Mothering at Millennium's End: Family in 1990s Norwegian Literature

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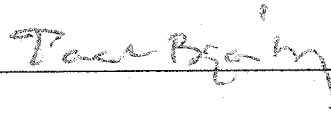

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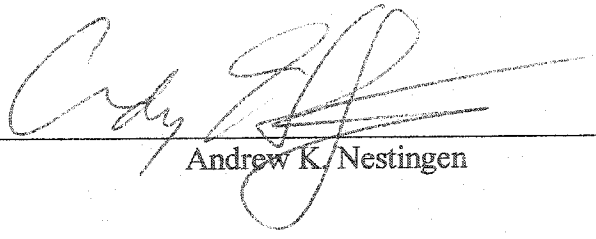

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Abstract

"Mothering at Millennium's End: Family in 1990s Norwegian Literature"

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Contemporary Norwegian literature received the label of "family literature" at the end of the 1990s, and this study investigates that term as a contested generational marker within a selection of novels from the decade. The overwhelming presence of mothers in this literature underscores the mixed opinions on what it means to mother, and narrows the focuses from the broad emphasis on the family. Whether she speaks in her own voice or if others speak for her, the mother is the catalyst of the plot and mark for familial success or failure. This body of literature provides a strong literary response to the renegotiation of motherhood and the family occurring in society at the end of the millennium. It questions the idealization of motherhood by creating bad mothers that rebel against societal norms. This study offers feminist readings of the representations of the mother in novels by Roger Kurland, Trude Marstein, Anne Oterholm, Tore Renberg, and Hanne Ørstavik.

The discourse surrounding this literature has been primarily concerned with the family, so this study begins with a historical look at the Norwegian literary milieu in the 1990s that anticipated and reacted to this emerging literature. The emphasis on the mother adds a distinctive component to the Norwegian discussions, and therefore requires placement within a larger context of feminist theory and feminist literary

criticism to substantiate the inclusion of mothers into this literary conversation. The majority of these novels is beyond the nostalgia for the nuclear family and opposed to a universal image of perfect motherhood. However, this literature does not undermine the position of mother even though the mothers appear as childless, excessive, and absent. A feminist reading of this literature exposes the idealization of motherhood, and transforms the negative images into a challenge for the reader to renegotiate her or his own opinion of what it means to mother well.

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Preface: The Birth of the Thesis

I must admit that when I started reading the literature for this project, I had high expectations for what I wanted to find in this body of contemporary Norwegian prose. My hypothesis was that Norwegian literature must have been saying something new and different about the family since the 1990s literary debate about "the family" was so heated. After reading Tom Egil Hverven's essay "Kjære familie, det finns ingen familie" ["Dear family, there is no family"], I agreed with most critics that there was something compelling about the notion of the family in this literature, but was dissatisfied with the theme.[1] Subsequent critical articles did little to clarify the situation, for they reported only how trendy it was to write about the family in the 1990s and seldom dug deeper into the issue. My tentative thesis posited this new literature as a point of convergence for the multitude of opinions on "the family" shared between feminist theory and literary theory in the 1990s. I assumed that the newest generation of Norwegian authors must be exploring their liberal sexuality by re-envisioning the family unit, and knew that there must be something radical about the literary representation of this age-old social construction.

Instead I encountered a plethora of authors—both female and male, all born after 1965, all debuting in or after 1993—addressing, either bluntly or discretely, the notion of "the family" in their texts, but not with the progressive slant that I had anticipated. There were no nuclear families, no lesbian or gay families, no interracial families, and no collective families, just average, heterosexual, patchwork families

[1] Tom Egil Hverven, "Kjære familie, det finns ingen familie," Vinduet 52.1 (1998): 4-14.

struggling to stay ahead of the daily grind like the overwhelming majority of today's Norwegian society. In fact, the closest thing to a visionary or new family model that I could gather from my reading survey consisted of an independent twenty/thirty-something protagonist (in a 3:2 female/male ratio) who was just starting/ending a relationship and had just birthed/conceived/debated conceiving a child. Interwoven in this contemporary familial debate was, of course, the protagonist's relationship to her/his disjointed family, one parent of which was either dead/non-participatory, and the other traumatically too near/far away in his/her physical/psychological relationship to be valued. It was an old story, and it inevitably took place mired in the routine details of the everyday.

My readings revealed my own preconceptions of a "liberal Scandinavia" compared to a "conservative America" and invalidated my goal to find a literature that embraced the sense of hopefulness of a society open to differences as envisioned by American feminist theorists. I wanted to be able point to newer Norwegian literature and to say that the exemplars of American gender theories rested in this relatively remote body of Northern European, pro-feminist literature. Here, I wanted to proclaim, was a localized literary model of the family, composed by a people no longer beholden to repressive behavioral norms for sex and gender, which handled the integration of heterosexual and homosexual families of different races, religions, cultures, ages, and economic situations. Instead, I found myself overwhelmed by a large number of novels and short story collections that presented painfully realistic images of the troubled family in Western, white, upper-middle class, more-or-less educated, ultra homogenous, non-religious, social welfare protected, and gender-conservative Norwegian society.

My resulting questions were twofold, first what to do with this surprising response, and then how to proceed with a thoughtful dissertation that tried to say something about these texts and their relation to Norwegian literature as a whole. It was impossible (and undesirable) to merge the different viewpoints in these texts into one ideal model that tried to claim "The Truth about the Family" in 1990s Norwegian literature. Composing only one narrative that attempted to tell the whole story of this literary experience would have silenced many of the competing voices intent on speaking, even in the homogeneity of this selection. My eventual realization was that the emphasis was not on the entire family, but that these texts specifically illuminated the mother. The zealous theoretical debates about mothers came to life within some of the characters of these Norwegian novels, and certain texts immediately stood out when I isolated mothers as the pivotal component of the family. This study engages the many maternal voices represented in a selection of newer Norwegian novels from the 1990s.

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of many influential institutions and organizations who fervently believe in cultivating the relationship between the United States and Norway. For financial support during dissertation preparation and research, I warmly thank the Fulbright Foundation, the Department of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Washington, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norwegian Information Service in the US, the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, the Sons of Norway, the Norwegian Commercial Club, and Nordmanns Forbundet. Your fiscal support was instrumental and generous.

To the energetic people in the Department of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Washington and the Nordisk Institutt at the University of Bergen I also offer my thanks. I am especially grateful to my Seattle adviser Jan Sjåvik, who has taught me a great deal about life and literature in rhetorical union, and my Bergen adviser Paal Bjørby, who has urged me to question the center and investigate the periphery. Thanks also to my committee members Lotta Gavel-Adams, who has shown me the value of a feminist perspective, and Andy Nestingen, who has encouraged me to ask tougher questions. To faculty members and fellow graduate students, it has been a pleasure to exchange ideas and criticism with you all during these productive years. You will be missed.

