 30 . . . '" (54). In the time of Shakespeare, Commedia dell'arte, and Molière, Mangan articulates two figures of (masculine) old age, one of which has relevance for Chapter Two's analysis of *Peer Gynt*, *Senex iratus* and *Senex amans.* The former is a domineering father figure who wants to control his children, especially in relation to their erotic desires. The latter character type, portrayed by Peer in Act Four, is an older man to be mocked for his foolish lust for much younger women. Moving on to the late 1600s, we find the evolution of the "social category of 'the aged'" (14), when a man greater than 50 or 60 was deemed too old to bear arms. Unfortunately, legal sources do not elucidate the phenomenon of being old, that is, how it felt to be old. As Shahar explains, "it is only rarely that the voice of an old man, and almost never that of an old woman, is heard from the medieval sources that survived, the voice that could tell us how he or she felt in his (her) family and in his (her) community" (53-54). Fortunately, contemporary age theory, in itself and as it is applied to drama criticism, opens us to the phenomenology of age (including the inequities based on gender) as well as providing access to old age's immensities, when we engage our consciousness.

Steven Katz, in *Cultural Aging*, notes a transition from the rationalism of the Enlightenment to a mid-19th century perspective in which "the vitality of living was no longer dependent upon personal discipline, moderation, and diet, but upon laws of development within the body's cells and tissues" (32). It appears bioscience posits a rather fatalistic progression

toward death inherent in each cell's ticking clock, independent of personal efforts, seemingly returning us to viewing chronological age as the determinant of the life course. Along with this shift came a turn away from seeing middle-and-old-age as one category (in other words, not young) and old age becoming separated from midlife, that is, seeing old age "as a distinct, developmental stage" (32). As a wellness-oriented clinician, I view the tendency to take control out of an individual's hands (fraught though this may be due to disparities in health stemming from socioeconomic position, environmental degradation, etc.) as highly deleterious to individual and collective health. Nevertheless, the shift did open the door for what developed in the social sciences about one hundred years afterwards. In the 1940s, the inclusion of old age in social science life course studies came together at the University of Chicago, with the establishment of the interdisciplinary Committee on Human Development. Bernice Neugarten was among the early scholars addressing this topic, and I draw upon a collection of her articles and essays, *The Meanings of Age: Selected Papers of Bernice L. Neugarten*, as it has significance for several perspectives about aging which I identify in *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah.*

Over the course of her career, Neugarten articulated key points about aging which had previously been neglected in life course scholarship (and public policy). The first is that chronological age ". . . is not a good index for predicting how a person is living out his life. (This is especially true for a person living out *her* life.)" (48). At the same time, she writes, a long life allows time for pursuing a variety of interests, which leads to an individual becoming increasingly differentiated from others (and thus becoming the interesting interviewees of her students). The second of her contributions to this discussion about aging is to make a distinction between the *young-old* and the *old-old.* Initially, the definition of young-old rested on the fact of retirement and continued until about age 75 (again, chronologically and gender determined).

These people were therefore (male) retirees between 55 and 75 years of age and without health limitations. The old-old were greater than 75 years old. However, the arbitrariness of a definition based on chronological age has forced a modification of our understanding of the terms as we entered our current era of longevity. Now, psychological, intellectual, or social performance are what distinguish the two groups, but even among the old-old, the majority are not limited in the performance of major activities. The gendered definition of middle age (as ending at retirement from the once male-dominated work force) carries over into old age and alerts us to Neugarten's assertion that we should really be talking about old men and old women, not old people.[6] Nevertheless, in following the lead of most theorists, I now return to writing about age theory in a mostly non-gendered way, as I take up insights from contemporary age theorists.

In discussing more recent discourse about age and aging, I first address the concept of *ageism* (a term coined by Robert N. Butler in 1969 in an interview with *Washington Post* staff writer Carl Bernstein) (A6). In *What Does It Mean to Grow Older?*, several of the essayists wrestle with the hostility directed toward the aged. Thomas R. Cole writes in his introduction to Part One about the "relentless hostility of liberal capitalist culture toward decay and dependency" and adds, "this ideologically rooted hostility may be the single most intractable obstacle to developing more socially just and spiritually satisfying meanings of aging" (7). If old people are resented or vilified by younger people, how can we hope to change the cultural hostility toward the elderly? Such resentment has both collective and individual consequences. Implicit in the study of ageism is that older people may be left to needlessly suffer or die. The recent mishandling of the COVID pandemic saw sick patients placed into senior living facilities, with predictable and tragic outcomes. Furthermore, Canada's euthanasia law has now led to

[6]Neugarten does not different further among gender-queer, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

marginalized adults of any age seeking assisted suicide because of job loss, lack of permanent housing, or depression.[7] Moreover, they may be prevented from discovering and enjoying the satisfactions available near the end of life. Is it possible to increase empathy for older people? One effort involves fitting younger adults with old-age suits, which simulate the physical difficulties of an (unhealthy) aging body. But according to Scott Magelssen in *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning*, the unintended consequence of young people's use of the suits has been to "instill in young people's minds the notion that old age is a condition they want to avoid at all costs" (147). Face-aging smartphone apps result in a "horrified fascination" according to Mangan (49), and "in that moment of aborted empathy which the face-ageing app engenders, we can read our culture's fear of old age" (51). Similarly, Tobin Siebers, in *Disability Theory*, reports that disability theorists have attacked "the use of disability simulations to raise the consciousness of therapists who treat people with disability" because "they place students in a time-one position of disability . . . usually resulting in emotions of loss, shock, and pity at how dreadful it is to be disabled . . . . The result is a thoroughly negative impression of disability" (28-29). In other words, in these simulations the participants precipitously experience the loss, with no time to adjust or for experiencing anything like immensity or enchantment.

Despite ageism's persistence, many old people manage to ignore or overcome this hostility which plays out in many ways, some overtly, as previously detailed. Additionally, as Gullette informs us, "the Internet is notorious for commenters who feel grossly entitled to

[7]See: Statutes of Canada 2021, Chapter 2, https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-7/royal-assent; Government of Canada/Gouvernement du Canada; "Cost estimate for Bill C-7 'Medical assistance in dying'"; Yuan Yi Zhu; *The Spectator*; "Why is Canada euthanizing the poor?"; https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.893653/publication.html; https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-is-canada-euthanising-the-poor-; Avis Favaro; CTV News; "Woman with chemical sensitivities chose medically-assisted death after failed bid to get better housing; https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/woman-with-chemical-sensitivities-chose-medically-assisted-death-after-failed-bid-to-get-better-housing-1.5860579.

dismiss vulnerable others . . . .' God forbid these miserable once-were-people not [sic] survive as long as possible to burden the rest of us'" (2017 4). However, one contributor to *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity,* Pat Thane in chapter nine, disputes the notion that "elders get marginalized" (181) and emphasizes that among old people "*visiting* is important" (199). Later I consider social gerontologist Lars Tornstam's assertion that clichés of isolation among older people result from male, middle-class, well-educated researchers projecting their own values onto elders. Undoubtedly, at other times, elder hostility happens more passive-aggressively, which may be harder to recognize. Theologian William F. May, in his essay in *What Does It Mean to Grow Old?*, writes that professionals (and I would add nonprofessionals, i.e., friends and family members) "can unwittingly exclude old people from the human race by consigning them to a state of passivity, moral and otherwise" (44). Disability scholars—such as Alison Kafer writing in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*—help bring to mind that the association of youth with able-bodiedness and old age with disability is unjustified, and that eradicating all disabilities is not the unquestioned future that everyone envisions (3). Later I show how Ibsen and Fosse disrupt these former assumptions. May goes on to explain that the body is a means of revealing ourselves to others, resting on two pillars of *controlling* the world via our feet, hands, and voice, and *savoring* the world by way of our five senses. If an old person's body fails, are old people exempted from questions of agency and ethical responsibility? What if, in old age, cultural ageism has become internalized? What if savoring succumbs to paranoid, nightmarish visions? Or what if our feet no longer move with grace and ease, or our voices become quiet and thoughtful? Can we nevertheless divest ourselves of internalized ageism and embrace old age's enchantments? Does not old age's immensity necessitate the inclusion of all aspects of our humanity, moral and otherwise?

Possibly, something unique to old age may be revealed at just such times of duress or awareness of personal mortality. According to Kathleen Woodward, also writing in *What Does It Mean to Grow Old?*, it is when we face death that the complete story of our lives becomes available. She cites an essay by Robert N. Butler in which he claims that the "'unforgettable emerges' in the imminence of death" (145). The use of the short phrase "the unforgettable" adds to my emerging refrain—immensity, enchantment, now the unforgettable—of descriptors of the phenomena present in our real lives. I question whether older people—by declaring, "but I feel 30 inside!"—are consenting to ageist demands and depriving themselves of their own immensities. Age theorists make the point that such statements are a justifiable reaction to how others see old people, and that they reflect a disconnection between an old person's inner life and their outer appearance. For example, Margaret Morganroth Gullette, in *Ending Ageism: Or How Not to Shoot Old People,* uses the phrases "'I don't feel old'" or "'Inside I'm only 30!'" (xii). Many of us have perhaps heard the older people in our own social milieu express this sentiment. (Of course, the opposite—"Ugh! I'm getting old"—is also heard.) Kathleen Woodward and Murray Schwartz, in their work, *Memory and Desire*, write, "ask people in their sixties, seventies, perhaps eighties if they feel old. They will insist that they feel the same way they did when they were thirty or forty, that *they* haven't changed, although their mirror image has" (104). It is evident that such phrases must be stated in response to some sort of reflection from the outside that one is *not* 30 years old. Recall Scott-Maxwell's vivid image of "wreckage to the eye" (32). As Woodward and Murray put it, "we may feel ourselves to be young, but others perceive us as old, perhaps even ancient" (104). In light of these regrettable normative clichés of aging, what can we draw upon as a source of inspiration in the face of physical, mental, or social realities that reinforce, if only mildly or insidiously, the decline narrative? Closing the gap between youth and

old age may be impossible, but at least older people may find hope, as do I, in the work of two age theorists whose work I discuss next.

Both Gene D. Cohen and Steven Katz offer alternatives to the peak-and-decline narrative. Cohen calls the years past the midpoint of life *The Creative Age*, and in *Cultural Aging*, Katz and Erin Campbell refer to it as "Creativity Across the Life Course" (101). In a later article, "New Theories and Research Findings on The Positive Influence of Music and Art on Health with Ageing," Cohen reviews the results of his study demonstrating "the influence of creative activities on general health, mental health, and social activities of older persons" (55). He believes that the real story of the aging brain "is not only of the positive developments that can accompany aging, but what can be added late in life even in the midst of loss" (55). By old age, most people will have suffered a series of losses, both tangible and existential, but the story does not end there. Cohen's studies "indicate that creative activities and their consequent positive effects on mood and morale can lead to an increased production of protective immune cells" (61). Moreover, contrary to popular opinion, "between the early 50s and late 70s there is actually an increase in both the *number* and *length* of branches from individual brain cells in different parts of the brain involved with higher intellectual functioning" (79). Admittedly, this support from experimental science makes my clinician's heart sing. Cohen adds to his ruminations on the physiology of the brain by stating that the older brain is less lateralized, which "appears to reflect a built-in mechanism to address the functional requirements of the brain. It is as if the brain moves to 'all-wheel-drive'" (50). He writes that activities that integrate left/right brain engagement are like "'chocolate to the brain'" (50). As a lifelong chocolate lover, I find this simile simultaneously energizing and relaxing, allowing me an inward smile about the SUV-ness of my aging brain.

Cohen postulates the influence of four creative growth phases that exist past midlife, two of which are directly salient to my discussion of *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah*. The first, from about age 40 to the late 50s, he calls the *midlife re-evaluation phase.* It is a period marked by a questing for meaning in life, fueled by "seriously confronting for the first time their sense of mortality" (52), but with a sense of time remaining rather than running out. The *liberation phase* occurs in the mid-50s to mid-70s, and as suggested by the label, "plans and actions are shaped by a new sense of personal freedom to speak one's mind and to do what needs to be done" (53). I see this as an opening into the multitude of age narratives called for by Gullette. Rather than lamenting the so-called invisibility that older women are supposed to experience, my friends and I thoroughly enjoy our liberation. Being freed from the male gaze has its perks, among them single-minded pursuit of our later life passions. The third phase, *summing up,* happens in the late 60s into the 80s or beyond. Here people tend to "look back, re-examine and sum up what has happened" (53), resulting in sharing their wisdom through various forms of giving back. My parents both wrote memoirs in their 80s which revealed much of their inner lives that they were perhaps unable to express in other ways. I cherish reading these memories of their remarkable inner and outer lives. Finally, we reach the *encore phase*, from the late 70s to the end. This is a time "to further attend to unfinished business of unresolved conflicts" (54) and even to "explore novel variations on themes." Cohen tells us the story of concert pianist Vladimir Horowitz, who, in his early 80s, experienced health complications which affected his performances. With renewed encore-phase energy, he "modified his technique, substituting exquisite coloration and finesse for bravura, achieving a new round of success" (54). I will show how the midlife re-evaluation phase and the summing up phase are especially relevant to *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah.*

Katz returns us to a theme found earlier in this discussion, that is, the tendency to turn encouraging theory and exemplars of so-called successful aging into positivist dogma. He cautions his readers about certain problems inherent in aging studies which have to do with believing that activity for its own sake is "a universal 'good'" (121) (he calls this positive aging), and that social inequities hide consumerism's role in the moral regulation of old people which he likens to a work ethic and to a sexist implication of productivity. Not all old people want to endlessly socialize with their peers in retirement apartments or villages. Some may prefer to read a book in quiet solitude. Whether in extroverted socializing or introverted solitude, what is it that supports people in the face of enormous difficulties? In his quest for understanding the origins (*genesis*) of health (*saluto*) among survivors of life's challenges, Aaron Antonovsky, in *Health, Stress, and Coping*, coins the term "salutogenesis." He first questions biomedicine's pathogenic orientation, that is, its focus on disease rather than health, as he wonders about the sources of peoples' strengths in the face of horrendous circumstances. He observed that some individuals manage to remain reasonably healthy by creating a "sense of coherence" about their lives (8), reminding us of Cohen's summing up phase of creativity. How can one re-assess one's life thus far if one is constantly busy? Swedish social gerontologist Lars Tornstam, in *Gerotranscendence: A Developmental Theory of Positive Aging*, agrees with Katz's cautions, as the application of middle-age's values of productivity to old people flies in the face of their desire for contemplation. Rather than viewing old peoples' solitude as withdrawal, he finds that they may become "less self-occupied and at the same time more selective in their choice of social and other activities" (3). There may even be "a feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, and a redefinition of time, space, life, and death" (4). I see Tornstam's comments as a call to embrace the unforgettable, the enchantments, or the immensities of old

age. Basting (who offered the useful phrase, "mature, vital adulthood" (18) refers us to Barbara Myerhoff, in so far as the fictional life narrative leads to the "development of a *personal mythology*" and "creates a new self in the present" (68). In Chapter Two I delve deeply into Robert N. Butler's concept of *life review*, yet another way of talking about the summing up phase. Given the inclination and opportunity to reflect on one's past, a personal, non-clichéd narrative may be constructed. This may take the form of writing a memoir (the facilitation of which has now become an industry in itself) or simply repeating certain stories about one's past, to the delight (and simultaneous frustration) of family interlocutors. Being playwrights, Ibsen and Fosse wrote plays.

Age Theory-Inflected Drama Scholarship in the Anglophonic World

To set the stage, I begin this section with a question asked by Valerie Barnes Lipscomb, writing in *Performing Age in Modern Drama*: "What if we do not regard age as a binary of young and old? Perhaps we can regard age as fragments of various selves, or as a fluid continuum. Theatre can show us different perspectives on age, perspectives that can fight the ageist pitting of young against old, if we will only look" (154). In a few short sentences she addresses the issues raised in the Age Theory section, such as wondering whether age can be seen as a continuum, or maybe a sphere, rather than a binary. And whether the study of age as a performance can make us aware of ageism's hostilities directed at older people. By seeing different perspectives, she suggests that theatre, in "holding up a mirror to culture and expanding the possibilities of humanity for more than 2,000 years" may aid in "developing wisdom and re-examining long-held beliefs" (154). Lipscomb acknowledges the importance of investigating drama with age in mind, but she laments the relative paucity of such scholarship. She writes that "most of the plays included [in her monograph] have not attracted critical attention regarding

age" (2). As a relatively new academic discipline, which began in the late 1990s and took off from 2010 onward, this lack is not unexpected. But even so, in her close reading of *The Glass Menagerie,* she postulates that this lack of scholarly attention to age may reflect our own abhorence of aging (30). Fortunately, a number of pioneers have courageously ventured forth to raise questions which are relevant to my investigation.

Among these pioneers is Anne Davis Basting who, in *The Stages of Age*, discusses a theater company, the Geritol Frolics,[8] composed of senior citizens and their audiences who want "positive, upbeat productions" (29). In their productions "youth is reified as healthy, energetic, and emotionally carefree" (43). Idealized youth is recreated as "the standard to which old age aspires" (43). She later asks whether "The Frolics' resistance to change and emphasis on the eternally youthful soul seems indicative of a culture ill at ease with time and history, especially . . . as represented by the aged body" (53). Do we devalue old age when we recreate it as an imitation of youth? The command to "Act your age!" which can be applied to both children and elders, is challenged in a 2012 critique of the *Candid Camera*-like Belgian television series, *Benidorm Bastards,* in which older actors behave like juvenile delinquents without actually committing any crimes. Author Aagje Swinnen writes that one can fail at living up to gender and age norms. The actors decidedly do not act their ages. The phrasing reveals how age norms are a constructed performance. Indeed, the very use of the word *act* in "act your age!" alerts us to agedness as a performance. How this is played out in daily life is revealed in a story told to me by a friend: her then 80-something-year-old mother used to behave in a somewhat helpless way when in the presence of her daughters, but then the mother would speed ahead of her fellow

[8]The Geritol Frolics was a nonprofit musical theater production company for senior citizens founded in 1987 by the theater director of Brainerd [Minnesota] Community College, Bob Dryden. The company dissolved in 2019 [Jennifer Kraus, January 4, 2020; https://www.brainerddispatch.com/community/people/4849456-Geritol-Frolics-is-gone-for-good].

assisted living inhabitants when they were out for a walk. She was able to use these two modes of performance to get what she wants, that is, either help or admiration.

Rather than essentializing positivist attitudes about aging or acceding to the habit of some older people who may have, as Basting puts it, "atrophied in his or her own repeated performances" (79), reminiscence theater seeks to create "multidimensional, meaningful social roles for the aged [in a] collaborative process among all age groups" (100), i.e., in intergenerational theater groups. Two articles by Rikke Gürgens Gjærum explore the interactive process of such productions and the resulting plays in great detail. Her intent is to demonstrate that older people can be viewed as a "'wave of resources' and not as a destructive 'tsunami'" (215). All generations of the mixed-age production reported positively on the experience, suggesting that such endeavors may function as a means of dissolving barriers between generations and aiding young people's development of empathy for their elders. Furthermore, returning to Valerie Barnes Lipscomb in *Performing Age in Modern Drama,* contemporary plays which "address memory of a younger self offer varying responses to that assertion of continuity" [of the *self*] (47). The plays she considers (*The Inversion of Love, Da, and Dancing at Lughnasa*) enact the tension between a "sense of the ageless self and the recognition of a fragmented aging self-concept" (47). They thus "interrogate the conventions of the memory play by establishing the sense of an essential, unchanging self, then undercutting it by a bodily separation" (49). This bodily separation is precisely what Fosse does in *Suzannah* in which three Suzannahs (Young, Middle-Aged, and Old) are present simultaneously on stage but do not interact. They are together but separate, and the sense of an essential *self* is not made explicit. Fosse joins Ibsen in forcing questions about an essential self. Do we perform a self? Does this performance change with age? In her discussion of *How I Learned to Drive*, Lipscomb refers to "an age performativity

reflecting a more postmodern fragmentation of the sense of self" (90). Lipscomb finds that the play *Wit*—in which the "expected midlife performative instead becomes an end-of-life review"—"offers a reconciliation of the paradox of knowing that the self has aged, but feeling that the self is essential" (114). Theater, with its embodiment of scripted characters, is well-placed to pursue such questions of the self. How much of what we see on stage is the character as written? What do the actors bring of themselves and their imaginations? In the end, the self on stage is an amalgamation of a scripted version and the experience and imagination of the actors, all in the service of the director's point of view. There may be no essential self at the center of the theatrical creation, but audience members most likely perceive a self on stage. In fact, in my own experience as an actor, the more I draw from my personal life (within the crucible of my imagination), the more audience members see the character as real, but not me. What an intriguing and perplexing phenomenon.

It may be obvious that growing old must be associated with the passage of time, but Maurice Charney highlights this awareness when he writes, in *Wrinkled Deep in Time: Aging in Shakespeare*, "the topic of growing old in Shakespeare is closely connected with the representation of time in the plays" (29). For Shakespeare, does time unfold in an exact, clock- or calendar-based mode? Rarely, and only if the narrative requires it, as in *Romeo and Juliet.* More commonly the representation of time is vague and more fluid. "In Shakespeare characters seem to age in relation to the logic of the dramatic action rather than the logical progression of the narrative" (29). For example, Hamlet is, at the outset a university student at Wittenberg. But in the gravedigger scene, near the end of the play, the text suggests that Hamlet must be about 30 years old. To Charney, Hamlet's literal age is not relevant, but instead the sense that he "seems much older than he did when the play began. He has a new seriousness and sense of purpose . . . .

He seems to have grown older and more mature" (31). This playfulness with the passage of time is seen in both *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah,* although managed in different ways and resulting in different effects. Paul Johnson differentiates two modes of time regarding old age, first as a lengthening of active life but also "as a lengthening of death through dependency and exclusion" (13). As Butler suggested, without death, old age would lose its sense of urgency and potential for the unforgettable. Both Fosse and Ibsen use time's mutability to inject a certain wonder about the fact of aging which I take up in Chapter Two.

For my exploration in Chapter Three's physical and vocal characterizations associated with old age, and what I can infer from such characterizations, I rely heavily on my own experience as a clinician and as an actor. As a chiropractor, I am trained to observe a patient's physical structure as it influences their function, and to feel/intuit what it's like to inhabit that particular self. As an actor, I am keenly aware of the importance of my voice and physical body as instruments of communication. Like an athlete or dancer or singer, an actor must keep their instrument in tune in order to access and perform whatever their preparation requires. Moreover, an actor's lifetime of observing their own and others' actions, emotional expression, and conversation provides a deep reservoir for insight into the human condition. For the individual actor, this all imprints on the faces as well as the rest of their body. As Jenny Egan writes in *Imaging the Role: Makeup as a Stage in Characterization,* "the thoughts, actions, and events that shape personality leave traces on the face, teasing and pulling the features into a mould as individual as a fingerprint" (xiv). How much truer is this for an old actor? Perhaps this explains why they need do very little to express a character's thoughts and feelings. A lifetime of experience is already molded into their features. In order to situate these personal experiences within academic discourse, I refer to Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing*

Cultural Memory in the Americas. The introduction to the online version of this work about the intersection of performance and Latin American culture and politics states, "Taylor reveals how the repertoire of embodied memory—conveyed in gestures, the spoken word, movement, dance, song, and other performances—offers alternative perspectives to those derived from the written archive . . . ."[9] A key point in her work is that she reinforces the connection between these embodiments and more intangible aspects of performance by writing, "embodied performance, then, makes visible an entire spectrum of attitudes and values" (49). The embodiment makes visible the inner world of the character. This is a critical part of how an actor communicates the intangible reality within. What attitudes and values are to be found in the character descriptions and of Peer and the Suzannahs? How do posture, movement, gestures, and use of the voice reveal something about the playwrights' or actors' assumptions about age? When do the playwrights adhere to normative clichés, and when do they deviate from or challenge or ignore such tropes? These are the questions which guide my analysis in Chapters Two and Three.

Literature Review Concerning Age and "Peer Gynt"

The vastness of *Peer Gynt* scholarship has led me to focus almost entirely on age-related commentary, incidental though it is. However, even when critical responses to this play lack explicit age-related observations, the existential questions of the play, centered on Peer's lifelong search for his authentic self, imply the importance of age's accompaniment, an unavoidable sense of one's personal mortality. Recalling Butler's assertion that without death, old age would lose its sense of urgency and potential for the unforgettable, Peer's fifth act journey through the landscape of his youth (some 60 years later), serves as a meditation on aging and mortality. The ambiguity of the ending and the flawed character that is Peer trigger a deep fascination with the

[9]https://read-dukeupress-edu.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/books/book/849/The-Archive-and-the-RepertoirePerforming-Cultural.

play. Moreover, the variety of its genre-elements—satire, irony, fantasy, comedy, tragedy—provoke a recognition of human complexities embodied in the character of Peer. Harold Bloom, writing in *The Western Canon*, is rather enthusiastic about Peer. He writes, "Peer provokes our affection" (358), despite (or because of?) his flaws. Later, Bloom cautions his readers that were we to take dramatic characters as exemplars of how to live, we would be led astray. Bloom recognizes a theme important to age scholars when he writes in his introduction, "all that the Western Canon can bring one is the proper use of one's own solitude, that solitude whose final form is one's confrontation with one's own mortality" (30). If this is true, then to the attuned reader, all plays, no matter the age of the characters, contain this unavoidable element of old age. Olivia Noble Gunn, in *Empty Nurseries,* cites Paul Gorceix's comparison of the function of death in three authors' works—Aeschylus, for whom "fatality is divine;" Maeterlinck for whom death is "associated with mysterious higher powers;" and Ibsen, for whom "death is in us" (74). As much as Peer would like to disavow that death is in him, as much as he attempts to forestall death as an event that might apply to him only in the unforeseeable future, Act Five relentlessly funnels Peer toward confrontations with his own mortality.

I now venture into certain aspects of the production history of *Peer Gynt* because they are relevant to my understanding of the issues surrounding scholarly critiques of the *Peer Gynt* Festival. I explore this critique in Chapter Four's phenomenological and arts-based research methods discussion. Historical-national, culturally specific readings of *Peer Gynt* have examined how *Peer Gynt* functions as national satire, critical of mid-19th-century Norway, despite a production tradition which, for several decades, emphasized its national romantic elements (see below). Daniel Haakonsen asserts, in *Henrik Ibsens "Peer Gynt"* (*Henrik Ibsen's "Peer Gynt"*; my trans.), that one source of Ibsen's criticism of Norway arose from the fact that Norway and

Sweden did not support Denmark in its conflict with Germany (Prussia) over the fate of the duchies of Holstein and Schleswig. (Hostilities came to a head in 1848 with armed conflict.) To make the play's satire explicit, he references certain scenes, among them the troll scene in Act Two in which the self-sufficient trolls represent the isolationism of Norwegians, content with their insular concerns. Haakonsen views this play as a break from Idealism in its representation of a farm lad who is not satisfied with maintaining the role society has written for him and who is unable to choose between trolldom and his higher self, represented by his beloved, Solveig. Even though the final scene (Peer's reunion with Solveig) follows "en rik litterær tradisjon" ("a rich literary tradition") (my trans.; 157) in which redemption is achieved by the power of love, its ambiguity disrupts the tradition such that the play never engages in the Idealism it has resisted for five long acts. Otto Reinert, in "Peer and Peer: The Gyntian Self," highlights this lack of closure when he writes, "or her [Solveig's] lullaby could be Ibsen's final, sardonic irony. We are left in two minds about Peer and his fate" (144). In a later article, "Ibsen and Mimesis," Reinert asks why Ibsen's plays are still performed and answers:

> What endures in Ibsen's drama is what endures in the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides: their catastrophes, rather than their plot resolutions. The downfall of the protagonist . . . still speaks to our existential awareness of the abyss, of ironies and paradoxes that turn back on themselves, of the perils of hubris, of the absence of certainty about everything including uncertainty itself (218).

In other words, it is the existential elements of the play which allow for its continuing popularity, not only in Norway but globally. Indeed, ambiguities and existential questions are congruent with contemporary concerns and explain the creative liberties taken by international productions. Although rooted in a specific, historic time and place, *Peer Gynt*'s ambiguities lie at the root of

the diversity of interpretations and international fascination with the play. Whether issues of age are explicit in various productions, I find that age often lies in the background, as an unacknowledged factor contributing to these ambiguities and existentialist fears.

Originally published in 1867 as a poetic closet drama meant to be read rather than staged, it was not long before Ibsen initiated the first production by asking Edvard Grieg "to compose music for a shortened and 'melodramatic' stage version of the play," according to Keld Hyldig in his article "Robert Wilson's Staging of *Peer Gynt* and the Norwegian Tradition" (2). Frederick J. Marker and Lise-Lone Maker, in *Ibsen's Lively Arts: A Performance Study of the Major Plays*, point out that Grieg's music ". . . cast an aura of romance over the play that obscures the ironic and anti-sentimental aspects of Ibsen's ambiguous hero . . . [and] . . . it was the conciliatory atmosphere of folklore and romance which continued to color productions of *Peer Gynt* . . . well into the present century" (15). Hyldig reiterates the influence of Grieg's music, "the unity of the spectacular sceneries and Grieg's music was the basis of the national-romantic Peer Gynt tradition" (2). Toril Moi, in *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism,* points out that Ibsen had spent a great deal of time studying visual art. In 1873 he was "the Dano-Norwegian representative on the jury for painting and sculpture at the Universal Exhibition" (105), so the influence of the visual arts on his production concepts is well-founded. Adding to the national romanticism, in 1892 Norwegian author Bjørn Bjørnson[10] re-staged the first three acts of the play (starring himself) replacing Ibsen's rhymes with a "contemporary Norwegian dialect" (3). The translation of Ibsen's text into *Dølemål* by the Peer Gynt Festival (to be discussed in Chapter Three) is thus shown to have deep roots. Hyldig further writes that "the first period of the national romantic Peer Gynt tradition lasted from 1876 and until the 1940s" (3). He goes on to

[10]A Norwegian actor and theater director, born 1859, died 1942, son of author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and his wife Karoline (contemporaries of Henrik and Suzannah Ibsen).

describe several ground-breaking productions of the play which broke with this tradition, starting in 1948 at The Norwegian Theatre, with director Hans Jacob Nielsen's intentionally anti-romantic staging. Marker and Marker add to the list when they describe Ingmar Bergman's staging in 1957 at the Malmö (Sweden) City Theatre as follows:

> The conscious aim of Bergman's mammoth, ninety-actor production . . . was to lay bare the inner, deromanticized essence of Ibsen's drama, removing it decisively from the realm of amiable but confused pantomime and cleansing it—before the very eyes of the audience—of all the sentimental stereotypes and consoling idealizations that had been built up around it over the years (27-28).

That this and other anti-romantic productions failed to eradicate the conventions initiated in the first production by elaborate scenic elements coupled with Grieg's music hardly needs to be mentioned, but I agree with Marker and Marker who find, in *Peer Gynt,* "a virtually Shakespearean expansiveness and a correspondingly broad spectrum of possible performance choices" (43), as my discussion of global productions illuminates.

Hyldig concludes his section on the history of *Peer Gynt* productions by mentioning the annual Ibsen festival, beginning in 1990, in which productions of various of Ibsen's plays from multiple countries and cultures join Norwegian productions in expanding "globalization of the Norwegian Ibsen tradition" (8). Erika Fischer-Lichte takes up the theme of globalization in her introduction to *Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities*. She believes that "the concepts of modernization and modernity must be investigated" (3) before we can understand the relationship between the performance of Ibsen's works as part of identity creation in developing nations, as well as a factor in furthering it. Her approach is to focus on the notion of multiple modernities and diversity, with modernity to be self-assessed by each society itself. In relation to

performances of Ibsen's plays, she finds an "interweaving of cultures as part of the process of modernization, . . . [which can] . . . develop multi-dimensionally" (3). This takes the form of combining Ibsen's text with traditional theater forms of said countries with a diversity of staging elements in sets, costuming, casting, and music, and adaptations of the text. In this instance, "the global [i.e., a play by Ibsen] works as an enabling structure that informs and adapts the sum total of local conditions that, in turn, enable the production's process of interweaving that can lead to a new performance aesthetic" (9). Situating a now-globalized text, such as *Peer Gynt*, in the local venue constructs the local as a site to encounter local cultural realities, as I further explore in Chapter Four.

An example of the significance of locale is found in Japanese scholar Mitsuya Mon's chapter, "Self and Non-Self: A Japanese View on *Brand* and *Peer Gynt, Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities*. She compares Peer's journey to that of the sacrilegious Monkey King who is pressed under five mountains by Buddha, and who must wait 500 years to be saved by an enlightened monk. Mon equates the 'nothingness' of Buddhism with Love in Christianity and thereby provides the fresh perspective that Peer's potential to be melted down by the Button Molder might not be the abhorrent outcome Peer takes it to be (322-323). As a writer influenced by Christian mysticism, Fosse seems to concur with Mon's point of view when Seiness quotes him as saying about melting into the elements: "Det er nesten som ei frelse frå å døy" ("It is almost to be freed of dying"; my trans.; 242). However, when a Norwegian production is simply plopped into a foreign setting, intriguing multi-dimensionality (à la Fischer-Lichte's proposition about the concepts of modernization and modernity) cannot occur and may have the opposite effect, as was the case for the now-infamous 2006 production of *Peer Gynt* at the Giza Plateau outside of Cairo. This staging contrasts sharply with another African production

during the same year at the New Horizon Theatre Company in Zimbabwe under the direction of Robert McLaren. This latter version was adapted to a "contemporary Zimbabwean reality" (184). On the other hand, the setting on the Giza plateau, according to Ståle Dingstad's *Den Smilende Ibsen*, was a piece of Norwegian cultural imperialism (44). Elizabeth Oxfeldt, in *Nordic Orientalism: Paris and the Cosmopolitan Imagination 1800-1900*, and Frode Helland, in *Ibsen in Practice: Relational Readings of Performance, Cultural Encounters and Power*, also take up this subject, which receives a nuanced elaboration by Egyptian theater scholar and activist Nehad Selaiha. She enumerates the multiple ways that the Orientalism in the text was amplified by the staging, e.g., by having the Sphinx (silent in Peer's Act Four encounter and a positive symbol to Egyptians) speaking the amorphous Boyg's lines. She adds, "what can be neither defended nor justified, however, was the identification . . . of the Sphinx with the slimy, amorphous, evil Boyg, the propagator of compromises, circumlocution and prevarication—the advocator of 'roundaboutness'" (127). Such are the pitfalls of transferring a Western culture's iconic drama to another location, without consideration for cultural values. Despite such *faux pas*, Selaiha "loved the sense of timelessness, suggesting eternal cyclic recurrence, intimated by the constant, non-aging appearance of Peer and Solveig" (128-129). This last statement brings me to explicit references to, or commentary on, age as a factor in the text or in various productions.

Due to the lack of significant age-related commentary about *Peer Gynt,* I found that, like a bird of prey, I needed to read the literature with a search pattern focused on brief, incidental mentions of age. The overall structure of the play, with Peer aging from a youth in Acts One through Three, to middle-age in Act Four, to an old man in Act Five, first inspired me to look at the play from an aging perspective. Haakonsen writes that *Peer Gynt* ". . . er fargerik og underholdende og bygger på en serie grunnmenneskelige situasjoner: ved ungdommens

frigjørelse og oppbrudd fra hjemmet, dens kjærlighet og nakne begjær; det voksne livs seire og nederlag; alderdommens tilbakeblikk; angst og håp ved dødens terskel" (13). (". . . is colorful and entertaining and builds on a series of basic human situations: with youth's freedom and break from home; the adult's triumph and downfall; old age's backwards glance; fear and hope on death's threshold" (my trans.). "Old age's backwards glance" eloquently summarizes the concepts—introduced in the age theory section—of Butler's life review and Cohen's *summing up phase*. Haakonsen views Peer's return home in Act Five as "en gjenreisning efter ungdommens feiltrinn" ("a restoration after youth's false steps"; my trans.; 26), but how does that square with Peer's Act Four line—in attempting to escape the trolls: "Den gamle var fæl; men de unge er værre!" ("The old man was foul, but the children are worse!"; 54; Fjelde 63)? If I take this line to apply more generally to Peer's feelings about age, I surmise that Peer places himself in a timeless middle-agedness. Aarseth points out that Peer's youthful vigor in Acts One through Three is not entirely lost by Act Five, at the beginning of which Ibsen describes him as worn and weather beaten but still "kraftig" ("vigorous"; 123; Fry and Fillinger 122). If we consider only his vigor, which follows him into old age, Peer fulfills at least one attribute of Basting's "mature, vital adulthood" (18). He remains vital, even though he refuses to mature. Haakonsen may be overly idealistic in characterizing Act Five as a restoration, but the point is well-taken that there is a potential for reconciliation, if not restoration, in Peer's meandering review of his past and his final reunion with Solveig. The two productions I consider in Chapter Three take opposing positions relative to this question. Bloom continues this overview when he describes 20-year-old Peer as "a heroic vitalist," middle-aged Peer as a "matured humorist and a scoundrelly scamp" (364), although characterizing Act Four's racist, lecherous, confused, and ultimately incarcerated (in an insane asylum) Peer as a scamp may be far too generous. Bloom goes on to characterize

the aged Peer as "more rancid and more poignant than before" (364). He adds that "old age . . . sets the bleakness of a cosmos where death is a constant intimation" (364-365). Death looms in Act Five, but it does not defeat him, as Peer is still alive at the end of the play. I read Peer's finding solace in Solveig's lap as evidence that he never actually confronts his own mortality. He avoids it to the end of the play, but I cannot avoid my curiosity about what happens next.

Despite the demands of the text, various stagings have played with age in the casting of Peer. Sometimes the actor is roughly (conventionally) middle-aged, at other times the role is split among two or more actors of differing ages. Freddie Rokem, in *Global Ibsen,* discusses three Israeli productions. A description of two of them follows. In 1952 the actor, Shimon Finkel, was 47 years old, and critics were reserved "about the manner in which he played the young Peer, while remaining highly enthusiastic about his older, mature Peer in the homecoming scenes" (135). In 1971 another production cast 39-year-old Yossi Banai as Peer. Rokem interprets this choice as a "behind-the-scenes struggle between the old and the young generation at the Habimah Theater" (135). The social context of the event played a significant factor in the casting and expressionistic interpretation of the play. Returning to the theme of modernity in global productions, I reference Catherine Naugrette's claim, in "Patrice Chéreau's *Peer Gynt:* A Renewed Reception of Ibsen's Theater in France," that *Peer Gynt*, as it oscillates "between concrete realism and dreams and the imagination . . . [is] . . . perceived as a vector of modernity in France" (172). She discusses a Stéphane Braunschweig production in which two actors play Peer, one for young Peer, and another for the mature and old Peers. This choice allowed the elderly Peer to confront himself in the Button Molder, played by the younger actor. Naugrette believes that how the age of the actors is deployed makes explicit "the pivotal question . . . [of] . . . irreversibility" (173). She quotes Braunschweig's explanation that "the elderly Peer could

meet his self . . . and assess his own life in this face-to-face meeting with himself, for it is to himself that he is held accountable" (173). As unsettling as Peer's life review in Act Five is, and although Peer ultimately fails to hold himself accountable, Braunschweig accentuates the possibility of accountability with this choice. The preceding discussion has alerted me to certain aspects of the two productions of *Peer Gynt* that I discuss in Chapter Three, specifically, questions of how the casting and playing of Peer in terms of age color the meanings I found in answer to the question, "what does it mean to grow old?" and the possibility of finding our own immensities. I now turn to background material on Jon Fosse, the scant commentary on his plays, and more fruitfully, his self-described approach to writing in general. After beginning with the almost non-existent commentary on the two productions of *Suzannah*, I focus on key points from the more general scholarship about Fosse and his works.