For the unwavering support through my entire education, I offer humble and heartfelt thanks to my family. More specifically, I thank my parents for my passion for reading, my little brother for my skill at arguing, my grandparents and tantes for my interest in Norwegian, and my dearest friends for my non-academic distractions and diversions. Without the love, patience, and encouragement of family and friends both near and far, this project would still be a distant dream.

DEDICATION

To my mother and my beloved friends,
for making me laugh.

Introduction: Listening to Mother Talk Back

A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.[1]

This dissertation offers an analysis of the mother as a subject in a selection of Norwegian novels from the late 1990s, a body of fiction commonly regarded as "family" literature by contemporary critics. Under the guise of the family label, this study argues that the Norwegian literary scene experienced a strong maternal turn in that decade as authors started to explore the mother from alternate perspectives that questioned the notion of ideal motherhood. A maternal paradigm shift began in the 1990s, and the literary concentration on mothers fed on the polarized debate on motherhood in Norwegian society. The decade witnessed substantial changes made to motherhood on political, social, and cultural fronts as the role started to evolve. That ideal image permeates Norwegian life, and this literature attests to the level of societal apprehension about how to define, appropriate, and renegotiate the role of mothers. As the epigraph suggests, it is not easy to displace embedded beliefs like the ideal image of the mother; hence, the extreme subversion of motherhood present in this literature triggered such provocation.

Contemporary Norwegian authors engage in a redefinition of the mother by telling maternal stories. The youngest generation of Norwegian authors confronts the

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 115.

relentless repetition of this maternal picture in their novels by creating bad mothers who defy and negate the patriarchal bastion of motherhood. Rather than propagating the myth of idealized mothering, these stories bring to light the seldom-discussed emotions and consequences of mothers who cannot live up to the pressure of being a perfect mother. Many authors allow the mother to speak in her own voice for the first time, telling of the struggles of mothering from her own vantage point. Female and male narrators who were not mothers also measured her to the narrator's own preconceptions of a perfect mom. The resulting stories of manipulative and destructive mother images shocked readers, even as publishers continued to turn out novels engaging this topic. These stories, set in the realistic world of the everyday, highlight the mother in peril: without her child, absent from her child, and obsessed with her child. Defamiliarization of everyday maternal situations invites a renegotiation of the reader's own understanding of what it means to mother at the turn of the millennium.

Chapter I gives a historical account of the anticipation and reception of 1990s literature, focusing on the rise of "the family" as a literary fascination. Before "the family" became a catchphrase for the decade, critics disagreed about how to talk about the literary spirit of the era. This chapter questions the validity of generation and the usefulness of dividing literary movements into decades, as many contemporary literary critics do. Although literary historians commonly assess literature in this way, it proves difficult to encompass the breadth of the 1990s within a system of neat boundaries. That said, the 1990s did witness the start of another generational redefinition of the family and motherhood in public discourse, and when Tom Egil Hverven made the connection

between these debates and literature, the effects of his categorization were sensational. The declaration of "the family" as the theme of 1990s literature provoked a twofold reaction, first against the act of classifying this literature as a decade, and then against the content of its strict parameters. The label ignited a raging debate, and this chapter identifies the divergent standpoints of some of the key cultural and literary discussants in that forum. This study engages both sides of the debate by acknowledging the undeniable presence of the family in novels written by the youngest generation of Norwegian authors, but then reading that familial emphasis as a clear focus on mothers. All of the authors discussed in this study debuted between 1994 and 1998, and their subsequent novels continue to address the intimate family relations in their literary contributions to this debate.[2] This study concentrates on the turn of the decade, century, and millennium in the hopes of understanding and encompassing the multitude of viewpoints that ignited controversy in the 1990s.

Chapter II contextualizes this emphasis on mothers in Norwegian literature by mapping elements of the conversation about mothers in feminist and literary theory. The historical, sociological, and political aspects of the maternal debate necessarily inform a literary study of mothers, so the chapter begins with a short interdisciplinary synopsis to inform the situation and clarify differences between terminology, as in definitions of motherhood and mothering. This chapter addresses the feminist critique of motherhood, and looks to several feminist scholars who have contributed to that ongoing dialogue in recent years. It also examines relationships between mothers and

[2] Roger Kurland is the exception. Kurland had a serious accident and was in recovery for many months in the late 1990s, but has a new release forthcoming.

the everyday as an arena of influence and subversion for ordinary acts, an observation that elucidates the construal of the negative maternal figure so prevalent in 1990s Norwegian literature. This chapter does not attempt to cover the entire debate on motherhood in feminist theory; however, it does present key scholars who influence the interpretation of mothering favored by the feminist literary reading in this dissertation. This study approaches this body of primary and secondary literature with a background in American critical and feminist theory, and tries to be sensitive to the similarities and differences in the Norwegian situation. Faced with similar scholarly concerns, Toril Moi is an important feminist scholar who encounters that divide. The chapter ends with a brief account of the history of the mother in Norwegian literary history, as a preface for the 1990s maternal voices discussed in the following three chapters.

The final chapters explore the literary applications of the previous discussions of families and mothers, and tease out the varying thoughts on motherhood in the novels of Roger Kurland, Trude Marstein, Anne Oterholm, Tore Renberg, and Hanne Ørstavik. These authors' texts stand at the fore of the body of contemporary Norwegian literature that presents a gripping but fictional account of mothering. These five authors captivatingly use and exploit the notion of motherhood. Most authors are beyond a nostalgic longing for the ideal maternal identity of the mother/child bond, and the narrators of their stories empty that romanticized construction to lay these preconceptions bare. It is refreshing to hear a maternal voice narrating many of these stories, and shocking to see how many male narrators still tell the mothers' stories in these novels. The split gender focus in this literature confirms that the topic of

motherhood is not just a "woman's question" that stems from a body of "women's literature" that carries less literary value. Some of the most critical and outspoken voices in these novels are the male narrators; their interpretations, criticisms, and reflections on the role of the mother are crucial in the ongoing creation of a well-rounded image of the mother. They often temper the analysis with insightful evaluation.

Chapter III features the mother without her child as she appears in Kjærlighet [Love] by Hanne Ørstavik and Avslutningen [The Conclusion] by Anne Oterholm. Drawing on Elaine Tuttle Hansen's thesis that literary representations of these mothers provide a clear inroad to a feminist examination of motherhood, this chapter looks at the maternal protagonists to gauge common difficulties with mothering and the response to these shortcomings. Both protagonists, Vibeke and Mona, lose their sons during the course of the novel, but readers are only privy to Mona's behaviors following that loss. These novels face the consequences of maternal negligence, unintentional or premeditated, as the mothers struggle with their own identity formation and subjectivity.

Chapter IV addresses excessive mothers in two dissimilar ways, but both provide striking commentary on the task of mothering. In Plutselig hører noen åpne en dør [Suddenly Hearing Someone Open a Door] by Trude Marstein and Matriarkat [The Matriarchy] by Tore Renberg, both narrators are obsessed with mothering. Marstein's nameless narrator thoroughly rationalizes motherhood to rescue it from the nostalgic cliché of the perfect mother, but she struggles to maintain her own ideals as she goes about the everyday act of mothering. Renberg's narrator Kjeran loves women, and

needs to be loved by them in return. Kjeran's romantic view of motherhood comes in conflict with three generations of women, and he cannot adjust to the maternal attitudes of his peers.

Chapter V compares the absent mothers in Anne Oterholm's novel ikke noe annet enn det du vil [nothing more than what you want] and Roger Kurland's novel Lekestue [Playroom]. Oterholm's unnamed mother is under constant observation by her doting brother, and he evaluates her behaviors according to his scale of maternal responsibility. Kurland's unnamed narrator comments on not one but every mother in his story, appraising the quality and quantity of mothering done by family, friends, and strangers. Although the narrators have differing goals and methods, their methods query the complex emotions surrounding mothers who distance themselves from their children. It is fitting that each of these novels features conflicting images of the mother, for the plurality of their perspectives and criticism reflects the openness and multiplicity inherent in a renegotiations of motherhood at the millennium shift.

Chapter I: The Family as a Generational Marker

Projections and Speculations for 1990s Literature

Helge Rønning warned his colleagues at the beginning of the 1980s to be wary of simple comparisons and alignments of the literary past in the Scandinavian *fin de siècle* of the 19th century to the approaching end of the 20th century. He was simply illuminating the disciplinary risk of historical classification and the resulting urge to compare this current era with Scandinavia's celebrated period of artistic creativity in the 1890s. Many others in Scandinavia were also wary of attempting to predict the literary future. When Vinduet editor Jan Kjærstad wrote to all 450 members of the Den norske forfatterforening [Norwegian Author's Union] asking them to speculate on characteristics, authorial problems, pressing themes, and narrative styles in the 1990s, only 22 authors responded to his inquiry. Kjærstad published all submissions in the 1989 journal edition, and the responses cover a wide range of topics and issues.[3]

Karin Moe's brief entry contained her predictions for women and literature in the coming decade, and many of her predictions came to life in 1990s literature. Moe reacted against the clinical study of language and hoped for a return to the inner and the personal:

> Samtidig foregår ein sosial innovasjon i kvardag og yrkesliv, langs språket, men med språk som eitt av mange måtar for kommunikasjon og samhandling. [...] Ei god kjensle av status quo er ein føresetnad for

[3] Vinduet 43.2 (1989): 31-71.

> forandring: kjernefamiliens orgie med hund og støvsugar etter frokost er overskridingar den eksperimenterande utan frokostduk [...] realismen høyrer korkje til i romanen eller i verda (70-1) [Simultaneously a social innovation is underway in the everyday and the workplace, through language, but with language as one of many ways for communication and trade. [...] A good feeling of status quo is an assumption for change: the nuclear family's orgy with dog and vacuum cleaner after breakfast is a transgression of the experimental without breakfast tablecloth [...] realism doesn't belong either in the novel or in the world].[4]

Contained within these few sentences of Moe's predictions for the decade are some of the same themes that this study emphasizes as actual manifestations. These include the increased attention to the everyday, the revolution of the nuclear family, and the re-emergence of realism. These three elements are crucial in a discussion of motherhood in 1990s literature, and will be investigated further in Chapter II.

The Search for the Novel of the 1990s

Although Kjærstad's query elicited negative and hesitant responses from Norwegian authors, other members of the literary scene were more optimistic about the potential relations between the 1890s and 1990s. On June 5, 1990, the Norwegian daily newspapers and literary journals published an advertisement announcing an award for

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[4] Karin Moe, "Det er kneet i utkanten av teksten som får deg på beina. 90-talet handlar om bakgrunnen som tilhøyrer ingen," Vinduet 43.2 (1989): 70-1.

the creation of the archetypical "1990s novel" by the following year. The bold, full-page advertisement has an easily recognizable content and design: a wizened Knut Hamsun stands menacingly posed as the patriotic Uncle Sam, pointing his finger directly at the reader/viewer over a headline that reads "Norsk litteratur trenger DEG som er FØDT ETTER 1960" ["Norwegian literature needs YOU who were BORN AFTER 1960"].[5] Both the phrase and image are reminiscent of the American "Uncle Sam Needs YOU" draft poster used during WWI and WWII. The powerful union sponsoring this literary recruitment, however, was composed of NRK P1 [the Cultural Editorial Office of the Norwegian Broadcasting Company] and Institutt for nordistikk og litteraturvitenskap [the Departments of Scandinavian and Comparative Literature at the University of Oslo], under the organizational efforts of the book club giant Bokklubben Nye Bøker [BNB]. The controversial advertisement named Hamsun's novel Sult [Hunger] as the quintessential novel of 1890s, a text written by Hamsun when he was thirty. Wanting to inspire their own national literary pride, the poster called for all not quite thirtysomethings to follow Hamsun's lead by capturing the essence of the new *fin de siècle* Norwegian generation in narrative form. The sponsors, in direct conflict with Rønning, were confidently hoping to elicit a corresponding masterpiece of equal value as Sult worthy of recognition at home and abroad.

Otto Hageberg and Hans H. Skei retell the entire process from their academic perspective and participation, and Hageberg reported that the initiative provoked "ikkje

[5] Kritikk (1990) 54.

berre aggresjon, også stor kreativitet" ["not just aggression, also great creativity"].[6] Forty-nine manuscripts were submitted to be judged by a committee of peers (all were younger than thirty). Hans Skei told of his pleasant surprise at the competition's ability to elicit such enthusiasm and to see "kor *produktiv* i tydinga igangsetjande for unge, skrivelystne menneske initiaitivet har vore" ["how truly *productive* the initiative has been for young people who want to start writing"].[7] Skei also reported that the student jury found very few so-called generational signs in the manuscripts, in keeping with their expectations. However, Skei did admit that there were a few apparent tendencies, including "ei litt annleis omverdsforståing og haldning til liv og samliv" ["a slightly different understanding of the outside world and attitudes to life and relationships." Skei also commented on the lack of "den språkmedvitne romanen som spelar med konvensjonar og genrar" ["the language-conscious novel that plays with conventions and genres"] that had been popular in the 1970s and 1980s.[8] Elin Brodin won the award in 1991 for her manuscript Døden ikke heller [Not Death Either]. Brodin extended the winning text into a novel, Bedøvelse [Anesthetized], which BNB published later that fall and marketed as the book of the month in October.[9] Although the novel was well received at the time, the hype about this "novel of the 90s" has not outlived the decade as anticipated.[10] It is worthy to note that the jury awarded the prize to a woman, and that Brodin took up emotionally troubling issues of the day like substance abuse, AIDS,

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[6] Otto Hageberg and Hans H. Skei, "Hundre år etter Hamsun: Bokklubben nye bøkers romankonkuranse," Norsk litterær årbok, (Gjøvik: Det Norske Samlaget, 1992) 222-241.
[7] Hageberg and Skei 232.
[8] Hageberg and Skei 233, 234.
[9] Hageberg and Skei 223.
[10] Elin Brodin, Bedøvelse, (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1991).

cancer, abortion, and eating disorders in her novels.[11] This recognition signals the lean toward socially conscious literature that continued to appear in various forms in the decade.