Concerning Fosse and "Suzannah"

Although Fosse's plays have been translated into 40 languages and are produced around the world, they have been less popular in Great Britain and the U.S. According to Seiness, early productions in France and Germany were highly successful, but "ein katastrofe i England" ("a catastrophe in England"; my trans.; 250). She quotes the German director Thomas Ostermeier as saying that Fosse's (then) lack of success in England was due to a language problem in that German and Scandinavian languages have a more mysterious and poetic way of depicting the world. He postulates that perhaps the anglophonic theater tends more toward concrete conflict and has a different approximation of reality. Such generalizations do not explain the popularity in the U.S. and England of, for example, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or any of Harold Pinter's plays, with their intentional lack of exposition, not to mention the blending of art and theater by performance artists of the 1960s and following. My intent here is to give a taste of the

reception of *Suzannah* and Fosse's plays more generally, before moving on to what Fosse himself has to say about his writing, as recorded in his essays and book-length interviews/conversations with an interlocutor.

To my knowledge, there have been only two productions of *Suzannah.* Fosse was commissioned to write the original version for the Norwegian national television station, NRK, where it was first televised in January of 2004. Then, in December of 2005, Teater Cinnober in Gothenburg, Sweden, created a musical adaptation of the play. Björn Gunnarsson's review[11] of the latter production mostly explains Fosse's writing style, which is typically filled with pauses and repetitions. Kjell Arnold Nyhus writes in *U Alminnelig: Jon Fosse og Mystikken* (*Nonuniversal: Jon Fosse and the Mystery*; my trans.): "Repetisjonen kan også brukes på den måten at ordene så å blir tømt for mening" ("Repetition can also be used so that words, so to say, become emptied of meaning" (my trans.; 2009b 52). Gunnarsson calls these traits *"fosseismen"* [Fosse-isms; my trans.]. In keeping with the avant-garde nature of the piece, Icelandic composer Atli Ingólfsson created musical repetitions which, according to Gunnarsson, sometimes supported the theme and at other times disrupted the time-breaking, mysterious illusion created by the actors. The production also played at Oslo's Ultima music festival in 2006, which occasioned an article by Jon Øystein Flink in Ballade.no. Flink cites the favorable critical reception to the Cinnober production in Gothenburg. He quotes, for example, Sven Rånlund, of *Göteborgs-Posten*, who was impressed by the piece's rich detail and precision as a fusion of dissimilar cultural expressions; *Dagens Nyheter'*s Martin Nystrøm who described it as having "brilliant moments of utterly unsafe musical theater;" and Björn Gunnarsson of *Helsingborgs Dagblad* who called it one of Fosse's best plays. Of the NRK production, Flink writes that for

[11]https://www.hd.se/2005-12-13/fosse-och-hans-teatervarldRbqTc.

some the lyrical stillness was deep and gripping; for others it was slow and boring. In the face of the potential tediousness of Fosse's plays, Carole Di Tosti, writing a review of a 2014 New York City production of Fosse's *I Am the Wind*, advised audience members to "settle back, let go, and not resist" in order to allow the play to engage their feelings as they follow two men setting out to sea. The result, she writes, is a taste of Kierkegaardian existentialism in which there is no certainty, only the unknown. Therein, Di Tosti believes, lie "immense possibilities." In using this phrase, to my delight she nearly quotes Fuchs. The end result is to be jolted from "complacency to wonder." Author and blogger Jon Sobel writes a mixed review of another Fosse play, *Sa Ka La,* which played in New York City at The Theatres in 2008. He writes favorably about the production values and acting, and he considers the piece to be "Problematic but thought-provoking, and intermittently fascinating, funny, and insufferable . . . ." Tedious, boring, insufferable—these are not words that provoke an eagerness to read or view Fosse's plays. However, after my close readings of the play and Fosse's essays, I find great beauty and wonder emerging in those frequent pauses and repetitions. I, too, have imagined setting it to music because of the fugue-like nature of the play's rhythms, as Nyhus calls them. As far as I am aware, NRK's production was telecast only once, and I have been able to view it only by borrowing a DVD copy from the Norwegian National Library. I am critical of some of the choices made by the director and actors, choices which do, to my ear, enhance the potential for tedium. I take up this discussion in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Fortunately for my purposes, Fosse is a prolific essayist about his own work. Through essays, in conjunction with other scholarship, I am able to identify certain Fosse-isms which inform *Suzannah*. First, death looms large in Fosse's works, as it does in Ibsen's. Fosse writes, in *An Angel Walks Through the Stage and Other Essays*, "death is not a mystery to be solved but an

inherent condition of the novel. And to me, the novel, to be obstinate, is constantly in search of the lost God" (27). Although Fosse refers here to the novel, metaphysics is at the heart of Fosse's writing process, whether in literary fiction or drama. I believe this metaphysical perspective is essential to avoid rashly dismissing his dramas. In the same collection of essays, Fosse quotes Walter Benjamin: "'In all grief, there is the deepest need for speechlessness'" (31). The spaces between the words, like rests in a musical score, allow time for the spoken words to land and take root for elaboration of the reader's or viewer's personal response. Nyhus suggests that although we search for language to describe our experiences, we may not be able to find the words, and that it is words themselves which cover over our apprehension of the mysterious (2009b 69-70). That words cannot capture one's apprehension of the infinite is an expression that God is . . . larger than thought (2009b 209). In the same text, Nyhus also reports on Fosse's affinity for philosopher Martin Heidegger in that humans are beings headed for death. Nyhus describes these characters as existentially dead or sleepwalking through life (66). Metaphysically speaking, death is inherent in life, and Fosse seeks to give his audience an experience of that existential fact. Or as *Peer Gynt*'s Button Molder tells Peer, "At være sig selv, er: sig selv at døde" ("To be one's self, is to kill one's self"; 159; Fry and Fillinger 158).

Second, a distinct meaning of voice figures heavily in Fosse's work. Writing in *An Angel Walks Through the Stage and Other Essays*, Fosse explains, "for me, all art is connected to just this voice," that is, "an unmistakable writing voice . . . almost inhuman in its silent speech" (82). Listening in the silence becomes translated in his dramatic writing into the frequent directions for the characters to pause, as if they, too, are to listen for this silent speech. He also refers to "a mute voice" (82) and "a voice that comes from somewhere far away" (85). It may be fruitless to try and pin down a meaning for this sense of the word voice, but an analogy from Fosse's youth

brings us closer to a felt sense of the word. Kjell Arnold Nyhus entitles an article from 2009 "Det Er Ikkje Språk Men Det Er i Alt Språk; Om Skriftmystikken i Jon Fosses Verk" ("It Isn't Speech But There is Language in Everything: On the Writing of the Mysterious in Jon Fosse's Work"; my trans.). The article begins with a story that Fosse tells about his youth: he often lay in the grass, gazing up through the branches of a tree and at the spaces between the branches. Language is wholly unequal to the task of explaining the experience of what he saw, yet Nyhus offers another insight from Fosse, "språket er samstundes det som skil mennesket frå Gud og det some knyter mennesket til Gud" ("speech is simultaneously that which separates people from God and that which binds humans to God"; my trans.; 45). Such paradoxes densely populate Fosse's mysticism, which he calls *negative mysticism,* relying on words such as "usagde . . . ubestemt . . . u-endelig, u-begripelig, u-utgrunnelig, u-vitende" ("unsaid . . . indefinite . . . endless, incomprehensible, unfathomable, unknowable" (2009b my trans.; 23) to metaphorically allude to something which cannot be grasped directly. The phrase "lysande mørker" ("luminous darkness"; my trans.; 98) again uses paradox to point to "en religiøs og eksistensiell erfaring det er vanskelig å finne ord for" ("a religious and existential experience that is difficult to find words for"; 2009b; my trans.; 98). Nyhus quotes Fosse, "'for i den [den kristne mystiske tradisjonen] . . . den verkeleg innsikt er aldri meiningsfull, et er først gjennon ikkje-kunnskap at ein kan nå verkeleg innsikt'" ("'for in that [the Christian mystical tradition] . . . the real insight is never meaningful, it is first through not-knowing that one can reach the true insight'"; 2009b; my trans.; 107). What is left unsaid creates the space between the branches of the tree and the wonder. The result of Fosse's writing-cum-meditation is that he does not, as Nyhus reports in his first encounter with Jon Fosse's works at the National Theater in Oslo, "skriver . . . om mystikk, han skaper mystikk" ("write about the mystery, he creates the mystery"; 2009b; my trans., 9). If a

reader or viewer is to experience this mystery, then taking Di Tosti's advice to "settle back, let go, and not resist" may be required.

In *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Materialism,* Elinor Fuchs brings to mind a third Fosse-ism when she describes post-modern dramatists as writing in "an aesthetic of breaks and gaps, surfaces and masks, objectless in its irony, without closure . . ." (6). This quite precisely describes the structure of *Suzannah.* Writing about *Suzannah* in an article for *Ibsen Studies* ("Altering Henrik Ibsen's Aura: Jon Fosse's Suzannah"), Kyle Korynta, alludes to the post-modernism of the play when he describes it as post dialogic, with "a free play of many voices which are arranged according to a freedom of structure that has broken away from dramaturgy of the classicist kind" (143).[12] In the course of his career as a dramatist, Fosse has repeatedly explored this structural liberation in his numerous plays. For example, *Suzannah*, typographically speaking, appears on the page as poetry written in free verse, suggesting this freedom from linearity and the demand to create a singular self-identity and meaning. Seiness quotes Fosse, who claims that he is, even in his novels, essays, children's books, and journalism, as well of course in his plays, a "poet av legning, men ikkje rein lyrikar" ("poet of layering, but not a pure lyrical poet"; my trans.; 17). Seiness again quotes Fosse as he defines what he means by poet: "Ein lyrikar skriv lyrikk, men ein poet kan vera biletkunstnar eller komponist. Poesi betyr å skapa, det handlar om å laga noko grunnleggjande, ikkje rapportera, men laga noko frå grunnen av, slik at det er innsikter i måten det er laga på" (301-302) ("A lyricist writes lyrics, but a poet can be a painter or composer. Poetry is to create, it concerns itself with making something

[12]After Knut Ove Arntzen, "From Cabaret Dramaturgy towards a New Theatre Text" in *Dramaturgische Und Politische Strategien Im Drama Und Theater Des 20. Jahrhunderts,* edited by Knut Ove Arntzen,, Siren Leirvåg and Elin Nesje Vestli, 11-23, Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, GmbH, 2000.

fundamental, not reportage, but to make something from the ground up, such that there are insights in the method of its creation" (my trans.).

Seiness claims that by joining the Bergen Project, something opened in Fosse which resulted in a movement in his language, into free verse, using the lyrical dramatic situations from his novels but excluding their action (138). Fosse has a very specific intent in writing in a post-modern mode, that is, that he is listening for a silent voice, the voice which speaks by being quiet, the voice which comes from a silence (151). Leif Zern describes this poetic effect as being at the core of Fosse's writing, ". . . there is a strong lyrical streak in all his writing, a musicality that gives his words a magical, conjuring tone, at once simple and intense" (11). According to Zern, Fosse's characters "retreat rather than attack," and that at the core of his dramatic writing is found "the fragile balance between emptiness and meaning" (8). In that delicate space Fosse interjects *waiting,* which Zern believes could be "a motto for all Fosse's writing for the stage" (35), as it captures the existential experience of "being suspended between the past and the future, the present that cannot be captured" (35). Fosse calls this state *omnitemporalitet* (omnitemporality). (I expand on this concept in Chapter Two's text analysis of *Suzannah*.) Transitioning from the busy-ness of our daily lives to reading Fosse requires a change of pace, perhaps a withdrawal into old age's gifts of solitude and contemplation, so that we can get a foretaste of old age's immensity or enchantments or unforgettables. Fosse listens for this mute voice while writing. We in turn need to quiet the chatter of our internal monologues or external dialogues to enter into his evocation of the mystery.

Summary

Chapter One has created a foundation for my fascination for these two plays as an opportunity to comprehend something of old age's potentials, which depend on in its conscious

experience, that is, its immensities, its enchantments, or life's unforgettables. In my daily practice of solving the *New York Times'*s *Daily Mini Crossword Puzzle*, I came across the following clue, attributed to David Bowie: "An extraordinary process whereby you become the person you always should have been." The answer to the clue: "Aging." In preparing the reader for the following chapters, and to capture some of that "extraordinary process," I divided Chapter One into five sections, as follows:

- ***The Introduction*** introduces questions of aging and its meanings which I explore in this dissertation. I owe Elinor Fuchs's article, "Estragement: Towards an 'age theory' theatre criticism," a debt of gratitude for alerting me to the field of drama scholarship based on age theory. My first readings on the subject began with her citations and reference list. The brilliance of her concept of the "immensity of the conscious experience of age" has provided a guiding light throughout my years of research and writing.
- ***Age Theory*** surveys the development this discipline's concepts from its historical roots in ancient Greece and Rome, on through the Middle Ages, to recent history as an academic discipline, to the exciting turns that age theory has taken more recently. I identify two main narratives of aging, peak-and-decline and creativity-across-the-life-course. Within the continuum between these two poles are innumerable ways of experiencing and talking/writing about aging. I bring to our attention felicities hidden in old age which have nothing to do with frailty or feeble-mindedness, much to the surprise and delight of individuals who seek to experience their old age with keen awareness.
- ***Age Theory-Inflected Drama Scholarship in the Anglophonic World*** is influenced by the age theorists highlighted in the previous section. Writers caution us to avoid polarized thinking and positivist dogma about how old age should look. They draw our attention to

playwrights' understanding that death lurks behind all drama. A sense of mortality drives the creative process, even in such pieces as *Geritol Frolics* and *The Benidorm Bastards* which humorously defy norms of decline. The multi-dimensionality of aging is captured in reminiscence theater when devised pieces include a wide age range.

- ***Literature Review Concerning Age and "Peer Gynt"*** focuses on scholarship which discusses the existential dilemma of "the self," whether or not explicitly concerning age or aging because knowledge of death (in youth or old age) is what creates the dilemma in the first place. Though sometimes misinterpreted as a piece of national romanticism, the production history I outline explains how *Peer Gynt* came to be seen as satire which critiques 19th-century Norwegian isolationism. The existential aspect of the play is what allows *Peer Gynt* to move out of its culturally specific identity to become a source for global localized interpretations.
- ***Concerning Fosse and "Suzannah"*** relies heavily on Fosse's own essays and book-length interviews, with some help from critical scholarship (and briefly, a look at critical reception of a Swedish production of *Suzannah*). I delineate three aspects of his writing which are meant to help the reader or audience member into the mystery he attempts to create. First, the way in which awareness of death leads to his metaphysics; second, a distinct, metaphysical meaning of voice; and third, certain freedom arising from his plays' post-modern structure and lyricism.

Outline of Remaining Chapters

In Chapter Two I take a close look at the written versions of the plays. I am guided by five perspectives which revealed themselves as I juxtaposed the two plays: the physicality of age, gendered attitudes and beliefs about age, the mystery of time's passing, making sense of a life,

and setting. The latter perspective is briefly mentioned in Chapter Two and is expanded upon in Chapter Three, while the first four perspectives structure Chapter Two's text analysis. Setting and the physicality of age are emphasized in Chapter Three's performance analysis of two productions of *Peer Gynt*—the Peer Gynt Festival's annual touristic production in Norway and Hallvard Bræin's 2008 film *Gatas Gynt*, which is a rendering of the fifth act, performed by people of Oslo experiencing homelessness—and the NRK version of *Suzannah*. Close viewings of the plays (via DVDs) enable me to differentiate the texts from the productions, and to explore how actor and director choices influence the impact of age (or lack of it) on the performances and in what ways the normative meanings of age are conformed to or altered. Specific moments from the plays elucidate the themes discussed in age theory and provide an understanding of ways in which *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah* disrupt or adhere to normative clichés of aging or offer intriguing alternatives. Further discussion of Fosse's metaphysics deepens our understanding of *Suzannah.*

For Chapter Four's phenomenological study of volunteer actors with the Peer Gynt Festival's production, I ground my personal experience with scholarship by Henry Glassie, Ellen Rees, and Lars Harald Maagerø. Also included is a review of the folklore elements which inform the perspectives as applied to *Peer Gynt*. I then use qualitative methods—identifying significant statements, then coding, and finally arriving at subthemes and themes—to analyze transcripts of interviews with the actors. Inspired by the emerging field of arts-based research (ABR), and such examples as the annual "Dance Your PhD" contest[13] sponsored by *Science* magazine, I share my findings in the form of a playscript. In this chapter, the role played by age mostly retreats from the foreground but occasionally reasserts itself. With informants in their 60s and 70s who are

[13]"Announcing the annual Dance Your Ph.D. contest," https://www.science.org/content/page/announcing-annual-dance-your-ph-d-contest

reasonably mentally and physically capable, I found that they attribute little significance to their chronological age. As exemplars of Basting's "mature, vital adulthood" (18), age becomes integrated into the larger experience, perhaps unwittingly not feeling "obliged to identify willy-nilly with age as their primary identity," as Gullette suggested.

CHAPTER TWO

CONSTRUCTING AGE AND AGING IN *PEER GYNT* AND *SUZANNAH*

Introduction

The potential for a more imaginative reading of dramatic literature in terms of aging is highly available in these plays because they enact three ages across the life course of the eponymous characters, that is, youth, middle-age, and old age. By doing so, the plays provide windows into the consciousness of the characters at various stages of life. Their earlier selves, in conversation with their older selves, give us a view into, as Fuchs writes, "dimensions of age which have frequently been missed by actors, directors, spectators and critics alike" (2014 77). In order to unpack the dimensions revealed in the two plays, I focus on the first four perspectives I introduced in Chapter One: the physicality of age, gendered attitudes and beliefs about age, the mystery of time's passing, and making sense of a life. These perspectives allow me to examine multiple facets of aging. In *Peer Gynt*, its five-act structure sequentially encompasses Peer's youth, late middle-age, and old age, whereas in *Suzannah,* Fosse writes independent monologues for Old, Middle-Aged, and Young Suzannah. The perspectives appear in both plays, but function differently and provide insights which sometimes agree and sometimes diverge. Fosse never explicitly suggests that the three Suzannahs interact or even that they are aware of each other, even though they appear simultaneously on stage. Having introduced the perspectives that emerged during my reading, I now explore more fully how each functions in the plays. I begin with performative embodiment, by which I mean the manner in which physicality is used to effect a change in another character or, as occurs in both plays, for the characters themselves. This definition follows Erving Goffman, who, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life,* writes that performance is "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which

serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (15). I discuss additional pertinent meanings of performance in Chapter Three.

Revealing the Physicality of Age: Performing Vigor versus Frailty

Ibsen delays physical decline and Fosse accelerates it, thereby disrupting the association of old age with decrepitude or youth with agility. Ibsen describes Peer—at the beginnings of Acts One, Four, and Five—as "sturdy," "handsome," and "vigorous," respectively. In Act Five he would therefore be categorized, according to Neugarten's paradigm, as "young-old." Because of Fosse's descriptions of Old Suzannah, such as that she "stands, supporting herself by the edge of the table" (83), Old Suzannah may tentatively be considered old-old as she is, at least partially, limited in the performance of at least one major activity, climbing or descending stairs. Fosse does not back away from describing Old Suzannah's physical limitations. In fact, he deploys two commonplaces of aging that contrast with Peer's physical vitality—pain and physical weakness—in frequently repeated character descriptions of Old Suzannah, for example:

> *Ho riv seg laus frå bordkanten, og går støtta til ein stokk ut på golvet* (86)
>
> *ho prøver å rette seg opp* (87)
>
> *Ei smerte går over andletet* (106)
>
> *ho begynner å gå sakte, og med smerte, kring på golvet* (107)
>
> She pushes away from the edge of the table, and crosses supported by cane
>
> she tries to straighten up
>
> A grimace of pain crosses her face
>
> she begins to walk slowly, and with pain, around the floor (my trans.)

The historical Suzannah's struggle with arthritis, from a fairly early age, here serves as an emblem for physical decline, but not necessarily aging, since it occurred at a relatively young

age. As I will show, this sign of embodied weakness creates the overall effect of enhancing, rather than diminishing, Fosse's fictional Suzannahs' strength of character, as it offers a physical obstacle that does nothing to limit Old Suzannah's consciousness of the immensity of her life, as reflected in her reminiscences. In harvesting the unforgettable moments from their past, the Suzannahs alter historical reality to support their assertion that they *are* Ibsen.

Among the scenes of Peer using performances of physical vigor to recover from his deflated sense of self, I begin by citing a speech from Act Two. The morning after he has abducted Ingrid from her wedding and spent the night with her in the mountains, Peer rejects Ingrid, and they go their separate ways. On a mountainside, Peer leaps about as he revels in his physical strength and claims the invigorating fuel of life which he imagines gives him power over the forces of nature itself. Ibsen gives Peer very specific action to emphasize the physicality of the lines:

> Det er Liv! En blir Bjørn i hvert et Led.
>
> *(slaar om sig og springer ivejret)*
>
> Bryde, velte, stemme Fossen imod!
>
> Slaa! Rykke Furuen opp med Rod!
>
> Det er Liv! Det kan baade hærde og højne!
>
> Till Helved med alle de vassne Løgne! (41)
>
> It's life! It gives you the brawn of a bear.
>
> [*He strikes out with his arms and leaps in the air.*]
>
> You feel you can crush and overthrow,
>
> Stem the torrent, and root up fir trees!
>
> It's life! It makes you iron and air.

To hell with all those crappy lies! (Fry and Fillinger 34)

By playing a bear—and an unnaturally strong and violent one who strikes out and leaps—Peer exaggerates his sense of self and identifies with a destructive power that he cannot exert in the civilized society from which he has been outlawed. Throughout most of the play, Peer calls upon his physical prowess to defy aging and the nothingness of death itself. Well into Act Four (when he is over 50 years of age), he has not abandoned these displays of physical vigor, as long as they function as a strategy for youthening as he confronts his losses and his advancing years. For example, in Act Four's encounter with the alluring Anitra, who is accompanied by her dancing attendants, Peer is fooled into believing that she is succumbing to his seductions. However, she proceeds to relieve him of his jewels and bag. Seemingly unaware of what he is losing, Peer declares, "Som en Bukk kan jeg springe!" ("See, I can leap like a buck!"; 105; Hill 272). He proceeds to dance as he sings:

Jeg er en lyksalig Hane!

Hakk mig, min lille Tippe!

Ej! Hopp! Lad mig trippe;—

jeg er en lyksalig Hane! (105)

O I am a jolly cockerel!

Peck me, my biddybaddy hen!

I will prance while you count to ten!

O I am a jolly cockerel! (Hill 272)

In a way, Peer may be seen as having internalized ageist norms, in that he feels the need—like the players in *Geritol Frolics*—to reify youth in the face of advancing years. Ibsen employs the stereotype of the *Senex amans*, the old man who is mocked for his foolish lust for much younger

women, to comic and cautionary effect. Does Peer feel 30 years old inside? What is he to do in the face of strong cultural pressures? Succumb? Comply? Perform old age as a physical or mental cliché? Up until now he has declined to decline, as suggested by the title of Gullette's book, *Declining to Decline*. In any case, playing along with Peer's advances, Anitra continues to pluck Peer of his wealth. Eventually realizing the futility of his youthful performing, Peer reconfigures his use of the cockerel imagery:

> Ville stoppe Tiden ved at trippe og danse!
> Ville stride mod Strømmen ved at svinge og svanse!
> Spille paa Strengeleg, kjæle og sukke,
> og ende som en Hane – med at lade sig plukke.
> Den Adfærd kan kaldes profetisk vild.—
> Ja; plukke! – Tvi; jeg er plukket slemt! (107)
> . . . vying to halt time
> by prancing and dancing or trying to swim
> against the stream,
> by monkeying and tail-flunkeying,
> harping, throwing the occasional fit,
> strutting like a cockerel! Pfui! I was plucked all right! (Hill 274)

This is the last we read of Peer's efforts at youthening through displays of youthful vigor, notwithstanding his tussle with the Cook for the upturned lifeboat during the shipwreck scene early in Act Five. For the remainder of Act Four Peer embodies Cohen's *midlife re-evaluation phase* (a period of questing for meaning in life motivated by, for the first time, seriously confronting one's mortality). Peer gives voice to dissatisfaction with his previous exploitive

business practices, and he tries on for size a litany of other options, from historian to philosopher to mad man.

Differences between Peer and Suzannah in the representation of the physicality of middle-age are striking, beginning with the playwrights' differing definitions of middle-age. For Peer, middle age does not occur until about fifty years old. Peer's Act Four speech, on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, to his fellow imperialists mentions the appearance of a few gray hairs. He uses this awareness of creeping age as an explanation for his decision to get out of immoral business endeavors, such as the slave trade, but adds, "og skjønt min Helbred var fortrinlig" ("Although my health was excellent"; 81; Hill 243). Peer's proud declaration serves to dismiss the idea that he has any real concern for his physical capacities despite:

> Desuden tog jeg till at ældes;
> jeg nærmed mig mod Femtiaarene,—
> fik efterhaanden graasprængt Haar; (81)
> Besides, I'd started to find hints
> of threatening age—you know, hair tints,
> full head of hair but touched with grey? (Hill 243)

These hints and tints are nothing more than mild insults to his vanity.

For Fosse, old age is marked by frailty, but it is not defined by it. Middle age occurs by age thirty, presumably because Middle-Aged Suzannah is married and has a seven-year-old child. Motherhood, rather than chronological age, marks Suzannah as being middle aged.[14] The following sequence of monologues shows that Fosse at first seems to reinforce the association of

[14]Gendered differences continue in old age. Gunhild O. Hagestad and Pearl A. Dykstra point out that despite the principle of intersectionality being well-articulated, "little progress has been made in understanding age and gender as intertwined systems" (135).

physical decline with old age, but a closer look at the text offers a more nuanced interpretation. At the very least, none of the Suzannahs exhibit an abhorrence of old age. This is in spite of the fact that at a relatively young age, signs of arthritis are already making their mark. The effects are first described by Old Suzannah, and then anticipated by Young Suzannah:

DEN GAMLE SUZANNAH

Og då

ja då måtte dei bere meg ned trappene

for eg kan ikkje gå i trapper

så dei bar met

steg for steg

nedover (129-130)

DEN UNGE SUZANNAH

Tenk når eg blir gammal

og kanskje ikkje eingong

kan gå skikkeleg (130)

OLD SUZANNAH

And then

yes then they have to carry me down the stairs

because I can't manage the steps

so they carry me

step by step

downward.

YOUNG SUZANNAH

Just think, when I get old

and maybe someday

I won't be able to walk properly (my trans.)

Is Young Suzannah making assumptions based on her beliefs about what old age should look like? Is she performing these beliefs by rehearsing them in her imagination? The text indicates that Young Suzannah is physically capable as she tells us how she hurried down to the street to walk with the nascent genius, Ibsen, sometime after an awkward dinner hosted by her stepmother. Immediately following Young Suzannah's reveries, we read Middle-Aged Suzannah's description of her already failing body. She says:

Det verker slik i kroppen

Og ofte er det tungt å gå (130)

My body hurts like that

And it's often hard to walk (my trans.)

The affliction, which was imaginary to Young Suzannah, has started to become a reality by age thirty. Does she begin to perform the restrictions of her arthritis? The condition is on the minds of all three Suzannahs, first as an undeniable reality for Old Suzannah, then as an act of the imagination for Young Suzannah, and finally, Middle-Aged Suzannah's observation of a periodic problem which foreshadows the future. This sequence of monologues expands our understanding of physical decline to include such components as imagination, belief, performance, progression, and inevitability. Within the monologues I find no trace of the Suzannahs relegating themselves to William F. May's moral passivity. They remember, reconsider, and question themselves throughout the play.

While Old Suzannah's frailty does nothing to hinder the vigor of her reflections, Peer relies on his physicality to get himself through his mostly unexamined life. In Act Four, when Peer's performance of youthful vigor as a bulwark against life's disappointments deserts him, his mental decline accelerates and culminates in his incarceration in the insane asylum, and at the end of the play, in laying his head in Solveig's lap. He exhibits something of old age's potential for moral passivity as he gives himself over to Solveig's ministrations. Solveig, in turn, reinforces Peer's passivity as she sings a lullaby, "Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal vaage;—/ sov og drøm du, Gutten min!" ("I shall rock you, I shall watch over you / sleep and dream, my boy" (171; my trans.). On the other hand, the early physical decline that Suzannah experiences sets her up for a lifetime of coping, such that it subsides in importance. As an old woman of sufficient wealth, she can indulge in recalling her past without concerns for her survival, unlike Middle-Aged Suzannah for whom poverty was a daily reality. But for all three, the relationship with Ibsen is their chief concern. At no point do pain and stiffness define the Suzannahs, but they do provide a physical link among them.

Gendered Attitudes and Beliefs about Age

I have already briefly touched on gendered differences in the physical representations of age. I now take a closer look at these differences from the perspective of (feminine) beauty and its connection with virtuous innocence. The differences provide additional insights into my reading of the last scene of *Peer Gynt* and the self-doubt that concerns about beauty inflict on the Suzannahs. Whereas Peer identifies with the norm of physical vigor, from the first moment till the last, he defines Solveig in terms of the virtue of feminine innocence and its connection with religiosity. Peer muses:

Hvor lys! Nej, skulde du set en slig!

Skotted ned paa Skoen og det hvide Sprede—!

Og saa holdt hun i Moderens Skjørteflig,

og bar en Salmebog svøbt i et Klæde—! (24)

How fair! Who's ever seen one like this!

Eyes on her shoes and snow-white apron—!

And how she held onto her mother's dress,

And the kerchief she carried her prayer book in—! (Fjelde 27)

Modesty, cleanliness, a religious text, and hanging on to her mother all emphasize Peer's view of Solveig as innocently beautiful. Solveig alone, in her unattainability, incites this idealization. Neither the bride (Ingrid) nor the Herd Girls in Act Two, nor the troll princess (the Greenclad woman) in Acts Two and Three warrant Peer's approbation. In Act Four, Peer is abandoned by his fellow entrepreneurs and watches his wealth go up in smoke with the explosion of his ship a distance offshore. His despairing thoughts of mortality are relieved by the appearance of the alluring Anitra.[15] She offers a stark contrast to his idealized Solveig on the one hand and confirm his generally dismal view of women on the other:

Enten yderlig fyldig, eller yderlig mager;

enten ængstende ung, eller skræmmende gammel;—

det middels gjør vammel.—

Hendes Fødder,—de er ikke ganske rene;

ikke Armene heller; især den ene.

[15]I agree with Frode Helland's point in "Empire and Culture in Ibsen. Some Notes on the Dangers and Ambiguities of Interculturalism" that the many demeaning clichés deployed by Ibsen cannot be ignored even when interpreted as satire, because even so-called positive stereotypes offensively characterize Anitra as being among "cunning, untrustworthy thieves and bandits" (139).

Men *det* er igrunden ingen Forringelse.

Jeg vil snarere kalde det en Betingelse— (98)

They're either too stout, or else too gaunt,

Disturbingly young, or grimly antique—

The ones in between make you sick—

Her feet, they're not entirely clean;

Same with the arms; especially the one.

But that's no cause to be critical.

In fact, it's one morsel of her appeal— (Fjelde 119)

Peer's oscillation indicates that he is never satisfied, or that he has become jaded in his endless pursuit of some feminine ideal, which perhaps the exoticized Anitra can fulfill. Unsaid but left tantalizingly in our awareness is that no woman can measure up to his image of Solveig as eternally youthful and beautiful. This is reinforced by Act Four Scene Ten's interjection of a middle-aged Solveig, singing and still "lys og smuk" ("fair-haired and comely"; 109; Hill 276). This attitude is reinforced when Peer, rejected by Anitra, dismisses women as a whole, "og Kvinderne,—det er en skrøbelig Slægt!" ("And the women—pah, they're a scrubby lot!"; 109; Fjelde 133). Solveig continues to represent virtuous innocence, which the Greenclad Woman (because she is a troll) and Anitra (because she is an exoticized other) are not allowed to represent. Kari Jegerstedt's article, "Anitras etterliv: 'Ibsens kvinner' i en postkolonial kontekst" ("Anitra's afterlife: 'Ibsen's women' in a postcolonial context"; my trans.), argues that the fourth act interjection of middle-aged but fair, lovely, and loyal Solveig underscores "the imperialistic construction of gender and femininity" and "contributes to how Solveig's appearance in the fourth act sticks out as uncomfortably problematic in relation to what Skorgen and Oxfeldt assert

is Ibsen's anti-orientalistic intention in the Anitra scenes" (64). These passages show the intersectionality of gender, femininity, imperialism, and orientalism with age. This has salience in my age-theory based dissertation because normative constructs, regardless of their source, constrict the possibilities of self-identity and self-expression away from various possibilities of being.

In contrast to Solveig's attractive innocence, the undesirability of masculine dependency (if not innocence) is demonstrated twice. The first occurs at Act One's wedding scene, when Mads Moen is distraught over his bride Ingrid's refusal to unlock the door of the shed in which she is hiding. First, Ibsen writes of the Bridegroom (Mads) that he enters "*smaagrædende, nærmer sig Faderen, som staar i Samtale med et Par andre, og trækker ham i Trøjen*" ("*The* BRIDEGROOM *comes whimpering to his* FATHER, *who is talking to one or two others, and pulls at his sleeve*"; 22; Fry and Fillinger 18). A few pages later, Mads wails that Ingrid has still refused to unbolt the door and "*trækker i sin Moder*" ("*tugging at his mother*"; 26; Fry and Fillinger 21). His father reacts with suppressed anger and derisively declares, "Aa, du var værd at bindes i Baasen!" ("Ah, you're only fit to be tied up / With the calves in a barn!"; 26; Fry and Fillinger 21). Hanging on to a parent's clothing is suddenly no longer an attractive gesture. Instead, it becomes a sign of unsympathetic weakness which is underscored when Mads is cuckolded by Peer's abduction of Ingrid at the end of the act. This action occurs once more when Peer's idealized troll princess, the Greenclad Woman, returns in Act Three with her (and Peer's) son in tow, "*en stygg Unge med en Ølbolle i Haanden halter efter og holder hende i Skjørtet*" ("An UGLY CHILD, carrying a jug of ale, limps after her, holding her skirt"; 66; Fry and Fillinger 59). It is not enough that he is unattractive and physically disabled; he also shows unmasculine weakness by clinging to his mother's clothing. The contrast between the

expectations for girls versus boys is thus made highly explicit. Girls may cling to their mothers, but boys should not. Peer's perception locks Solveig (from his point of view) into childhood and prevents him from seeing other women as anything other than lustful, willing servants of his erotic desire, as exemplified by Ingrid, the Herd Girls, the Greenclad Woman, and Anitra. Whereas Peer's hair is allowed to turn gray in his middle years, Act Four's Solveig is still blond, patiently singing about her lost love and asking God to bless him on his journeys. By the end of Act Five, however, Ibsen's description of Solveig has changed to reflect some physical realities commonly associated with aging. She is blind and holds a staff, the purpose of which is unstated. We are tempted to wonder, does she use it to guide her footsteps? Or for balance? Or to herd her goats? Despite these signs of physical decline, Ibsen describes her as standing *"rank og mild*" ("erect and mild"; 169; Fjelde 207), thereby countering the cliché of associating aging with physical disability. However, Peer reveals that his initial perception of Solveig is fixed in his mind when he refers to her as his mother, his wife, and innocent woman. Moreover, he clings to her, echoing how Solveig, Mads Moen, and the Ugly Brat clung to their mother's clothing. Solveig is ever young and innocent in Peer's eyes. The stasis of Peer's image contributes to the contemporary problem of how to interpret and stage the final scene of the play. More importantly for my purposes, Ibsen stirs the pot of age-related norms and thus provides additional fuel for understanding the complexities inherent in the "immensity of the conscious experience of age" (Fuchs 77).

In contrast to Peer's rigid beliefs about beauty, virtue, and innocence, in *Suzannah* the Suzannahs are not subject to the male gaze of another character. There is no hint of seeing themselves through Ibsen's eyes. Instead, as Maren Anderson Johnson writes in “Jon Fosse's Suzannah: Illuminating Henrik Ibsen's Genius Partner," Suzannah is unique in seeing Ibsen's

larger eye (in contrast to his other, smaller eye). By doing so, "she gains power over the eye and thus over Henrik's method of seeing and observing the world. Her ability to see and know the eye is her power" (461). Knowledge about Ibsen's large eye symbolizes that the Suzannahs have their own agency. Not entirely subject to societal norms of beauty and innocence, we encounter a more ambivalent relationship with these norms. Fosse flexibly interweaves the Suzannahs' concerns about beauty with evidence that such concerns do not prevent them from exercising their will. For example, Young Suzannah, in the midst of musing about walks with Ibsen and memories of his glancing up at her from the street, where he waits for her to come down to meet him, says:

> Men eg er jo så stygg
>
> *Gjer seg litt til*
>
> Stor og klumpete og stygg
>
> Marie-søster er så mykje finare
>
> *kort pause*
>
> nesten alle er finare enn meg (111-112)
>
> But I am so ugly
>
> *Makes as if to laugh at herself*
>
> Big and clumsy and ugly
>
> My sister Marie is much prettier
>
> *short pause*
>
> almost everyone is prettier than me (my trans.)

But such observations do nothing to hinder Young Suzannah's pursuit of the rising literary star. Her memories are full of confident self-assertion, even though Old Suzannah expresses doubt about the meaning of her relationship with Ibsen.