Lillesand Predictions

Hamsun was also the impetus for a seminar on the Norwegian novel and its readers in the 1990s; the seminar took place before the literature competition, but sponsored by the same power alliance of literary institutions. They held the seminar at Lillesand to honor and emulate Hamsun's famous lectures on new trends in Norwegian literature, delivered there in 1890. Organizers invited authors, editors, critics, journalists, and professors to weigh in on the status of Norwegian literature one century later, comparing the present to the past, and making projections for the future.[12] The thoughtful papers given provoked a broad base of critique on many issues, including Otto Hageberg's lecture on the expression of generation markers from 1890 to 1990. Hageberg articulated the differences between the oppositional forces of becoming a generation and intentionally being a generation, and showed further how that development hinged dangerously on today's media propagation of "fashionable" literature in a way that was incomprehensible in Hamsun's time:

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[11] Tom Egil Hverven was one of the jury members for this competition, an interesting connection and perhaps beginning to Hverven's later fascination with 1990s literature. The other members of the jury include Morton Harry Olsen, Ina Blom, and Bjarne Buset.

[12] Den Norske Bokklubben published the seminar proceedings in 1990, entitled Lillesand hundre år etter. The written transcripts of the seminar were transposed from the radio uptake of the sessions and written as essays in the book.

> Eg meiner likevel ikkje at det bak all utvikling og alle program i seinare år ligg eit audmjukt bukk til medieutviklinga. [...] Dei fleste litterære generasjonsmarkeringar i norsk roman litteratur etter 1890 let seg nettopp *ikkje* sjå i eit slikt perspektiv. [...] Generasjonen er eit genuint vitnemål om store sosiale endringar i det norske samfunnet frå hundreårsskiftet og utover. Det var ein generasjon som eigenleg slett ikkje trong rydda plass for seg; dei tolka ei tid som hadde behov for fortolking (42) [On the other hand, I don't mean that a humble attitude toward media development has driven all the development and programming in the latter years. [...] The majority of literary generational markers in Norwegian novels after 1890 specifically did *not* allow themselves to be see in that kind of perspective. [...] The generation is a genuine testimony to large social changes in the Norwegian society from the turn of the century and beyond. It was a generation that did not need to make a place for itself; they interpreted a time that had a need for interpretation].[13]

Hageberg doubted that external literary and sociological circumstances in the 1990s would be controversial enough to influence and sway literary developments in the way such events did in 1890. "Mitt synspunkt går ut på at dei ytre litteratursosiologiske omstende som eg prøvde å risse opp den gongen, ikkje er til stades på same måte i dag," (57) [My perspective is that the external literary-sociological conditions that I tried to

[13] Otto Hageberg, "Romanen som generasjonsuttrykk og generasjonsmarkering 1890-1990," Lillesand hundre år etter: benpibernes bøn eller hvad tiden kræver: Seminar om den norske romanen og dens leser i 1990-åra, Lillesand 28.-30. mars 1990, (Oslo: Den Norske Bokklubben, 1990).

carve out at that time, are not in place to the same degree today"]. Hageberg's analysis of the social and literary situation assumed that little could happen in the coming decade that could change societal life.

Both of Hageberg's predictions were fulfilled in the 1990s, primarily because the development of "the family" as a theme in Norwegian literature adhered to both of Hageberg's generational poles of being and becoming. As discussed later this chapter, many scholars agree that "the family" became a topic of literary value only after the publication of Tom Egil Hverven's essay. Interpreted in this way, Hverven created a generation of "familial" authors that he labeled as an entity. The authors themselves did not write about this trend in programmatic lectures or speeches as in Hamsun's day, but critics and the media sent this wheel spinning through the spaces of newspaper reviews and debates, journal articles, and radio programs that literally founded the movement. Therefore, the development of "the family" in 1990s literature was in keeping with Hageberg's predictions: critics built and drove a bandwagon to prove the existence of a fabricated platform. On the other hand, the solidarity of shared familial experiences between these authors grouped them as allies within their generation. Diverse in literary style, external social factors like age and common interests connect these authors and unite them as a group with shared concerns. Many critics have pointed to their collective childhood experiences as determining factors that link their authorial attitudes, behaviors, and choices. It is also possible to group them thematically, even though their narrative styles and approaches differ. When family values and the understanding of motherhood came under fire in the 1990s, these authors responded to

the societal anxiety that surfaced for their generation around this topic. The heated renewal of this and other social debates proved Hageberg's forecast for a less dramatic and influential cultural environment to be untrue. Many controversial things have affected the societal milieu, and thereby influenced the literature in the 90s, as the discussion about mothers in Chapter III will show.

Another prophetic voice at the seminar was Alf van der Hagen who, in an ironic summary of the weekend's session, encapsulated some of the most important arguments from the seminar into a list of what he hoped to read in the coming decade. Point 3 of this list orbited the desire for new trends and a name for the decade, questions he attempted to answer with the following suggestions. "En lansering: Nymodernisme. Fraværsmetafysikk. Søke sannhet vel vitende om at den aldri lar seg gripe. 90-tallet—sorgens og ironiens tiår. Rekonstruksjonisme" (203) ["A beginning: New modernism. Metaphysics of absence. Seek truth with the full knowledge that it will never allow itself to be caught. 90s—sorrow and irony's decade. Reconstructionism"].[14] Point 7 expressed a desire for closure, or an end of an epoch. In his words, one need not be "hegelianer for å ha sympati for den som håper på et 90-tall som syntesen av 70- og 80-tall. Av moralsk/umoralsk bevisstgjøring og tekstlig bevissthet. Dette er en vakker og umulig tanke, vel verdt å tenke" (204) ["a Hegelian to have sympathy with those who hope for the 90s to be the synthesis of the 70s and 80s. Of moral/immoral conscious acts and textual consciousness. This is a beautiful and impossible thought, well worth

[14] Alf Van der Hagen, "Hva jeg håper å lese i 1990-åra,"Lillesand hundre år etter: benpibernes bøn eller hvad tiden kræver: Seminar om den norske romanen og dens leser i 1990-åra, Lillesand 28.-30. mars 1990, (Oslo: Den Norske Bokklubben, 1990).

thinking"]. The final visible statement of his twenty-one point proclamation, point fourteen, called for the continued angst and absurdity of literature, akin to that found in Beate Grimsrud's novella collection from 1989. He cited her words before concluding with his own:

> 'Det ikke er tid som skaper oss, forandrer ... det er øyeblikk. Vet at bare de vakre, de vakre og svært brutale øyeblikkene virkelig har skjedd.' Jeg tror gode romaner—midt i en evindelig elektronisk tid—er slike vakre og brutale øyeblikk som skaper og forandrer (205) ['It is not time that creates us, changes … it is the moment. Know that only the beautiful, the beautiful and very brutal moments really have happened.' I believe good novels—in the midst of an everlasting electronic time—are such beautiful and brutal moments that create and change].