Old Suzannah rejects the blind faith of her youth as well as the confidence of her younger middle years that taking care of Ibsen will bring (or keep) them close together, "minne og minne / utan meining" ("memory upon memory / without meaning"; my trans.; 108). The phrase "without meaning" suggests that the recitation of her memories does not add up to a prime narrative, or mythology, of her life. The memories of her youth, mostly enacted by Young Suzannah, suggest Old Suzannah's fondness for the youthful version of herself. Despite Young Suzannah's insecurities about her appearance, she exhibits a great deal of confidence about the possibilities of a life with Ibsen. Young Suzannah is conjured onto the stage (after fifteen pages of Old Suzannah's uninterrupted monologue) by Old Suzannah's description of young Ibsen standing on the stage of "Det Norske Theater i Bergen" ("The Norwegian Theater in Bergen"; my trans.; 100). Three pages after her entrance, Young Suzannah finally speaks, and she remembers an argument with her friend Karoline, who enumerates Ibsen's flaws. Despite those flaws, Young Suzannah says, "Ja eg vil ha Ibsen / han og ingen andre" ("Yes I will have Ibsen / him and no one else"; my trans.; 104). According to Young Suzannah's reminiscences, Karoline continued her campaign. Despite some obvious faults which Karoline is more than happy to point out—his age, his social awkwardness, his small stature, his clumsiness, and not to mention his yellow gloves (103-104) —Young Suzannah stands firm in her conviction. She exhibits great agency as she recalls an upcoming ball which both she and Ibsen were to attend:

> Og då skal alt bli bestemt
>
> *Ganske kort pause*

Det har eg bestemt (104)

And then everything will be decided

Rather short pause

So I have decided (my trans.)

In the course of a few lines, we learn much about Suzannah as a young woman. Even though she is eight years younger than Ibsen, it is she who decides their future together. Neither societal norms, represented by Karoline, nor self-criticism, prevent her from asserting her will.

However, doubts emerge as Middle-Aged and Old Suzannah brood over Ibsen's associations with several young women, and Young Suzannah interjects statements about her appearance. Not explaining whether the relationships with these other women were sexual or a matter of an older man being energized by the admiration of a younger women or something else, Fosse writes about them from the points of view of the Suzannahs. About these liaisons, they express dismay, scorn, irritation, and wry amusement. From a conventional point of view, the two older Suzannahs are now past the age of desirability[16] and other figures threaten to take that role. In a complex passage, the three Suzannahs compare themselves with the younger, prettier girls. Perhaps as a defense against self-criticism, Middle-Aged Suzannah expresses her wonder at why the young women are drawn to Ibsen. Old Suzannah adds to the list of historical figures that are known to have been smitten with Ibsen:

DEN MIDDELALDRA SUZANNAH

Eg merker det nok

han liker dei så godt

[16]Such conventions are sometimes defied to comic effect in contemporary film and theater, for example in Aagje Swinnen and John Stotesbury's *Benidorm Bastards,* a Belgian *Candid Camera*-like television series. Elderly actors very deliberately do *not* act their age, thereby disrupting stereotypes of old-age performative norms such as refraining from overtly sexual behavior and hiding the "grotesque aging body" (11).

dei unge jentene

alle dei vakre jentene

. . . . . .

Og dei der jentene dei liker han

den vesle puslete mannen

. . . . . .

DEN GAMLE SUZANNAH

Line

Lina

Rita

. . . . . .

Hildur Andersen

DEN UNGE SUZANNAH

Eg er så stygg

DEN GAMLE SUZANNAH

Rita

Og Emile

seier det veldig spist

Emilie

Emilie BarDach

DEN UNGE SUZANNAH

Og Marie-søster er så fin (112-113)

MIDDLE-AGED SUZANNAH

I notice it well enough

he likes them so well

the young girls

all the pretty girls

. . . . . .

And these girls like him

the pokey, fussy man

OLD SUZANNAH

Line

Lina

Rita

. . . . . .

Hildur Andersen

. . . . . .

YOUNG SUZANNAH

I am so ugly

OLD SUZANNAH

Rita

And Emilie

speaking very cuttingly

Emilie

Emilie Bardach

YOUNG SUZANNAH

And my sister Marie is so beautiful (my trans.)

Middle-Aged Suzannah, who initiated these musings a good four pages earlier, ends it by stating, "Han treng meg" ("He needs me"; my trans.; 116). Nevertheless, to be with Ibsen is to be left alone, waiting for his arrival for a birthday dinner. However, Middle-Aged Suzannah declares that the distance between them is a good thing for both Ibsen and her. Emerging from these passages is a view of Suzannah's character: strong and willful from the start, over time evolving into an ambivalent independence apart from Ibsen.

The Mystery of Time's Passing

Both Ibsen and Fosse use time's mutability to inject a certain wonder about the fact of aging. Using different means, both plays adeptly reinforce the fallacy of a uniform passage of time (represented by a clock's ticking or the changing of the seasons) and reveal time's mutability. In *Peer Gynt*, with its temporal gaps (between Acts Three and Four and Acts Four and Five) and use of folklore figures, time is compressed. At the same time, Peer's interactions with the Button Molder (the messenger of the Master)—in which he tells Peer that he is neither bad enough for hell nor good enough for heaven and instead is destined to be melted into nothingness—awakens Peer to death's imminence, even though he makes every effort to forestall its reality. Mostly alone, and otherwise an outsider looking in on the social action of Act Five (i.e., onboard the homebound ship and the funeral and auction scenes), all of Act Five displays Peer's solitude and unavoidable encounters with death and his efforts at evasion. Not for him Harold Bloom's advice about the proper use of one's own solitude, that is to confront one's own mortality (30). And neither for Old Suzannah, at least in the sense of directly contemplating her own mortality. In Old Suzannah's case, it is the death of her husband which drives her

ruminations. In remembering, time for Old Suzannah is expanded into a present that includes the past. Time's failure to pass from the eternal now is highlighted by the act of waiting. Old Suzannah's waiting in solitude is filled with an internal occupation, or preoccupation, such that time ceases to exist altogether. At first glance, the Suzannahs may appear too passive,[17] but then none of them is encumbered by a social norm of endless productivity.

Ibsen's disruption of a purely linear perspective relies on Peer's encounters with folktale creatures. The creatures distort the clock- or seasonally based perception of time. It is as if the spiritual beliefs of nineteenth century Gudbrandsdalen correspond with how Benedict Anderson explains the perception of time in medieval Christianity, that is, it is stretched into eternity, despite physical mortality, to either eternal damnation in hell or eternal life in heaven. This is the opposite of Anderson's "homogeneous, empty time" of calendrically based, textualized narratives and histories (204). Things turn out, however, to be something other than what is suggested by the Christian binary of hell or heaven, and this creates Peer's existential dread of the nothingness on the other side of death. His fear manifests in his first encounter with the amorphous Boyg, who declares himself to be both dead and alive. Peer tries to fight with him, but this is impossible because, as Peer says:

> Ikke dødt. Ikke levende. Slimet; taaget.
>
> Ingen Skikkelse heller! Det er som at tørne
>
> i en Dynge af knurrende halvvaagne Bjørne! (56)
>
> Not dead, nor alive. Slime; gray air,
>
> Not even a form. It's like trading jabs

[17]Frustration with this passivity led to Astrid Sæther's thoroughly researched biography, *Suzannah: fru Ibsen* [Suzannah: Mrs. Ibsen], to which I am indebted for helping me distinguish between the historical Suzannah and Fosse's fictionalized Suzannahs.

With a den of snarling, half-awake bear cubs. (Fjelde 65)

Whether the Boyg is *both* dead and alive or *neither* dead nor alive, the Boyg forces Peer to confront the outcast state to which his crimes have led him. Peer is dead to society, but physically alive. This meeting with nothingness deftly foreshadows Peer's Act Five scenes with the onion (which he peels, only to find no core, that is, no self), the Thin Man (who, with his cloven hoof, represents the devil), and the Button Molder. In Act Five, Peer is once again dead to society, unable to define himself as a human being who has led a meaningful life.

In Act Three, the appearance of another folkloric creature accentuates the distortion of time and the disturbing realization of how quickly we seem to arrive at old age, with or without a match between how we feel inside and how others view us. Just as Peer and Solveig reunite at his freshly built hut, the suddenly aged Greenclad Woman appears with her Brat in tow. When Peer first meets the Greenclad Woman, this mountain *hulder* (siren) was beautiful and alluring on the outside (but who is, according to folklore, wicked and hides a long, cow-like tail). Late in Act II, the Dovre-Master (troll king) has told Peer, upon Peer's frantic departure from world of the trolls after a presumed tryst with the Greenclad Woman, that he will soon have proof that lust is not a trifling matter. Subsequently, the Greenclad Woman warns Peer that he will be a father before the end of the year. According to the Dovre-Master:

Men *den* Ting er sikker, at gjort er gjort,

item at din Afkom vil voxe;

sligt Blandingskræ voxer urimelig fort— (53)

But one thing's certain, what's done is done,

Which means your offspring is bound to grow.

Mongrels mature at a fearful rate. (Fry and Fillinger 47)

No sooner has Peer escaped the trolls to build his mountain hut and then reunite with Solveig—a passage of perhaps a few weeks or at most a few months—than the Greenclad Woman returns as an aged hag. If Peer refuses her, she threatens to haunt him until the end. Peer's inability to confront the disparity between his idealized Solveig and the troll figure causes him to flee from his childhood valley and to abruptly enter into Act Four's middle age.

Peer's Act Four sojourn in North Africa demonstrates the futility of attempting to stop the passage of time, with only two possible exceptions: madness or death, which change our subjective experience of time, if not its actual passing. For someone who has spent his life looking for his identity in the pursuit of wealth, only to have it vanish in an unfortunate explosion of his ship, the emptiness of the future, even without the threat of death and/or eternal damnation, is deeply frightening. How can Peer stop time's passing? A tryst with a beautiful woman (Anitra) leads only to being mocked for his old age. Trying to stop time in this way is hopeless. If being a prophet for Anitra was a dead end, and all else has come to nothing, then a complete reframing of his destiny might save him, by becoming the emperor of human life. Nonetheless, Peer's impossible dreams of future endeavors presumably come to nothing with his incarceration in Cairo's insane asylum. Peer's aging, while leaving him physically robust, has worn him down mentally. Ibsen hereby deftly disconnects age from frailty and physical fitness from mental well-being. As Robert N. Butler cautions, "the most tragic situation is that of the [old] person whose increasing . . . insight leads to a sense of total waste." He further writes, "I believe that this situation is one contribution to the increased suicide rate found in old age" (69). By the beginning of Act Five, Peer has come out on the other side of this midlife crisis, but Ibsen provides no answers to the question of when Peer regains his sanity, at least insofar as he is able to book passage on a ship bound for Norway. The thirty-year unexplained gap in Peer's narrative,

between Acts Four and Five, leaves the reader wondering what happened during those intervening years. Without a narrative continuity, Ibsen effectively communicates the feeling of the abruptness of old age's onset. Lacking a coherent sense of self, Peer's confrontations with his past ultimately brings him to suicidal ideation, as I show in the next section.

By using a non-linear structure, Fosse explores another way of playing with the passage of time, as recorded in *Mysteriet i Trua: Ein Samtale Mellom Jon Fosse Og Eskil Skjeldal* (*The Mystery of Faith: A Conversation between Jon Fosse and Eskil Skjeldal*; my transl.). The result allows the reader to enter the mystery (*mysterium*) by evoking omnitemporality (*omnitemporalitet*), which he describes as "Ei slags oppheving av tida, gjennom tida. At fortid og framtid forsvinn i eit slags no . . . altså ei slags all-tid, ein slags simultanitet, altså" ("A kind of cancellation of time, through time. That future and past disappear into a kind of now . . . so a sort of all-time, a sort of simultaneity, accordingly"; my trans.; 32). Skjeldal further explains the use of the Latin *omni-* as it is used of God, as being all powerful, that is, omnipotent. In *Suzannah* the interwoven recitations of various memories by the three Suzannahs furthers this mutability of time and the effect of entering the *mysterium.* As I earlier pointed out, Nyhus writes that "Jon Fosse does not write about the mystery, he creates the mystery" (9). Even as Old Suzannah's character traits superficially reflect old age clichés of pain, weakness, and loss of balance, I find within them Fosse's negative mysticism in pursuit of this indefinable state. Her physical being has declined, but either her limitations are completely irrelevant, or they propel Old Suzannah toward her unforgettables as revealed in the form of memories. Influenced by Christian mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Fosse approaches a numinous experience in terms of what it is not, since trying to approach the infinite with words only brings one further from it. Recall Nyhus' retelling of Fosse's story (2009a 48) in which Fosse describes an experience he had as a child

lying on the grass and gazing up at the branches of a tree. He sees branch after branch above him, and notices the limitations of the word *tree,* which in actuality should include *branch, twig, sky, and clouds,* and by implication, the space between all of these physical objects. In striving to recreate this state in his plays, the results are Fosse's characteristic pauses and repetitions, creating Nyhus' notion of a musical fugue. In *Suzannah*, the pauses create the opportunity for contemplation of the spaces between the branches of the tree, metaphorically speaking. This is made explicit by a passage in which the pain and cold that Old Suzannah experiences in rainy, dark Kristiania (Oslo) triggers a rumination about Ibsen's old fingers, one hand encircling the other, as he sits staring at a pile of paper. Ibsen was neither his face nor is hands nor his body, but rather:

> Vi er nokko anna
>
> og dette andre
>
> av og til
>
> kan det liksom syne seg
>
> *ganske kort pause*
>
> i rørsler
>
> i hendenes rørsler
>
> i andletets rørsler
>
> kan det syne seg
>
> *kort pause*
>
> alt det andre
>
> ja det er borte (107)
>
> We are something else

and this other thing

now and then

can somehow show itself

a rather short pause

in movements

in the hands' movements

it can show itself

short pause

everything else

yes that is gone (my trans.)

Through this passage Fosse hints at the space between the branches of the tree which so moved him as a child. Old Suzannah sees that the bodily Ibsen is dead and gone, but she asserts that the outward form is not the thing itself, that there is something else to which those physical shapes and movements gesture. Fosse does not make the something else explicit, so the reader is left to their own interpretation. This ambivalence is essential to Fosse's pursuit of the *mysterium*.

In addition to pauses and repetitions, Fosse is well-known for his characters who await that which is absent—someone or something—and which is late or fails to arrive. As Hadle Oftedal Andersen articulates in *Ikkje for ingenting: Jon Fosses dramatikk* (*Not for Nothing: Jon Fosse's Drama;* my transl.), Fosse's plays investigate, in different ways, how things can be absent (10). The effect is to bring the reader into a state of the expanded present, where past, present, and future co-exist. The figures from the past (Young and Middle-Aged Suzannah) exist simultaneously with the grieving Old Suzannah. If Old Suzannah can vividly recall scenes from the past, and they appear on stage with her, then the past and her previous selves still exist for

her now. Whereas Peer avoids the reality of his own mortality, leaving him with deep insecurity about death and the nothingness to come after, the drama in *Suzannah* is propelled by Ibsen's recent passing, which informs every scene, and hovers in the background of the entire play. However, Old Suzannah does not appear troubled by thoughts of her own mortality. Indeed, rarely does she speculate about her own future. One exception is her sensory-inspired rumination about Ibsen's clothing, which the serving girl (Old Suzannah questions whether this is Lina or Rita) has put away in the armoire. However, some clothing still remains on the bed and contains Ibsen's scent, as well as one of his white, brittle hairs, and, in this jacket pocket, a bit of tobacco. Old Suzannah says:

> Alle kleda skal bort
>
> har dei sagt
>
> Men ingenting skal bort (95)
>
> All his clothing should be gotten rid of
>
> they have said
>
> But nothing will be gotten rid of (my trans.)

Like the clothing left behind in his bedroom, which Old Suzannah resists getting rid of, the metaphorical scent of her memories of Ibsen infuses the monologues with reminiscences which move fluidly among the three Suzannahs. She will dispose of neither Ibsen's clothing nor these memories.

Fosse uses the ambivalence of the monologues—which say one thing, then sometimes in the next line say the complete opposite and then drift off into another time and place altogether—to propose that questions about the past cannot be definitively answered, only experienced. By writing a seemingly random stream of monologic statements, Fosse puts the reader—who cannot

quite pin down when and where the action is taking place or what to believe of the Suzannahs' reminiscences—in a state of uncertainty. Frequently placed between these various musings, the Suzannahs return to the question of the moment—where is Ibsen (Young Suzannah) or where are Ibsen and Sigurd (Middle-Aged Suzannah) or where is Sigurd (Old Suzannah)? The table is set; what is keeping him or what is keeping them? That neither Ibsen nor Ibsen and Sigurd nor Sigurd appears is what allows the space for Suzannah's memories. With the use of three Suzannahs, the memories—as they wander about, disagree, seemingly converge only to be corrected or refined—reveal layers of self. The post-modern structure of the play disrupts the notion of a coherent, intrinsic, or integrated self. The three Suzannahs are aspects of a whole, but they are not one. Living as they do outside the rigors of industrial clock-time, they have moved to a different experience of time, that of *omnitemporality.* In this space, Old Suzannah expresses doubts about the meaning of her relationship with Ibsen. She rejects the blind faith of her youth and the confidence of her younger middle years that taking care of Ibsen will bring (or keep) them close together. In the course of her reminiscences, she is developing a more nuanced understanding of who she was at different stage of life while avoiding any pat conclusions about herself in the past or the present. Old Suzannah asserts that no one could be with Ibsen because he was never in one place, he was always moving among several places. She concludes enigmatically after a short pause, "og der ein stad / bak alt saman" ("and there one place / behind all of them together"; 117; my trans.). What is that "one place"? Does she refute her own claim, and the claim of her younger selves, that they were always together, even when they were apart? By evoking the questions without answering them, Fosse allows the ambivalence of this relationship to come to the fore. He fulfills his desire to create the mystery, not explain it.

Approaching the end of the play, the actuality of old age, crippling disease, and the loss of someone to whom she devoted her entire life has left Old Suzannah somewhere that she could not have, as a young woman, imagined. As Fuchs puts it, a place "unimagined by the characters earlier selves" (2014 77). In the presumed present, Old Suzannah reminds herself that Ibsen is gone. She cannot manage to think that Ibsen is not here, even though she knows that they carried away his body:

Eg er her berre

og Ibsen ligg der inne i senga

det tenkjer eg

eg klarer ikkje å tenkje at Ibsen ikkje er her

og så

kort pause

og så veit eg at han ikkje er her

at dei har bore Ibsen bort

men eg trur det ikkje

for han er her

han må vere her

Eg veit at Ibsen er her (129)

It's only me here

and Ibsen lies there inside in bed

that's what I think

I can't manage to think that Ibsen isn't here

and so

short pause

and so I know that he isn't here

that they have carried Ibsen away

but I don't believe it

because he is here

he must be here

I know that Ibsen is here. (my trans.)

This simple, short passage effectively evokes the mystery of loss and the liminal state of the grieving widow. Moments before, Young Suzannah has imagined that in her old age she will be wise:

Tenk når eg blir gammal

blir ei gammal kone

ei klok gammal kone (128)

Think when I get old

when I'm an old woman

a wise old woman. (my trans.)

The immensity of Suzannah's life has outrun her youthful imaginings about what it means to be old. She does not necessarily see herself as wise in the midst of the unforgettables. She simply acknowledges and savors them.

Late in the play, Fosse renders with sensitivity the unforgettable moments of Suzannah's life, about which Young Suzannah had only an inkling. He juxtaposes the three Suzannahs' monologues more rapidly and reiterates previous themes, which now seem to be gnawing at them. Still, no grand summation of her life is available to Old Suzannah. Instead, she returns to

facts that are important to her without summing up what they mean. Old Suzannah once again references Ibsen's clothing:

> Og kleda hans
>
> dei ligg jo der på senga
>
> heng der i skåpet
>
> *Kort pause*
>
> Ibsen vil ikkje lenger kle på seg
>
> Og han treng jo ikkje det
>
> Henrik Ibsen er død (132)
>
> And his clothes
>
> they still lie on the bed
>
> hang there in the armoire
>
> *Short pause*
>
> Ibsen will no longer wear them
>
> And he no longer needs them
>
> Henrik Ibsen is dead. (my trans.)

Middle-Aged Suzannah then frets about Ibsen and Sigurd's delayed arrival for Sigurd's seventh birthday party. Young Suzannah restates her determination to marry Ibsen:

> Henrik Ibsen og eg
>
> vi skal gifte oss
>
> Det har eg bestemt
>
> Og kanskje kan Karoline vere forlovar (133)
>
> Henrik Ibsen and I

we will get married

I have made up my mind about that

And maybe Karoline can be the maid-of-honor (my trans.)

But Middle-Aged Suzannah immediately changes course:

Eg ville ikkje sjå Karoline igjen

Ho snakka stygt om meg til andre

ho er berre misunneleg

fordi min Ibsen er den store diktaren

og ikkje hennar Bjørnson (133)

I won't see Karoline again

She says nasty things about me to others

she is just envious

because my Ibsen is the great poet

and not her Bjørnson[18] (my trans.)

Fosse forces the question of whether the Ibsen referred to throughout the play is Ibsen the husband or Ibsen the renowned playwright. Not settling on an answer, the three Suzannahs circle back around to already stated concerns: appearance, Ibsen's drinking, his writing, the young women, and at the very end, where is Ibsen? Old Suzannah forgets certain things but returns to her memories anyway, like old friends. It is as if the repetitions are a way of sorting through the immensity of the past in order—as William F. May, in "The Vices and Virtues of the Elderly," describes the function of our senses—to savor key impressions or moments. Factual reality about the past is beside the point. Reliving the experiences is what matters. The Suzannahs do not wait

[18]Middle-Aged Suzannah is referring to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, contemporary of Ibsen and winner of the Nobel prize for literature in 1903.

idly for Ibsen or Sigurd. Their waiting is filled with the work of excavating memories, sifting through them, repeating them, weighing their significance, and telling the, at times, inconsistent story of their life. Such is the work of Cohen's *summing up phase,* in which we look back, re-examine, and sum up what has happened. Fosse leaves the work of summing up to us.

Making Sense of a Life

Within the structure of the plays, Peer and Old Suzannah are given two distinct opportunities for Robert N. Butler's life review process, although I note explicit correspondences only for Peer in Act Five. Although I use a different framework for my analysis of *Suzannah*, there are easily identifiable correspondences in that play as well. However, *Suzannah'*s similarity to reminiscence theater—in terms of non-linearity, characters of multiple ages, and lack of explicit meanings for the play—leads me to use this form of theater as a foundation for my analysis. I doubt that Fosse has any interest in being an activist for "multidimensional, meaningful social roles" as Basting describes one intent of reminiscence theater (100). Nevertheless, his representation of the Suzannahs at three stages of life creates a sense of a collaboration among them as their reminiscences flow in a post-modern, post-dialogic manner. In her solitude, never directly interacting with her younger selves, Old Suzannah turns away from society, at least for the duration of the play.[19] Can a coherent meaning for one's self be found when, in the case of *Peer Gynt*, the entire play rests on the question of self, and in the case of *Suzannah,* the character of Suzannah is split into three non-interacting figures? Whether or in what way(s) Peer or Suzannah gains a sense of coherence or develops a personal mythology is the work of this section.

[19]Astrid Sæther informs us that the historical Suzannah received visitors and kept up an active correspondence on the issues of the day.

The whole of *Peer Gynt*'s Act Five dramatically depicts Cohen's *encore phase* as Peer attends to "unfinished business (especially as it pertains to Solveig) and unresolved conflicts" left over from his youth. In order to expand on this concept, I turn more fully to life review as described in Robert N. Butler's foundational work, "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged." It contains several insights which are relevant to my discussion of Act Five, in which Peer literally enacts a looking back as he encounters scenes and characters from his youth. We journey through the landscape of Peer's younger years as he travels upward from his home valley to his final reunion with Solveig in the mountain hut he had built while outlawed for bride-theft. According to Butler, life review is most likely "prompted by the realization of approaching dissolution and death" (66). An awareness of biological death, independent of circumstances, is enough to trigger the process. Early in Act Five Peer puts off concerns about his personal mortality by saying, as he peers into the grave of the man who once cut off his finger to avoid conscription:

> Jeg har intet imod, min Dom at tage
> af denne værdige Sogneprest.
> Naa, der er sagtens en Stund tillbage,
> før Graveren kommer og beer mig till Gjæst;— (139)
> I wouldn't mind facing my destiny
> At the hands of this excellent parish priest.
> Well, I have a while, undoubtedly,
> Before I'm called as the gravedigger's guest— (Fjelde 169)

Peer may believe that he has awhile before he dies, but each subsequent scene forces Peer to confront who he is behind the layers of hopes, regrets, resentments, losses, and fears, even as he

vows to continue on his way, "gamle Peer Gynt gaar sin egen Gang / og blir den han er; fattig men dydig" ("Old Peer Gynt will go it alone, / True to his nature: poor, but virtuous"; 139; Fjelde 170).

Despite this moment of denial, his awareness of his own mortality begins to take hold in the iconic onion peeling scene. Peer says, "Naar jeg engang skal dø,—hvad sagtens vil ske,— / saa kryber jeg under et vindfældt Træ;" (When I come to die—as it has to be— / I'll crawl in under a windfallen tree"; 144; Fjelde 176). In peeling the onion to its center, and finding no core, Peer experiences a dawning recognition that there is no *self* at his center. This awareness reflects Robert Butler's observation that those who "never achieved an individual sense of identity may suffer especially intensely in old age" (71). Ibsen dramatizes these negative effects in Peer's reaction to Solveig's singing, which comes to him from their old mountain hut. He flees onto the heath where charred remains of a forest fire echo his existential crisis. He cries out:

> Aske, Skodde, Støv for Vinden,—
>
> er er nok at bygge af!
>
> Stank og Raaddenskab for inden;
>
> alt ihob en kalket Grav. (146)
>
> Ashes, fog, and dust, wind-driven—
>
> There's enough to build with here!
>
> Stench and rottenness within;
>
> Only a whited sepulcher. (Fjelde 178-179)

Peer's panic is furthered by the voices of "THREADBALLS," "WITHERED LEAVES," "A SIGHING IN THE AIR," "DEWDROPS," and "BROKEN STRAW" (Hill 179-181). Nature has become a nightmare vision. Butler cautions that if flexibility, resilience, and self-awareness are

lacking, depression, panic, guilt, and obsessional rumination may occur. This is especially true among those who are now isolated from an engaged listener. Peer runs from Solveig, his only possible engaged listener, whereupon he is promptly tortured by memories of his many failures, as recounted by these products of nature, and lastly his deceased mother, Aase.[20] Thinking to escape from these unwelcome thoughts, he encounters the Button Molder, who only compounds Peer's existential crisis by informing him of his fate:

> *Du* var nu ætlet till en blinkende Knapp
> paa Verdensvesten; men Hæmpen glap;
> og derfor skal du i Vraggods-Kassen,
> for, som det heder, at gaa over i Massen. (151)
> You, dear sir, He meant for a shining button
> on the world's waistcoat; but somehow a loop broke.
> Even so, you were never forgotten.
> You shall be fused
> into the lump that He'll rework. (Hill 321)

The Button Molder points out that Peer has been neither good enough for heaven nor bad enough for hell. Instead, he must be melted down like an old silver button and be reformed from this state of undifferentiated limbo. Peer fails to get a reprieve from the Thin Man, who tells Peer he is not, unfortunately, bad enough for hell. He is certainly destined for the melting ladle, like so many others. There is not even a warm (not too warm) place for him in the company of other sinners. Peer thus realizes that he is utterly alone, with no one in heaven or hell to speak for him or to care about him. As Butler observes, "the more severe affective and behavioral

[20]Early versions of this dissertation reflected on Aase's aging, but in the end space did not allow me to include her. I hope to do so in the future.

consequences apparently tend to occur when the process proceeds in isolation" (69). Peer imagines only one solution to his dilemma:

> Jeg vil oppad, højt, paa den bratteste Tinde;
>
> jeg vil endnu engang se Solen rinde,
>
> stirre mig trætt paa det lovede Land,
>
> se at faa Snedyngen over mig kavet;
>
> de kan skrive derover: «her er *Ingen* begravet;»
>
> og bagefter,—siden—! Lad det gaa, som det kan. (167)
>
> I want to climb up on the highest crag
>
> And see the sunrise once again
>
> And stare myself blind at the promised land;
>
> Then let me be covered by drifting snows;
>
> Scratch on a rock, 'Here No One lies.'
>
> And afterwards—then—! Ah, never mind. (Fjelde 205)

For Peer, it has become unbearable to live, and suicide seems to be his only escape. And yet, he lives, saved from his suicidal thoughts by the singing of churchgoers.

At last Peer reaches his hut, as lost as the boy he once was and the youth who escaped his home valley. He has realized that the accoutrements of life mean nothing at the end, but what else is there? How can he resolve this impasse? The patient Solveig, whose own prolonged period of waiting has stretched out much further than she likely imagined at the end of Act Three (in which she tells Peer that she will wait for him as he goes off on some nonexistent errand), has maintained herself through productive work. We can infer from the textual evidence in Scene Ten of Act Four that the old Solveig in Act Five managed to survive by her own productivity,

with her goats and spinning. While waiting for Peer's return, she undoubtedly has had plenty of time to reflect on the choices she made in her youth, that is, to leave her family and look for and join Peer in his outlawed state. She demonstrates her hard-won wisdom when she answers Peer's question (about where he has been all this time) with an expression of her enduring love: "I min Tro, i mit Haab og i min Kjærlighed" ("In my faith, in my hope, and in my love"; 170; Fjelde 208), whereupon Peer clings to her as mother, wife, and pure and innocent woman. Ibsen once again uses the motif of clinging to a woman. In this case, Peer is not innocent and probably not unmanly, but he has not grown out of his idealized concept of Solveig. Rather, he now conflates her as both mother and wife. The Button Molder promises that they will meet at the final crossroad, but for now, he will remain silent. Solveig has the last word as she continues her lullaby, telling Peer to sleep and dream. Ibsen leaves us, the living, with ambivalence and uncertainty. Peer himself may not experience his own immensity in the face of his earlier grandiosity, but we certainly may do so, having placed our attention on this possibility, as we followed Peer from callow youth to confused middle-age to despairing old age.

While *Peer Gynt*'s fifth act is structured around life review, I have previously described Fosse's *Suzannah* as a form of reminiscence theater which incorporates Cohen's *summing up phase*, as Old Suzannah looks back and re-examines previous phases of her life. Faith Gibson, in her introduction to Pam Schweitzer's *Reminiscence Theatre: Making Theatre from Memories*, describes reminiscence theater as a form of theater "in which the universal components of people's remembered personal past are transformed into accessible dramatic representations" (11). Reminiscence theater often employs an episodic, non-linear arrangement of scenes which renders an overall impression of the lives of the characters without explicitly arriving at something essential about their lives. Using a stream of reminiscences in *Suzannah*, Fosse

achieves a similar effect. As the ending of *Suzannah* demonstrates—in which the three Suzannahs maintain their non-dialogic non-relationship as they sit together at a table—it is not necessary for Old Suzannah to settle on a definitive meaning for her life. It is enough for the three to sit together at the same table in silent non-communication allowing for their own recognition of the immensity of their life to emerge quietly, as if between the branches of the trees, between the facts that comprise her life. The *mysterium* is not to be found in a recitation of events and personalities but in the spaces between all that, in the many scripted pauses. Literal accuracy of memories is beside the point and, if demanded, would only diminish the experience of the negative mysticism that Fosse offers to the reader. This spiritual aspect of life review is articulated by Barbara Myerhoff, writing in *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling, and Growing Older,* when she describes life review as a process during which "the old person, living with intimate knowledge of coming death, may undertake the construction of a sacred account, providing him/herself with a formulation about what, ultimately, life has been about" (249). The process allows for the formulation of a personal mythology and creates a new self in the present. The Suzannahs do not construct a singular personal mythology, but they allow us to wonder about the meanings of their life. Fosse's structuring of the monologues in an overlapping way indicates that Old Suzannah's present inner life is the result of having been previously populated by different people, or characters, from whom the current Suzannah has emerged. Sometimes they diverge in their memories of a past event, and sometimes their reminiscences reinforce each other. Not this, not that, something else that words cannot capture as in negative mysticism.

Swedish social gerontologist, Lars Tornstam, takes great pains to point out that those conducting social gerontological research are often guilty of projecting their own white, Western,

middle-class, male, highly educated and productive values onto expectations for old people, who may, instead, be more inclined toward reflection and contemplation (22). The process of telling one's story may require reconsideration and reframing of important events and themes which were previously unconsciously experienced in the rush of life. However, memory experts tell us that memories of our past are a construction, an act of the imagination. As Michael Mangan reminds us in *Staging Ageing: Theatre, Performance, and the Narrative of Decline*, "to remember the past is, whether we like it or not, to perform a creative act in the present" (74). The two older Suzannahs perform this act of creativity (à la Katz's creativity-across-the-life-course) when they add a claim, that they themselves were Ibsen. With the aid of their will and their insight, they took care of Ibsen, who could not take care of himself. Middle-Aged Suzannah says:

> Og då han drakk opp dei få kronene han tente
>
> *Kort pause*
>
> Og dei fann han
>
> liggande i ei av Christianias gater
>
> i søla
>
> And when he drank up all the money he earned
>
> *Short pause*
>
> And they found him
>
> lying in one of Kristiania's streets
>
> in the mud

Old Suzannah immediately confirms the problem:

> Han drakk og drakk (124)

He drank and drank (my trans.)

The Suzannahs were needed to rescue him from himself and by doing so, they stake a claim on being Henrik Ibsen:

DEN MIDDELALDRA SUZANNAH

på eit vis er han jo også knytt til meg

han treng meg

han ville ha forkomme utan meg

forsvunne

det er eg som er Henrik

Ho ler

Det er jo det

MIDDLE-AGED SUZANNAH

in a way we are knitted together

he needs me

he would have gone to ruin without me

disappeared

it's me who is Henrik Ibsen

She laughs

Of course that's how it is

Old Suzannah immediately repeats the claim:

DEN GAMLE SUZANNAH

Og ingen veit

at det er eg som er Henrik Ibsen (125)

And no one knows

that it's me who is Henrik Ibsen. (my trans.)

The monologues of reminiscence have circled around and finally land on this (momentary) conclusion, that Suzannah *is* Ibsen. Since the physical Ibsen's body has been removed, we may (momentarily) conclude that she is referring to the writer, Henrik Ibsen, not her husband.

I now return to the idea of omnitemporality and its role in reminiscence. At the end of *Suzannah*, we witness, for the first time, a gathering of the three Suzannahs around the table. Seeing them together cancels the individuality of their times and invokes the now of all-time. Their reminiscences converge; the past and present have become simultaneous, yet the three Suzannahs do not collaboratively work out the meaning of their lives. Instead, Fosse turns to the metaphor of the apocryphal burning of Suzannah and Ibsen's letters, where Old Suzannah symbolically claims Ibsen as her own before it all disappears.

DEN GAMLE SUZANNAH

Alle brev er brende

Det blir mellon oss

alt blir mellom oss

. . . . . .

Alt blir mellom oss

før det forsvinn

og blir borte

Med meg blir det borte

Pause

Men kjem ikkje Ibsen snart

Ho går og set seg ved bordet

DEN MIDDELALDRA SUZANNAH

Eg skjøner ikkje kvar Ibsen blir av

Ho går og set seg ved bordet

DEN UNGE SUZANNAH

No må snart Ibsen komme

Ho går og set seg ved bordet

Lyset ned (146-147)

OLD SUZANNAH

All the letters are burned

They were to be between us

everything becomes between us

. . . . . .

Everything stays between us

before it vanishes

and is lost

With me they vanish

Pause

But Ibsen isn't coming soon

She crosses and sits down by the table

MIDDLE-AGED SUZANNAH

I don't understand what's become of Ibsen

She crosses and sits down by the table

YOUNG SUZANNAH

Ibsen must be coming soon now

She crosses and sits down by the table

Lights down. (my trans.)

Where indeed has Ibsen gone? The Suzannahs, who earlier claimed to *be* Henrik Ibsen, are now left with the reality of the husband's absence. These final lines offer three different interpretations of his absence. Old Suzannah can no longer claim to be Ibsen, but she maintains the privacy of their personal life together, and then admits that Ibsen is not to be expected soon. Middle-Aged Suzannah is still trying to puzzle out Ibsen's delayed arrival. Young Suzannah is characteristically confident that Ibsen will appear at any moment. To Old Suzannah, Ibsen is dead and she is alive, leaving her alone with her memories, in a state of *omnitemporalitet*, as the presence of the younger Suzannahs implies.

In *Suzannah*, the surface signs of age—whether a young woman giddily in love and obsessed with her appearance or a mother primarily concerned with her child or an old woman afflicted with pain, loss of mobility, and a faulty memory—create a vivid picture of a woman with an enormous inner life which belies the normative signs of age: Young Suzannah is determined, insightful, and aware of her own agency. Middle-Aged Suzannah, though taken up with Sigurd's seventh birthday, has time for developing her insights and reflections in the midst of difficult life circumstances, such as poverty and Ibsen's drinking. Old Suzannah pauses upon the death of her life partner to look back, albeit through a sometimes-blurry lens, to tell the story of her life as she wants it to be told. Her memories, though sometimes hazy, reveal *her* truth. The differing recollections among the three Suzannahs suggest that the truth has evolved over the years. On the other hand, memories may coincide or reinforce each other, and so represent key,

significant points. Her reflections about the past are put to the service of savoring certain memories without necessarily seeking to reconcile the disparate parts of herself. The silences, the waiting, and the lack of interlocution conjure for this reader the multiplicity of selves and meanings that comprise Suzannah. At the end an overarching meaning is not offered, but perhaps we can simply and profoundly experience the immensity of her inner life.

Conclusion

Reading these plays from an age theory perspective can supplement or revise our own construction of a relationship to aging, as (once again returning to Fuchs) it opens our awareness to that which has "frequently been missed by actors, directors, spectators and critics alike" (77). Perhaps Fosse, by writing a fictionalized account of Ibsen's wife, is toying with us about having come out from under Ibsen's long shadow and is inviting comparisons anew. In any case, by standing on the bridge that interweaving the playwrights' insights constructs, I have sought to open our understanding to more nuanced notions about aging and old age via the four perspectives of physicality, attitudes, time, and life review. The gap in time aids the *immensity* as it becomes filled with the reader's concurrent ruminations. Perhaps we even gain a sense of timelessness, or omnitemporality, the experience of which may further foster a sense of wonder as we contemplate the enormity of a life remembered in appreciative detail. Neither Fosse's *Suzannah* nor Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* is held captive by models of aging such as peak-and-decline or creativity-across-the-life-course. Neither playwright prescribes a clichéd meaning for old age. Rather, the ambivalences leave us open to the myriad ways in which we might enhance our reading of dramatic literature, whether an iconic play from the nineteenth century or a post-modern memory piece from the twenty-first.

In opening our awareness to that which has previously been unseen in reading a play—that is, the significance of aging, and its corollary, death—we may amplify our own existential dread of decline and our own mortality. Ibsen and Fosse have taken their machetes to the thick undergrowth of our unconsciousness, hacking a path toward greater understanding of the various ways that we may conform to the clichés of aging or sidestep the pitfalls of ageist norms. Gullette, believing that the world needs multiple narratives about age and aging, urges each of us to recount our own narratives. By reading *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah* within the framework of age theory, we have seen how the characters' diversity of experiences, each valid in its own right, has provided clarity and possibilities that lie within Fuchs's "immensity of the conscious experience of age" (77). It is left to our own imaginations to continue the journey.

CHAPTER THREE

PERFORMING AGE AND AGING IN PRODUCTIONS OF *PEER GYNT* AND *SUZANNAH:* THE PEER GYNT FESTIVAL'S *PEER GYNT* 2016 THE FILM *GATAS GYNT* 2008 NRK'S *SUZANNAH* 2004

Multiple Understandings of "Performance"

What does it mean to perform age? The performance studies literature questions the definition of the term and its relationship with age. Does the performance of age apply only to an actor's characterization in a play? Or do we perform age in our daily activities? In my exploration of the three productions listed in the chapter heading above, I find diverse interpretations of performing age that allow the viewer to become more attuned to what Fuchs may have meant by the "immensity of the conscious experience of age" (77). These productions make such an awareness highly available without the use of old age clichés or overt attempts to reflect creativity-across-the-life-course. The productions I examine are the following: (1) the Peer Gynt Festival's DVD recording of the 2016 production, from a manuscript in regional dialect adapted from *Peer Gynt* by Njål Helge Mjøs in 2014; (2) *Gatas Gynt* (*Peer Gynt from the Streets*) a film adaptation of the fifth act of *Peer Gynt*, directed by Hallvard Bræin from a screenplay by Christopher Grøndahl; and (3) *Suzannah*, written by Jon Fosse for NRK and, under the direction of Berit Nesheim, broadcast on January 1, 2004. My inquiry asks several questions of these productions. Do the productions reflect the perspectives I have established regarding age and aging? If so, in what specific ways? Do the productions add to these perspectives, and, if so, how? Additional questions arise when considering the actors' performances of age. Do they play the ages indicated by the texts? Are their interpretations confined by the normative, peak-and-decline narrative? If so, how? In what ways do they ignore, amplify, neutralize, or resist this

norm? In light of my reflections on these questions, what do the productions have to tell us about the inner life of the aged? Do they capture something about what happens when we consciously experience old age? If so, whose consciousness is activated? That of the characters? the actors? and/or the spectators? Whether or not the production teams seek to make any explicit commentary on age and aging, the many choices of scene or set design, costuming and make-up, and the actors' physicality and vocalization effectively demonstrate their attitudes and beliefs about what age means in the context of the play being produced, despite their widely differing forms. As creative works, they are certainly not concerned with adherence to models of aging as elaborated in age theory. Nevertheless, I have identified certain commonalities in the use of setting and performance that color our impressions of age and aging. Among these commonalities is the dimension of space. Whether open to the mountains and sky or confined to the back streets of Oslo or Old Suzannah's apartment, space informs old age's dilemmas and losses. A second example is found in the deft use of pauses in the characters' speech patterns to suggest access to the *mysterium* and Butler's unforgettables. I elaborate these components after the following brief exploration of what I mean by the term performance.

Before delving into the influence of design elements and specifics about the actors' physicality, I feel compelled—since I am writing about performance—to explore shades of meaning of the term, as well as its close relatives, performative and performativity. Performance studies scholars have been influenced by anthropologists' studies of various forms of performance in ritual and ceremony. In turn, theater criticism has been influenced by how those performance studies scholars digested examples from the ethnographic literature and applied them to theatrical performance. A founding member of this movement is Richard Schechner, who, in *Between Theater & Anthropology*, offers a pithy definition of performance. He describes

it as "never for the first time. It means: for the second to the *n*th time. Performance is 'twice-behaved behavior'" (70). This meaning is easy to understand when we think of performances in a theatrical production that has had a rehearsal period followed by some number of performances, but Schechner—heavily influenced by anthropology—applies it to a wide variety of performances such as shamanism, trance, ritual dance and theater, social dramas, etc. This concept of twice-behaved behavior shows up in aging studies as applied to theater criticism. For example, Valerie Barnes Lipscomb, writing in the introduction to *Staging Age: The Performance of Age in Theatre, Dance, and Film*, applies the term performance to aging when she states that "Age is both a performance and a performative" (1-2), meaning that we may behave habitually and repeatedly according to age norms. We can take a page from Judith Butler who, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* questions gender as performance. Butler asks, "does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?" (x). Are these performative acts then molded into our bodies and psyches, as Egan suggested about the face? Might we disengage from our unconscious habits and choose various performances of age? Schechner's concept of performance as twice-behaved behavior is relevant for both gender and age, as the characteristics of being male or female are rehearsed by the growing child and so, too, can age become a performance through repetitions of clichés of aging. Individuals may rehearse what aging is supposed to look and feel like in their imaginations and subsequently in their physicality. These rehearsals may become ossified as the years pass by, as we see in *Suzannah*. Lipscomb refers to this tendency as a performative. She develops this idea by arguing that aging "can be viewed as a performative, in that each of us performs the actions associated with a chronological age minute by minute, and the repetition of

these performances creates a so-called reality of age both for the subject and for those who interact with the subject" (2). The repeated performances, done mostly in an unquestioned manner, become the realities of a person's age. An individual actually changes their condition of being through habitual ideation and physicality, therefore, their presentation of age becomes performative. Lipscomb's understanding of performative coincides with that of linguist J. L. Austin, who coined the term in *How to Do Things with Words*. He refers to a speech act which actually changes an individual's (or an object's) state of being. For example, in saying "I do," a couple becomes legally married. Or, when christening a ship by cracking a bottle of champagne against the hull, the ship is formally named. Austin's meaning is represented in *Peer Gynt* when Peer is legally declared an outlaw for the crime of bride theft. When an individual actually changes their state of being by rehearsing old age clichés, they are indeed engaging in performative behavior. By this I mean that they seek an effect by enacting certain clichés of aging. Recall the example of my friend's mother who performed different degrees of physical ability in order to get help from her daughters or to impress her friends. The waters become muddied in colloquial use when *performative* is used in Austin's sense of "infelicities," which include a cynical utterance, as in an insincere demonstration of solidarity with a particular cultural or political group. I refrain from the latter meaning in this dissertation.

The drama theory and cultural studies literature provides a plethora of definitions of these terms, which I now bravely, but briefly, attempt to tease apart. Leaving aside performance as it is used in sports, business, and sexual activities in favor of what actors do in a theatrical production and what characters do within the world of the play, I return to Erving Goffman's definition as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (15). Goffman is writing about daily life, but I find this definition

apt when applied to questions that actors ask themselves in preparing for a role. Famed acting teacher Uta Hagen, in *Respect for Acting*, outlines nine questions that an actor may use to guide their preparation. The last of the nine is "What do I do to get what I want?" thus demonstrating that Goffman's definition applies to both the actor and the actor's character, i.e., to Peer and the Suzannahs. An additional feature of *performance* comes from Marvin Carlson who writes in *The Performance Studies Reader,*[21] "Performance is always *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self" (75). In contrast, according to committee member Prof. Guntis Šmidchens,[22] in folklore studies, performance requires an audience other than oneself. This position is similar to that of Donald L. Fixico's *The American Indian Mind* when he writes about the Indian oral tradition, "from a traditional perspective, one might say that the story . . . is spirituality in the form of released power or energy with its effects on the listeners of the audience" (26). The skill of the storyteller is paramount, as is the active engagement of the audience, for the success of the story. Peer works in this oral tradition as a fabulist, but his audience tends to mock him for his efforts. In times of ego-deflation he turns to performances for *himself*. Old Suzannah also can be said to be performing for herself as she calls forth her younger selves to perform on stage with her. With these multiple meanings of *performance* in mind, Gullette offers insight into old age as a performance when she writes: "decline feels true to many people because it *enacts* itself. *Practices* constrain us to translate 'messages' into feelings, meanings, and habits" (1997 199). Do the actors playing the characters in this play enact decline? And if so, in what ways? The source

[21]Edited by Henry Bial and Sara Brady.ni

[22]Personal conversation; drawing from Richard Bauman and Barbara A. Babcock's *Verbal Arts as Performance* in which an audience separate from the storyteller is assumed. Each has their own responsibility regarding the performance: the performer in the manner in which "communication is carried out" (11), and the audience member to evaluate the communication's effectiveness.

material offers rich opportunities for posing these questions. I do not seek to provide definitive answers to these questions, but I do hope to clear away the brambles and reveal some possible insights. For example, these performances allow me to tease apart the association of youth with ability and old age with disability. Likewise, the productions disrupt the clichéd correspondence of mental fortitude with youth or with physical vitality. In this chapter I focus primarily on two perspectives previously encountered: setting and the physicality of age (including costuming and makeup, physical movement, and the voice). I will weave the other three perspectives into my discourse on these two, rather than creating separate sections for them.

Setting

We gain our first access to the themes of a given piece—whether for a live performance or as a recording of a staged production or as a film—through the setting. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, in *Life's Philosophy: Reason & Feeling in a Deeper World,*[23] uses the natural landscape as a metaphor for life. He writes, "confronting life can be quite brutal. We are flung into it at birth, then flung further in 'encounters' that can be everything from the vile to the sublime" (1). He adds that "to live is like traveling through a landscape with both easy and broken terrain, light and dark places, all concealing the unexpected" (1). In light of this description, I view the landscape, or setting, of the plays as a metaphor for the play's action, character arcs, and overall meaning. The theatrical setting is not real life, but Næss draws our attention to a range of feelings a setting can evoke, from "the vile to the sublime" (1). Elinor Fuchs, in "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play," reminds us that the landscape of daily life is not the same as the setting of a play (6-7). She therefore guides us in our query into the imaginary world of the play by posing several questions, the first of which is

[23]Originally published in Norwegian in 1998 by Universitetsforlaget with the title *Livsfilosofi: Et personlig bidrag om følelser og fornuft."*

relevant to setting. She asks, "what is space like on this planet?" (6). This question calls for a description of the setting and suggests that the setting is linked with the mood and tone of the play as a whole. I find this perspective especially applicable to both productions of *Peer Gynt* in which the settings are (mostly, in the case of *Gatas Gynt*) outdoors. But even in *Suzannah*, whose "landscape" is strictly interior, that very interiority can be seen as the metaphorical landscape of the memories of Old Suzannah who is grieving the loss of her husband. In writing this section I found that the "immensity of the conscious experience of age" (Fuchs 77) is intricately associated with the immensity of the conscious experience of life. How does the setting reflect or influence this immensity? Does it amplify a peak-and-decline narrative, or does it support creativity-across-the-life-course? As I demonstrated in my analysis of the texts, the plays offer a range of possibilities which provide a basis for further exploration in production.

Whether occurring in the mountains of south-central Norway or the back streets of Oslo or a dark apartment, the settings are deployed in such a way as to emphasize certain feelings related to aging and death, among them fear, loneliness, and grief. The settings do not, however, radically change how the dramas oscillate around the poles of either confirming or rejecting clichés of aging. Rather, they expand and illuminate that which is suggested in the texts, especially in terms of aging and the recognition of our personal mortality, with its accompanying fears. Barbara Myerhoff asks, "how can we do anything but dread the coming of age?" (19). And as I work on this material over a period of time in my late 60s and into my 71st year, my own terror more easily (especially in the darkest time of night) gains purchase in my thoughts about the future: Will I have nowhere to live? How will I be/feel/function if my husband of 41 years dies before me? Or if I am on my deathbed before him? What if my bones crumble to dust? And on and on. How do the presence of death and the fear of mortality influence the setting and

staging of *Peer Gynt* in the Festival and Bræin versions? The expansiveness of the Peer Gynt Festival's *Peer Gynt* lends itself to contemplation of infinitude. The worn-out urban setting of *Gatas Gynt* plays with our prejudices about both aging and unhoused people. The enclosed interior of *Suzannah* forms the backdrop for Old Suzannah's inward journey of reminiscences.

Subliminally, at least, the setting of the Festival *Peer Gynt* production reinforces the potential for experiencing the magnitude of Peer's life, even if he does not, or does not appreciate it. Whether the weather is rainy or fair, the outdoor conditions are experienced by the ticket holders as much as by the actors. All participants must contend with whatever the weather brings. When rain begins to fall, there is a communal rustling among the audience members as they pull rain jackets or ponchos out from their backpacks and put them on. As the onstage action draws our attention outward toward the landscape or more inward, toward the playing area between the lake and the audience, one can never *not* be aware of the natural setting. All participants have access to serendipitous natural occurrences, whether (as I experienced as a volunteer actor in 2014) this might be birds flying by above the playing area, or the setting of the sun at the death of Peer's mother at the end of Act Three. By way of these common sensory experiences, I suspect that the audience members more readily join in the journey from a young, athletic Peer to the old, lonely man returning to his homeland. The production is expanded through creative use of the outdoor setting, but its theatricality is simultaneously emphasized with the use of several modern elements: a speedboat, a Segway, plastic bottles and other contemporary detritus adorning the costumes of the trolls, as well as the non-diegetic music influenced by Grieg's score but reinterpreted in a decidedly non-romantic-nationalistic mode.

Audience members of the live performance (though not viewers of the recording) first encounter the setting as they enter from behind a tall wooden fence through one of two gates.

The sight of Lake Gålå, surrounded by rounded mountains and the turf-roofed wooden buildings beside the playing area, immediately draws the audience into the landscape of the early 1800s of Act One. The manuscript of the Festival production maintains the five-act structure of *Peer Gynt* with an intermission between Acts Three and Four. The opening shot of the video of the 2016 production captures the gentle expansiveness of this setting. These are not the jagged peaks of the fjords, but the more human-scaled mountains of the upland summer farms of Norway's central valley. In the live Festival production, the actors must draw the audience's attention away from this beautiful setting to focus on the action of the play. The DVD version does this for us, by selecting a wider or narrower framing, from an establishing shot to a closeup.[24] In either case, the scenic backdrop settles into the background (but of course cannot entirely disappear) as the players command our attention. But before the action onstage begins, we experience a few moments of quiet as the audience adjusts to the scene and the action that is about to begin. The camera takes in the backs of the audience seated on the tiered benches as well as the faces of two latecomers as they climb the aisle to their seats, suggesting to the viewer of the DVD that they are sitting with the audience. The light tree on the edge of the screen to the right and the glass-walled structure for the band on the left remind us of the theatricality of the event. Incidental flute music, playing in a minor key, accompanies Peer as he enters the scene from behind one of two small mounds which flank the playing area. He walks along the sandy shore of the lake, pensively surveying the scene.

The "conscious experience of the immensity of age" can be seen to correspond with a conscious experience of the immensity of *life* as the staging connects death with eternity via the

[24]For purposes of my discussion of the Festival *Peer Gynt*, I use the term *close-up* not in its formal definition as a shot which frames the actor's head—which never occurs in the DVD recording—but as a relative term which includes *medium shots* (which capture the actor from the waist up) and *full shots* (which include the entire body of one actor) (Definitions taken from Ed Sikov's *Film Studies: An Introduction*.).

eternal landscape. The setting activates an interaction among poignancy/death/end-of-life, acts of intergenerational care, and nature. There is a note of poignancy underpinning the action, whether Peer is at home, or later, abroad. Although the repeated climbing up and down the mountain as detailed in Acts One through Three of the play is not literally enacted, the two small mounds flanking the flat playing area in the center of the scene suggest this movement as actors enter from behind, on top of, or in front of the mounds. This action allows for multiple visuals of peak and decline on the physical level. In addition, the timing of the production, in which Aase's death at the end of the third act coincides with sunset, amplifies the poignancy of her death and Peer's response. Even when clouds cover the sky, my experience as a volunteer was that a gap often appeared between clouds and mountaintops at just that moment, allowing the setting sun to shine through. For some of us volunteers, this phenomenon overtly added emotional resonance to the death scene, as if nature were cooperating with the play's action. Peer's care for Aase at her death counters the cold abruptness of Peer's response to his mother's death as written by Ibsen:

PEER GYNT

Faa Moer med Ære begravet.

Jeg faar friste at fare herfra.

KONEN

Skal du langvejs fare?

PEER GYNT

Mod Havet

KONEN

Saa langt!

PEER GYNT

Og længer endda.

Han gaar. (76)

PEER GYNT:

See that she's buried worthily.

It's time that I quit this soil.

KARI:

Are you going far?

PEER GYNT:

To the sea.

KARI:

So far?

PEER GYNT:

Yes; and farther still.

(*He goes out*.) (Fjelde 90)

In the Festival interpretation the emphasis is on a son's last (and within the context of the production, first) demonstration of tender concern. He provides Aase with what is conventionally referred to as a good death, that is, she is attended by a family member, and her body is cared for by her son. This Peer does not foist the final arrangements off on the tenant farmer's wife, Kari, whose return to Aase is cut from the manuscript. Instead, the dialogue of the Festival manuscript ends, before Kari's return, with Peer's pressing his cheek to Aase's mouth and saying, "Se saa; det var Takk for Skyds" ("There—that was thanks for the ride"; 76; Fjelde 89). The mood is elongated by Peer's silently dragging his mother's body to a rowboat, lifting her into it, rowing out on the lake, and disappearing into the distance as the *Spillemann* (violinist), standing on the

audience right mound, plays a tune in a minor key. This staging returns our awareness to the landscape and its infinitude, from lake to mountains to sky. As Peer heads out in hopes of his kaiserdom, the mountains suggest obstacles to be encountered during the extended gap between youthful Peer and Act Four's middle-aged Peer. If the setting sun peeks through between the clouds and the mountaintops, a moment of enchantment may amplify the effect, and further provoke reflection on the unforgettables of life as the stage lights fade to black and the audience exits for the intermission.

The outdoor setting maintains its influence throughout the play, even as the scene shifts from Gudbrandsdalen to the shore of northern Africa. This transformation is accomplished by means of theatrical staging. At the beginning of the act, under "sunny" lighting, beautiful young women, scantily clad (while we see the audience members dressed in parkas and stocking caps) set up chairs and champagne for the international businessmen lounging on the shore. Peer's arrival begins with his waterskiing behind the *Miami Vice* speedboat and then gracefully coming ashore as he jumps out of his water skis. The dynamism allowed by the environment, both here and in the preceding acts, echoes Peer's youthful vigor and sexuality. Later, the explosion of Peer's boat, full of his wealth which the other men have stolen, takes place far out on the lake, so that it seems as if the speedboat actually blows up. We hear an explosion and see smoke arising above the lake in the distance. The other men were fated to die, but Peer, escaping this fate, takes it as a sign of being shielded by God's favor, despite his sins. Death remains a distant abstraction, as the exploding boat was a distant distraction. The sandy beach continues to serve as the north African desert throughout Act Four's wandering, progressively distraught, Peer, until, at the end of the act, the playing area is the gathering place for the inmates of the insane asylum in Cairo.

At the beginning of Act Five,[25] Peer is aboard a ship bound for home, played on a round platform which rises from the flat surface of the central playing area. The angle of the platform increases as the gale force winds capsize the boat and all but Peer (after fighting the Cook off the lifeboat) are drowned. The sequence benefits from our knowledge that in the background is the home to which Peer is returning.

Peer, ever resistant to confronting his own mortality, responds to his fifth act encounters with desperation. Unlike the 2014 production, Peer never returns to Solveig in her mountain hut. Instead, Solveig is out on the lake, rowing a small boat back and forth. A lighting effect from the floor of the boat illuminates her in golden hues. Peer hears her siren call and walks into Lake Gålå in search of (re)union with Solveig (his beloved/his mother). The last we see of him is his head, the rest of his body having become submerged in the cold waters of the lake. Peer and Solveig disappear from sight entirely as the lights go out. Does this represent the surrender of his ego in order to merge with the infinite, or does it symbolize a regression into embryonic oneness? For Peer, I favor the latter, but for some audience members, it could suggest the former. The beauty of the ambivalence of the final scene is that both interpretations can be felt simultaneously. Throughout the production, our attention repeatedly shifts between expansion and contraction—from the landscape to more human-scaled settings—from lake and mountains to farmstead or insane asylum. The setting allows for the immensity of nature and the finitude of individual life. We, the audience, experience both, even if Peer, hoping to escape the fate presented by the Button Molder, submerses himself in the watery womb of Lake Gålå. I am reminded that old age is no guarantee of wisdom or the creation of a meaningful narrative of one's life. It may simply be the end.

[25]Beginning at time stamp 41:17.

In *Gatas Gynt*, the director substitutes dread of aging with our collective (if unconscious) fear of being unhoused. I have long wondered how it is possible that in relatively wealthy nations such a condition persists. I have concluded that if it did not serve some purpose—for example, to keep the rest of us working with our noses to the grindstone—it would no longer exist. When I strolled through the streets of downtown Oslo in 2015, I was surprised by the presence of beggars on the street. So much for my naïve picture of the perfection of the Norwegian welfare state. I previously mentioned Anne Davis Basting's question of whether our cultural "emphasis on the eternally youthful soul [is] indicative of a culture ill at ease with time and history . . . as represented by the aged body" (53). If the aging of the body is hastened by living rough, as research indicates,[26] then I propose that our unease may be exaggerated when we confront the premature aging of unhoused people. Time and history are key elements of both *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah* in that the entire lives of the eponymous characters are represented via the structure of the plays. In *Gatas Gynt*, only the old Peer of Act Five is enacted, and the rough edges of Oslo become a metaphor for the decay of his aging body. The inexorable passage of time and the actors' histories of living on the street are visually reinforced by the choice of setting.

The entire film is one of intense contraction, never expansion, at least until a few seconds at the end of the final scene. From the opening sequence, in less than a minute of screen time, *Gatas Gynt* sets the stage for our understanding that this is not to be a rendering of *Peer Gynt* in the national romantic landscape of summer cabins and domestic and foreign tourists. Notably absent are mountains, lakes, or forests (with one brief exception). Instead, we first see white *sans serif* print on a black background which covers the entire visual field of the film. We read a quote from the Button Molder explaining to Peer that he is destined for the scrap heap. What are

[26]See for example "Aging Among Homeless Populations: Causes, Consequences, Solutions" by Margot Kushel, MD, professor of medicine at UCSF: https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/kushel-ppt-naeh-2019.pdf

we to make of a film that begins with a shot of the textual material for the film itself? Before we can answer that question, we are quickly thrust into a subterranean urban scene, instead of the scenic Oslo prosperity of tourist brochures. We see no sign of a sunny Oslo fjord or bustling waterfront or modern high rises housing the financial and tech sectors. Rather than a haunting flute, we hear the jarring clacking of a subway train running on its tracks. We then cut to an extreme close-up of two dirty thumbs pressing against an open copy of *Peer Gynt*. The actor is heard in voiceover reading the Troll King's lines, in which he asks Peer for some spare change. The next shot captures a man, presumably unhoused, sitting on the floor of a hallway in the Oslo subway system, book in hand, continuing to read the Troll King's and Peer's lines. A black dog sits beside him. The background coloring is a cold bluish gray. Overhead fluorescent lights harshly illuminate the sharp angle of the receding hallway. From the depths of that angle, a man—signifying bustling neoliberal anxiety, always rushing to the next task or appointment—runs toward the camera and disappears offscreen as the man reading from *Peer Gynt* comes across the Troll King's line about having become a tramp.

As foreshadowed by the opening sequences, the film alternates between two primary modes, either of which may be shot as exteriors or interiors, but always in some part of Oslo that is well off the tourist track or cozy residential neighborhoods. The first mode is comprised of shots of the actors in rehearsal or speaking directly to the camera possibly in response to interview questions, although we neither see nor hear an interviewer. The second mode entails enactments of selected scenes from the fifth act of *Peer Gynt*. From the opening scene through to the end, the decayed urban settings could suggest a singular interpretation of Peer as a pathetic or tragic figure in his decline. However, as we get a glimpse of the actor Egil Schønhardt's inner and outer life, as well as that of the other actors, their performances of the characters in *Peer*

Gynt become ever-more poignant and revealing of the immensity of *their* consciousness of their lives, not as aging or aged clichés, but as human beings each with a uniquely fascinating story to tell. I remind myself that during the documentary sequences, the actors, aware of the camera focused on them, may likewise be performing certain aspects of themselves that will show them in a favorable light. Of course, Bræin has selected which footage to use and which to discard. Nevertheless, he has taken up Gullette's 1997 challenge to her readers to tell their stories of aging, insisting that the world needs to hear them in all their variety. Through his selection of scenes, he shows how each actor, in their own way, declines to decline. That is, they refuse to make the decline narrative their own. For example, Schønhardt, at one point, is seen resisting a retake of a scene, protesting that "My liver hurts. My whole body hurts."[27] Even as he protests, Schønhardt immediately resumes his place. The majority of the intercut scenes of the actors as themselves refocuses our attention on their vitality, resourcefulness, and insightfulness. The actors and director have created a community, at least for the moment, and this community has similarities with Myerhoff's southern California community of Jewish elders, whose stories are recounted in *Number Our Days*. In the introduction to her book, Victor Turner writes, "wisdom comes through in the many autobiographies Dr. Myerhoff collected and vitality informs the sociocultural dramas of the living she observed and took part in" (x). This is paralleled by the biographies that Bræin selects for his film. Furthermore, writes Turner, "the very old can remain in command of the basic human faculties of insight and imagination to the very end" (x). This applies to *Gatas Gynt* in which the actors have aged through living on the streets and drug use, but they still maintain their wit and wisdom. The film's setting provides an effective means for

[27]Time stamp 6:09.

supporting Peer's decline while simultaneously contrasting it with the actors' refusal to be defined by it. The film successfully disrupts age clichés of mental decline.

Myerhoff's anthropological study makes a strong case for the need, among those often ignored by family and society as a whole, to be heard. The actors, by being cast in the film, have been invited to be heard. Thus, a frequently unmet need shared by both unhoused people and the aged—interlocution—is honored and perhaps to some extent at least, satisfied. The documentary footage allows the actors to have their moments of self-revelation. The contrast between performance and interviews/rehearsal scenes gives the viewer a peek into the varied lives of the unhoused. Even as they can identify with the down-and-out Peer, they do not necessarily define themselves by their circumstances. Living rough and long-term use of drugs may have caused their bodies to age prematurely, but the humor of the actors in the scenes where they "play" themselves offsets a cliché of the aged and of unhoused individuals as sad victims of their circumstances. Whether in the modest social hall of a church, on graffiti-adorned back streets, in a cemetery, at a momentary resting place beneath an overpass, on a subway platform, or inside an old van, the settings of the scenes based on the play serve as an effective backdrop for seeing the fifth-act Peer as a tattered, lonely old man.

However, the documentary scenes of the actors caution us to resist assuming this is true for them. For example, in the film's first sequence of the cast, Synnøve Søberg, who plays Solveig, teasingly calls the bald actor playing the Thin Man "a long-haired brute."[28] In that same scene, as Bræin describes Peer's encounter with the Cook, who lies half dead, clutching a bicycle, Bræin says that we expect Peer to help the Cook, and that we are surprised when Peer fights to rob the Cook of his bike. The actor playing the Cook, Ragnar Tollefsen, says, with a

[28]Time stamp 1:36. Translations taken from the English subtitles.

glint in his eye, "Not for us,"[29] and the entire cast responds with knowing laughter. Their camaraderie, played against other documentary scenes of isolation or despair, invites us into the complexity of their lives. At another rehearsal, Tollefsen arrives happily declaring that he has finally saved up enough money to buy a PlayStation 3.[30] Later, Ray Howard, who plays Mads Moen (the cuckolded groom), critiques the ending as being rather clichéd, ironically declaring, "He [Peer] is saved by true love."[31] Wit predominates these scenes and counter a stereotypical, one-sided view of life on the streets. The actors are actively engaged in a project—the making of the film—which allows them to experience Cohen's and Katz's creativity-across-the-life-course. The combination of a creative activity and being acknowledged for their humanity may contribute to the actors' well-being in subtle, if unacknowledged, ways.

The documentary footage also reveals that the actors are keenly aware of their role in society, and they critique the new Norway which ignores them. Ray Howard even quotes Shakespeare's "all the world's a stage." With a note of irony, he allows that he has been playing the role assigned to him. He seems to be aware of life as a scripted performance, perhaps even a performative, when he wonders aloud whether other people, located on a higher rung of society, are anything but their roles and their masks. An early documentary scene adds to this critique. Schønhardt walks along the subway platform[32] and reflects on how in the past Norwegian sailors, in contrast to Swedish, British, or American seamen, were trusted. However, he continues, one or two missteps can destroy the faith and confidence for which one has worked long and hard. At the same time, Norwegian society has changed. He says, "We are so rich that we don't give a damn about others. We have no need for Europe. We don't need hardly anyone.

[29]Time stamp 3:19.
[30]Time stamp 3:38.
[31]Time stamp 4:28.
[32]Time stamp 7:41.

We can manage on our own. We are to ourselves enough."[33] He says this last sentence without any knowing nod to the camera which would take us out of his moment of reflection. He does not acknowledge the future viewership of the film. Nevertheless, I am confident that he is fully aware of Ibsen's use of the trolls to condemn Norway's isolationism when he paraphrases their oft repeated line, "«Trold, vær dig selv—nok!»" ("Troll, to yourself be—enough"; 48; Fjelde 55). Schønhardt expresses a certain nostalgia—which I have heard expressed in personal conversations with Norwegians—for a previous Norway which was poorer but more concerned about its less fortunate citizens. Schønhardt thus indicts Norwegian society for having neglected those who are left out of contemporary prosperous society, as represented by the financial and high-tech district of the so-called barcode buildings. This sentiment is reinforced in another documentary scene.[34] The actor states that "Crime is not for me" even though "I almost got bullied for not stealing. Today we have a much more brutal reality." This repetition underscores the film's two interconnected themes: first, that society has changed, for the worse; and second, that people marginalized by the new world can still claim their individuality. Just moments before, this same man is seen walking toward his encampment hollowed out within a stand of trees and littered with a few bicycles. He talks to himself, delineating the fine points of the law between stealing and picking up something that has been abandoned in the open. He sits and says, "I see a lot of positive things in the future. I'll make the best of it." His world consists of walking the streets looking for items for his survival—to hoard or to sell or to trade. Nevertheless, he maintains hope in the face of enormous challenges. The green trees and the sunlit meadow in the background correspond with his hopefulness, and soften, at least for a moment, any sense of despair he may otherwise feel.

[33]Time stamp 9:00.
[34]Time stamp 33:45.

On the other hand, the urban detritus, mostly shot in a blue/gray palette, symbolically connects us with the gloomier reality of life without permanent housing. In an apparent break from filming, Schønhardt, in Peer's ragged suit, sits beside a derelict truck, its engine parts exposed, tilting and leaning this way and that. Schønhardt's bent posture mirrors the decay of the useless truck. The plaster of the building in the background is peeling, and its doorways are boarded up. He nibbles at a sandwich as Ray Howard walks briskly by. An unidentified man, dressed in a ski jacket, approaches and nods at Schønhardt. They have a very brief, unrecorded conversation, and the man continues on his way. Has Schønhardt closed himself off from casual conversation in preparation for the next scene, which occurs in a graveyard? Or is his solitude an expression of personal, if momentary, withdrawal from the chatty, productive world? Documentary scenes show Schønhardt to be a bit of a ham and an excellent raconteur, thriving on an audience of the camera and/or fellow cast members. Bræin expands our understanding of Schønhardt and his playing of Peer as Schønhardt turns at the voiceover of the pastor eulogizing the deceased parishioner. Now we have entered the world of the play within the movie, and we recognize that it is Peer who arises and looks at the mourners gathered on a hilltop, as Schønhardt recites lines from Ibsen's text. Death presents itself in the midst of whatever ruminations Schønhardt/Peer was having. In my experience, this blending of Schønhardt/Peer's action is an effective use of an actor's preparation for their entrance. In addition, it highlights the connection between Peer's lack of a home and Schønhardt's. Peer continues to eat the sandwich and creeps along the side of the truck, watching the burial scene through the truck's cloudy windows, as if hiding from the possibility of death touching him. He sees Solveig bend forward to place flowers on the casket. The mourners walk away and Peer approaches the gravesite. Being in society, having friends and loved ones, means being unavoidably burdened by loss

when they die. Perhaps it is better to remain on the fringes of society where such harm cannot occur.

The later scenes of Peer's decline suggest isolation is counterproductive to finding oneself and to creating a meaning for one's life, as Robert Butler warns. The final sequence of Act Five, set in the social hall of a church, begins dimly lit,[35] with a single overhead light illuminating Solveig. She is framed by two rows of pillars as she clears away some dirty dishes. Meanwhile, a reverse shot shows Peer at his worst, in the dark and framed by the open doorway. His shoulders just fill the space. During one of the rehearsal scenes, Søberg confesses that "I'm also one of those fools who would forgive and take someone back . . . . I think I would have made sure he would be okay the rest of his days."[36] A closeup on Solveig retains the lighting which gives an almost angelic impression, a role the clear-eyed Søberg, would be unlikely to claim. In the kitchen the lighting again favors Solveig but alternating extreme closeups reveal her and Peer's age- or drug-marked faces. The film follows Ibsen's text as Solveig answers Peer's question about where he has been all this time. Solveig replies, "In my faith, in my hope, and in my love." This reconnection, though coming so late in life, brings Peer out of his isolation and back into the world of his fellow humans, even if the world is comprised of just one other person. After the Button Molder's final line about meeting at the next crossroad, the camera pulls back, out of the kitchen to reveal the rain-spattered pane. It pans upward to the roofline and sky-filled rain. After our awareness is thus momentarily guided to infinitude, the movie ends with individual shots of several actors, silent and thoughtful, and an *in memoriam* of two actors. The community of actors is represented one last time, but now each back in their individual environments. The film throughout makes no effort to diminish how life on the street ages a person in appearance, or

[35]Time stamp 52:00.
[36]Time stamp 9:53.

hastens death, but it brings out the beauty and grace, kindness and humor, and an unvarnished view of the world in all its manifestations, in other words the *immensity* of the actors' lives.

Peer may be one of the loneliest characters ever written, and the isolation of old age is a factor in both productions of *Peer Gynt*, but this state of disconnection from the wider world is highly focused in *Suzannah.* The condition of isolation—not necessarily a problem, as Tornstam cautions us—is even more evident in Fosse's *Suzannah*, which was filmed in the Ibsen Museum in Oslo, the final apartment in which the Ibsens lived. The mostly dark, gloomy apartment feels claustrophobic, which is amplified by the many closeups of Old Suzannah. Myerhoff quotes one of her respondents who speaks about his fellow members of their Jewish senior, "'now when they are too old to do anything worthwhile, they go back into their past'"(100-1). Of course, the historical Suzannah was not too old or too riddled with grief for worthwhile endeavors, but Fosse captures Old Suzannah in a moment of backward gazing, as a response to her loss. Nevertheless, her monologues do not suggest loneliness in her isolation, even when she wonders where her grown son Sigurd is. Old Suzannah's monologues portray the interiority of grief, but her attention is on replaying her past, not on outward manifestations of grief. The character is caught up in the work of life review. The dark blues and greens of the interior symbolize her grief without necessitating emotional performativity to convince us (or herself) that she is now alone.

When I visited the museum several years ago, it did not seem at all dark or gloomy, suggesting that the lighting for the filming was deliberately lower than a museum goer would experience. The sparse furnishings create a sense of emptiness, entirely suited to Old Suzannah's emotional state. There are only one picture and a mirror on the walls. A music box rests on a side table. Absent are stacks of books or manuscripts or letters. Even Ibsen's desk, seen from Old Suzannah's point of view, has been cleared away, save for three silver items plus a lamp and

book, all neatly arranged. How empty her life must feel, at this moment, soon after the loss of her lifelong partner, not just as a life partner, but also in her role as collaborator in Ibsen's writing. The sense of isolation is emphasized by the characters who, as they appear on screen separately and sequentially, adhere to the play's non-dialogic structure, whether in voice-over or speaking diegetically. Each character performs separately in her own time and space. The background music[37] lends a pensive, almost mournful, aura to the opening sequence. The palette is dark blue or dark green, except for the opening shot of Young Suzannah who at first wears a white corset and tiered slip and gazes out a window framed by white, lacy curtains. The grayness of the scene reflects the grief of Old Suzannah and suggests something of the flatness of her life without Ibsen. She will fill this flatness with her memories, but it surrounds her throughout. A long life entails many losses as well as fond memories. Which of the two a person emphasizes goes a long way to determining the quality of one's old age. If life's disappointments or losses take center stage, then psychological decline may follow along with physical decline. If a range of memories, including both happy and sad events, are remembered, then the sense of having had a full and rich life can be appreciated as one nears the end. Certainly, I find this to be true in *Suzannah*. The brighter palette and illumination in scenes focusing on Middle-Aged and Young Suzannah represent memories leaning toward pleasure, pride, or vitality.

Nevertheless, the monologues reveal the prolonged wait for Ibsen and/or Sigurd, and the dark tones perfectly capture the slow passage of time which is foreshadowed by a ticking clock. (I elaborate on the effect of a ticking clock in the next paragraph.) A mood of loneliness, even though occasionally relieved by bursts of activity from the younger Suzannahs, pervades the film. Rather than opening out Fosse's play for the purposes of film—for example, by employing

[37]Goldberg Variations by J.S. Bach, played by Glen Gold [sic] 1955, Sony Classical SMK 52619XXX.

different sets for Young and Middle-Aged Suzannah, exterior shots of the street outside the window, or scenes of Ibsen and/or Sigurd showing why they are not arriving—the director mostly adheres to Fosse's script,[38] keeping us confined to the apartment and the mind of Old Suzannah.[39] The cool colors of the setting support Old Suzannah's complaints about the draft coming in the window, as well as the damp chill of Oslo, even in summer.[40] As a viewer, I hope for Old Suzannah to break free of the gloom and the coldness of her isolation, to engage directly with her younger selves, but such is the power of grief as conceived by Fosse that this is not possible. She is locked in her memories (at least for the duration of the play) as we are locked in the few rooms of the apartment she occupies. Old Suzannah may not find her setting confining, but I as a viewer do. However, I appreciate the choice, because staging the play otherwise would completely negate bringing us into the mental and emotional world of the Suzannahs.