Van der Hagen's argument reached to the core of the literature from the decade, correctly anticipating and identifying it as highly emotional and controversial, especially due to the focus on internal family relationships.

Van der Hagen drew attention to three points that represent a critical juncture in the 1990s, namely a confrontation between literature and literary tradition, a synthesis of gender debates, and a pragmatic application of the everyday. Applying the Hegelian model to a rough sketch of the last three decades of Norwegian literary history, Van der Hagen finds the "thesis" of the 1970s centered on physical sexuality, political activism of the working class, and liberation of women from entrenched patriarchal roles. This led to a severely abstract and apolitical "antithesis" in the 1980s with a concentrated

metaphysical spotlight in Norwegian literature on what it meant to be a human being. Which logical conclusions do readers draw from a 1990s "synthesis" following this historical pattern? Indeed, a body of literature at odds with politics, gender roles, theory, emotion, religion, and truth, unwilling to break from traditional literary form and content but dissatisfied with just settling for the status quo. These are precisely the attributes that van der Hagen consolidated into his third point, and his summary echoed his wish for fusion. Van der Hagen's final point identified the feeling of discomfort inherent in this kind of study that centers on the moment and on the minute details of the everyday, but simultaneously signals the potential for change within this volatile space.

Elements of Hageberg and van der Hagen's predictions materialized in the 1990s, although critics hotly debated and contested their appearance in the literature, as the clear discrepancies in the decade's literary criticism show. Like the 1890s, the 1990s also stands as a testimony to large societal changes, contrary to Hageberg's prediction that our times are not revolutionary. Authors rallied around those collective experiences, attempting to display the change. Spurred by media proliferation, themes and trends spread more quickly than anticipated, creating a false sense of unity around the family. Several jumped on the family bandwagon, complimenting Hverven for his astute and observant definition, but many more were dissatisfied with a seemingly simple answer to a very complex and diverse body of literature. While the family does appear as a natural point of synthesis between the politically radical movements of feminism and communism in the 1970s and the metaphysical search for self in the

1980s, the more specific target of the 1990s by my reading is the mother. She is the logical synthesis in this survey of literary history, and yet no one knows quite how to handle her literary presence. Chapter II looks closely at mothers as a literary and theoretical concern, while this chapter continues to address the large issues of the family and its literary ramifications. Whether critics consciously created "the family" or it independently arose, it certainly exists as a theme in 1990s literature. Up to this point, it has been unsatisfactorily explained and discussed as a serious generational marker of the decade.

Critical Reception of 1990s Literature

If at the beginning of the decade scholars were leery of predicting generational markers or new directions in the literature from the 1990s, their general indecision at the end of the decade was even worse. Contradiction and disagreement replaced Van der Hagen's hope for synthesis, as evidenced by the polarization of opinions regarding this literature. The great breadth of 1990s literature was too vast to pigeonhole into one genre or form, and critics covered the entire good/bad continuum in regards to style and content. For every positive comment made, a negative reaction always counteracted it. When one critic praised the literature for being emotional and probing, another pegged it as superficial and shallow. The positive proponents of Norwegian contemporary literature made these generalized comments about the 1990s: the new narratives turned inward to the personal, the emotional, and the internal. Increased emotion signaled a general increase in the openness of the text; even though words were sparse overall in the terse

linguistic form, the novels conveyed great feeling. The increased attention to intimate detail also manifested itself in a heightened concentration on the realism and the everyday. Critics rallied against the moralizing and ethical turn of this body of literature, negating the value of the conservative emotions surround these intimate familial affairs. They read the pessimism and nihilism as part of the fragmented nature of the narratives, lacking clear direction and purpose. By my feminist reading, all of the increased attention to detail and internal emotion suggests a shifting trend towards the intimate realm of women. If authors and critics returned to realism and simplicity, then that could signal a definite endorsement of a feminist turn in contemporary Norwegian literature. This perspective was not endorsed by the majority of mainstream critics.

In truth, the decade was rich and diverse in focus, leaving great room for artistic freedom and creativity. Some of the other trends and catch phrases that surfaced during the period were sincerity, intensity, truth, new moralism, ethics, and non-existentialism. Others found traces of realism, modernism, romanticism, and postmodernism in the plethora of 90s novels, but no one style encompassed all of the novels of the decade. In his literary history, Øystein Rottem created an axis-list of seven major trends from the decade that were faintly present in the 1980s and flourished in the 1990s.[15] His classification included: 1) fantasy versus reality, 2) subjective expression versus objective description, 3) textual irony versus search for meaning, 4) complexity versus simplicity, 5) fragment versus "big" narrative, 6) minimalism versus

[15] Øystein Rottem, Etterkrigslitteraturen. Bind 3. Vår Egen Tid, 1980-1998, (Oslo: Cappelen, 1998. 707.

"encyclopediaism," and 7) (post)modernism versus realism. The comprehensive system excludes very little and speaks to the polarized differences discernable in the literature.

While Øystein Rottem left space for the broad spectrum of possibilities, other interpretations of the era were much more direct and restricted. Trond Andresen spoke plainly in his evaluation of the 90's literary dogma as "det depressivt-livstrøtt-ironiske samlivsskjemaet" ["the depressive-world-weary-ironic cohabitation scheme"].[16]

> Denne programforplikta dragning mot nihilismen, pessimismen, det 'melankolske' (et yndlingsuttrykk), det depressive, sadismen, etc. –fører til en (for meg og mange andre som leser mye) uinteressant strøm av nyere norske bøker som monomant kretser rundt 'samlivsproblemetikk': incest, familievold, annen vold, maktmisbruk foreldre mot barn og følgene av slikt for unge voksne, stoffmisbruk, alkoholisme, nervesammenbrudd, ulykkelig sex, sadistisk sex, meta-romaner om frustrerte forfattere som sitter pal og forsøker å skrive om frustrerte unge forfattere som ikke får det til (dvs. seg sjøl), etc. etc. Og som om dette ikke er nok, er mange av disse bøkene programmatisk 'ulineære' og 'fragmenterte' (enda et yndlingsbegrep) i formen, slik at de skal bli enda mer bare for de innvidde [This compulsory programmatic fascination with nihilism, pessimism, the 'melancholic' (a favorite expression), the depressive, sadism, etc. –leads to an (for me and many others who read widely) uninteresting flood of newer Norwegian books that

[16] Trond Andresen, "Litteraturjournalistisk dogmatikk," KK-forum 5 Feb. 2002, 22 November 2002 <http://www.itk.ntnu.no/ansatte/Andresen_Trond/kk-f/fra151001/0404.html>.

> monomaniacally hover around 'an ethics of cohabitation problems': incest, familial violence, other violence, power abuse by parents against children and the consequences for such young adults, substance abuse, alcoholism, nervous breakdowns, unhappy sex, sadistic sex, meta-novels about frustrated authors who sit continuously and try to write about frustrated young authors who cannot get it (i.e.: themselves), etc. etc. And as if this is not enough, many of these books are programmatically 'non-linear' and 'fragmented' (yet another favorite expression) in form, such that they become even more so for only the initiated].[17]

Andresen's characterization of the most recent trends in Norwegian literature was extremely critical, and he dismissed any productive element of these novels. By stamping these novels with his programmatic assessment, Andersen negated the potential for meaning creation and literary experimentation within the familiar stories and styles. The personal element was too invasive or uncomfortable for Andresen, and his response was to smother the entire movement. Anyone who stood outside this "narrow" focus was welcome to join him in his critique, and indeed some authors responded to his call and took the role of the critics upon themselves. Many echoed Andresen's disapproval, including Ari Behn, who rejected the mainstream literary establishment of the 1990s and everything it claimed to represent, willingly or not.

During the summer of 1999, Tore Renberg and Ari Behn exchanged a heated debate on the status of contemporary Norwegian literature. Renberg claimed that

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[17] Andresen.

contemporary Norwegian writers were living in time of prosperity as evidenced by the outpouring of excellent Norwegian literature. Behn adamantly disagreed, equating the majority of recent literature to homework written by diligent students keen on pleasing their teachers. There was no compromise struck between the two authors, and the sharp dichotomy present in their argument also divided the criticism from the decade. One of the controversial components was Renberg's call for the return of an emotional literature that has the power to affect and move the reader. The debate expanded quickly, and many critics weighed in on the issue. Some rejected the turn, like Trond Andresen, while others acknowledged and supported the intimate focus. Cathrine Sandnes described the new authors of the decade as "en generasjon som tar livet og litteraturen på alvor" ["a generation who takes life and literature seriously"].[18] Sandnes recognized that there was a clear moralizing trend in much of this literature, but she admitted that the comical element make it much more fun to read than literary moralism from the 1970s. Sandnes also described the authors' penchant for internalization in the 1990s as a contradictory reaction to authors of the Kjartan Fløgstad/Profil generation, and their tendency to analyze from a distance safely removed from the present. "Du kan plassere deg midt i verden og sates på at forandringen i samfunnet manifesterer seg i deg selv, at man har historien i seg" ["You can place yourself right in the middle and gamble that the changes in society manifest themselves in you, that you have the story inside yourself"].[19] Truls Lie also emphasized the ethical undertone in 1990s literature, where many novels feature "små intime fortellinger, suverene beskrivelser av egne

[18] Cathrine Sandnes, "Mellom ironi og inderlighet," Dagsavsien 31 Dec. 1998, 27 March 2003 <http://www.dagsavisen.no/kultur/1998/12/165995.html?string=hverven>.
[19] Sandnes.

verdener, [… og] sammenhengene i den lille verden" ["small, intimate narrative, superior descriptions of individual worlds, [… and] the connections in the small world"].[20] Taking another perspective as he summarized the use of reality in young Norwegian contemporary literature, Bendik Wold identified realism as the mechanism used to express sincerity and validity in our internal and external realities. "Kanskje kan vi uttrykke det så sterkt: Den nye litteraturen gjør seg åpen, mottakelig og utilslørt fordi den tilstreber en intervensjon—et faktisk sprang mot politikk og samfunn" ["Perhaps we can express it this strongly: The new literature opens up, amenable and unconcealed because it aspires to an intervention—an actual leap towards politics and society"].[21] Wold recognized a crucial element in the personal trend, namely that the personal is political. This mantra colors much of 1990s Norwegian literature, where the personal stands at the fore as a narratological and thematic device intent on conveying some of the emotion Renberg desired.

The Origin of "The Family"

History will remember Tom Egil Hverven as the person single-handedly responsible for bringing about the theoretical wave of "family" into the literature of the late 1990s, but the request for his significant essay came from the newly installed editors of the literary magazine Vinduet. In their introductory editorial, Nikolaj Frobenius, John Erik Riley,

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[20] Truls Lie, "Nærhet og langsomhet," Morgenbladet 29 May 1998, 24 Sept. 2002 <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=6691>.
[21] Bendik Wold, "Å rygge ut av et hjørne," Morgenbladet 29 Nov. 2002, 10 Dec. 2002 <http://www.Morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=1005503>.

and Tor Eystein Øveräs expressed their observation and intent for the family emphasis in their first-ever issue:

> Det er et trekk ved bøkene til mange forfattere som debuterer på 1990-tallet at de tematiserer en familie-erfaring. Flere av disse er unge nok til å være Profil- og 68-generasjonens barn, og orienterer seg i en annen retning enn sine litterære fedre og mødre. Der den eldre generasjonen konsentrerte seg om de store samfunnsmessige strukturene, og hvordan disse former våre liv, er den kommende generasjonen kan hende mer interessert i å utforske de nære og intime relasjonene i en familie-situasjon. Som redaksjon vil vi at dette nummeret av Vinduet skal speile og problematisere familiens plass i litteratur. [...] Disse tre artiklene trykker vi i håp om at de kan føre til samtale og debatt (1) [It is a feature with the books of many authors who debuted in the 1990s that they thematically present a family experience. Many of these are young enough to be the children of the generation of Profil and 68'ers, and they orient themselves in another direction that their literary fathers and mothers. Where the older generation concentrated on large societal structures and their effect on our lives, the coming generations are perhaps more interested in researching the close and intimate relationships in the family situation. As editors, we want this issue of Vinduet to reflect and question the place of the family in literature. [...]

> We print these three articles in the hope that they will cause conversation and debate].[22]

The Vinduet editors capitalized on the same impulses in newer Norwegian literature, discussed earlier in this chapter, sensing that something new had entered the Norwegian literary scene in the latter half of the 1990s. Frobenius summarized the change in scope by noting the change in perspective. "De store ideologiene er på vei ut, mens de nære relasjoner har fått mer å si" ["The big ideologies are on their way out, while the close relations have gotten more to say"].[23] Riley believed that young Norwegian authors exhibited something new and exciting in their novels, and that drastic changes in society had introduced new literary impulses into a previously dormant body of literature. As co-editor of the leading literary magazine in Norway, he saw it as the journal's goal to broadcast those innovations to their readership. "Det er enorme forandringer overalt i samfunnet, det vil vi fange. Foreløpig er det generasjonene før oss som styrer, men det er et generasjonsskifte på gang. Før første gang på tretti år vokser det frem en ny slagkraftig forfattergenerasjon" ["There are enormous changes everywhere in society, we want to capture that. For the time being, the previous generations dominate, but there is a generation shift underway. For the first time in thirty years, a new, effective generation of authors is growing"].[24] The energy and enthusiasm of the young authors spilled over into the young literary critics who were also keen to start something new.

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[22] Nikolai Frobenius, John Erik Riley, and Tor Eystein Øverås, editorial, Vinduet 52.1 (1998): 1.
[23] Morten Abrahamsen, "Nye visjoner i Vinduet," Morgenbladet 9 Jan.1998, 23 Sept. 2002 <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=3448>.
[24] Abrahamsen.