The pacing of the film is slow, perhaps to match how Old Suzannah is about to stretch time out, into the past. First seen from behind, she stands at the dining room table and supports her weight with her hands pressed against the tabletop. As the film credits roll, we hear a clock chiming six times. Is the hour 6:00 a.m., or is it 6:00 p.m.? Two clues from the text suggest that it is summer for Old Suzannah, living in Oslo, where daylight hours begin well before 6:00 a.m. and continue until well after 6:00 p.m. The first clue is that the play more likely than not takes place shortly after Ibsen's death (May 23 for the historical Ibsen), and second, Old Suzannah awaits Sigurd's arrival for her birthday (June 26 for the historical Suzannah). On the other hand,

[38]At least in this way. Fosse's playscript was adapted for the television production with a few minor changes such as the ticking clock and the presence of Young and Middle-Aged Suzannah (as well as a four-year-old girl who runs by) before Old Suzannah begins her 18-page monologue. Lines are occasionally skipped or re-arranged during this monologue. There are also deviations from the order of lines throughout the production.
[39]The historical Suzannah was confined to the apartment for the last eight years of her life. However, she was not isolated. She received visitors and maintained an active correspondence during those eight years, as Astrid Sæther points out in her biography of the historical Suzannah, *Suzannah: Fru Ibsen.*
[40]At time stamps 3:06 and 20:46, respectively, in the film version.

Middle-Aged Suzannah, living in Italy, anticipates celebrating seven-year-old Sigurd's birthday (the historical Sigurd was born on December 23). This diversion into historical birthdates serves as background for what I believe is a misguided use of the clock sound effect. Birthdates ground us in industrial clock time and move us away from a sense of the eternal now. The chimes are first associated with Old Suzannah coinciding with her initial monologue. After the chimes—and long before the first lines of Young Suzannah—we hear the ticking of the clock. I read the chimes (in this instance), and especially the ticking clock, in four ways. The first, as I mentioned above, is to accent the slow passage of time as occurs when we are waiting for someone who is late. In this circumstance, frequent glances at a watch or clock will show that time has hardly moved at all, maybe a minute or two. The second is to indicate that time is passing, and as it passes, Old Suzannah is drawing nearer to death. However, there is no textual evidence that either she or the younger Suzannahs are concerned about their own death. Third, the ticking functions as a background reminder of Ibsen's death, that is, his time has run out, but time continues to pass, and life goes on, for Old Suzannah. Fourth, and most importantly, the constant ticking pulls the viewer into industrial clock time and thus out of omnitemporality. This strikes me as a misinterpretation of the play and the effect that Fosse seeks to create in his plays, about which he has so frequently written. Miscue or not, Old Suzannah, in voice-over, recites the opening lines of Fosse's play: "It is calm and quiet here in the apartment . . ." (83). The slow pacing has thus effectively prepared the viewer for her first line. Surprisingly, she does not characterize the apartment as claustrophobic, merely still, quiet, peaceful. She may be grieving, but she is not overwhelmed by her loss. For Old Suzannah, the slow pace of her old age offers time for reflection and reimagining of the story she wishes to tell. The dark colors of the gloomy

apartment reflect Old Suzannah's task of reviewing her life through her inward journey of reminiscences.

Throughout the film, certain set pieces reinforce the ages and mental states of the Suzannahs. The first is a round dining room table which plays a key role in providing a focal point for the Suzannahs' actions. We can identify which of the three Suzannahs the table belongs to by its appearance: austerely set with only three plates and knives and forks for Old Suzannah (Why three, not two? Is one for Ibsen?); the addition of a small vase of purple flowers for Young Suzannah; and a progressively more elaborate setting as Middle-Aged Suzannah tends to the preparations for Sigurd's seventh birthday. At various times she adds a larger bouquet (which replaces Young Suzannah's flowers via a special effect), a plate of grapes, dinner napkins, and crystal glasses. Thus, the table itself represents age-related attributes: simple but flowery freshness for Young Suzannah, maternal care for Middle-Aged Suzannah, and a loss of concern for the outer world for Old Suzannah. Another set piece, Ibsen's desk, functions in a similar manner for the two older Suzannahs. (Since, for Young Suzannah, we are in her childhood home, there is of course no sign of Ibsen's study.) As I pointed out, when the desk is first seen from Old Suzannah's point of view, it holds only a lamp, one closed book, and three silver accoutrements. Ibsen is gone; the desk is no longer used by him. The tidy arrangement of the set pieces suggests a stasis, a stopping of time. It is as if the desk is preserved as a memento. However, several scenes later, the desk is again seen from Old Suzannah's point of view. Now there is the addition of a sheaf of papers with a fountain pen laid diagonally across the top. Still, Old Suzannah sees the desk but does not interact with it. Middle-Aged Suzannah, however, views a desk that is the center of Ibsen's writing life. With casual familiarity, she sits on the desk and picks up a sheaf of

papers. She is later seen sitting at the desk, as if it belonged to her, as well as to Ibsen. She *is* Ibsen, after all, and may therefore stake a claim to his desk.

The Central Role of Appearance in Understanding Attitudes and Beliefs about Age

Two bedraggled old Peers, one in a raggedy old overcoat, the other in a worn suit. One refined Old Suzannah, dressed for mourning in a black, full-length dress with a lace-edged collar and a silver brooch at her throat. So much about the world of the play can be gleaned from a first glance at the characters. In what ways does appearance reinforce or alter the impression left by the plays' character descriptions and lines of dialogue/monologue? In both live and filmed productions, the actors' appearance makes an immediate impression before any lines of dialogue are heard. We see the actor's size and general appearance, perhaps unconsciously making assumptions about the character based on such attributes as their attractiveness, status in society, or age. Just as old people are admonished to *act* their age, so too, can they feel social pressure to *dress* their age. As I write this section, a scene from an old rerun of the TV show *Las Vegas* comes to mind. In this episode there was a B-story about a group of older women who were lounging topless in one of the casino's poolside cabanas. From there one or the other of them would walk to the bar to order drinks. One young male character said, "who wants to see old women's bodies, anyway?" This from a series which revels in young, beautiful, scantily clad women (and men). Assuming a woman's bare torso suggests sexuality, and that displays of the female form should be limited to the young and beautiful, do the productions of *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah* defy norms regarding age and sexuality? That is, do they dress their ages? Are exceptions made? If so, to what effect? And what about their faces? Because all three productions in question are filmed (although the Festival version is simply a well-shot and well-edited video recording of the outdoor stage performance), the face in closeup (or medium shot in

the case of the Festival *Peer Gynt*) also serves as a tremendously rich resource for assessing how appearance figures into the production's take on age. I first discuss how costuming contributes to these impressions.

Gatas Gynt's middle-aged Synnøve Søberg/Solveig is dressed simply in a long-sleeved blouse with a diagonal plaid, black knit pants, and sneakers. Her blouse is fairly low cut, but Søberg steers us away from thinking that the low-cut blouse has anything to do with overt sexuality. During a rehearsal, she says that she is too old for that. The middle-class Suzannahs wear dresses with tight bodices and floor length skirts, consistent with the feminine ideals of beauty of their eras. However, the first shots of Young Suzannah show her in a virginally white corset and flounced slip. I read this costuming choice as revealing her naïve eagerness for love, but unaware of, and perhaps unprepared for, the difficulties of a future with Ibsen. Young Suzannah defies the gendered norms of movement for her social status when she plops down on a chair with an unladylike disregard for the expected poise of a cultured young woman of her era.[41] This suggests that what she means when she describes herself as clumsy might be reflective of a certain athletic rejection of her clothing's restriction. Certainly, these modest dresses—floor length skirts and neck high bodices—minimize the characters' overt sexuality. Each Suzannah dresses her age, and their costumes, if not Young Suzannah's actions, reflect societal norms.

At the other extreme of costuming for overt sexuality, we have the numerous examples from the Festival *Peer Gynt*'s Acts Two and Three: Ingrid, during her tryst with Peer, clad only in her underclothing, one breast bared; the Greenclad Woman wearing a skintight bodysuit, and the shirtless Peer chopping branches off a felled tree. As characters in their (so-called) prime of

[41]Time stamp 38:10.

life, such displays of the attractive body are consistent with contemporary values. Interestingly, even young Solveig is less modestly dressed than the play would suggest. She wears no apron and her skirt ends just below her knees while the other women's skirts reach the ankle or the ground. In these examples, the characters' clothing corresponds with their ages and function in the Festival production and in Bræin's film. As for costume changes as the characters age, the Greenclad Woman, upon her arrival at Peer's mountain hut, sports extreme old age stage make-up and wears a ragged costume with pendulous breasts ending in exaggerated nipples. She is Scott-Maxwell's old age wreckage personified and is decidedly not dressing her age. In the Festival production, Act Four's Middle-aged Peer, although he is past 50, is still dressed for action in red board shorts, a floral tank top with scarf streaming behind him as he enters on water skis. His costuming performs a youthful, but no longer impecunious, version of Peer as he shows off for his fellow entrepreneurs who wear traditional traveling suits appropriate for the heat of Morocco. Returning to Norway, Act Five's old Peer now wears a shapeless, fleece-lined winter overcoat. He has, as in Act Four, a bit of gray around the edges of his hair. Middle-aged Solveig, as she sings her Act Four interlude, is barefoot, and wears a flowing pink skirt, white blouse, and yellow cardigan. In contrast to the ever-youthful Solveig of the Giza production, she has a few streaks of gray in her long, uncombed auburn hair. This Solveig is not rendered as eternally young but is allowed to age with the conventional sign of a few gray hairs. In the production's final scenes, she rows a boat back and forth a fair distance from the shore, so her appearance is unclear, although her clothing appears sometimes white, sometimes yellow/orange (a lighting effect), as Peer approaches the shorelines and walks toward her into the water.

Leaving aside questions of age-appropriate costuming, I return to *Gatas Gynt* for a closer examination of Peer's costuming as a metaphor for both Peer's old age and Schønhardt's life on

the streets. At the beginning, barefoot Peer wears an old, baggy suit jacket and pants (whose hem has come loose) with a dirty, untucked, unbuttoned at the sleeves, white dress shirt beneath. Along with the bicycle that he wrests away from the cook, he pulls off the cook's worn sneakers. Old clothing, which may once have been the business attire of Peer the international man of commerce, suggests something about his unexplained life between the Cairo madhouse and the present. Perhaps only one or two missteps (as Schønhardt reflects in the documentary scene previously discussed) have led Peer to his current circumstances. When Peer scorches his suit jacket over an open fire, while trying to dry it, he puts it back on, lacking a closet full of backup clothing. Schønhardt can easily use his history of drug use and living rough to inform his characterization of Peer. For us, the viewer, the clothing becomes a metaphor for the wear-and-tear of street life's premature aging. Schønhardt has no need to play Peer as an 80-year-old. It is sufficient that ruined clothing registers as the aging process itself, which can seem to come on suddenly. His clothing thus symbolizes age as well as his lack of financial resources. The agedness Schønhardt expresses is more about being worn down by the misery of living on the street and his previous drug experiences. However, like Peer, his ruination does not define him. Peer seeks one last chance at redemption. In the final scene, in which Peer enters the church social hall, Schønhardt's costume of tattered white shirt, suit jacket, and pants underscores what his life has been: a barely successful struggle for survival, but not without the "crusade against Death" that Bloom attributes to Peer (361). The unhoused person's daily struggles for survival are represented symbolically when Peer picks himself up from his fall down the gravel hill, walks barefoot through the snow, steals the Cook's bicycle and shoes, and finally seeks refuge in the church social hall, despite his extremely bedraggled appearance. Schønhardt's Peer fulfills Bloom's assertion that "Peer the scamp bears the Blessing: more life" (357). In the documentary

scene in which Schønhardt recalls his opium-filled dream in Philadelphia, the actor has shown us the scamp in him as well. Although Schønhardt never appears as destitute as Peer, the intentionally revealed close knitting of actor and character informs both Ibsen's Peer and Schønhardt's life on the street.

When it comes to analyzing closeups of the face in filmed performances, we need to keep in mind that, according to Josephine Dolan writing in "The Queen, Ageing Femininity and the Recuperation of the Monarchy," "film appears to show reality" (41). In actuality, camera techniques can either blur the facial signs of aging or accentuate them. In *Suzannah,* the actors playing the Suzannahs are considerably older than the characters' ages suggested by the play. Nineteen-year-old Young Suzannah is played by 28-year-old Ane Dahl Torp who effectively portrays a character nine years younger. Her smooth, unblemished face suggests innocence,[42] but her firm, decisive gestures while tying her petticoat and rapid crossing (almost running) from one room to the next shows the steely determination one finds in the script as she declares that she *will* have Ibsen.[43] Middle-Aged Suzannah, who would have been only 30 years old on Sigurd's seventh birthday, is played by 45-year-old Hildegun Riise. She shows early signs of aging with parallel lines across her throat, and she frequently leans back languidly on a settee one hand pressed against her forehead, as if the Italian heat were exhausting her. But such is the power of the actor's imagination that both performances, even when seen in closeup, are consistent with their presumed ages. As the actors' preparations inform their appearance, physicality, and vocalization, they take us along into their imagined universes. In the moment of viewing, I feel no disconnect between the reality revealed by the camera and the characters created by the actors. I accept that Young Suzannah is 19 years old and that Middle-Aged Suzannah is 30.

[42]Time stamp 15:40.
[43]Time stamp 19:41.

The historical Suzannah was 70 years old at the time of Ibsen's death and housebound due to her long history of arthritis. Recall that in Chapter Two both Old and Young Suzannah refer to being carried down the stairs. Wenche Foss, playing Old Suzannah, was 86 at the time of the filming of *Suzannah.* Foss's sagging cheeks and neckline, and the deeply etched creases of her face, readily reveal the emotional reality of the character, whether grief, consternation, enjoyment of fond memories, determination, or humor. The physical signs of aging on her face seem to allow for a greater range of expressiveness even in what appears to be stillness, as Egan writes about the past being molded in her features. For the older actor, perhaps because a lifetime of experiences is written on the face in their unique version of wreckage, a mere whisper of a thought seems to reveal the immensity of the character. For actors of any age, what they bring from their personal lives or their imagination is transparently communicated in the closeups. Interesting then, that despite the many references in Fosse's script to a grimace of pain, we rarely, if ever, see this overt sign of agedness in Old Suzannah. (We can, however, feel her pain through her physical stiffness and cautious gait.) Instead, her face reacts lightly to her memories, fond and otherwise, as she recalls them in her monologues or as they are played out by Young and Middle-Aged Suzannah. Young Suzannah primps in the mirror as she arranges her hair, and Middle-Aged Suzannah smooths her dress as she gazes at herself in the mirror and talks about her relative lack of beauty.[44] However, turning sideways she admires her slim figure. Old Suzannah has none of this need for identity-reassuring mirror-gazing. What a gift—to be freed from the impulse to *youthenize* or glamorize (see the cautionary tale of the aged Greenclad Woman who has not freed herself from this impulse). This Suzannah is liberated from such concerns as her reminiscences flow within and around her, while her younger selves still concern

[44]Time stamps 17:04 and 26:36, respectively, for example.

themselves with their appearance. She wisely ignores the mirror in her apartment. Such gazing would only serve to reveal the disconnect between how others see her and how she sees herself as the embodiment of all three Suzannahs and undermine the immensity of her life.

The actor Egil Schønhardt is revealed in the non-*Peer Gynt* scenes as having prominent bags under his eyes, a few laugh lines at the outside of his eyes, and an extra pair of parenthetical creases in addition to deep nasolabial folds, which make him appear weathered and aged. Depending on the lighting, the skin of this Peer's cheeks is either smooth or deeply etched. (Recalling Dolan, I wonder which is so-called reality.) These tracks of Schønhardt's life are trumped by the hint of a knowing smile as he rehearses his lines on the subway platform. Synnøve Søberg's face, as she reflects on Solveig and her relationship with Peer, is a middle-aged face that has suffered—revealed by the darkness under her eyes, the mottled texture of her complexion, and the folds of her skin hanging loosely under her chin. But in the extreme closeups at the end, when Peer follows her into the kitchen of the church social hall, she appears no older than conventionally middle-aged. Her Solveig has no need for the façade of makeup to either improve her appearance according to clichés of beauty or to exaggerate her age. During a rehearsal scene, Søberg says, "you're supposed to look great, but waiting 50 years isn't that great."[45] The actress is well aware of Solveig's age according to the script, but she does nothing special to perform old age. She and her character are just who they are: unapologetic, careful but caring, and welcoming. Peer's face appears more deeply etched, with deeper creases across his forehead and cheeks and a short, untrimmed beard. As they embrace, their faces hold the sorrow of a long separation and the comfort of their reunion, however late it has come.

[45]Time stamp 11:16.

Mads Ousdal, in his mid-forties when the Festival's *Peer Gynt* was filmed, relies mostly on his physical movements, rather than makeup or facial expression (though very expressive), to suggest the different ages of Peer, and rightly so, as this is an outdoor stage production, where such effects could not be read past the first few rows of the audience seats. In addition, Ousdal remains on stage during the transition from Act Four to Act Five, as Peer goes from middle-age to old, without any change in makeup. Peer's Act Four makeup of light lines to indicate a creased forehead, slightly deeper nasolabial folds, and heavier eyeliner suffice for both his middle years and his old age. In contrast, the Act Five old Troll King goes full bore with classic old age stage makeup, and he has a bald pate rimmed with long, stringy hair matched in its lilac color by a long, straggly beard. The young Greenclad Woman sports red lips and heavy eye makeup, but when she returns as an old troll her lipstick and eye makeup are smeared, her nose is huge, and she has a unibrow and thin, frizzy hair. I am reminded of what a friend once told me, quoting her mother, "you can't paint on a cracked canvas." In my experience this is true. Assuming I do not want to unnecessarily age my face, a light touch with makeup is required. The prematurely old Greenclad Woman has, perhaps in desperation, ignored the wisdom of my friend's mother, becoming a female *Senex amans*, lusting as she does after a much younger man, to painfully comic effect.

Performing Vigor versus Frailty: The Physicality of Age

At the beginning of this chapter, I explored multiple means of performance. Now, I return to Diana Taylor's assertion (cited in Chapter One) that "embodied performance . . . makes visible an entire spectrum of attitudes and values" (49). Some examples from daily life point out how we conventionally place people on the spectrum from young to old and make certain assumptions (or at least ask questions) about the person based on the quality of their movements. When we

see videos on the internet of old people running a footrace or ballroom dancing or doing a gymnastics routine on parallel bars, their torsos tend to be rigid, even as their limbs retain their youthful flexibility. When they perform these supposedly age-defying feats, at the same time that we admire feats of grace and flexibility, we see that their bodies have not entirely kept up with their spirited approach to life. When I have taken the opportunity to simply sit on a bench and watch the passing parade, for example, at the Minnesota State Fair or in a shopping mall, I can't help but observe people's movements and wonder about their lives. Are their steps strong and confident, or slow and stiff? (Has life slowed them down?) Is their posture erect or bent? (Have life experiences been too much to bear?) Do they move gracefully, or do they appear to be in danger of toppling over? (Have they neglected physical activity, or do they suffer from a neurological disease?) Do they navigate various terrains with ease (like the young men I once saw leaping down the boulders of the Norwegian hike across Besseggen, the site of Peer's fabricated encounter with the buck), or do they cling to their walkers on smooth (mostly indoor) surfaces? (Do they believe that diminished physicality is a normal result of old age?) We even have a special word for an old person who defies our images of feeble old age—spry—which utterly fails to capture the immensities of a person's life as revealed by their physical movement.

In analyzing an actor's portrayal of a character in terms of age and aging, I would like to distinguish between the actor's physical ability and the physical ability of the character being portrayed. In none of the performances do the actors succumb to clichés of representations of old age. Their choices relative to age, whether of vocal expression or gesture or movement, are subtle and consistent with the given circumstances of the characters. This comparison of actor and performance is possible in all three instances of the eponymous characters. In the Festival production, the same actor, Mads Ousdal, plays all three stages of Peer's life. I could not uncover

the age of the actor, Egil Schønhardt, playing Peer in *Gatas Gynt*, but the contrast between how he presents himself as himself and his portrayal of Peer can be observed in the interviews interspersed with the scenes of the play. After a brief search on YouTube[46] I found a memorial to the life and career of the actress, Wenche Foss, who was 86 years old when she filmed Old Suzannah. A clip from one of Foss's stage performances at some point in her later life shows her effortlessly making a deep curtsy. Her graceful movements in old age give me reason to believe that her physical representation of Old Suzannah depends on choices she made in preparation for the role, in accordance with Fosse's play. On the face of it, Old Suzannah's physical limitations do not suggest someone who needs to be carried down the stairs. However, steps can be a significant challenge for an old person who is weak and fearful of their balance. At any rate, Foss's theatrical performance of age can be teased apart from an individuals' conscious or unconscious performances of age in daily life. Interestingly, all three eponymous characters share at least one common concern of the elderly, that is, concern about loss of balance and falling. As a chiropractor I have seen, among my patients who are well into their own version of Basting's "mature, vital adulthood" (18),[47] that just one moment of inattention can result in a fall and possibly a broken bone. Although this risk is not overplayed (except perhaps in *Gatas Gynt*), it informs choices made by the actors, whether that means taking an extra beat before jumping down from a stump (as does Ousdal playing old Peer), or slouching and walking slowly and carefully (Schønhardt in *Gatas Gynt*), or by the use of a cane when not standing or sitting (Old Suzannah). Through these performance choices, the fear of falling becomes a metaphor for the fear of decline.

[46]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lHAgOFMnrc

[47]Coincidentally, just before writing this section I received an unsolicited email from neurobalancetherapy.org citing multiple peer-reviewed studies of, and governmental recommendations, concerning the dangers of falling among the elderly.

Despite William F. May's assertion in his essay—that "the psychic life of the elderly also shrinks, with an increasing preoccupation with the body and its troubles" (44)—I find that Old Suzannah is remarkably free of concerns about her body. As she becomes caught up in her memories, her physical problems retreat from the conscious expression of herself. However, consistent with May's comments about modes of meaning for an elderly person—one of which is the body as a "means of revealing ourselves to others" (47)—Old Suzannah's tentative gait, lightly supported by a cane, does the work of communicating her stiffness, and perhaps, her fear of falling. She does not lean her weight heavily into her cane in a lopsided fashion, which would be a more clichéd way of expressing old age (even though I have seen many people do this and am cheered by television commercials for a cane which enables the user to remain upright). Fosse's character descriptions of Old Suzannah frequently mention pain and weakness, but it is Young Suzannah who is preoccupied with her body, in terms of its clumsiness and her ugliness. Old Suzannah's use of her arms and hands (when she removes them from the side of her body) remains lively and quick. Whether walking slowly and deliberately with the use of her cane, or occasionally leaning her hands on the table, as per the script, the interiority of her performance suggests that her movements are influenced by her thoughtful deliberations as much as by physical frailty.

The contrast between the two younger Suzannahs and Old Suzannah in terms of their freedom of movement highlights Old Suzannah's more constrained movements. Young Suzannah moves gracefully as she crosses the dining room, sits at the table, rises quickly and crosses to the window as she recalls the first meetings with Ibsen. There is no evidence of self-proclaimed clumsiness in her performance. Instead, as I discussed in the section on costume, she moves with a kind of athletic quality, even though constrained by a tight bodice and a long, full skirt. Further

examples of her disregard for the conventions of her era include a shot where she sits on the floor and slouches against the wall[48] and another, a few minutes later, where she flings her legs over the arm of a chair.[49] Middle-Aged Suzannah likewise moves with grace as she appears from the adjoining room and crosses past Old Suzannah to set a vase of daisies and a bowl of grapes on the table. Whether bustling about in preparation for Sigurd's birthday or languidly reclining to cool herself in the heat, she shows no sign of pain or stiffness. The Young and Middle-Aged Suzannahs frequently interact with props, for example, fussing with the table setting or a stack of books on the couch[50] or their clothing or an element of the set[51]—although all Suzannahs get to nibble on a cookie—or gaze out the window in search of Ibsen and/or Sigurd. Old Suzannah does none of this rushing about. Her relative slowness reminds us how she has changed. Gone is the infatuation of young love, absent is the focus on providing a birthday dinner for Sigurd. Now, Old Suzannah pauses to recall scenes from the past and to talk about them as they enter her memory. We seldom see her walk for more than a few paces, and then slowly, partially supported by her cane—partially because she does not make the mistake I have commonly observed among old people, that is, of interfering with their overall coordination by leaning too heavily on their canes and thereby throwing themselves off balance. Most often she merely sits or stands. Her shoulders are rounded and she makes few large gestures (although, as previously mentioned, when she does so, the gestures are not at all aged). She mostly leaves her arms at her sides, as if by doing so they can support herself physically and emotionally. Foss's representation subtly captures the restrictions of Old Suzannah's aged body without in any way being spiritually defined or confined by them. In fact, at the penultimate moment, where the three Suzannahs

[48]Time stamp 35:06.
[49]Time stamp 38:58.
[50]Time stamp 33:25.
[51]For example, when Young Suzannah scratches at an invisible spot on the window at time stamp 33:14.

gather around the table, Young and Middle-Aged Suzannah are seated but Old Suzannah remains standing, in contrast to Fosse's stage directions which has all three sitting at the table. This variation from Fosse's play emphasizes the impression that this is Old Suzannah's story, and that the other Suzannahs are her supporting characters. Just before the credits roll, Old Suzannah stands alone at her table, and as the camera pulls back, she disappears from our view. Our final memory is of Old Suzannah standing alone with only a chair back to support her.

In the Festival production of *Peer Gynt*, the 20-year-old Peer begins his performance with an acrobatic dance on the ledge separating the audience from the playing area. He struts, leaps, pirouettes, suggestively sways his pelvis, and dives and rolls from one section to another, before performing a flip from the ledge to the ground and acknowledging, with a stare, the Button Molder who stands near the shoreline. This picture of a physically capable Peer carries us through all of Act Four, which begins with Peer sliding ashore on his water skis and nimbly stepping out of them to greet his fellow capitalists. Later, as Peer tries to seduce the much younger Anitra, Ousdal's performance highlights the ridiculousness of his efforts. He appears middle-aged but acts like a young man drunk on his lust as Anitra deftly liberates him from his jewels and finery. He even echoes the acrobatics of Act One when he does a backward roll off the rock on which he has been lying only to be stripped to his swim trunks.

Ousdal's old Peer is mostly erect, or at least he maintains his postural flexibility, such that he can move with easy fluidity, but we see less and less of the acrobat. Herein lies the subtlety of Ousdal's performance as an old man. It is rendered by the absence of what he once was, more than by the presence of old-man stereotypes. Such stereotypes are left to the old Troll King whose back is hunched and knees are bent. The Troll King sits down with a jerk and walks with

a sideways sway, as if his hip joints are frozen.[52] Indeed, Peer remains physically quite agile well into Act Five, but then he begins to subtly incorporate concern about balance. When he steps down from a large rock near center stage,[53] he first looks down at the ground, as if needing to carefully measure the distance and prepare himself for the jolt upon landing (as I do!). A few moments later, leading into and during the onion peeling scene,[54] he recreates his life's various modes of physicality. He leans forward and yells, "Du er ingen Kejser; du er en Løg" ("You're no emperor, you're an onion"; 123; Fjelde 176). He remembers the hopefulness of his youth by holding a layer of onion near his head, smiling, and moving his feet in a little dance before tossing the layer away in disgust. He continues to reject any memories which bring a momentary smile to his face or lift to his body. He leans over the onion, becoming more and more bent as he realizes there is no inner core, finally collapsing entirely over his knees. Ousdal takes us physically on the journey of Peer's life, from the acrobat dreaming of a crown, to the old man, forlorn and alone with his existential crisis. Near the end of the performance, Peer tries to get a foot up on a rock only to collapse over it, as he says, "stirre mig trætt paa det lovede Land, / se at faa Snedyngen over mig kavet; / de kan skrive derover: «her er *Ingen* begravet;»" ("And stare myself blind at the promised land; / Then let me be covered by drifting snows; / Scratch on a rock, 'Here No One lies.'"; 167; Fjelde 205[55]). He stands only with the support of the Button Molder, who embraces him from behind. This moment mirrors Peer's support of Aase at the end of Act Three. The repetition of the motif provides a sense of nostalgia for the loss of his mother, their wealth, and his home community, outcast though he was. Once recovered from his

[52]Time stamp 1:14:26 and following of Part 2 DVD.
[53]Time stamp 1:02:03 of Part Two recording.
[54]Time stamp 1:02:20 and following of Part Two recording.
[55]The 2014 Festival manuscript reads, "stirre meg trett på det lovede land, / se å få snedyngen over meg kavet; / de kan skrive derover: 'her er ingen begravet'; og bakefter, siden, la det gå som det kan" (2014, n.p.)

momentary near collapse, he regains his footing and walks ably toward the lake, where a spotlight illuminates Solveig rowing back and forth in a small boat, the same boat that Peer rowed out with Aase's body at the end of the third act. Peer walks into the water toward Solveig, moving slowly in the water to shoulder height before lights out and the curtain call. This rendition of the ending maintains and extends Ibsen's ambivalence as Peer seeks his idealized beloved. This Solveig is a mirage, a dream, a hope, not the flesh-and-blood Solveig standing in front of her hut.

Not to be outdone by Old Suzannah's and old Peer's fear of falling, *Gatas Gynt*'s Peer literally falls down, and not just to the ground, but down a high pile of gravel. Early in the scene Schønhardt has not indicated any concern about Peer's balance as he trudges up the hill of the gravel pit. However, standing at the top he slowly leans forward and then suddenly plunges headfirst. He rolls down the hill and is knocked unconscious as he comes to a stop at the bottom.[56] In the "filming of" part of the film, Schønhardt's sense of balance seems perfectly intact. For instance, when apparently warming up, he easily performs a deep knee bend and effortlessly arises with arms outstretched as if taking off in flight.[57] Although his posture is often stooped during the interview/rehearsal scenes, the actor is not limited to this posture. Nor is his gait slow, deliberate, or trudging. He often walks with a remnant of his youthful swagger and the scamp that he may once have been. In performing Peer, his torso is mostly quite collapsed, emphasizing how Peer's life has worn him down, leading to the appearance of being aged. In *Staging Ageing: Theatre, Performance and the Narrative of Decline*, Mangan discusses two theories of aging, programmed and non-programmed aging. The latter is due to the accumulation of somatic damage "driven by the chance accumulation of mistakes" (182). Or we might say,

[56]This sequence begins at time stamp 6:23, is interrupted by rehearsals scenes, and then picks up again at 11:43.
[57]Time stamp 10:48.

after Lipscomb and Schechner, rehearsed behaviors. In other words, how old (or middle) age looks, feels, and functions can vary greatly depending on the circumstances of one's life. Both chronological aging and hardship can lead to the same result.

As *Gatas Gynt*'s Peer awakens from his fall down the gravelly hill, he laboriously climbs back up, behind which we see the green of the tree line. Barefoot, he walks us back through a forested scene into the urban setting where his first action is to forcefully tug a bicycle away from The Cook, who has fallen and lies injured under an overpass.[58] Despite the Cook's pleas for help, Peer kicks him, strongly jerks the bike away from the Cook, and steals The Cook's shoes, leaving him to his fate. Peer easily walks the bike up the incline, embodying Ibsen's initial description of Act Five's Peer as being a vigorous old man. Entering the auction scene,[59] in which items from the Hegstad estate are being sold at rock bottom prices, with much scorn, Peer walks tentatively, as if unsure of the terrain. He nevertheless defends his friend Peer Gynt (who the others presume was long ago hung while abroad) as being true to himself till the end and briskly walks away. The film's Peer alternates between this confident stride and scenes of despair in which Peer collapses more and more into himself as the difficulties of life on the street pile up. A moving example occurs during the onion-peeling scene[60] in which Peer's face is framed in a closeup. His clothing drying in the background, he looks down, perhaps to the water puddle at his feet, glimpses of which are intercut with his monologue. His shoulders are bare, and at the end of the scene we see that he is still drying his clothes and wears only his briefs. Nevertheless, he gives no indication of suffering from the chill, damp air. The movement of his cracked lips and the nodding of his downcast head amplify the solitariness of his memories. But towards the

[58]Time stamp 13:34.
[59]Time stamp 23:47.
[60]Beginning at time stamp 29:42.

end, he raises his face to look out, forward but into the past, as if reclaiming ownership of his past and the reality of his mortality as he says, "I was afraid I was dead long before I died." The drooping of his head and torso continue to increase as later, when riding in an old van with the Button Molder, he is the picture of dejection. It appears he does not have the strength even to lift his head as he lists his regrets. The camera cuts to and from a brief scene of Peer walking barefoot along a snowy pathway with a hint of his younger strut, a momentary memory of his younger vigor. Nevertheless, after the van drops him off at the church social hall, he trudges up the steps and enters, his head and torso sagging to his left. He tentatively follows Solveig who has entered the kitchen to wash the dishes. Sitting next to her, he leans forward, curled over his hands, fingers interlocked in a prayer pose. On the final lines, the film at least figuratively adheres to the stage directions of *Peer Gynt*'s ending, as Peer leans into the standing embrace of Solveig (not placing his head in her lap). Solveig caresses his hair as she asks him to sleep and dream. I am struck by this use of leaning into a standing figure in both the Festival production and the film, as a way to evoke comfort in the midst of despair.

The Voice Speaks Volumes

Each of the productions share a skillful use of pauses in the actors' vocalizations. These pauses might be suggestive of a drop in pulmonary function among the elderly, or a way of allowing for their own and the audience's reflection, or the space within which the immensity of their lives can be apprehended. It is the *absence* of sound which speaks the loudest, whether because of the effort of speaking, or in moments of self-reflection during life review, or because of difficulty in recalling the past. What Fosse explicitly writes, and both Ousdal and Schønhardt find for their performances, is the gap that exists within the physical realities of their performances. Old Suzannah makes the gap explicit in her speech about Ibsen's hands. Ruth

PePalileo, in her performance analysis of four of Beckett's plays, alludes to his use of words and *pauses* [my emphasis] as creating a score for aged voices (129). In all three productions under consideration in this chapter, it is during the silences that the audience has time to catch up, to feel, to elaborate their own imaginings. A gateway to the *mysterium* may thus be momentarily created and experienced by audience members. As in music, the absence of sound becomes as important as its presence. In *An Angel Walks Through the Stage and Other Essays*, Fosse quotes Walter Benjamin's line, "in all grief, there is the deepest need for speechlessness" (31). Such is the case with Old Suzannah, with her many pauses. The pauses between the lines, as well as the timbre and tone of Foss's voice, suggest a character lost in her thoughts. She does not use manual interaction with the set to trigger her memories, nor does she discuss how she *feels* about these episodes, but simply recounts important moments and figures (the unforgettables?) from her past.

Ruth PePalileo also writes about the physiological reasons for an older person's voice sounding aged. These include the lengthening of the oral cavity; decrease in pulmonary function (leading to a decrease from speaking at a rate of about 150 words per minute at age 40 to about 125 at age 75); ossification of the laryngeal cartilage and stiffening of the vocal folds (both of which lead to vocal harshness and/or strain); decreased closure of the folds (resulting in breathiness and less precise articulation), and—in elderly women—lowering of the pitch due to a decrease in estrogen. PePalileo goes on to write that a trained voice can minimize these effects and therefore not seem aged (130-131). Whether professional or amateur, all the actors retain precise articulation without harshness or strain as might be expected from the physiology of the aged voice. However, there is another vocal trait of Old Suzannah which first captures our attention and points to her age, that of breathiness. Her voice mostly drops off at the end of a line, as if she does not have the energy to complete the thought before another memory comes

upon her. Her voice is sometimes almost a whisper, which can be inferred as an acting choice, based on recordings of Foss at about the same time. Although her aged voice still varies in tone, pitch, and volume, reflecting her actor training, her voice is tremulous and most lines end with a weak sigh. The overall impression is of a voice caught in the mode of sighing. I question this choice as it leads to my sometimes feeling bored. If I were to direct or perform the role, I would be careful to avoid this particular cliché because of its soporific effect. In addition, the sighing suggests fatigue, which is not indicated in the text. Middle-Aged Suzannah may also occasionally sigh, but it is not quite such a dominant feature of her performance and seems to occur in conjunction with a sense of the Italian heat and her weariness in waiting for Ibsen and Sigurd. We may take the apparent heat of summer in Middle-Aged Suzannah's scenes with a grain of salt given the historical Sigurd's birthdate. When she recovers, she speaks with a clear and strong voice and laughs with delight at one memory or another.[61] Old Suzannah's laughter makes an altogether different impression: remembering some interaction with irony or perhaps savoring a game she and Ibsen played about his suffering from pain ("*Haben sie schmerz*"? [Are you in pain?]). We may wonder, is she referencing her pain?[62] Is she projecting her own suffering onto Ibsen? During the sequence of shots[63] in which each Suzannah firmly declares that she will have Ibsen, Middle-Aged Suzannah's speech contains a note of pride, and Young Suzannah's voice is full of a quiet concern as she makes note of his eternal sadness (the phrase "*endelig trist*" comes out on a sigh), but she comes to life as she realizes that perhaps this is why she wants him. Finally Old Suzannah speaks more strongly as she says, "I would have Henrik Ibsen," but the voice that lingers on the long vowels is still full of breathiness and reinforces the

[61]For example, at time stamp 32:46.
[62]Time stamp 36:24.
[63]Beginning at 37:38

impression that at this moment in time she is caught in one long sigh. The younger Suzannahs foreshadow this characteristic of Old Suzannah, but their voices brighten as they briskly emerge from their reveries.

The outdoor Festival production requires that the well-trained actors, although wearing microphones, include the entire area in their awareness so as to be heard by the audience. The sighing voice of the Suzannahs is absent. Shouting, whether with exuberance, anger, or frustration, predominates, as suggested by Ibsen's abundant use of exclamation points. This strength of the characters' voices, throughout all of Acts One through Three, is an apt reflection of the dynamics of the script. Peer, whether telling tales, flirting, or hiding in the mountains, speaks emphatically. But then, as he tells the dying Aase the folktale of Soria Moria his voice softens. Nevertheless, he occasionally reverts to shouting (in her ear!). Both standing, Aase leans into and is supported by Peer as he vigorously shakes her body, as if he could inject her with his own life force. As she dies, his speech becomes reflective: it slows in pace, allows for pauses, rises in pitch, and quietens, even as he occasionally speaks with firm determination. Then, after realizing Aase has died in his arms, he either shouts or weeps his lines, and kisses her before quietly reciting his last line, "Takk for Skyds" ("thanks for the ride"; 76; Fjelde 89). The vocal stillness is underscored by the melancholic violin music played by a solitary musician standing on the audience right mound. The mournful tune accompanies Peer as he hauls Aase's body to the shore, loads her into the rowboat, and rows out onto the lake to end Act Three.