Responding to their initiative, Hverven's essay encompassed the editors' shared concerns. Norwegian critics granted the editors' wish for debate on the topic, for the entire journal issue and provoked intense debate among the literary community. Hverven's controversial essay postulated the family as the site of innovation between the individual and society in the 1990s. Like van der Hagen's desire for synthesis, Hverven read this familial juncture as the nexus of meaning for authors at the turn of the millennium. To defend his argument, Hverven presented literary readings of contemporary texts blended with his own experiences of growing up in a single mother household. This autobiographical journey into his troubled past was both his critical vehicle and his own way of dealing with his personal struggle with fatherhood. Not having a father for much of his childhood, Hverven admitted that the transition to become the father of three as an adult was challenging for him. Publicly he targeted the family as a hot political and social topic, mentioning the demise of patriarchy and the debate on children's powerlessness in society as two pressing current affairs that influenced the outburst of this literary trend. Conscious of this double-sided element, his readings were quick to condemn the obvious absence of the family in literary and theoretical debates in all disciplines. He used Arild Linneberg's angry text Far og barn i moderlandet [Father and Child in the Motherland] as a manifestation of the fact that nothing had changed with fatherhood in Norway since the 1950s. Hverven described the book as "det mest frastøtende jeg har lest om familien i nyere norsk litteratur" ["the most offensive I have read about the family in Norwegian literature"].[25] Both mothers

[25] Leif Høghaug, "Familiekritikeren," Morgenbladet 19 Nov. 1999, 24 Sept. 2002 <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=3633>.

and fathers, according to Hverven, were guilty of prioritizing self-realization over their children's well being, a natural result of cultural radicalism, the welfare state, and literature.[26]

Hverven's social sympathies were evident, and they carried over into his literary project. Hverven described his understanding of literature as human, and explained that term by calling it something to be experienced, something colored by the person who wrote it, and somewhere for people to meet; however, he argued that literature does not have an inherent moral imperative. "Tekstene jeg leser skal leses som litteratur, og ikke som veiledninger i hvordan vi skal leve som mennesker" ["the texts I read should be read as literature and not as instructions for how we should live as human beings"].[27] Yet even as he backed away from a moral measure, Hverven reinstated it in his spirituality. Perhaps the most argumentative element of Hverven's essay was his religious ending, which equated Jesus' privileging of the children in the New Testament to the renewed focus on the child against egotistic fathers and mothers in recent theory and literature. Using Hanne Ørstavik as his concluding example, Hverven cited his interpretation of Ørstavik's ethical goal in her novel Kjærlighet as a literary manifestation of the preference for the child. "Slaget rammer leseren desto hardere ettersom Hanne Ørstavik kaller fram et lite barn og stiller det midt iblant oss, midt i litteraturen. Barnet, Jon, framstår som ren utsatthet og sårbarhet" (14) ["The blow strikes the reader even harder since Hanne Ørstavik brings forth a little child and places him among us, at the heart of the literature. The child, Jon, appears as pure exposed

[26] Tom Egil Hverven, Å lese etter familien: forsøk om norsk litteratur på 1990-tallet, (Oslo: Tiden, 1999) 54.
[27] Høghaug.

position and vulnerability"].[28] By Hverven's reading, Vibeke, the antithesis of the ideal mother and wife within the family, becomes a shadow in the brilliant light of her child, Jon. Hverven repeatedly favors the child and father in his readings, rarely adding the mother in his analysis.

Hverven's essay was so controversial, that less than a year after its publication he released an expanded collection of essays on the topic in book form. The book allowed Hverven to extrapolate his theory to new novels and authors, and to give a public response to many of the criticisms his essay had received. The book was entitled Å lese etter familien: forsøk om norsk litteratur på 1990-tallet [To Read for the Family: Search for Norwegian literature in the 1990s], a cumbersome title that fittingly reflects the controversy surrounding the family in literary space.[29] While Hverven declined to attach firm meaning to the title, he ruminated over the openness of his topic in an interview, and speculated that the title actually created space for many readings. "Å lese for å lete. Lete etter familien. Eller rett og slett å lese etter at familien ikke lenger finnes, eller er blitt til noe annet. Og det er mulig det er flere betydninger" ["To read in order to find. Find the family. Or simply to read for the family that no longer can be found, or has become something else. And it's possible there are more meanings"].[30] He repeatedly stressed that reading literature for the family opens the possibility for freedom and change in familial relations. Yet Hverven's moral direction for literature and family structure excluded many perspectives, as evident in the criticism he received which will be discussed further in the following section.

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[28] Tom Egil Hverven, "Kjære familie."
[29] Tom Egil Hverven, Å lese etter.
[30] Høghaug.

Hverven continued to read the emphasis on the family in contemporary Norwegian literature as a safe middle ground for philosophical discussion. It offered an innovative solution to the constant battle between the individual and society often overlooked as a compelling element in their respective formation. He cited a number of scholars from other disciplines who had also set the family in the foreground, as for example sociologist Stein Ringen. Ringen maintained that the "family question" at the end of the 20th century was equivalent to the "worker question" at the end of the 19th century.[31] Hverven also quoted poet Friedrich von Hardenberg, better known by his pseudonym Novalis, who in a 1793 letter to his mother wrote that the affluence of the state depended on the well-being of its individual families. Hverven assimilated these notions and others to illuminate the irony that 1990s Norway, as one of the richest nations in the world at that time, had absolutely no prosperity in the nation's familial well being, although residents enjoyed an extremely high level of material comfort otherwise.[32] Hverven maintained that he was in search of a literature that could help increase the level of understanding and empathy for the changes happening in the family at the end of the 1990s.[33] Hverven wanted literature to show how to cope with feelings of nostalgia and adapt to a changing worldview, and he envisioned that the focus on the inner space of the family resulted from people desiring more integration and less autonomy in modern society.[34] Hverven saw literature providing negative examples of how families ought to be, and how parents ought to behave once they

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[31] Hverven, Å lese etter 53.
[32] Hverven, Å lese etter 60.
[33] Hverven, Å lese etter 68.
[34] Hverven, Å lese etter 73.

accept responsibility for a child.[35] In the midst of all these tangible, realistic perceptions of the personal, Hverven shied away from the grasp of postmodernism, a phase he projected will turn out to be a brief "parentes etter modernismen—og en parentes før det som kommer" ["parenthesis after modernism—and a parenthesis before that which is coming"].[36] He was unwilling to formulate what that might be or when it might begin as a component of his literary classification.

Criticizing "The Family"

Hverven's article and book of essays loosed a flood of criticism, but the ethical and religious overtones of his writings elicited the strongest criticism. Eivind Tjønneland read Hverven's metaphysical turn as a conversion; he compared Hverven's "finding the family" to some younger Norwegian authors' mission first to "find religion" and then rebuild the crumbing nuclear family on Christian foundations.[37] This critique of Hverven was exemplary of how Tjønneland viewed the entire decade, namely as a "verdikonservativ reaksjon" ["value-conservative reaction"] when compared to other literary trends through the ages of Norwegian literary history; he adamantly called for

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[35] Hverven, Å lese etter 88. Interestingly enough, one of the only positive family portrayals that Hverven found was the Asian immigrant family in Roger Kurland's 1997 novel Lekestue. That is rather amazing, considering the vast number of strikingly diverse contemporary Norwegian authors with whom Hverven takes issue, authors such as Hanne Ørstavik, Dag Solstad, Knut Faldbakken, Jon Fosse, Kyrre Andreassen, Lars Ramslie, Linn Ullmann, and Karl Ove Knausgård to name a few.