Throughout the fourth act's North African scenes, Peer's voice remains strong, even as he turns reflective during his mid-act monologues. The emphasis he places on the ends of his lines, demanded by the poetry of the play, also reflects his continuing ability to recover from his losses. When he hears Solveig singing in voiceover or as his confusion escalates in the asylum scene,

there is no hint of diminished vocal capacity. Returning to Norway, Peer's will to live in battling the Cook for his spot on the keel of a lifeboat, represented by a tree stump, is demonstrated vocally in strength and range of volume (with a bit of vocal fry). There is no hint of the failing old voice; in the final scenes Peer has full command of tone, resonance, pitch, and volume. Ousdal avoids vocal clichés of old age, thereby allowing for a full range of emotional expression as Peer turns more and more reflective, and fearful or angry, in his encounters with the Button Molder. These emotions are expressed through pauses during his last exchange with the Button Molder which mirrors the action of Aase's death. This time, it is the Button Molder who supports the upright Peer as Peer leans back against him, until Peer dismisses the Button Molder with a vision of putting his house in order. Peer's last lines, while Solveig rows back and forth on the lake,[64] draw the viewer in with their quiet questioning. There is wonder in his slow reading of the lines. At last he cries out, "Min Moder; min Hustru; uskyldig Kvinde! – / O, gjem mig, gjem mig derinde! ("My mother, my wife, innocent woman! – / Hide me, hide me there within"; my trans.; 170). He then proceeds to take off his stained overcoat and walk into the lake, toward the elusive Solveig who is now barely a speck of light as she sings her lullaby. The violin repeats the last musical phrase, the Button Molder looks on from the audience left mound, and the lights go out, leaving the faintest hint of the silhouetted mountains in the far background.

In *Gatas Gynt*, the contrast between the scenes with the actors playing themselves and playing their characters, highlights the self-awareness and humor of the actors. The down-and-out world of the film's representation of the fifth act of *Peer Gynt* does not erase the spirit of the players; rather, it poignantly highlights their resourcefulness. Ironic laughter is the predominant vocal effect in those scenes. When it comes to playing Peer, Schønhardt adjusts his voice to

[64]Time stamp 1:24:02.

inhabit Peer's existential angst, but he never gives in to the deflated sighing of Old Suzannah. Nor do the other characters. There is just one moment in which Peer questions a whispered voice he hears (in voiceover) asking, "Are you the boy who wanted to dance?" Peer replies, "What are those sighs?" The Button Molder tells him, "Only the song of a woman."[65] The sighing presumably comes from Solveig, but Søberg has earlier informed Schønhardt, in no uncertain terms, that the scene of the film is 50 years later, and that Peer is now old and gray.[66] A woman is said to sigh, but there is no actual regretful sighing in the interviews or in the Act Five scenes. Instead, we find a Peer, who, like Ousdal's Peer, maintains a broad vocal range. He shouts—with harsh strength—at the cook, who clings to a bicycle, as they wrestle for its possession.[67] When telling a tale of once upon a time in Philadelphia, Schønhardt's voice is full of vocal fry and slow in pace as he remembers an opium-fueled dream. But then his pace accelerates as he approaches his punch line, ending on a note of irony as he says, "But as I mentioned, I had smoked a lot of opium."[68] The smile on his face and in his voice lets us know that he is fully aware of the irony and the humor of the human condition. Moreover, he, like Peer, is a natural storyteller.

Schønhardt's vocal range is further exemplified by how he interprets the onion-peeling scene, which, as I previously mentioned, takes place as Peer is drying his soaking-wet clothing. As he gazes into a puddle, he peels back the layers of himself (*sans* an onion). He speaks deliberately and with a medium to lower pitch as he delineates the layers. He simply and clearly, and without judgment, states the facts of his past. Schønhardt's line reading underscores the reality of one whose life has been marked by drug addiction and life on the street. This juxtaposition between the fictional world of *Peer Gynt* and the historic events of Schønhardt's

[65]Time stamp 48:50.
[66]Time stamp 11:23.
[67]Time stamp 13:56.
[68]Time stamp 22.42.

life (as he has told us) creates an intense poignancy during Peer's first encounter with the Button Molder. The Button Molder tells him, "You were designed as a shining button . . . . So you end up on the scrap-heap, to be reduced to an ingot." Peer's face reveals his fear, but then his voice strongly and emphatically shows his resistance to being judged as irrelevant: "I say no! No!"[69] Peer claims his individuality, as do Schønhardt and the other actors when they tell stories from their pasts. There is no whining (or sighing) in any of their tales. Instead, they use insightful humor to reveal wisdom gained from their life experiences. For example, we see one man in his solitary encampment, his dog in his lap and a book in his hand, saying, "No way Ibsen was sober when he wrote this. Definitely not. Totally stoned, or on absinth."[70] A second actor immediately comes up with a similar explanation, that Ibsen must have eaten "some psychedelic mushrooms."[71] This insight should not be taken literally, but neither should it be lightly dismissed. Theater scholar Kirsten Shepherd-Barr writes in *Ibsen in Context*,[72] "Already in the early 1870s he [Ibsen] sensed its [the environment's] influence on his own work, acknowledging how the *vinrus* (wine intoxication) of Italy had shaped *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* . . ." (85). In the same scene an actor tells of stealing audiotapes from a center for the blind so that he could have access to literature (and emphasizing that he returned most of them) as he shares a box of foil-wrapped candy that he had gotten from a woman for helping her change a tire.[73] At another time another actor philosophizes about Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players . . . ."[74] Bræin's honoring of the humanity of the players is sealed by the final scene. As Peer enters the church social hall and follows Solveig into the kitchen, his voice

[69]Time stamp 38:05 and following.
[70]Time stamp 43:43.
[71]Time stamp 44:14.
[72]Edited by Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem
[73]Time stamp 45:30.
[74]Time stamp 17:28.

is humble, tentative, clear, and most of all yearning, as he asks Solveig to solve the riddle of his life. Her voice, in reply, is clear, soft, somewhat high in pitch, and unexaggerated. In other words, the simplicity of her line reading reflects her reply to Peer's query, as she says, "An easy riddle" [75] The players of *Gatas Gynt* may be ignored by society-at-large, but the film insists upon their individuality and humanity, as our/their truest selves rests in the hearts of each other. Estrangement may have been Peer's and unhoused people's lot in life, but the film ends by emphasizing our need for human connection. The film treats age as one of many acting considerations and avoids evoking normative clichés of decline. Old age seems to bring reflection, as Butler identified, but the productions portray this more through the use of pauses than through age-dependent vocal weaknesses or performative habits.

Conclusion

For the viewer of these productions, questions of age may go mostly unexamined. We are aware that the fifth act Peer is supposed to be old, but neither the settings nor the performances force the issue. Nevertheless, the expansiveness of a mountain setting, and Peer's walk into the lake, cannot help but raise questions of mortality. Likewise, *Gatas Gynt*'s casting of people who are unhoused and who have struggled with drug addiction brings our awareness to life on the edge. The dedication of the film, in the end credits, to two missing cast members, draws our attention to the fragility of their (and our) existence. Old Suzannah's practice of *life review* spotlights the power of loss to pique a re-examination one's life. Slowing down, whether for reasons of physiology or self-reflection (or both), in physical movement and vocal production, creates the gaps that point toward the *mysterium*, though none of these productions interpret that experience in an overtly religious mode. (Although religion does lie in the background of *Gatas*

[75]Time stamp 54:05.

Gynt which is suggested by the ending which takes place in a church kitchen. Moreover, the production was partially supported by the Salvation Army.) Whether the viewer becomes more attuned to the "immensity of the conscious experience of age" (Fuchs 77), these productions certainly make such an awareness highly available without the use of old age clichés or overt attempts to reflect creativity-across-the-life-course.

CHAPTER FOUR

A PHENOMENOLOGIC STUDY OF VOLUNTEERS WITH THE PEER GYNT FESTIVAL USING ARTS-BASED RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter I bring to the fore meanings of volunteer participation as a part of the Festival phenomenon. My concern was with how volunteers feel about their experiences as long-time on-stage participants in the Peer Gynt-Festival, and in what ways, if any, their ages influence these perceptions. The informants' ages ranged from 68–78, and they have performed in the chorus and in speaking roles and as extras over the course of several different productions of the Festival's *Peer Gynt.* I did not expect questions of age to recede into the background as profoundly as they did. It turned out that age for these individuals appears to be integrated within the total lived experience. Recall Gullette's plea that "people past youth need not feel obliged to identify willy-nilly with age as their primary identity . . . . Why should we give this . . . imposed identity first place, given the hostile world we inhabit?" (50). I observed that since they remain in "mature, vital adulthood" (Basting 18), chronological age is less relevant than mental and physical ability adequate to the demands of rehearsal and performance. Unless hampered by memory loss or decreased mobility, age turns out to be unimportant. This is consistent with personal observations of friends, family members, and patients. As long as they have their *Marbles and Mobility*—as I once called a patient lecture—chronological age is irrelevant. The long days of rehearsal require stamina, and the blocking and choreography, although not athletic, require focus and precise timing. Any beliefs about aging I uncovered were (unsurprisingly to me) not related to gender but did in one case reflect an awareness of the significance of numerical age, while another defied the number in favor of a general perception of her personality. The length of time that the particular volunteers have been with the Festival (8–22 years) influences the depth of their experiences, as does the inescapable natural beauty of the

setting. By combining revelations derived from the interviews with the phenomenon of the Festival as a whole—with all its related events in addition to the production of *Peer Gynt*—I have come to see the Festival as a contemporary folkloric, ritualesque[76] experience. The second half of this chapter is comprised of a playscript based on arts-based research methods. My purpose in writing a script is to turn age theory into an entertainment which expresses concepts about age in more implicit, subtextual ways, rather than with the explicitness required of academic writing. In addition, the playscript may serve to extend the folkloric, ritualesque experience to its readers and (potential) audiences.

Frameworks

My fascination with the Festival began in 2006 when my mother, sister, and I were treated to tickets by a relative involved with that year's production. I then volunteered as an extra in 2015 and returned in 2016 and 2022 as an audience member. During my time as a volunteer actor, I attended associated activities, such as the presentation of the annual Peer Gynt-Prize (*Peer Gynt-Prisen*) on the stage; the art show then held in the Festival headquarters on the edge of Vinstra; a community celebration in downtown Vinstra with performances by local talent and an award given to a long-time volunteer from Germany; and tea with two of the volunteers and a visiting British director in a mountain cabin beside a museum dedicated to the invention of Norway's traditional *brunost* (brown cheese). This immersion in the local culture was both challenging and the thrill of a lifetime. I ground my curiosity about the experience of other volunteers by comparing my findings with Henry Glassie's classic folklore study, *All Silver, No*

[76]A term used by Jack Santino in *Public Performances: Studies in the Carnivalesque and Ritualesque* to describe ritual-like events that are not meant to be expressions of the sacred. Ritualesque points to "aspects of a symbolic event that are meant to lead to . . . transformation" (6). It is often applied to political actions. However, according to Santino, the precise meaning is dependent on context. For my purposes, I apply this term in the way that social gatherings, with their shared symbols and behaviors, are meant to create and reinforce a sense of community.

Brass, which reports on the revival of Irish Christmas Mumming during the period between the two World Wars. My analysis is also informed by Ellen Rees's *Ibsen's 'Peer Gynt' and the Production of Meaning,* especially her fourth chapter, "Emplacing *Peer Gynt,* Peer Gynt, and Per Gynt," and Lars Harald Maagerø's "Celebration or Critique? Performing Peer Gynt in the Heart of Norway." Both authors question the phenomenon of the Peer Gynt Festival itself. It was my resistance to some aspects of their arguments that clarified for me the purpose of this chapter, that is, to explore the phenomenon from the point of view of the participants, of which age is a subtle part. Finally, Ibsen uses many folklore figures, the purpose of whome I expand upon later in this chapter. Taken together, Ibsen and the three scholars have stimulated thoughts about what kinds of information I sought regarding the Peer Gynt Festival, what I would like to know more about, and the questions I would ask my interviewees. Upon questioning, age emerged in surprising ways, and only once as a possibly limiting factor.

Glassie opened my eyes and ears to folkloric aspects of the Festival phenomenon and its meanings and functions. The sensitivity he displays in reporting on his conversations with mummers and householders guided me in my own interviews with Festival volunteers. He did not draw away from developing friendly relationships, even friendships, with the mummers. Although the time I had to spend with my interviewees was much shorter, my hope was to create comfortable, relaxed engagements so that the conversations flowed freely. Meanwhile, Rees and Maagerø alerted me to concerns about commercialization, identity formation based on pseudo-history, and the emplacement of fictional characters in the actual landscape. I may not share these concerns, but a dose of skepticism offered a balance to my fondness for the Festival (as no doubt Glassie felt about Irish Christmas mumming). In the end, I have to ask, cannot the production milieu and the anti-national romanticism of the play (and of recent productions)

coexist, not necessarily in tension, but as two perspectives which complement each other? To my eye, the beauty of the natural setting serves to highlight the anti-romanticism of recent post-modern interpretations, rather than work against such stagings. In previous conversations with volunteers, I learned that participants are explicitly aware of *Peer Gynt* as a critique of 19th century—as well as of contemporary—Norwegian culture (and our individual trollism) at the same time that it holds a space for appreciation of the natural beauty of the setting and evocation of nostalgia for a time which never actually existed, but which has been mythologized by national identity formation. Local volunteers are well-aware of the historic poverty of the region which led to the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Norwegians to the U.S. and Canada during the 1800s and early 1900s. Ibsen captures this movement in the parson's monologue at the grave of one of the parishioners whose three sons had all joined that exodus. One of my informants was perturbed by the cutting of this familiar and moving scene in the 2022 production.

In this chapter I take an arts-based research approach to present my phenomenological (that is, how it feels, what it means, and what it does for the participants) study of three individuals who have volunteered with the Peer Gynt Festival for 8, 20, and 22 years, respectively. I first met two of them when I was a volunteer actor in the 2015 production. The longevity of volunteers such as these piqued my curiosity about why they have returned, year-after-year. What do they get from their participation? What motivates them? What were their experiences like? Do they have any criticisms about their involvement, or the Festival organization, or the productions? How have they reacted to various changes over the years, and especially to the 2022 production, which saw a change in recruitment of volunteers, and the number of volunteer actors needed? Did they have any observations about age, in general, or as it

relates to *Peer Gynt,* or the surrounding Festival? I carried out the interviews during the summer of 2022, one on-site at the foot of Lake Gålå and another on the porch of a volunteer's summer cabin during the rehearsal period. The third interview was conducted via Zoom in June, before the rehearsals began. Following conventional qualitative research methods, as described by (among others) John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth in *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* I prepared a list of questions (see Appendix A) for these semi-structured interviews which were to serve as an anchor for the anticipated free form discussion. Because of my previous personal experiences, I was I also able to draw upon memories of the setting, interactions with other volunteers, and general observations.

A personal recollection exemplifies the draw that the location and the event hold for returning volunteers. Several times in the course of the 2022 visit, I encountered a volunteer with whom I had become acquainted in 2015. She is the person who hosted the tea in her rented *hytte* (cabin) for another volunteer, the theater director from England, and me. As is typical of such cabins until recently, it lacked running water. Our hostess therefore needed to supply herself with water by carrying a large jug of water on her back up the hill from the Festival setting. I was very impressed by such strength exhibited by a not-young individual, although perhaps not surprising for someone who works for the Norwegian Trekking Association. (Hikers will be very familiar with the red T's marking trails in the countryside.) She reminded me of Peer and Aase, and the other characters, for whom climbing the mountainsides is a fact of daily life, no matter their age. In 2022, seeing her off and on during the course of a day in which I enjoyed a hike in the mountains, the art show on the premises, and a pack lunch on the shore of the lake, I approached her, reintroduced myself, and asked her whether she returned to her cabin when she was not rehearsing. She replied that no, she stays in place, even for the duration of a 12-hour day. I said

that it must be tiring to stay on the scene for such a long period. She disagreed by saying that she found "it" to be energizing. By "it" I took her to mean the combination of the beautiful setting, the rehearsals, and the other people. Absorbing the entirety of the experience seems typical of those who repeatedly volunteer. My casual assumption that she would be fatigued by the process was proven wrong. In the case of my informants, I found no hint that they were stressed or physically strained, even though their ages ranged from 67 to 78. Quite the opposite, explicitly in one case, for whom the yearly respite from the pressures of academic life was greatly appreciated. By interviewing these long-timers, I hoped to link something of the magic of the folklore Ibsen uses in the play with their own experiences. Their responses did not directly do so, but they alluded to the magic of the natural setting itself. Each year the magic is enhanced and further imbued into the setting by the productions. Furthermore, I was curious about how their ages factored into their thoughts and feelings about their volunteering. Again, the association between age and experience was mostly subtextual, but not entirely absent. Although I did not inquire into their health status, it was obvious from my interactions during the interviews and my memories of the demands of rehearsal and performance that these three were, like Peer, hale and hearty in their older years.

The scholarship surrounding *Peer Gynt* and folklore is well-developed, with diverse contributions to Ibsen's use of folklore other than my own focus on aging. In order to connect Ibsen's use of folklore and my explorations of the folkloric aspects of the contemporary stagings by the Peer Gynt Festival, I briefly review relevant scholarship. How does folklore function in *Peer Gynt*? In several ways, one of which I touch upon in Chapter Two where I argued that Ibsen uses folklore to evoke disturbing feelings about the passage of time and aging. Harold Bloom offers another aspect of folklore's function in the play when he writes in *The Western Canon* that

"Ibsen relied . . . upon the occult Norwegian folk mythology that functioned for him the way the Freudian mythology works for many writers of our Chaotic Age" (353). Bloom here tries to articulate how it is that folklore can trigger our reactions—including an affinity for the characters and their circumstances—at some preverbal, possibly subconscious level. I believe Ibsen successfully developed the complexity of Peer, in part, by using preternatural figures such as the Boyg, trolls, the Thin Man, the Button Molder, and the various elementals of Act Five (balls of yarn, withered leaves, sighing in the air, dewdrops, and broken straws). That Ibsen was steeped in Norwegian folklore is well documented. According to Nina S Alnæs, writing in *Werewolf in the Night*, Ibsen directly contributed to the assembling of legends and folksongs with a collecting tour in 1862 supported by a stipend of 110 *spesiedaler* (Norwegian coin used until about 1873) (142). Alnæs relates that some have questioned the purpose of this trip, whether it was to get a few weeks' summer vacation or a pause from thinking, but that there is no doubt that he had a genuine interest in folktales. According to Ørnulf Hodne, in "Henrik Ibsens Bruk av Folketradisjon i 'Peer Gynt,'" "Når Henrik Ibsen brukte norsk folklore i Peer Gynt, stod han altså i en gammel litteraturhistorisk tradisjon, som han tidligere hadde levert mange bidrag til" ("When Henrik Ibsen used Norwegian folklore in *Peer Gynt,* he stood on an old historical, literary tradition, to which he had earlier contributed much"; my trans.; 36-37). Hodne and Alnæs point out a third way that folklore functions in the play, that is, to highlight Peer's trollish egotism. Asbjørn Aarseth[77] and Merrill Kaplan further this thesis in their works. As Bloom makes clear, Ibsen used folkloric figures neither as ancient fantasies nor modern metaphors, but as recognition that we are ourselves part troll (353). "Trollishness, for and in Ibsen, is a question

[77]In *Dyret i Mennesket: Et bidrag til tolkning av Henrik Ibsen's "Peer Gynt"* (*The Beast in the Human Being: A contribution to interpretation of "Peer Gynt"*; my trans.), especially 100-103 where Aarseth posits trolls as an umbrella term for all supernatural creatures who do harm.

of psychic cartography" (367). Thus, previous scholarship has substantiated the overall theme of Peer as a trollish egotist, an opinion which is generally held among those who are familiar with the Peer Gynt Festival's production of the play.

As Otto Reinert states in “Ibsen and Mimesis,” the combination of "satire on Norwegian nationalism, a picaresque fairy tale, an anti-romantic fantasy on identity crisis, a morality play, . . . [and] a cautionary tale about aggressive individualism" (128) makes for its continuing fascination by contemporary artists and audiences. My respondents take it as a given that the trolls represent the excesses of individualism. How the folkloric elements work their way under their skin, in Bloom's meaning of them as a precursor to Freud's concept of the subconscious, is less explicitly articulated. In preparing my interview questions, I wondered whether Bloom's psychic cartography plays a part in the experience of the volunteers. If not explicit, perhaps the psychic influence exists as an inexplicable something that pulls on some participants to return year after year. I believe the individuals I interviewed are so steeped in the play, that all the characters—human and folkloric—have become deeply infused into their psyches. Each of the fictional figures has formed a unity from which the volunteers, like my acquaintance at the beginning of this chapter, draw energy and sustenance.

Another use of these stories by Ibsen has to do with metatheatricality. I include background on this aspect because it informs how I came to appreciate the Festival experience as a many-layered, ritualized phenomenon. Early in Act Five, once Peer is on land and back in his home valley, he comes upon an auction. Hoping to get a swig of schnapps, Peer tells a story from his days among the extravagant characters lured to San Francisco in pursuit of gold. As Merrill Kaplan puts it, in “On the Road to Realism with Asbjørnsen and Moe, 'Peer Gynt', and Henrik Ibsen,” Peer regales his listeners with "how the Devil tried to impress a crowd with his skills of

pig-imitation" (491). Peer describes, at the end of his recitation, the reception to the Devil's performance as being "yderst outreret. – " ("grossly overdone") and that "Dødsskriget altfor studeret" ("the death-shriek [was] too studied"; 144; Fry and Fillinger 142). This commentary on the dangers of melodramatic performance—reminiscent of Hamlet's instructions to the players[78]—brings us out of the world of the play and into our consciousness as observers. Kaplan writes that Peer "has stepped out of the frame creating a play-within-a-play-within-a-play" (506). This layering is repeated in the dramatic rendition of my interviews, in which I write a play about players playing characters in a play based on an iconic piece of Norwegian dramatic literature and produced outside a small town in the valley where Ibsen's play, for the most part, takes place. As Bertolt Brecht showed us, for example, in *Mother Courage*, metatheatricality can be a potent alternative to submersion into the world of the play.

Turning to my secondary sources, I begin with Rees who observes that simply reading or viewing *Peer Gynt* in a theater no longer suffices. She critiques the "drive to 'experience' Peer Gynt in his 'authentic' environment" (85–86) and the touristic entrepreneurism that such motivations engender. She recognizes that connecting literature and tourism is an international phenomenon (way beyond Norway and *Peer Gynt*). Somehow this association represents a "profound lack of authenticity in every aspect of the modern world" (86). Is this true? Is there a lack of authenticity in the modern world, or has authenticity changed or lost its meaning in the modern world? I believe that for my interviewees, the answer would be that there certainly is authenticity in their modern worlds and in their volunteership. They are individual human beings participating in a creative and communal experience that involves not just themselves but the wider world, in so far as volunteers and audience members come from not only the far reaches of

[78]William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare: Complete Works*, 1971, 87.

Norway but also abroad. Furthermore, Rees problematizes the situating of the play in a natural setting as it corresponds with the Norwegian cultural identity with nature and suggests that the urbanization of Norway makes this more theoretical than real. I question this, given the increasing construction of vacation cabins (albeit with the modern conveniences of electricity and running water) somewhere away from the urban centers. These cabins attest to a drive—for the middle-class, at least—to be in nature, with ready access to hiking, skiing, or fishing. They serve as a testament to the preservation of this aspect of Norwegian cultural identity, even if it is not shared by all citizens. Rees takes issue with certain locations in the surrounding landscape (in Gudbrandsdalen) being labeled with fictional connections to *Peer Gynt,* such as the Peer Gynt cabin, farm, and festival. I liken these creations to Santino's description of unofficial memorials which occur spontaneously at the site of, for example, a person's accidental death. By doing so, "folk and popular levels of organization" (6) lay claim to public space. In the case of the Peer Gynt cabin, farm, or memorial stone, these are not officially sanctioned markers, but they do lead to literary/heritage tourism. People thus travel to a real environment to experience a virtual space. Since there is no scholarly confirmation that the legendary Per Gynt ever existed, the entire project becomes a fictional construct, not an ethnographic or a historical reconstruction. Rees proceeds to delineate this construct, and to my ear, her overall tone is critical of such endeavors, including the commercial aspects. I argue that this fictional construct is a necessary component for creating the folkloric, ritualesque aspects of the Festival.

One philosophical basis used in drama and performance studies is phenomenology, which insists that we cannot separate our personal experience from our description of the object, in this case the Peer Gynt Festival. By reflecting on my own small-town past, and experiences with the Festival, I situate my interpretation in the cultural context of small town life. Furthermore, like

phenomenology, affect theory explicitly restores the body and its affect to critical theory. Rebecca Schneider reflects on this when she writes, in *The Explicit Body in Performance,* about an experience she had when watching a show by three Native American women, called *Reverb-ber-ber-rations.* She first became aware of her doubts about commenting on any work by people of color through her body. She "felt it in my belly, bones, and nerves as much as in my head" (155). My initial reaction to this passage, which comes near the end of her book, was, "it took you this long to listen to your body?!!" We have phenomenology and affect theory to thank for bringing the body—and one's personal experience of it—into scholarly discourse. When I first discovered these perspectives, I was excited, because it meant that I could integrate my training as an actor and experience as a chiropractor with my academic writing. I felt this allowed me to engage my whole self, which is has long been a driving force in my life. To address the commercial aspects, I need only recollect my experience of growing up in a small town in Minnesota. There, any business success, in the face of big box stores and other chains in nearby larger towns, is greatly appreciated and supported by the local inhabitants. The financial support of the Festival comes primarily from local municipalities and businesses, in keeping with its identity as a locally based endeavor. Sadly, for some, as my interviews reveal, 2022 may have been a turning point away from the Festival being a local endeavor and the feeling that it is a project of a close-knit community.

Because of my own experience as a volunteer with the Festival, I find the fictional aspects ironically intriguing, a feeling I presumably share with other volunteers and visitors. Cashing in on a legendary Per Gynt seems to me to be rather enterprising, not an inappropriate appropriation of local folklore. After all, it is their folklore, even it has been rendered through the writings of an urban elite. Legends and fictional constructs outside of *Peer Gynt* and its various

productions were of no concern to my informants. Volunteers may not talk about having a ritualesque experience, but in many ways the seasonal repetition of the proceedings contributes to this feeling. Whether permanent changes for the Peer Gynt community occur by this repetition is a question for later research. But on the individual level, my respondents alluded to how, through repetition, personal experiences are layered, year after year, and add depth to each year's return. I believe that ritualesque can be used as a broad term for the draw that friendships, the natural setting, and Ibsen's genius exert on returnees, including myself. Each year, as soon as I have left the area, I begin daydreaming about my next opportunity to sit in the audience at the foot of the beautiful mountain lake, curious about the next iteration of the play and eager to reconnect with family, friends, and acquaintances.

Pondering the continued existence of the Festival, I wonder about its survival and the meanings it has for the volunteers. This is important to my project because the Festival itself—as a dynamic organism—grows, changes, ages, and will someday cease to exist. In articulating my questions about this rural project, I have taken inspiration for my interviews and the subsequent writing of this chapter, including the playscript, from Glassie's classic. His insights provide a framework for interrogating my own experience as an audience member, volunteer, and researcher, as well as those of my respondents. In his book, Glassie describes the revival of Irish Christmas Mumming in the period between the First and Second World Wars. The revival was initiated by historian of local traditions, James Owens, for the purpose of bringing "balance to a community torn between nations at war" (136). During that time, using scripts written out by Owens, young men dressed in homemade costumes, including conical straw hats which they constructed themselves. Over a period of about twelve days, they would walk to various farms to perform an improvised play, the purpose of which was to "mount a party for the entire

community" (79). One member of the group, the Captain, dressed well so as to be admitted into the house. Seven characters were required, in addition to the Captain: Beelzebub, Prince George, Oliver Cromwell, Saint Patrick, the Doctor, Big Head, and Miss Funny, although a couple of characters could be left out if there were not enough mummers. They approached a house noisily, so as to warn the residents of their arrival. Upon admittance, the mummers improvised around scripted rhyming couplets and acted out a fight in which one of the characters dies, only to be revived by the Doctor. If there was a musician among the players, a householder might request a familiar song. At the end, Miss Funny collected money from the audience and extended invitations to the Mummers' Ball.

As times changed (e.g., the arrival of cars), mumming died out. Will *Peer Gynt* at the foot of Lake Gålå likewise disappear, or change so much that it no longer retains its loyal volunteer base? I found no definitive answers, but a few clues emerged from my interviews. Like Glassie, I rely on key informants— in his case five individuals familiar with the mumming revival and in my case three volunteer actors—to uncover reasons for the appearance of these folk traditions. He divides his findings into five categories, as follows:

- Survival—what historical-cultural factors motivated its revival;
- Geography—how the local geography supported their cultural identity;
- Performance—as an "attack on the Western tradition that separates an artist from his audience . . . [and] the forces that keep people apart" (93);
- Meaning—the importance of its place in midwinter, when the natural world lies dormant; the mummers' improvisations expose discord, death, and despair, but do not allow too much of them;

- Function—to bring unity among the local inhabitants, and put more plainly, "the goal of the mummers was money" (122);

The following sections relate each theme to the Peer Gynt Festival, although I have changed the order in order to clarify how they relate to my interpretation of the phenomenon. I do begin with Survival because folklorists argue that a folkloric event exists only so long as it has meaning for the participants. If someday the Festival becomes entirely professionalized, as this year's trend suggests, it may move out of the folklore realm into a primarily commercial venture. If so, I hope that my research among the volunteers captures the diminishing folkloric elements of what was once a more robustly local project.

Survival

Glassie takes a long look backwards through the national romanticism of Irish literature and early folklorists, a step in the development in Ireland of folklore studies which parallels that of many European countries, including, of course, Norway. Although there was formerly talk of relating Christmas mumming to ancient fertility rites, that notion has fallen out of favor. Of importance to Glassie is to suss out the factors which led to a revival/survival of a tradition which was first described in 1685. Of relevance to the contemporary folklorist is that it did exist for that period between the two World Wars, indicating that for the duration of its existence, it had some meaning for the people and communities involved. As a phenomenon of folklore, the Festival began as a community project based in the small town of Vinstra. Vinstra lies in the region where the legendary Per Gynt is said to have lived, and where Ibsen traveled on his research stipend to collect folk tales. Rees historicizes her analysis of the current Festival by examining influences from the national romantic period to the present. She quotes Jon Nygaard that open-air theater productions in Norway serve as "'a new kind of ritual experience'" (101).

My interviewees do not explicitly describe their experiences in terms of a ritual experience. However, two respondents expressed some dissatisfaction with how the Festival changed certain ways that the current production was carried out. The loss of familiar aspects, the loss of repetition, suggests that a sense of ritual contributes to the depth of their experiences.

By the volunteers' ongoing participation, they have enabled *Peer Gynt* to become a living, breathing cultural festival which goes far beyond a mere production of the play. Perhaps unwittingly, they are following Richard Schechner's suggestion, writing in *Performance Theory*, that "the human community taken as a whole is entering a postmodern phase where the construction of intercultural aesthetics and ritual is essential" (324). The annual blending of legendary history, tourism, and artistic endeavors— production of *Peer Gynt,* the art show, and the Rondane outdoor concert—is just such a construction of intercultural aesthetics and ritual. This is a point which Rees does not consider in her discussion of these annual performances of *Peer Gynt* at the foot of Lake Gålå, and which I believe alters the meaning of the entire endeavor. Rees writes that this production, unlike other Norwegian open-air theater performances—is based on a "fictional narrative and not an empirically historical event" (102). This insight legitimately supports her overall analysis of the constructions of meaning surrounding *Peer Gynt*, but it ignores the volunteers' experiences. I therefore take her argument a step further and embrace the fictional aspects as essential for the Festival's survival because it creates an aura of theatricality surrounding the entire phenomenon. Visitors themselves become players in the myth-making endeavor of which attending the play itself is the climax. Moreover, having entered a theatrical, perhaps ritualesque space, audience members no doubt delight in the opportunity to see the latest experimentations with Ibsen's text. In recent years, there has been a trend toward post-modernism in the blending of old and new. For example, the first production

that I attended, in 2006, while maintaining Grieg's score and chorus and using traditional costumes, featured a red Cadillac for Peer's Act Four entrance. In 2014–2016, the creative team expanded on this by eliminating Grieg's score (except as motifs in the jazz-influenced incidental music) and by use, for example, of the *Miami Vice* speedboat, plastic trash affixed to the trolls' costumes, and the use of selfie sticks by the inhabitants of the insane asylum (the selfie sticks serving as a symbol of our contemporary form of madness, i.e. self-absorption). The translation of Ibsen's text for the Gudbrandsdalen scenes into *Dølemål,* which at first glance seems to be a regression to a national romantic interpretation, allowed the locals to exert some ownership of the production by gleefully correcting the professionals' pronunciation.[79] They thereby asserted a degree of ownership of the production and their role in it. The 2022 production became a study in abstraction in several ways. First, none of the costumes were literal remakes of 19th century rural clothing. Second, groups of characters were costumed in palettes distinct to their groups: Solveig's and her family's clothing matched the sand that covered the playing area, and Anitra and the Dancing Girls were clad in full length robes and headdresses in various shades of scarlet. Third, Peer's mountain hut, in which Solveig stood staring out at the lake—inviting the question, is she looking into the past? or the future?—was constructed of a metal frame and platform which looked like a child's drawing of a house. Fourth, neither Peer nor Solveig aged during the course of the play. At the end, Solveig runs around the playing area carrying Peer on her back. These significant variations in productions, although expensive to mount, no doubt contribute to the Festival's survival by enticing repeat customers who are eager to see what the new creative team has envisioned.

[79]An as I mentioned in Chapter One, Bjørn Bjørnson replaced Ibsen's rhymes with a then contemporary Norwegian dialect.

The Festival, as it has expanded over the years, could not have done so without the support of these volunteers, although in 2022 the actor volunteers were about half the number of previous years. For the 2022 production of the play, 89 individuals are named in the program, under the headings of volunteer actors, costumers, and help with the masks, props, construction, and the all-important waffle canteen. In addition, others help with associated activities such as the annual art show, the concert on Rondane, selling swag, etc. These volunteers are not primarily concerned with a possible historical figure known as Per (from among several legendary options), nor are they troubled by marking the surrounding countryside with commemorative stones of purely fictional events, for example, the meeting between Peer and the Boyg. As Rees writes, the identification of sites for fictional characters "reaches a highpoint of confusion and absurdity with official sanctioning in 1990 of the fictional Sherlock Holmes's virtual home at the actual, but anachronous 221b Baker Street, an address out of sequence in a block of Baker Street that bore a different name in Arthur Conan Doyle's day" (88). Rather than being confused by these "absurdities," the locals have created a community-based cultural tradition which survives because it has some sort of meaning for them, just as those living in the countryside of Ireland during the interwar period manifested something of importance to them. When travel was restricted and money was tight, Irish Christmas mumming relied on the actions of a few to generate a fund for an end-of-the-season party for all who had contributed. Now, in the small town of Vinstra, the Festival relies on local (and more distant) volunteers for the play and the surrounding cultural events, the financial support of local municipalities and businesses, and the annual return of faithful tourists eager to see the latest interpretation of the play and revive themselves in accommodations that range from campgrounds to simple accommodations at a church camp to hotels with meals featuring trout locally-sourced from Lake Gålå, the latter

according to Maagerø. The survival of both these traditions required volunteers. When the need for mumming faded in the face of modernization, it disappeared. I wonder whether the *Peer Gynt* performances will likewise fail to survive, leaving the area vacant for simple recreation or some other creative or commercial operation.

Meaning

As I stated earlier, Rees's book is centered on exploring productions of meanings for which the play *Peer Gynt*—and its many academic, literary, artistic, political, pseudo-historical, commercial, touristic, and social iterations—provides the site of construction. In some respects, recent productions speak to this conundrum by way of anachronistic staging. Maagerø addresses Rees's problematization of the commercialized national romanticism surrounding the play. He writes about the 2017/2018 production in which a plywood wall was constructed at the rear of the playing area, thus blocking out the view of the lake (and the players, from some seats, according to one of my informants). He questions whether the national romanticism surrounding the touristic endeavors can be disrupted by the production itself. He further asks whether it is possible for the production to contribute to "the deconstruction and critique of hegemony rather than to its constitution and reproduction" (40). He uses the term "exploit" to describe the commercial ventures of the hospitality industry for which the annual productions "are an important source of marketing and income" (42). The small town of Vinstra, the site of the corporate headquarters of Peer Gynt AS (Inc. or Ltd.) has a population of just over 2,500, and, according to Maagerø, investors consist primarily of local municipalities and businesses. As I have already stated, my perspective is quite a bit less critical of the commercial aspects, as well as the combination of postmodern productions and the fictional, but national romantic, elements. I do find a great deal of authenticity when viewing the Festival in its entirety, in the sense that it

creates an opportunity for individuals in the community to connect by having fun while working together toward a common goal. In my experience, such activities are the lifeblood of a small town. They provide timestamps for shared memories that bind a community, for a moment at least, into a common identity. One of Glassie's informants humorously summarized Irish Christmas mumming as follows, "that's a group of men who go from house to house getting money for drink'" (122). Whether the commercial aspect is informal or corporate, the key factor is the creation of a (temporary) sense of community without concern for authenticity or anti-national romanticism.

Both mumming, which took place for about a fortnight around Christmas Day, and *Peer Gynt* at Gålå, which occurs annually during late summer, reflect the importance of seasonal rhythms in such experiences. Of course, the long daylight hours and extended twilight, and the expectation of reasonably fair weather during the summer tourist season, are the primary reasons for the Festival to occur in the summer. Nevertheless, the repetition embodies the construction of a mythology comprised of a legendary Per Gynt and related sites, *Peer Gynt* and actual productions of the play, and memories built up by participants over the decades. In 2015, when I asked one of the volunteers, who was a preschool teacher in Oslo, how many years she had been with this insane asylum (*dårekiste*) (as we waited outside the gates to make our entrance for Act Four's madhouse scene), she thought for a moment and then said, "fourteen years," referring, with a twinkle in her eye, to her long history as a volunteer. Other adult volunteers had first participated as young children, having grown up with the various productions. Glassie writes of the seasonal repetitions of mumming, "it does not dissolve ambiguity in clear resolution; in symbol and act, mumming has the power to ignite chain reactions of reference deep in its viewers' minds" (121). He adds, "it [the mummers' play] does not lie to people, pretending there

are easy answers when there are not. If all ambiguity is removed, the play is only entertainment—an intensification of the very best in day in day out existence" (121). *Peer Gynt* ends in such ambiguity, promising a meeting at the final crossroads with the Button Molder, who says: " Vi træffes paa sidste Korsvejen, Peer; / og *saa* faar vi se, om –; jeg siger ikke mer ("We'll meet at the final crossroads, Peer; / And *then* we'll see—I won't say more"; 171; Fjelde 209). At the end of the Festival, new and old friends part ways, some leaving with the expectation of returning the following year, others having had a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Actors and backstage crew meet for a short period, experience the intensity of their time together, and go their separate ways with regret or nostalgia or relief. As one volunteer said to me at a subsequent visit, as I was taking my leave, "*Till næste Korsvej*" ("Until the next crossroads"; my trans. 161).

Performance

The definitions of performance, as I have earlier written, are varied. Musings on age briefly arose in my interviews. The 68-year-old professor spoke with insight about age as a construct having little to do with chronological age. He also stated that one of the benefits of participation was the opportunity to interact with diverse groups of people, including volunteers of different ages. Another interviewee refused to apply any clichéd meaning to her chronological age, stating that "my passport says I'm 70; otherwise, I'm a perpetual teenager." Her statement suggests that she is aware of age as a performance and a refusal to "act her age." Her statement harkens back to the Geritol Frolics' penchant for theatrical events that showed seniors as age-defying players. This interviewee did not express any age limit to her continued participation, in some capacity, although this was the first year that she was not cast in the play. Instead, she helped with makeup and mask making. My third respondent, 78 years old at the time of the interview, hopes to continue performing in *Peer Gynt* until she turns 80, two years from the

summer of 2022, but she expressed doubts about having to learn new blocking and choreography if there were to be another new production before then. (Recently productions have changed every two to three years, but lately every two years, not three.) She admitted that she could do it, but that she may not want to. She seems to feel that she may age out of participation. Perhaps there is a significant difference in the gap between 70 and 78. On the other hand, I wonder how much of her hesitation has to do with her perceptions of what aging is supposed to look like, feel like, and/or be like.

I now return to the Irish mumming tradition to highlight some similarities and differences having to do with another meaning of the word performance, that is, what it means in staged productions versus its meaning in folk performances. Unlike the "centralized decision making" of Festival productions (as the professor-interviewee pointed out), the Irish Christmas mummers followed a scenario, but they improvised the particulars depending on the response in each household. In the 2014–2016 productions, the volunteers were needed for the crowd scenes, during which certain moments were tightly choreographed, but between those moments the volunteers did improvise conversations, manner of movement across or down to the playing area, etc. Because the *Peer Gynt* performances (and the Festival as a whole) contain elements of a folkloric practice but are not actually folklore-in-performance, the audience response is not quite as important as in the Irish Christmas mumming tradition. For example, if children were present in the household, the mummers' improvisations would tend to be less bawdy and the killing of one of the characters less dark. However, all actors are aware of their audience, and their performances will be influenced—at least on a subtle level—by the audience reception. Glassie notes that the relationship between performer and audience was reversed when young boys, previously audience members, broke away and played the roles on the hillside, thereby

disrupting "the Western tradition that separates an artist from his audience . . . . The mummers attacked the forces that keep people apart" (93). The Festival's need for volunteers also disrupts a line—between theater professionals and the local community. Although the handful of professional actors have a separate dressing room, the camplike atmosphere of the setting does allow for informal interactions between the two groups. One such instance occurred in a tent generally used by the volunteers to sip their coffee and eat a waffle or two and chat with their friends. On this occasion, volunteers and professionals gathered to sing happy birthday to the female lead. Before she arrived, those present, including the director and professional actors, spontaneously erupted into song in four-part harmony. This fortifies my understanding of the Festival as a bonding, community-affirming phenomenon.

Geography

> The value of national and local identities is discussed by Glassie. He writes:
>
> "The connection to a broad cultural region, spreading beyond Ireland to Scotland [where similar mumming traditions were found] . . . [but] . . . at the same time, their local identity was reinforced by the knowledge that their particular rhymes were different from those of any other men" (71–72).

Like Glassie's informants, the reaction of the volunteers to the translation of Acts One through Three and Five into *Dølemål* strikes me as evidencing a similar pride in one's locality. Another example, concerning the 2022 production, arose in my interviews. One respondent was peeved by the mispronunciation by one of the actors of the word *Lunde*, saying instead *Linde*. She stated that "*Lunde* is a very special name of the farm in Vinstra." This farm had resonance for her, not just as a line in Ibsen's text, but as an actual location with which she is familiar. In terms of the broader geography, the beauty of the setting at which *Peer Gynt* is staged each year cannot be

denied, situated as it is at the foot of the mountain lake. Softly rounded mountains surround the lake, and despite the steady increase of artificial lights emanating from new cabins nestled on the hillsides (where once these *hytter* were without electricity), the presence of nature lends a special aura to the productions. Maagerø's analysis of the 2017/2018 production highlights the interruption of this natural beauty by the construction of a wooden background between the playing area and the lake, in keeping with the director's setting of the play in an unfinished theme park. Director Strøm Reibo thus played with audience expectations by defamiliarizing the setting and therefore asking "the audience to reflect on what it actually means to make these connections between Ibsen's play, the location, and Norwegian culture and identity" (11). According to one informant, Reibo and the scenographer were convinced by a committee of the volunteers to remove the wall earlier than originally planned as it not only blocked the view of the lake and mountains, but also obstructed the sightlines for some of the audience. In the minds of the volunteers, the locale is as much a character in the production as Ibsen's. To my mind, the locale asserted itself via the actions of the committee.

As an outsider attending my first performance of the Festival *Peer Gynt* in 2006, I was at that time untroubled by the problematization of national romanticism, in Norway or anywhere else, and as a nature-lover to the core, I could not help but be affected by the aesthetic contribution of natural occurrences. For example, during that production, my companions and I first spotted black rowboats (sometimes called church boats) approaching the shore from far out on the lake. At that time there was a small rise between the shore and the playing area, so we did not see the boats actually land, but suddenly the wedding guests came rushing over the top of the rise. It was a memorable theatrical moment that made use of geography to suggest guests arriving from all around the area. Rees points out that efforts to form a Norwegian national

identity constructed the ideal of "a profound connection to nature . . . especially among the small group of urban elites who produced the bulk of the most important nationalistic literary texts" (86). Whereas in the past the predominantly rural population simply "used and lived in nature . . . increasingly people today pay to 'experience' it" (87). Times have changed, but the cliché of Norwegian nature lovers is not without foundation, and I situate myself within that category, even having gone so far as to undertake the challenging Besseggen hike, during an optional field trip while attending Oslo University's International Summer School in 2016. One of our guides described the hike, the site of Peer's fantastical ride on the buck, as "the most difficult hike in Norway you can do without technical equipment." Yet, there were young children scampering over the rocks and two adults out for a quick run. According to a brochure about the hike the fastest traverse was by an Ethiopian—one-and-a-half hours—a hike which normally takes six to eight hours to complete. Whether discussing national or local identities**,** Rees criticizes "the emplacement of a virtual Pe(e)r Gynt [via such things as "a Peer Gynt cabin, the Peer Gynt trail, and a luxury resort" (85)] into the topography of Gudbrandsdalen" as being inauthentic, but nevertheless asserts that they "attest to the tenacity and centrality of this text in contemporary Norwegian consciousness" (85)—as well in the broader European context, if lectures presented in both German and English are any indication of its international appeal. I resist calling such emplacements inauthentic, preferring to think of the national, and international, appeal of the Festival as in part dependent on the fictional constructions, which allow for volunteers and visitors alike to participate in a ritualized, theatrical experience.

Function

The years of the mumming revival depended not only on tradition, but on several other factors, among them poverty, political divisiveness, and a desire to create unity. Glassie believes

that the revival "was the expression of a system of values that endured for centuries and has recently failed" (139) due to prosperity, automobiles, and urban cultural encroachment. Rees outlines the history of the Per Gynt Festival (as it was originally spelled, to distinguish the legendary figure from the play's character). The Festival began in 1967, but the performance of the play was not introduced until 1989. With funding limited primarily to local entrepreneurship, the incorporation of the festival and the commercial branding of various aspects of the twelve-day event were perhaps inevitable. This commercialization, and (as Rees quotes the Peer Gynt AS website) the touting of the experience as rooted "in our unique culture, natures, and tradition," may be, on the face of it, problematic. Moreover, the failure to establish a local documentation center on Ibsen (which is now housed at the University of Oslo as the Centre for Ibsen Studies), which Rees describes as having "promised to be anything but academically stringent" (106), strengthens her claim (when writing about the translation to *Dølemål*) that "The concern is for enhancing local identity, rather than artistic loyalty to Ibsen's autonomous text" (104). Indeed, locale is important, as I previously noted, but does that mean that the creation of local identity is at odds with artistic loyalty? I am not quite sure what she means by artistic loyalty, but the production history of *Peer Gynt,* which I summarized in Chapter One, demonstrates the license with which theater artists approach the play. From my perspective, artistic loyalty connotes some sort of preconceived notion of how *Peer Gynt* should be performed, whereas the entire history of its performances is replete with alterations to the text (even by Ibsen, who once proposed cutting Act Four) and flexibility in its staging. As noted in previous sections, the Festival has commercial (as well as artistic) goals which function in support of the social goals of community cohesion and identity formation. My interest in the event as a local, cultural phenomenon is precisely what propelled my investigation.

Arts-Based Research Method

Leaving Rees and Glassie, I now introduce a brief overview of arts-based research methods as it applies to my project. Throughout my lifetime I have participated in theater as an actor, writer, and director. In addition, I am drawn to public-facing scholarship. Given these two influences, it is not surprising that I became fascinated by arts-based research. I first encountered this method of relaying research findings to the general public through the work of Patricia Leavy, who is perhaps the most visible proponent of the method. She began by turning her social science research into novels, and, as she has said, her first attempts were not very good, but a mediocre novel will have greater influence than the best journal article. She writes in *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* that "data collected via any other research methods can be translated or adapted into performance texts or films in numerous ways" (174). Among these ways, "*ethnodrama* refers to the writing up of research findings in dramatic or script form and may or may not be performed" (182). I embrace the latter notion that the play may not even be intended to be performed because it liberates me from concerns about producing the work. The script then incorporates my participant observations and close readings of the interview transcripts, as well as previous familiarity with two of the interviewees. The short play which results attempts to achieve dramatic impact by playing freely with implied conflicts while at the same time letting the influence of Jon Fosse's plays, which do not rely on conventional conflict/resolution tropes, to percolate through the work. As I allowed the voices of the interviewees to penetrate my psyche, possibilities for a playscript began to take shape in my imagination.

I began by formulating questions for my semi-structured interviews. I then carried out the interviews in English for two reasons. First, all three informants are conversant in English, and

second, transcription of English-language audio files would simplify this step of the analysis process. One of my informants was born and raised in the United States, another is a university professor who collaborates internationally, and the third is a retired schoolteacher quite comfortable speaking English. Upon completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service. I then listened to the recordings while editing the transcriptions as needed. This was particularly necessary when the interviewees used a Norwegian word or phrase. I then used colored markers to highlight significant statements, a highly intuitive process. This was followed by coding and the identification of subthemes, all leading to the following themes. I include for each a key statement that exemplifies the theme.

(1) Roles in the play or with the Festival: "I was part of the host team in the 90s. The host team gives tickets and shows people their places."

(2) Whether their backgrounds had included previous acting experience: "I've never had experience in theater, no, not at all. But I've always been interested in seeing movies and going to concerts and watching theater."

(3) Benefits of participation: "It’s the Peer Gynt family, it’s a common experience. It does become a family. It’s just in our blood."

(4) Motivation: I was very motivated to be part of that group, the Peer Gynt family. To do something in common with the young and the old, middle-aged people, professionals, amateurs, local people, people from Oslo and from the community"

(5) How they got started with the productions: "I went to a choir rehearsal to give the director a neck massage. I asked him how I could join. He asked me to start that evening."

(6) Feelings or experiences of participation, specific and general: "It's tiring; it's fun. We're creating something. Just standing there and taking the applause—at the end—of 2,000 people can sometimes blow you over."

(7) Comments about the Peer Gynt Festival organization: "I've worked under five different directors, and that's very nice because they do thing different. All of them are very creative."

(8) Age: "I see the differences from the old people, for example, their preferences for music and dancing and such things. But when we are all on the stage, then we are one group, even if, I think the oldest lady is 78 or something."

Analyzing the interview transcripts evoked memories of my own participation, which added to the information I was gleaning from reading and rereading the transcripts. The result was (I hope) a broad understanding of the participants' experiences. Then, intermittent periods of letting the details lie fallow allowed for all pieces of data to be combined in the crucible of my imagination. In attempting to unpack that process, I note that many bits of information are left out, while other details are added for dramatic purposes. Perhaps because of the environment in which the interviews took place (Zoom, a back porch, behind the canteen), and the personalities of the interviewees, most criticism was understated. The American-born participant seemed more willing to offer her criticism in an unfiltered way. Therefore, I availed myself of her insights to add some spice to the script. As for the NAYSAYERS (a label I am not quite happy with), their dialogue is assembled from various passing comments, conversations, and general observations that I remember from the summer when I was a volunteer actor. These characters allowed me to include, in an exaggerated way, certain things that one respondent (who became AGOT) said about people growing up and moving on, irrelevance to their current lives, or even the death of

some former participants. I also found that the NAYSAYERS gave me an opportunity to re-imagine *Peer Gynt*'s female characters, bringing their roles up to date within the frame of second and third wave feminism as well as post-colonial critiques. As always, this short play is not to be taken as a literal rendition of what my respondents said, any more so than *Suzannah* is meant to be historically accurate about Suzannah Ibsen. These products of the imagination take liberties with facts to express an authorial truth. In my case this truth has to do with the gravitational pull exerted by the Festival with all its complexities. Without both flaws and successes, the pull would be diminished and fail to engage participants and visitors in the ritual of myth making and community building.

Although aging was not a primary concern for the volunteers, a certain way of performing older age is implied by the physical and mental vitality of the volunteers. My interviewees appeared to be generally healthy, and necessarily capable of quite strenuous or choreographed movement on stage, as they have done for many years. To expand upon this aspect of their experiences, the work of Gene D. Cohen comes immediately and forcefully to mind. He writes, in "New Theories and Research Findings on the Positive Influence of Music and Art on Health with Ageing," that creativity is universal and that it continues to function, in different forms, in conjunction with ongoing psychological growth, throughout the life cycle. He arrived at this conclusion by studying, over the course of two years, participants of a Washington, D.C.-area chorale comprised of individuals from 65 to 103 years old. He found significantly better health outcomes among these individuals compared to the control group as evidenced by a reduction in doctor visits and medication use, fewer falls and general health problems, as well as better morale and less loneliness (59). (Recall that in Chapter Three's performance analysis I point out how both old Peers and Old Suzannah demonstrate the fear of

falling.) Overall, the benefits, when extrapolated to the Medicare population as a whole, would mean an annual cost savings of approximately $6.3 billion. I believe this sum of money, if not the health benefits for people, should force consideration by public health policy makers. Such awareness has had a profound effect on the public policies of the Nordic governments, if not so much for American, where most activity is supported by nonprofit organizations. As for the cognitive benefits of participating in theater, I turn to Helga Noice and Tony Noice. They documented, in "An Arts Intervention for Older Adults Living in Subsidized Retirement Homes," the results of an intervention "given to 122 older adults who took acting lessons twice a week for 4 weeks" (1). The authors theorize that the multi-modality of acting—which includes cognition, emotion, and physiology (facial expression, tone of voice, and body language)—was a primary reason for the cognitive benefits they found.

It interested me that the topic of age left center stage, even though all interviewees, in their 60s and 70s were well into Basting's "mature, vital adulthood" (18). Their vitality is a given, what with the demands of the productions, but for the most part they did not connect age with their ability to participate. One person did, however, reflect on her belief that learning was good for brain stimulation, "maybe [participating] helped me to be more accurate? to concentrate, to use my head so maybe I don't have this Alzheimer's (*laughing*). Because I really have to think, concentrate to do the right things." She hopes to continue until she is 80 years old (at the time of the interview she was 78), but she was unsure whether she was up to learning new blocking and choreography if a new production was mounted before she reaches 80. The professor expressed an academic interest in concepts of aging, including chronological versus physical, psychological, or social age. He also expressed how the diversity of volunteers, including in terms of their ages, was very motivating for him. And here I bring to mind the

delightful phrasing of my third interviewee, "my passport says I'm 70; otherwise, I'm a perpetual teenager!" Rather than concerns about age or Festival politics or production changes, what emerged as the overall theme was that they had experienced their participation as being part of a community, even a family. The Peer Gynt website also uses the word family to describe the experience of the volunteers, but my sense during the interviews was that this sentiment was sincere, and not merely a repetition of the Festival's recruitment strategies. Like most families, relationships are sometimes harmonious and supportive, and at other times, conflicts occur. Individuals move on to other things, feel estranged, die. Their use of the terms community and family did not suggest to me a Pollyannish one-dimensionality, but rather communicated the complex richness of the experience. The playscript begins on the next page.

IT'S A FAMILY

SCENE ONE

The VOLUNTEERS meet each other for the first time this year under the shelter of a white canopied tent among rows of tables and chairs. The side of the tent facing the lake is made of clear vinyl, thus allowing a blurred vision of the landscape.

AGOT: *Neimen*, here we are again!

TROND: Ja, another ring around the rosie.

IDONA: Around Peer Gynt's world, you mean.

TROND: With Aksel Hennie! What a coup.

AGOT: He's mostly a film actor, isn't he?

IDONA: I wonder how he'll do on this outdoor stage. Not just a stage, but in the open air with the lake behind us, surrounded by mountain tops. I hope he's up to it.

TROND: I haven't heard anything about this director. His vision.

IDONA: All I know is his creative team is from France, or Montréal . . . . Somewhere French speaking.

AGOT: And the composer is Danish. We'll just see, I guess.

IDONA: I didn't make the cut.

AGOT AND TROND: What?!

IDONA: I'll be helping out backstage, with the makeup and masks.

AGOT: How strange.

IDONA: The auditions . . . no idea why. After 20 years on stage.

AGOT: I heard that they are using many fewer volunteers this year — for the crowd scenes.

IDONA: And half of them aren't from around here. Mostly from *Innlandet*.

TROND: Well, I'm from *Innlandet* – Lillehammer, but I don't think that would help my case. I think they don't have so many older men trying out.

AGOT: Anyway, you and your wife have a cabin around here, don't you?

TROND: Ja. It's a nice way to spend our summer holiday.

IDONA: Hardly any children this year.

AGOT: Remember the families who used to make it part of their summer vacations?

IDONA: They could do that when the rehearsal period was shorter. Now, with another new production . . . .

AGOT: So many changes this year. So many old-timers seem to have given up the ghost. I'll miss them.

TROND: Some move on, children grow up —

AGOT: Mine did. They've flown away. And some people have died. Quite a few in the last couple of years.

TROND: So it's not true that no one dies in Gudbrandsdalen.

They all LAUGH in response to this reference to a line from the play.

AGOT: As an outsider, you can laugh about that.

TROND: After 8 years, am I still an outsider?

AGOT: No, of course not, but compared to my 22 years with the festival —

TROND: It takes a long time to become an old-timer, I see.

IDONA: Even if we're all old enough to be called . . . older. Trond, you're the youngest one of we three.

TROND: And you are our perpetual teenager.

They laugh knowingly, as if remembering previous years' escapades.

Lights up on THE CHORUS OF NAYSAYERS, scattered around the periphery of the stage. Their ages range from 20-40.

MEMBER #1: They were all so cliquish.

MEMBER #2: I never felt a part of the group. I couldn't wait to go home.

MEMBER #1: Even though home was just five kilometers that way. But that's where we met.

MEMBER #2: Yeah, there is that.

MEMBER #3: The weather! Worse than England in the summer. Cold and rainy.

MEMBER #2: Do you remember how we put plastic bags between our warm base layers and our costumes?

MEMBER #4: It wasn't so bad. Everyone seemed to have a good time. Even when we got soaked, at least we weren't making an entrance on water skis!

MEMBER #3: In a swimsuit!

MEMBER #1: I heard he loved it.

MEMBER #2: Who?

MEMBER #1: That year's Peer.

MEMBER #3: They took pretty good care of our group from England. Even though I was cold the whole month. I could never get warmed up.

MEMBER #1: It was okay.

MEMBER #2: I was on unemployment. It was something to do.

MEMBER #5: Didn't you want to get to know the professionals? I did. Kind of hoping for some connection, for breaking in.

MEMBER #4: Probably not the way to do it. They just hung out in their dressing room. They had really demanding roles.

MEMBER #2: Yeah. Still, they could have opened up a little to us lowly extras.

Lights down on THE CHORUS OF NAYSAYERS.

AGOT: I'm going to get some coffee to warm up my hands. Can I get some for you?

TROND: You bet.

IDONA: Thanks. Are the waffles ready?

AGOT: Smells as if they are.

IDONA: I'll check.

AGOT and IDONA exit. TROND stands alone, looks around, sits on a chair, waits expectantly.

TROND: It seems kind of quiet, without all those children running around. I really liked getting to know some younger ones. It took a little effort, but I didn't want to be limited to just our older group. I told a young woman who was working on her thesis that I was a professor. Maybe I could take a look, help out a little. That broke the ice. She was writing something about aging. It got me thinking about constructs of age, separate from our chronological age. Social constructs, and so forth. Even at 68 I don't really feel like time is running out. Maybe that's because my health is good. Just like Peer. Vigorous, Ibsen wrote, even at 80 years old. I like to stay active. That helps. Here we can go on hikes whenever we're not rehearsing. Just head out from our cabin and get lost somewhere beyond. As Peer says, to the sea, and beyond. *Typisk Norsk*, as they say. Always eager to get out into the fresh air. My wife and I come here to relax, to get away from the pressures and responsibilities of our jobs. My wife, especially. She doesn't want any speaking roles. For a few years I got some sentences to say. Being the father of Solveig. Nothing more than that. I know my limits.

(AGOT and IDONA return with coffee and waffles.)

TROND: There you are. I thought maybe you got lost.

IDONA: We weren't gone that long.

TROND (teasingly): It only seemed like 60 years. I don't think I could wait that long, like Solveig.

IDONA: Solveig has her vision, of the soul of Peer.

AGOT: People are lucky to have that kind of love even once in their lives. Even if it doesn't last.

IDONA: It rarely does. Except for our dear friend, here. Is your wife with us this year?

TROND: Ja, she's coming later. She had a meeting with the Festival folk.

AGOT: I'm content just to be on stage. All that organizational stuff is not my cup of tea. Or coffee, as the case may be.

TROND: And she's happy just having some very minor role on stage. Nothing with a microphone. She comes here to get away from responsibilities.

IDONA: Her work is demanding.

TROND: To say the least. Thank goodness she gets a good summer holiday. And my co-authors and I submitted our manuscript just about a month ago, so that means I can relax, too.

AGOT: I'm happy being retired. Having time to do just as I please. Although when my children left home, I felt there was a little too much time on my hands. So, here I am, 22 years later.

IDONA: Will you keep going?

AGOT: I'd like to. Until I'm 80. That's a nice round number. But if the third year is another whole new production, I don't know. I don't know whether I can learn all the new blocking and choreography.

TROND: You certainly could.

AGOT: I could, but will I want to? I don't know. It's good for this old brain, to keep learning something new. So they say.

IDONA: I think they change it too often. Every two or three years is a bit much.

A BELL RINGS in the distance.

AGOT: That's our call.

IDONA: And I've got a meeting with the costumer.

They exit. The NAYSAYERS amble into the break tent. Look around, touch a few things, including the cups and plates left by the VOLUNTEERS. Member #3 bites into a leftover waffle.

MEMBER #3: Mmm. I've missed these waffles!

MEMBER #2: Even stale and cold?

MEMBER #3: Mmm. Too bad I can't go get a fresh one.

MEMBER #4: 'Cuz we're not really here.

MEMBER #5: Just echoes of memories.

MEMBER #4: I pretty much hung out in the volunteers' dressing room between our scenes. There was a guy from way up north, we had great conversations. *Sotto voce* conversations. So we didn't disturb the band.

MEMBER #1: I missed having Grieg's music. And the choir.

MEMBER #5: They jazzed him up.

MEMBER #2 (*referring to MEMBER #1*): She is such a traditionalist.

MEMBER #1: I am not!

MEMBERS #2 & 5: Are, too!

MEMBER #1: Only about *Peer Gynt*.

MEMBER #2: Uh-huh.

MEMBER #1: Name one other thing . . . .(*Off a look from MEMBER #2)* Oh, right.

MEMBER #5: Music, books, movies.

MEMBER #1: Clothes.

MEMBER #2: Alright, alright! You've made your point.

They all laugh.

MEMBER #3 (*peeking through the tent flap*): Looks like they're on their way back. At least some of them.

MEMBER #2: We'd better scram!

(*They laugh and scatter back to the periphery.*)

(*AGOT is the first to return. She sees the empty coffee cups and plates, picks them up, and exits to return them to the snack shack. TROND and IDONA enter.*)

TROND: That wasn't so bad.

IDONA: He's very serious.

TROND: He wants us to understand the play.

IDONA: From his perspective.

(*AGOT returns with fresh coffee for the three.*)

AGOT: So serious. I was afraid to laugh.

IDONA: The whole cast was just — silent.

TROND: You were there?

IDONA. Yeah. After my meeting I sat in the bleachers. Up by the control tower.

AGOT: Hiding out.

IDONA: I wouldn't say that.

TROND: Spying on us.

IDONA: Missing the action.

(*A pause as that sinks in.*)

AGOT: I think maybe you're lucky to not be on stage this year.

IDONA: That's what I was told.

TROND: By whom?

IDONA: Not saying.

AGOT: I'm sure everything will go fine. It's just a new director, new team, new ideas . . . .

TROND: I'm not at all unhappy that they cut the father's lines. Now I can just do some movements, be a part of the group . . . .

AGOT: Hmm.

TROND: Idona, have you seen anything of the costumes?

IDONA: They're color-coded.

AGOT: What?

IDONA: That's all I'm saying. Sworn to secrecy. It's all 'need to know.'

TROND: We're in the don't need to know category.

AGOT: We are not the ones who decide.

TROND: It's centralized decision making.

AGOT: Not a democracy.

(*They chuckle wryly.*)

IDONA: I hear the professor speaking.

TROND: It's a paradox. That's all. I'm interested in paradoxes. Theater seems to be a little corner of centralized decision making in the midst of —

IDONA: Us.

AGOT: Nothing to get upset about. We've volunteered, after all.

IDONA: There's something about this — it draws me back, year after year.

TROND: It's more than a holiday. The setting.

IDONA: Do you remember the birds? Agot, you and I used to sit on the beach in our camping chairs. Between our scenes. Just watching day turn to dusk.

AGOT: Never quite night.

TROND: This far north there is still a bit of light at the end of the show.

IDONA: Except that time when the power went out? Do you remember that?

AGOT: We didn't get started until nine o'clock.

IDONA: Pitch black halfway through the play.

TROND: I heard some people liked it. They said we should do it that way all the time.

AGOT: Uff!

IDONA: No way!

(*They laugh.*)

AGOT: That must have been the younger ones talking.

TROND: Well, break's over. Back to it.

(*They exit.*)

(*The NAYSAYERS resume.*)

MEMBER #1: They seem so happy.

MEMBER #3: Our little group from England got to see a lot of the Peer Gynt history.

MEMBER #2: You should say legendary history. They've made up a lot of bogus stuff, for the tourists.

MEMBER #3: I don't have a problem with that. In London we have a plaque at Sherlock Holmes's address. He was entirely fictional, not even legendary.

MEMBER #4: I wish I had gone on those tours with you all. It sounds interesting.

MEMBER #3: It was. But the best part was going to the *brunost* museum.

MEMBER #4: I was there. With your, uh, chaperone.

MEMBER #3: Director.

MEMBER #4: Right. Director. Well, it was closed, but we had coffee in a *hytte* that one of the volunteers rents every summer.

MEMBER #1: She's here this summer, too, isn't she?

MEMBER #4: Yeah, I ran into her up there, behind the arena.

MEMBER #5: One of the lucky ones.

MEMBER #1: I wonder how they decided who made the cut? There are a lot fewer volunteers this year.

MEMBER #5: Not my problem. I've moved on. I got a job.

MEMBER #2: Acting job?

MEMBER #5: Huh, are you kidding? No, in tech. I went to coding school. I'm working in one of the bar code buildings in Oslo.

MEMBER #2: Ugh. Oslo. Too crowded.

MEMBER #5: Still a homebody, huh?

MEMBER #2 (giving MEMBER #1 a light squeeze): A dedicated homebody.

MEMBER #1: I'm pregnant.

MEMBER #5: Whoa –

MEMBER #4: Congratulations.

MEMBER #1: I wouldn't have had the energy for these long days –

MEMBER #2: And nights.

MEMBER #1: So I'm glad I didn't audition. I think that stage of life is behind me.

MEMBER #5: Me, too.

MEMBER #4: Children pretty much take over your life. At least for a couple of decades!

MEMBER #5: Well, we all kind of grew up with *Peer Gynt*.

MEMBER #2: Does that make us one of the impenetrable cliques?

MEMBER #5: No, I don't think so. We were just kids having a good time.

MEMBER #3: You all welcomed me into the fold. Translated what I needed to know.

MEMBER #5: You're welcome. So are you still acting?

MEMBER #3: Yeah. In the sticks, but it's a pretty good regional company. The pay sucks, but we're doing some interesting work.

MEMBER #5: Still reworking fairy tales?

MEMBER #3: Sometimes, if by reworking you mean totally ripping them apart and just barely putting them back together.

MEMBER #5: Sounds pretty inventive.

MEMBER #3: Yeah. Mostly derived pieces – (*off looks from the others, except MEMBER #*5) – created by the ensemble.

MEMBER #1: So not like this beast.

MEMBER #2: Total dictatorship.

MEMBER #4: But it gets the job done. Every year.

MEMBER #5: I hear there's been some grumbling about how often the productions change.

MEMBER #1: And the length of the rehearsal period.

MEMBER #5: Another reason to have moved on. Some are coming back.

The NAYSAYERS retreat to the periphery. IDONA enters with materials to build masks, singing Grieg's "Pinsesalme." The NAYSAYERS join, in four-part harmony. IDONA sits and begins constructing a mask. She continues singing till the end of the song. The NAYSAYERS continue singing softly in the b.g.

IDONA: Grieg, Grieg, Grieg. Where did you go? We miss you!

MEMBER #1: We do!

IDONA: What is *Peer Gynt* without your music? How else to capture the magical qualities of the setting? *Mor Aase*'s death at sunset. Even if was cloudy, the sun sometimes peaked through. Not when they put up that plywood wall. *Herregud*! We got them to take it down after the wedding scene, thank goodness.

MEMBER #2: It was funny though, when Peer hung his mother up there on the wall. The audience loved it.

IDONA: At least we had some say. That may have been the last time they listened to us.

MEMBER #5: We were nameless volunteers.

SCENE TWO

A few days later.

IDONA: This year a giant screen rises up at the end, blocking the view again. To focus our attention, he said. Uff. Nature is not meant to be one of the actors, he said. Then why do it here? They have cut so many of the best scenes. I don't know what the effect will be. I guess he's depending on Aksel, and Mimmi. What a voice she has. The director says that the play is deeply religious. Solveig's family have always represented the religious side of things. Solveig with her prayer book. But their costumes. So bland. Blending right in with the sand. He says that Peer's mother has to take responsibility for how her son turned out. Yes, blame the mother. *Typisk*! 'To be oneself enough' has a deeper meaning than simple egotism. *Jo*, you couldn't take on this job without a fair bit of ego. He says his interpretation may not be to everyone's liking, but he has to stand one hundred percent behind his vision. He says he sees the beauty as well as the harm in the relationship between Peer and his mother. And the powerful influence of a missing father. So there's hope.

MEMBER #3: I would love to see this production. But I can't get away. Sadly.

AGOT *(entering with coffee for two.) Neimen*, this should warm us up.

IDONA: *Tusen takk*. How did it go?

AGOT: Well, I think. It's very serious, but I see Aksel growing each day.

IDONA: What about Mimmi?

AGOT: Very interesting. She seems quite reserved.

IDONA: Completely opposite her pop persona, then.

AGOT: I haven't seen that version of her.

IDONA: Sexy, dynamic, passionate.

AGOT: None of that. At least not that I can see. Their scenes seem destined for closeups. Very intimate.

IDONA: Not the wide open outdoors?

AGOT: It reads, though. I was sitting about halfway up in the bleachers. Somehow it comes across.

IDONA: You never say an unkind word about anyone. Or anything.

AGOT: It's not really my place. Although one actor keeps saying *Linde* instead of *Lunde*. It's making my skin itch every time I hear it.

IDONA: The farm *Lunde*?

AGOT: Ja.

IDONA: *Linde*?

AGOT: *Linde* is nothing.

IDONA: You could say something.

AGOT: Not my place.

IDONA: I would.

AGOT: You would, but it's really not my place. I wouldn't want to confuse him. And I shouldn't speak to the actors about their performances.

MEMBER #3: She has that right.

AGOT: Centralized decision making.

IDONA: Now you're sounding like Trond. Centralized decision making. Not a democracy.

They laugh, kindly.

AGOT: He adds something –

IDONA: Enthusiasm.

AGOT: Yes, he really seems to enjoy himself. Not take himself too seriously.

IDONA: Unusual for an academic. Where there are lots of egos, or so he has said.

AGOT: He draws parallels with Peer. But curiously. Not judgmentally.

IDONA: Well, after only eight years, he hasn't gotten jaded.

AGOT: Are you?

IDONA: Maybe a little. But the magic's still here. I just can't stay away.

AGOT: It draws a lot of people, year after year. There must be something –

IDONA: The lake, the mountains, the trees, the birds –

AGOT: Maybe a few too many lights in the mountains. All those cabins.

IDONA: Remember when it was dark on the hillsides?

AGOT. *Ja*. So calm and still. Peaceful.

IDONA: No distractions from the modern world.

AGOT: Your cabin –

IDONA: Not one of those modern affairs. Just a composting toilet, paraffin heat. A small solar panel to charge my phone.

AGOT: You're really roughing it.

IDONA: At least I don't have to lug five-gallon bottles of water up the hill.

AGOT: She still does that?

IDONA: Yeah.

AGOT: Ah, here's Trond.

TROND (*entering wearily*): That was tough.

IDONA: You need some caffeine. Be right back.

IDONA exits.

TROND: The shipwreck scene is a bear. We kept sliding down the screen as it arose from the ground. Even with ropes to hang on to.

AGOT: It's quite slippery, is it? The surface?

TROND: Quite. (*short pause)* It's meant to reflect back on the audience. To make it explicit that this play is about all of us.

AGOT: But you keep yourself in shape for such exertions.

TROND: *Ja*. How goes it with the women in the harem?

AGOT: It's quite beautiful. And when we close in on Peer, threatening. This is a completely different take on Anitra.

TROND: It would have to be. After 'hashtag me, too.' It's always been a difficult part of the play.

AGOT: I've heard some productions just cut it out.

TROND: Yes, but there's something there. We need to see a successful Peer who loses everything. Returns to where he began –

AGOT: Penniless –

TROND: But he doesn't give up.

AGOT: Even though he ends up in an insane asylum.

TROND: Only to emerge 30 years later as an old man.

AGOT: Older than any of us, and still going strong.

TROND: Except existentially.

AGOT: *Selvsagt*. Where we find ourselves.

TROND: If we're lucky.

AGOT: In community.

TROND: Social beings that we are.

AGOT: *Ja*. Ah, here's your coffee.

IDONA (*entering with a cup of coffee for TROND and a pot to refill hers and AGOT's cups)*: What's this about community?

AGOT (*indicating the pot*): There's something to be said for your ability to make yourself useful.

TROND: We were talking about the play. We were saying that you can't find yourself in isolation.

IDONA: The *Peer Gynt* family.

AGOT: Even those who have moved on are still a part of it. In our memories, at least.

They sip their coffee in silence as the NAYSAYERS blend into the scene.

MEMBER #1: Uff! This baby had better come soon.

MEMBER #2 (*taking her hand)*: It's moving a lot.

MEMBER #1: Kicking, you mean. My ribs are sore!

MEMBER #2: Our little Viking.

They wander off together.

MEMBER #5: They don't seem to mind the chill.

MEMBER #3: Looks like the sun is trying to peak through.

MEMBER #5: Did you see the ducks flying by?

MEMBERS #3 and #4 *(together)*: Yeah.

MEMBER #4: It takes me back.

MEMBER #3: I don't remember you from the year you were here.

MEMBER #4: No reason you should. You were hanging out with the younger crowd. Truth be told, that whole month I was a jangle of nerves.

MEMBER #5: I think that's pretty common, once you get past childhood. The kids seemed to take the whole thing in stride. Playing on the beach, wading in the water, skipping stones–

MEMBER #4: Did you feel nervous?

MEMBER #5: Yeah. Pretty often.

MEMBER #3: Me, too.

MEMBER #4: And I wasn't sleeping enough. I'd leave here after 11:00, but it took a long time to fall asleep. And then I was waking up at my usual crack of dawn.

MEMBER #5: I don't do very well without enough sleep.

MEMBER #4: Me, neither.

Brief pause

MEMBER #4: But I could safely say it was the highlight of my life.

MEMBER #5: You're lucky to feel that way.

MEMBER #4: I'm used to how the theater world works. Actors take care of their jobs, the director does theirs. I really didn't have any opinions about how things should go. I was just trying to keep up and not make any bone-headed mistakes. Ba-da-da-da-Da-da-da-da-Da-da-da-da-Dum! And stop!

MEMBER #3: Some people had a hard time getting the rhythm.

MEMBER #4: I got it, but I had to listen really hard to the beat. That was in the wedding scene.

MEMBER #5: I wasn't in that one. I was one of the trolls and I was in the auction scene, and that part where all the young men are mocking Peer.

MEMBER #4: Poor Peer. You guys tried to get him all liquored up!

MEMBER #5: That's when he was the most fun – getting him to make a fool of himself. Pure pleasure.

MEMBER #4: Poor Peer.

MEMBERS #1 and #2 stroll back in.

MEMBER #1: What's this about poor Peer?

MEMBER #5: Just reminiscing.

MEMBER #2: You'd make a good Peer.

MEMBER #5: Especially if they set it in the tech world. Plenty of trolls there.

MEMBER #3: I'd like to see the whole thing from the female characters' points of view.

MEMBER #1: *Ja*, Solveig tending her goats for sixty years. No, wait – something to do with goats. She started making cheese and selling it on the farm-to-table market. And becomes famous for her weaving. She creates a cooperative with other women. Together they prosper. Somehow, she joins forces with Anitra whose startup has made her rich. Together they hire a detective–

MEMBER #4: –the Button Molder!–

MEMBER #1: –who decades later finds Peer being held at Guantanamo. They manage to free him, and bring him home–

MEMBER #5: –to Solveig who has retired to her hut in the mountains–

MEMBER #3: –only now it's one of these modern cabins, with electricity and running water.

MEMBER #1: She still keeps some goats, though. And weaves the most beautiful blankets.

MEMBER #4: I want one. They're so soft.

MEMBER #5: They're not real–

MEMBER #2: Meanwhile, Ingrid had inherited the farm and she lives happily ever after, taking as many lovers as she wants.

Pause.

MEMBER #3: Let's do it! Let's hold a counter-narrative, a counter Peer Gynt Festival.

MEMBER #5: You're dreaming.

MEMBER #4: The script will practically write itself.

MEMBER #3: A devised piece.

MEMBER #1: We could–

MEMBER #2: Right. We'll have plenty of time after the baby's here.

MEMBER #5: What's our timeline?

MEMBER #3: So, you're in?

MEMBER #5: *Ja*, I'm in.

MEMBER #4: There's something about this place . . . .

MEMBER #5: You can't escape its gravitational pull.

The NAYSAYERS scatter and exit.

AGOT, IDONA, and TROND do their physical land vocal warmups.

IDONA: Did you hear that?

AGOT: What?

IDONA: I felt something. I thought I heard voices.

TROND: Better check your temperature.

AGOT: Voices from the past. I hear them once in a while. In my memories.

IDONA: Sweet memories.

TROND: They get triggered every time my wife and I drive down here for the first time each year.

AGOT: It's as if the twenty-two years–

TROND: –or eight–

AGOT: –yes, eight – for me, those twenty-two years have collected in the bones of this place. In the Earth, the trees, the lake, the mountains, the clouds, and the sky.

IDONA: I can't help but be drawn in. There's a quality–

TROND: It draws you back–

AGOT: –and draws you in.

TROND: Like family.

IDONA: The Peer Gynt family.

AGOT: We're not perfect–

TROND: What family is?

AGOT: –but we can't escape it. Until it's over, however that happens.

They join hands as part of their warmup.

Lights down.

CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTIONS IN THE SPIRIT OF MEMOING

Memoing is part of the ethnographic or phenomenological research process. While conducting interviews, observations, etc., one is to record one's self-dialogue; kinesthetic sensations; observations; reactions and responses; personal beliefs; values, biases, and assumptions; possible explanations of phenomena; and research-related events, processes, and procedures. By following this practice, my conclusion becomes somewhat autoethnographic in combination with more abstract reflections about the preceding four chapters. I am documenting those aspects which confirmed, exceeded, or changed my expectations about each chapter, and what insights I gained from them. I then pair the insights with a personal experience or realization about my own life. I begin with reflections on new medical developments in the field of healthful aging.

As I wrote this conclusion during the winter and spring of 2022, I had just launched—after several months of preparation—a regenerative medicine service center in my chiropractic practice. The promise of regenerative medicine is to turn back the clock on health problems that accrue with aging, simply because of the biology of aging. This is due primarily to the fact that we have used up the stem cells (and related components) with which we were born.[80] The signs of aging first appear on our faces (incipient wreckage), which mirror slow, internal, physical degeneration. The irony does not escape me that I have spent the last three years exploring age and aging from a cultural (not biological) perspective. Nevertheless, biology, psychology, and culture cannot help but be interconnected. I wonder how much of our clichés about aging have to

[80] *Life Force: How New Breakthroughs in Precision Medicine Can Transform the Quality of Your Life & Those You Love* by Tony Robbins, Peter Diamandis, and Robert Hariri; and, PR Newswire, "New York Times Best Selling Author Tony Robbins Releases New Book Empowering Readers to Become CEO of Their Own Health: LIFE FORCE: How New Breakthroughs In Precision Medicine Can Transform the Quality Of Your Life & Those You Love Reveals How the Latest Breakthroughs in Precision and Regenerative Medicine, Technology and Therapies Are Making It Possible to Maximize Energy and Strength, Prevent Disease, and Extend Personal Healthspan."

do with fear of this inner degenerative process. How much of ageism arises out of a primal fear of this biological process which is, of course, reinforced by cultural forces? If only the historical Suzannah had had access to the injection of human cellular tissue products into her arthritic joints. Would this have changed her life during her middle and late life? More to the point, would it have changed anything about how Fosse represents his fictional Suzannah? What if Peer could have received mood boosting nutrients via an intravenous infusion? Would his existential crisis have been lessened or solved? Would it have changed anything about his life trajectory? After writing the preceding four chapters, I believe that I can answer these questions with a resounding "No." The reminiscences of Fosse's Suzannah are clearly not impeded by her physical constraints. In her imagination she is once again eighteen or thirty years old. She is a time traveler within omnitemporality. Her arthritic stiffness and pain have not defined her earlier life, and they do not do so for her in her old age. She is free to wander through the past and present and future as she pleases. For Peer, extensive travels as a merchant of western hegemony and his return home were never affected by physical decline. As Ibsen shows us, especially through dialogue with the Button Molder, his problems were of the soul, not his physical self. What follows is a review of each chapter, leading to some overarching conclusions about how we can read *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah* as a means for enhancing our own consciousness about aging and the immensity that such an awareness can bring.

Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review

I began, in Chapter One, by posing the questions that drove my inquiry into these two plays. Age theory inflected drama scholarship charted a course for my investigation, beginning with Elinor Fuchs's inspiring article, "Estragement: Towards an 'age theory' theatre criticism" (2014). In asking, "what insights do these plays provide into the phenomenon of being old?"

multiple answers become manifest, whether having to do with the physical, mental, social, or spiritual aspects of being human. I attribute my interest in these questions, at least in part, to my own rendition of what Basting called "mature, vital adulthood" (18) and to conversations with my aged mother whose physical decline has not, until very recently, impeded her emotional or social well-being. She frequently expresses gratitude for the blessings of her life and has maintained an active social life based on a lifetime of service in her community. People call on her, now that she is unable to drive herself to them. She does not fear death, nor is she in a hurry to die, although she is currently taking great pleasure in planning her funeral. She, like Suzannah, savors her memories, and meanwhile, consciously engages with her elderhood through self-reflection and conversation.

Age theory frames my investigation into the cultural clues that surround us, whether reading popular media or viewing videos of exceptional feats performed (to our wonder) by people in their 80s or 90s. Not a day goes by that my *Apple* newsfeed (the customized *Reader's Digest* of the 21st century) fails to print at least one article about healthful aging. I chalk this up to its use of algorithms to determine what articles are likely to interest me. But even the popular print press (needing to appeal to a wider demographic) frequently contains articles about aging. Perhaps they are appealing to the relatively few remaining readers of newspapers who tend to represent the bulge in the snake that is the baby-boomer generation, as our concerns have frequently been a force for popular discourse and commercial enticements. I see no mention, however, of what Scott-Maxwell describes as the inner, incommunicable "wild flame" she experienced as an octogenarian (32). I labeled such secret treasures *enchantments,* adding to Fuchs's *immensities* as a way to further expand our mental images and emotional availability to something other than physical decline. In describing the two poles which dominate age theory

discourse—peak-and-decline and creativity-across-the-life-course—my intention was to show the ancient roots of conventional narratives of decline, and to contrast them with more recently explored possibilities which await us as we age. I hope that understanding the latter can prevent internalization of ageism, at least among those of us who are ourselves becoming older, if not yet willingly self-identifying as old. (My 96-year-old mother is old, not I). As we face our own mortality, Butler, via Woodward, reminds us that the threat of death can reveal one's "real life" (1986 145). The emergence of what Butler called *unforgettable* is yet another way of describing the *immensity* or *enchantments* available to those who consciously observe their inner world in old age. Such language has broadened my own awareness of the phenomena of elderhood as it varies radically among individuals. I hope that I can learn from my mother to count my blessings, rather than focusing on lack or loss. At the same time, I intend to take full advantage of regenerative medicine to preserve (and improve) my marbles and mobility. In weekly walks with an artist friend, who is in her early 70s, we talk mostly about our passions, and only a little about any health concerns. I recently told her that I believe she is now in the prime of her life (so far) because she has the time and sense of urgency to be incredibly focused on her sculpture and painting. Recalling the clue about aging in the *New York Times Daily Mini Crossword Puzzle,* she is finding the person she was always meant to be, and her work is approaching what she was always aiming for. She exemplifies Cohen's *liberation phase* which occurs in the mid-50s to mid-70s, and as suggested by the label, "plans and actions are shaped by a new sense of personal freedom to speak one's mind and to do what needs to be done" (53). There is a sense of, if not now, then when? Just last week I realized that the past decade of my life has been mostly about my foray into academic life. I began studying Norwegian under the Access program at the University of Washington in the fall of 2012, then four years later began my graduate education.

Now, just over ten years later, I am about to defend my dissertation. It surprises me how vast the experience has been and how fast it has gone. I have gotten a taste of the immensity of my own conscious experience of aging which I hope will continue to expand in the years to come. Age theory has greatly diminished any fear of old age I may have harbored, and I am eager for whatever new adventures await.

In the discourse around Norwegian drama and performance, very little has made use of age theory. I therefore turned to the anglophonic literature to illuminate my reading of *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah.* Valerie Barnes Lipscomb tells us, in *Performing Age in Modern Drama*, "theater can show us different perspectives on age, perspectives that can fight the ageist pitting of young against old, if we will only look" (154). Like so many age theorists, she shows a warrior spirit called to fight the harm that is inflicted on us, both young and old, by ageism. I include younger people among those who are limited in some way by ageism, if only in reinforcing and compounding their own dread of decline. My good fortune as a young adult was to encounter many older people who minimized my fears. If I can extend my so-called middle-age ("mature, vital adulthood," as Basting puts it) into my 90s, what is there to fear? Put another way, if healthspan can equal lifespan, then the pleasures and challenges of life simply continue, regardless of chronological age. Lipscomb and others achieve their aims of resisting clichés of aging by documenting the variety of ways that old age is conceptualized by playwrights and performed by actors. Doing so adds not only to perceptions of aging but also to our general understanding of dramatic literature, by interrogating whether we have an essential, unchanging self. This question is salient for *Peer Gynt* (explored at length by Ibsen scholars) as well as *Suzannah.* Moreover, awareness of approaching death draws our attention to the passage of time. Both Ibsen and Fosse exhibit a certain playfulness about the passage of time, the former by

jumping from youth to middle age to old age and by using figures from Norwegian folklore, and the latter by stretching time into his omnitemporality. More than one casual conversation has been about how time stopped during the COVID lockdowns. For example, a speaker at last September's Northwest Regional Telehealth Conference mentioned this phenomenon. It seems we were collectively thrust into Fosse's omnitemporality, whether we like it or not. I am not sure that I will ever emerge from that sense of time stopping, as the passage of time has ceased to make much impact in my own psyche. I do not know whether to attribute this to habits I developed during the COVID years of relative isolation or whether it is a product of my own stage of life. Either way (or both ways), I am glad to have found a term for this state of being.

Despite the paucity of the explicit use of age theory in *Peer Gynt* scholarship, I found some intriguing and relevant references, beginning with Harold Bloom's fondness for the character of Peer and his descriptions of him at his three stages of life. Mortality looms through Act Five, when Peer is somewhere in his 80s. Recall Gunn's citing of Paul Gorceix who writes that for Ibsen "death is in us" (74), but neither acceptance of his own mortality nor death itself overtakes Peer. He misses the opportunity for writing his own master narrative and claiming his *unforgettables*, although we as readers or viewers can do it for him. Instead, he defaults to Solveig and her summation of the meaning of his life. Nevertheless, Reinert points out that the paradoxes and ironies of the play and its ending are what make for its enduring interest (2008 218). The production history of *Peer Gynt* provides additional insights into why this interest endures, including on the global stage. Questions of modernization and modernity arise in productions which combine some altered version of the text with local theatrical elements. Thus, setting becomes a crucial aspect of interpretation, as I show in Chapter Three. Even the understanding of Peer's fate—to be melted into nothingness—is reinterpreted by Japanese

scholar Mitsuya Mon as a not undesirable phenomenon. In my own early readings of the play, I had the same reaction. Why not think of it as assimilation into the oneness of all? That is certainly a stretch from Ibsen's time, but pertinent to those of us steeped in comparative religions, including beliefs from Eastern or Western mysticism. Reading Fosse's many essays opened my mind to fresh readings of *Suzannah*. Each time I sought a passage to cite, I found myself falling a little bit more in love with the play. I came to admire Fosse's willingness to not reach a conclusion, to end in ambiguity, after exploring Suzannah's depth of feeling and poignant memories. Reading *Suzannah* simultaneously with *Peer* Gynt heightened my appreciation of Peer's homecoming where he finally finds his interlocutor. To be heard, to be seen, to be recognized in one's soul, are perhaps the greatest gifts someone can bestow on their beloved. Suzannah and Peer were two of the lucky ones, to have had this experience at least once in life. Even though it is easy to forget, I am reminded to remember my blessings, even in the midst of troubled memories or two a.m.'s existential crises. Secondary sources draw to my attention the value of the unforgettables as I lie awake in fear or despair. There is gold to be mined within.

Fosse's road to international acclaim initially by-passed British and American theater, and *Suzannah* does not appear to be among his more popular plays. Its production has been limited to the original NRK rendering in 2004 and a Swedish production in 2005, for which the critical reception was favorable (and its restaging at Oslo's Ultima music festival in 2006). In general, for American critics, the pacing of Fosse's plays, with its characteristic pauses and repetitions, may be perceived as boring or insufferable. Indeed, productions of his plays may succumb to certain clichés which contribute to these feelings. Although theater audiences are not required to read Fosse's many essays, perhaps aspiring directors of his plays would do well to do so. The essays reveal Fosse's fascination with loss, grief, silence, and negative mysticism. Apprehension

of these states is achieved through listening for the "mute voice," as Fosse puts in Akerholt's translation of his essays (82). In a bit of synchronicity, the quotation in my desktop calendar for Saturday, January 14, 2023, was from Rumi (source not cited but oft-quoted on the web), "there is a voice that doesn't use words. Listen." It may be necessary, as Carole di Tosti writes, to "settle back, let go, and not resist" in order to hear this silent voice coming through Fosse plays. As for myself, repeated readings of the play have only served to pique my interest in someday, maybe, staging the play. Let me get just a little bit older, and I can cast myself as Old Suzannah. (Here's me crossing my fingers that my memory holds up! Those initial eighteen pages of monologue would be daunting at any age.)

Chapter Two: Constructing Age and Aging in *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah*

In close readings of the plays, I unpack the five thematic categories that they share, that is, the physicality of age, gendered attitudes and beliefs about age, the mystery of time's passing, and making sense of a life. (The fifth category, setting, was fully explored in Chapter Three's performance analyses). To review, Ibsen delays physical decline and Fosse accelerates it, thereby allowing us to interrogate physical decline's association with old age. Peer remains sturdy and vigorous through all five acts. When he collapses in middle and old age, it is because he finds his existential crises unbearable. Late in Act Four, he can no longer sustain himself with performances of youthful vigor and succumbs to madness but has somehow recovered by the beginning of Act Five. When in at the end of Act Five, Peer finally collapses in the lap of Solveig, it conjures images of Michelangelo’s Pietà sculpture, which Reinert, among others, notes. Meanwhile, all three Suzannahs perform various stages of arthritic stiffness. Young Suzannah begins the performance in her imagination, Middle-Aged Suzannah complains of some pain, and Old Suzannah embodies it fully with Fosse's frequent references to the use of her cane,

a grimace of pain crossing her face, and walking slowly. The Suzannahs' disability does not define them, but it does provide a physical link among them. In the end, physical ability, or the lack thereof, takes a backseat to the inner world of Peer and Old Suzannah.

I noted how gender differences nose their way into the representation of age in the two plays, beginning with the authors' definitions of middle-age. Peer is middle-aged past 50 years old (Basting's "mature, vital adulthood"; 18) whereas Middle-Aged Suzannah two decades younger. The playwrights continue this distinction through the eyes of the characters. From the outset Peer defines Solveig, whom he first meets when she is about at about sixteen years old and holds "en Salmebog" ("a book of psalms"; 24; Hill 188), as being virtuously innocent. He freezes this perception as reflected in his Act Four vision of middle-aged Solveig singing, "*lys og smuk"* ("fair and lovely still"; 109; Fjelde 133). Ibsen reinforces this idealization at the end of Act Five when Peer declares of Solveig "Min Moder; min Hustru; uskyldig Kvinde!— / O, gjem mig, gjem mig derinde!" ("My mother; my wife! You innocent woman!—" / "O, hide me, hide me within!"; 170; Fjelde 209"). Fjelde inserts a note after this last line to lead the reader to the Bible's John 3:3-7 (228), in which the Pharisee Nicodemus asks Jesus, in verse 4, "'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'" (837). Steeped in religious references as *Peer Gynt* is and the community of readers of the 19th century would be, it is no stretch to read this as Peer asking to be enveloped by Solveig as if he could return himself, through her, to the innocent he was *in utero*. Lacking the cloak of religious innocence, the other women—from Ingrid to the Herd Girls to the Greenclad Woman, to Anitra—are incapable of providing Peer with anything more than temporary distraction or solace. I was happy to reframe the roles for these women in my playscript. It seems to me our times call out for just such a retelling of *Peer Gynt.* Perhaps my NAYSAYERS will manifest

themselves in real life and embark upon this project, whether with me, through me, or for me. And yet, and yet, I never fail to be moved by Peer and Solveig's reunion. It took a long time to reconnect, but sometimes it does seem to take decades to connect with one's beloved. One time, at a training for one of the chiropractic techniques I use, the speaker asked those of us in the audience, "how many of you have gotten to the sweet side of the troubles in your relationship?" The woman next to me said, "after twenty years, I couldn't take it anymore." I thought (based on personal experience) but did not say aloud, "you should have waited a couple more years." Of course, she did the right thing for her, but Ibsen shows us that it can seem to take a very, very long time, and that it might be worth the wait.

In contrast, in reading their monologues, we see that the Suzannahs define themselves not so much by age as by their relationship with Ibsen. They conclude that they *are* Ibsen. Nevertheless, the Young and Middle-Aged Suzannahs work through concerns about their appearance, that is, that they are or were ugly and clumsy. This self-perception lies behind the two older Suzannahs' concerns about the younger, prettier women who were drawn to Ibsen. However, in their case, neither innocence, virtuousness, nor religiosity figure into their reflections. Their meandering monologues leave the impression of lifelong assertion of individual agency, in contrast to assumptions about women's roles in the 1860s. Perhaps this arises in part from the historical Suzannah's stepmother, the cigar-smoking Magdalene, who saw to Suzannah and her sisters' education and was a leader in the cultural life of Bergen. I believe Fosse incorporates the sense of this blending of environment arising from the father-minister and the bordering-on-Bohemian mother. Fosse understands the influence of this childhood when he writes about Young Suzannah as taking charge of her relationship with the young Ibsen. She decides that they will be married. Middle-Aged Suzannah is no longer starry-eyes and wonders

why the younger women are attracted to "the pokey, fussy man" (113) that is her husband, and she concludes that Ibsen needs her. Old Suzannah never expresses doubt about her reflections, even though she may hesitate about the clarity of her memory. She has become independent of Ibsen, not because he has died, but because she has had a lifetime to interrogate the choice she made as a young woman. I was once starry-eyed. And after that it turned to disappointment and bitterness. Now, much later, on the sweet side of all that, I still need to consciously stop myself, to actually see my husband, to hear what he has to say without judgment, to know that he has an independent existence outside of me. Even though I am not widowed, I fully relate to the three versions of Suzannah. I seek to observe my own memories and feelings without necessarily telling myself some story about them, because no story would be large enough to encompass the totality of our life together. *Suzannah* showed me that.

A certain mystery surrounds time. Neither a ticking clock nor the changing seasons necessarily correspond with our subjective experience of time. A few minutes may seem to drag on into eternity, or old age may appear suddenly, as if out of nowhere. Ibsen's use of the Greenclad Woman reflects the latter, whereas the entire play of *Suzannah* reveals that we can be time travelers within the state of omnitemporality. My son-in-law once said to me, "waiting is a gift. Use it wisely." Old Suzannah expresses this wisdom by taking the time to reminisce. Behind both perceptions of time lies the inevitability of death. Like Old Suzannah, we may savor it and allow it to drive us into the unforgettable. Or, like Peer, we can ignore it, deny it, evade it, or negotiate with it but never yield to it. Suzannah finds something indefinable in the spaces between her husband's hands as Fosse did while gazing upward through the branches of a tree. Peer buries himself in his mother-beloved's lap. Despite these differences, both Ibsen and Fosse remind us that we cannot quite apprehend our own mortality. It is (perhaps even almost to the

very end) just out of reach, at the next crossroad. When my 87-year-old father died, at the end of a short bout with pneumonia, my mother said, "Oh! He's leaving me!" She was shocked by the relative abruptness of his departure. Now, she said (at least in our most recent phone conversation—I'm fully aware this could have been a reflection of a passing mood), "I'm ready to go." Her timeline about past events is becoming confused. It still matters to her to get it right, but thanks to Fosse's omnitemporality, I can reframe what this means and refrain from trying to correct her. We do not get to know when the end will come (five years? tomorrow?), but the not-knowing provides a space for me to practice just being with her. More connected than the Suzannahs, but at the same time, like them, not interfering with each other. At the end they sit together at the dining room table in silence. I now see this as the silence of eternity, in *Suzannah* and in my relationship with my mother.

Returning to the question that began this dissertation, the penultimate emergent theme of the five asks, "what does it mean to grow old?" This dissertation has demonstrated that there is no one answer to this question. Rather, there are multiple meanings, even within one individual (or character in a play). For some it is a time of *reviewing the past* in order to create a master narrative of one's life. Such review may be accomplished while sitting in quiet solitude, while at other times it may be found in social interaction with family and friends of various ages and/or with peers in retirement apartments or villages. Neither tendency precludes reflection and eventual access to Cohen's *summing up*. Robert Butler points out that the emotional reality of the process has much to do with the presence or absence of unresolved conflicts left over from youth. Interestingly, both Peer and Old Suzannah wrestle with such conflicts but in entirely different ways. Peer distracts himself by becoming a successful entrepreneur but is then forced to confront them in Act Five. Ibsen so skillfully puts the squeeze to Peer. There is seemingly no

escape from his existential dilemma. But rather than seizing the opportunity to figure out who he is, he deflects, avoids, and finally regresses. Old Suzannah, however, takes the time to reminisce about certain troubles from the past, such as her appearance, Ibsen's drinking, their earlier poverty, and Ibsen's attraction to younger women. Neither she nor Peer arrive at a master narrative. Peer returns to Solveig and allows her to define the meaning of his life. The Suzannahs sit together non-dialogically at their table, still wondering when Ibsen will arrive. However, the journey to the end of the plays has certainly allowed us to speculate about the meaning of their, and our own, lives. Both plays offer the opportunity to think about how we would like the end of our lives to look, feel, be.

Chapter Three: Performing Age and Aging in Productions of *Peer Gynt* and *Suzannah*

This chapter begins by reviewing possible meanings of performance, as applied to either a person in daily life or to a character in a play. In both cases, the primary meaning is that performance is a behavior that is meant to change the action of another person or another character. Moreover, in folklore, the performance is explicitly meant to elicit an energetic exchange between performer and audience. With this foundation I explored three productions: (1) the Peer Gynt Festival's DVD recording of the 2016 production; (2) *Gatas Gynt*, a film adaptation of Act Five of *Peer Gynt;* and (3) the 2004 NRK production of *Suzannah.* My interrogation asked several questions regarding how the productions interpreted aging. Did they reflect, add to, or diverge from the texts? If so, in what ways? Do the performances ignore, amplify, neutralize, or resist the peak-and-decline narrative? Where do we find the "immensity of the conscious experience of age"? Within the characters? The actors? Or the audience? These two plays offer multiple answers, and at the same time they just scratch the surface of possibilities. Performance of age may be explicit or implicit, but in either case is revealed

through scene or set design, costuming and makeup, and the actors' physicality and vocalization. I began the chapter with an exploration of how the setting influences these questions.

Arne Næss writes about the natural landscape as a metaphor for life, and his insights apply to how our feelings are affected by the setting, "from the vile to the sublime" (1). Elinor Fuchs applies this sentiment to the world of the play when she asks, "what is space like on this planet?" (2004 6). The settings of the three productions differ greatly, from a rural, mountainous landscape, to urban locations frequented by unhoused people, to the dark interior of Suzannah's apartment. Despite these differences, the setting of each production evokes feelings about aging and death such as fear, loneliness, and grief. Each in its own way expands and illuminates what the texts suggest about old age. In the Festival version of *Peer Gynt,* the lake and surrounding mountains provides a backdrop to the playing area which leads the audience's vision to the sky above and thus, possibly, to a feeling of infinitude and its temporal mate, eternity. The playing area itself allows for action that rises and falls when played on the two surrounding mounds or implied by the wedding guests who gaze fixedly upwards to "watch" Peer's abduction of Ingrid. The mountainous setting invokes much of what Næss observes about the range of emotions triggered by nature. As someone once said to me, to emphasize its dangerous side, "nature wants to eat you." You can fall off a cliff (not being saved by riding a buck into the lake below), drown in the sea after your boat explodes, or freeze to death walking barefoot through the snow. When Lake Gålå stands in for the Mediterranean Sea, Peer's arrival on water skis and the explosion of his boat far offshore, captures both the fun, beauty, and dangers of untamed nature. Nature has its own story of immensity. The expansiveness of the Festival setting contrasts intensely with the sense of contraction of the settings in *Gatas Gynt.* Even though most scenes are set outdoors, the opening sequences are set on a subway platform, with fluorescent lights harshly illuminating the

gloom. When the scenes move indoors (for the documentary footage) or range across the rougher edges of Oslo, the decay stands in for the decline of the aging body. However, the vigorous spirit of the cast members belies acceptance of physical decline as in any way suggestive of moral decline. They are not a reflection of May's warning about exempting the aged (or otherwise marginalized people) from agency and ethical responsibility. That they have not internalized such clichés is revealed when they question their own actions (delineating the difference between stealing and taking things left behind) and the actions of Norwegian society as a whole (Schønhardt discussing the decrease in compassion as Norway's wealth has grown). The setting becomes old age's failing body, and it evokes certain feelings about old age, but like my artist friend, neither the setting nor bodily limitations define the person.

Both Peers are disconnected from meaningful relationships, but Old Suzannah's isolation dwarfs theirs. The dark blues and greens of the interior setting colorize the intensity of her grief. Moreover, the sparseness of the apartment's furnishings creates a sense of emptiness and loneliness, as does the background music. This empty space is an ideal setting for the internal expansion imagined by Old Suzannah and enacted by each of the three Suzannahs. The ticking clock, although it takes us out of Fosse's omnitemporality, does function as a reminder of the slow passage of time when waiting for someone as well as the fact that time marches onward to one's own death. The table at the center of the action itself serves as a metaphor for the three ages of Suzannah, depending on how it is decorated. At the end, they gather around the table, still not interacting, not speaking to each other, each lost in her own interpretation of waiting. How do I interpret the waiting of now-deceased elders in their nursing home rooms? My maternal grandmother, when last I saw her alive in her 90s, was a silent bag of bones lying asleep in her bed. Her husband, on the other hand, although suffering from pain, was still cracking jokes, one

of which could have been taken as racist, as my uncle certainly did. He was highly embarrassed by my grandfather and tried to shush him. In quiet times between visitors, was Grandpa waiting for his wife to die? Was he savoring his memories? Now, just recalling my visit, I feel a rush of love. I do not think it is primarily my love for him, but his love for his wife. Does Suzannah's love for Henrik seep through Fosse's play? I think any staging of the play would do well to take their love as a given and build the rest on top of that.

The appearance of the characters reveals much about our attitudes and beliefs about age. Should old people not only *act* their age, but also *dress* their age? I often find myself preferring casual or athletic clothing that an older woman maybe shouldn't wear, except to work out. During the early days of the COVID lockdown, I made an entry on my Facebook page: "Today I felt like dressing up, so I put on yoga pants instead of sweats." Lockdowns reinforced my introverted nature. Except for time spent in my clinic, I haven't changed my leopard spots. I still favor funky sweats, merino wool base layers, and down vests for day-to-day life. Meanwhile, I admire older women who make the effort to gussy themselves up a bit in order to go grocery shopping. I recognize that doing so most likely gets them better service. The Suzannahs lived in a time of more formal attire, but I felt a kindred spirit in Young Suzannah who flung her legs over the arm of a chair or slumped down onto the floor. On the other hand, Old Suzannah is primly dressed in a black dress, a reflection of her social standing as well as her state of mourning.

The old Peers wear worn-out clothing, just as they themselves are worn out, physically and psychically for Peer in *Gatas Gynt* and just psychically for Peer in the Festival production. Søberg's Solveig wears casual clothing and rejects any notion of sexual attraction between Solveig and Peer. Not for her the wild, lustful Peer whose trysts with Ingrid, the Herd Girls, the

Greenclad Woman, and Anitra, contrast with his idealization of Solveig. The rapidly aged Greenclad Woman, her wreckage on full display, exemplifies the folly of a woman not dressing her old age. Meanwhile, middle-aged Peer, in the Festival production, initially escapes criticism for his appearance in youthful beach attire, but Anitra's treatment of him reveals his foolishness in acting and dressing like a young man. These scenes demonstrate society's enforcement of clichés of aging. Such social pressure escapes the characters and actors of *Gatas Gynt*, but the destruction by fire of Peer's already tattered clothing vividly reflects the decay of aging. This Peer's aging (like the Festival's) is more a result of his difficult life (just where was Peer in the 30 years between Acts Four and Five?) than chronological aging. But neither Peer is defined by this ruination. The closeups of the faces of the old characters in all three productions reveal as much or more than the costuming. The wrinkles, crevasses, and sagging skin leave no doubt about the physical process of aging. However, lived-in faces such as these can convey so much of the character's inner life that all three productions wisely avoid any attempt to cover up the reality, nor is there any need to enhance the effect through makeup. Only in the Festival's fourth and fifth acts is Peer's face theatrically aged with the addition of lines across his forehead and deepening of his nasolabial folds. In this production, the equally aged Solveig has become a mirage on the lake, lit from below as she rows back and forth.

How to dress my age? Should I wear dress slacks and jacket over a silk blouse? Not for me, unless I am, for example, presenting at a conference. I am grateful to live in Seattle where norms are very relaxed around attire. No doubt there are enclaves of older women, both in Seattle and in the Eastside suburbs, who dress up to go shopping. Bless them all. What these plays do is give food for thought about attire as another aspect of performance. When I taught Norwegian for a year, I wanted to perform a college instructor. When I go to my clinic, I seek to

perform a competent, caring doctor, without succumbing to wearing a clinic jacket—too sterile for the friendly atmosphere I hope to create. The plays draw our attention to what version of ourselves we portray in which circumstances, allowing us to play with *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, as Goffman titled his book from 1959.

Fortunately, none of the actors succumbs to aging clichés in the physical portrayal of their characters. Their performances of agedness are rendered with subtlety, as when the Festival Peer carefully assesses the distance from a rock to the ground before jumping, or when Old Suzannah walks carefully with a cane. She does not stoop over or lean heavily into the cane, nor does she exaggerate a need for help with her balance. Schønhardt's Peer slumps in times of despair, but he maintains access to his youthful swagger. Ousdal generates a sense of Peer's aging by the slowing of his gait and the absence of his youthful acrobatics, but his posture is still flexibly erect. Old-age clichés are left to the Troll King with his bandy-legged, hunch-backed (but still nimble) gait. For both Peers, the difficulties of their pasts creep into their posture when they confront their existential fears, as during the onion-peeling lines of dialogue. But both maintain Ibsen's description of Act Five's Peer as being a vigorous old man, deviating only as the emotional journey of the character demands. The slowing of the eponymous characters in movement is echoed in each actors' vocalizations, especially in the use of pauses. The pauses allow time for reflection and contemplation and give the impression of thoughts and feelings bubbling to the surface from the characters' inner depths. The words and pauses, as Ruth PePalileo points out, create a score for the aged voice (129). As I wrote, these silences allow the audience to catch up, to feel, to elaborate their own imaginings as they enter the *mysterium.* The training of the professional actors allows them a great range of vocal expression in tone, pitch, and volume. Ousdal plays with Ibsen's ample use of exclamation points by speaking

emphatically when telling tales, flirting, or hiding in the mountains. He also finds moments of softness, for example, in the face of his mother's death at the end of Act Three. And even though Foss, playing Old Suzannah, overuses the falling of her voice at the end of her lines, none of the actors depends on a failing old voice. Schønhardt, though not a professional actor, has considerable vocal range, as demanded by his interpretation of the script and as revealed in the documentary scenes. In these scenes, laughter, reflecting the actors' humor, dominates their interactions or ironic self-reflections. When I find myself stuck in a lower register, I may remind myself of my own training, and remember to experiment with the pitch, pace, and power of my voice.

Chapter Four: A Phenomenological Study of Volunteers with the Peer Gynt Festival Using Arts-Based Research Methods

Age mostly disappeared from the conversations with the volunteers, but it was inherent in the background of their experiences. My hope in writing this chapter was that the reader might use the framing of the script and the script itself (where age is primarily subtextual) to interrogate their own conscious experience of age. Patricia Leavy has led the way in the creation of Arts-Based Research, a relatively new approach to communicating research findings. She began by turning her social science data from interviews, surveys, etc., into novels. She has stated that her first attempts were "not very good" but that "a mediocre novel will have a much greater influence than the best-written journal article."[81] I took this disclaimer as permission to begin my own explorations into arts-based research. I find that writing a playscript based on interviews is different from writing a playscript meant for production based solely on my life experience. Despite different source material, however, to my delight, imagining the world of now fictional

[81]Class notes, IMD Core Seminar I, Graduate Certificate Program in Medical Humanities, University of Maine (via Zoom), October 9, 2021.

characters triggered a similar creative process. I can't answer the question, Where do the characters and their words come from? except to say from some combination of life, observation, the interviewees themselves, and perhaps even Fosse's silence, all melted down in the button molding ladle of my imagination. The interviews of three long-term actor-volunteers with the Festival production was long-delayed due to COVID lockdowns, but the travel window finally opened for a trip to Gålå in the summer of 2022. As it turned out, one of my respondents was able to meet via Zoom in June, before the trip. I interviewed the other two once I arrived in Norway.

In preparation, I devised a list of questions for these semi-structured interviews. My curiosity about the informants' experiences was the foundation for the list, while Glassie's classic, *All Silver and No Brass,* oriented me toward the larger phenomenon of ethnographic research as applied to a folk tradition. I outlined the similarities of the annual Festival production (and related activities) with the Irish Christmas mumming revival by using Glassie's five categories of survival, geography, performance, meaning, and function, leading to the self-evident conclusion that the Festival, like other folk traditions, depends for its existence on its volunteers. Besides this handy guideline, what struck me in reading Glassie was his respect for and deep connections with his informants. By living among local residents in 1972 and returning for a week in 1973, he was able fulfill his desire "to understand how real people endure moments of violent change" (xii). I, too, have made friendships among the Festival volunteers, and feel nostalgic about the experience. I have no desire to be a volunteer actor again, but the scene of the action still exerts its call. My list of questions served as a guide and provided a structure for comparison when performing my analysis. My respondents were happy to tell me about their experiences. The resulting playscript attempts to capture something of what motivates some

volunteer actors to return year after year, as well as their critiques of 2022's movement away from using mostly local volunteers in favor of holding auditions away from Vinstra itself. If this is a trend, the folkloric nature of the event may eventually be supplanted by a more corporate approach (but I do not mean to enter the debate about whether corporate events can be folkloric). At the same time, I gave voice to those who—for a variety of reasons—have left the Festival, some of whom critique the Festival operations and/or the play itself for its treatment of its female characters. Of course, the playscript is an invention, and it is not meant to be taken as a literal rendering of my analysis of the interviews or personal observations of the Festival phenomenon. Those elements provided the fuel for a another look at the Festival, and *Peer Gynt*, including the subtlety of age's influence. Subtlety does not mean unaware, and the "immensity of the conscious experience of age" (Fuchs 2014) is inherent in the history of productions, the natural setting, and the friendships developed over the years. It goes without saying that age requires the passage of years. The end result is a deepening sense of community, even family, among the participants. Each year, it is reignited among those who return, and the immensity of the experience is compounded, even if the conscious experience of age is set aside by the informants.

Concluding Remarks

Through the two plays and their three productions I have examined many possibilities for the meanings of old age. While I investigated age theory and its application to drama and used it as a framework for my text and production analyses, I witnessed the decline of my own aged mother. At the time of writing this paragraph we family members had recently celebrated her 96th birthday. Her balance is poor and her stamina is greatly diminished. She manages to maneuver around her home with the aid of a walker and has thus developed the stooped posture so typical of those who use walkers. Her voice is weak, requiring the listener to lean in closely to

hear what she has to say. And even though she frequently repeats certain key stories and insights from her life, she also surprises me with some new revelations from her past. She has lived a full life, without regrets, and remains emotionally and spiritually present. She expresses gratitude for the past and present, in all its immensity, even as she finally admits to a readiness to go home to her eternal rest in heaven. Through all the losses that a long life brings, her spirit remains lively. Her conversations reveal her insights and wisdom which continue to evolve. Seeing that her granddaughter and grandson-in-law were able to join the late night festivities in one of our hotel rooms because they set up a baby monitor in their room, she said, "I'll never criticize technology again." After this recent family gathering, I was left with the following impression of one way to grow old:

When the pieces and parts of life drop away,

love rushes in to fill the nooks and crannies.

All that's left is love.

At the end, Peer finds his version of love. Whether Old Suzannah is driven by love is entirely subtextual, left to the reader or actor to explore. The purpose of this dissertation has not been to define any particular way to grow old. Instead, I hope that it leaves each of us with the freedom to define our own old ages (if we get there) in whatever forms we wish them to take.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First of all, thank you for agreeing to this interview. As you probably know the purpose of this interview is to gather information for my dissertation at the University of Washington about volunteers' participation in the *Peer Gynt*-Festival—what the experience is like for you, and so on. I'd like your permission to record this session and to use the information you provide for my dissertation and potentially in an academic journal. Any use of this information will be made anonymously. Do you agree to this? _____ Thank you.

Since my dissertation project looks at the representation of age and aging in two Norwegian plays (*Peer Gynt* and Jon Fosse's *Suzannah)*, if you don't mind, I'd like to know your age.

Where do you live? What travel arrangements do you make?

How long have you been involved with the *Peer Gynt*-festival?

What drew you to participate?

How did you get involved?

In what ways have you participated?

What are some of your good memories?

What were your successes?

I know some people come back year after year, and that some people have grown up with the Festival. Why do you think this is so?

If you could wave a magic wand, is there anything you would change about the Festival or your experience with it?

In what ways does the Festival affect the community *of Sør og Nord Fron* or the larger area?

What other creative activities do you participate in?

What do you get out of your creative endeavors?

The play takes us from Peer's youth to middle age to old age. What insights about aging do you think people might get from watching these productions?