[36] Høghaug. Vinduet editor Jan Erik Riley shared a similar opinion in a Morgenbladet article. Riley stated that authors are blending all possible types of genre, moving us into a new period that has no name. (Morten Abrahamsen 9 Jan. 98).

[37] Eivind Tjønneland, "Familiesosiologiens mysterier," Morgenbladet 12 Nov. 1999. <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=6568>.

mobilization against the "nypuritanistisk landeplage" ["new puritanical nuisance"].[38] Tjønneland criticized Norwegian authors for failing to probe the troubling emotions expressed only superficially in literature of the 1990s. "Problemet er at ingen av forfatterne går inn i årsakene og forutsetningene for all kjedsomheten og melankolien. De går ikke inn i begjæret, seksualiteten, aggresjonen—eller mangelen på aggresjon som årsak til kjedsomhet" ["The problem is that none of the authors go into the causes and effects of all the boredom and melancholy. They do not look into the desire, the sexuality, the aggression—or the absence of aggression as the cause of the boredom"].[39] Tjønneland addressed a fundamental problem of this literature, namely its conservative nature, but he expected a traditional solution to the problem that did not include feminism. While many of Tjønneland's statements resonate with the tone of this dissertation, it departs by arguing that a new wave of feminism produced this rebellious reaction to these conservative values.

Other critics took an alternative stance to the melancholy in Hverven's chosen authors, attributing it to the disintegration of values that accompanied the dissolution of the nuclear family. Erle M. Stokke read the family influence as the outbreak of a new generation of coming-of-age novels where the common factor for readers and writers was parental detachment or abandonment. These novels privilege the child, according to Stokke, and exhibit shared characteristics such as "morsomme, tragiske, korte og lange skildringer av oppvekster der den splittede familien og mors eller fars forsvinning og fravær ligger i bunn" ["funny, tragic, short and long descriptions of childhood where the

[38] Jan Zahl, "En dårlig tid," Dagbladet 3 July 2000, 20 March 2003 <http://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/2000/07/03/209983.html>.
[39] Zahl.

split family and mom or dad's disappearance and absence rests at the core"].[40] Aage Storm Borchgrevink examined the move towards realism among some of the new authors at Tiden Forlag [Tiden Publishers], including Tore Renberg. Borchgrevink saw Renberg as an opposite counterpart to Roger Kurland and, to a degree, Tom Egil Hverven, who both invoked a new moralism in their desire for the reunification of the nuclear family. "I stedet for å tematisere hvor bra ting *kan* være eller hvordan de *burde* være, er disse forfatterne opptatt av hvordan det faktisk er" ["Instead of characterizing how good things *can* be or how they *ought* to be, these authors are interested in how things actually are"].[41] Borchgrevink assessed and then labeled this body of literature as hypernaturalisme [hyper-naturalism], and warned that the "eventuell genrebetegnelse måtte ta utgangspunkt i tekstenes virkelighetsforankring og høyde for det overdrevne i de absurdistiske og fremtidsvisjonære formene" ["eventual genre label must have, as its point of departure, the texts' anchoring in reality, and account for the exaggerated in the absurd and futuristic forms."][42] He ended his analysis of five selected novels with a description of the typical 1990s narrator as a nameless tourist passing through an airport, a vagrant without responsibilities or duties.

While some focused on discrediting the contents of Hverven's study, other stepped back to see what Hverven missed in his analysis. Kjell Olaf Jensen examined those young authors excluded by Hverven, especially those who did not fit the almighty father-image Hverven was so intent on portraying in his book, and wished for further

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[40] Erle M. Stokke, "Som om moren og faren din var skilt..." Morgenbladet 15 Oct.1999, 24 Sept. 2002 <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=3095>.
[41] Borchgrevink 2.
[42] Borchgrevink 11.

explanation as to how Hverven devised his familial canon.[43] Jan Inge Reilstad, in his comparison of Hverven and Linneberg, strongly criticized Hverven for his blatant defense and idealization of the nuclear family instead of re-evaluating the traditional definition. "Jeg er dessverre redd for at Hvervens artikkel en gang i fremtiden vil bli lest som et palimpsest for den overfladiske etiske vendingen i Norge mot slutten av årtusenet" ["Unfortunately I am afraid that Hverven's article will be read sometime in the future as a palimpsest for the superficial ethical turn in Norway at the end of the millennium"].[44] Even with a few years' distance to the controversy, Eirik Vassenden's analysis of Hverven's text had mellowed in tone but still his wish was for a more inclusive label:

> Det er viktig å ikke avgrense den seine 1990-tallslitteraturen under rubrikken "familien" slik vi av og til ser det gjort. Det gikk overraskende kjapt å kanonisere enkelte sentrale forfattere fra det seine 1990-tallet. […] Jeg savner en videre undersøkelse av hva som faktisk skjedde på litteraturfronten i årene 1995-1999. For meg står ikke forfatterne i denne epoken som en generasjon med familieforfattere [It is important not to limit the late 1990s literature under the rubric "the family" as we occasionally see it done. It went surprisingly quickly to canonize individual central authors from the late 1990s. […] I miss a further investigation of what actually happened on the literary front in the years

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[43] Kjell Olaf Jensen, "Hvor er litteraturkriteren?" Dagsavisen 24 Nov. 1999, 27 April 2003 <http://www.dagsavisen.no/kultur/1999/11/408412.html?string=hverven>.
[44] Jan Inge Reilstad, "Familien i vold," Vinduet 28 Aug. 1998, 24 Sept. 2002 <http://www.vinduet.no/tekst.asp?id=4&p=y>.

1995-1999. For me the authors in this period do not stand as a generation of family authors].[45]

Instead, Vassenden characterized the decade as encompassing sentimentality, sincerity, intimacy, self-reflection, self-torture, reality, and the repressive tolerance for excess. Vassenden attributed the collective search for reality as one of the major trends in the decade, as contemporary authors suddenly realized "hvor ufattelig stor og problematisk velstanden vår er" ["how inconceivably big and problematic our welfare is"].[46] Vassenden touched on a controversial aspect of judging the quality of the national literature. "Det eksisterer en nedarvet holdning om at litteratur er mindre avansert og sofistikert når den er direkte. Kanskje beveger vi oss nå bort fra den oppfatningen" ["There is an inherited opinion that literature is less advance and sophisticated when it is direct. Perhaps we are moving away from that perception now"].[47] Vassenden's recognition of the problematic relation to realism and the focus on the personal signals the difficulty Norwegian critics have taking intimate and everyday topics seriously.

One of Hverven's supporters was in fact author Tore Renberg, who matter-of-factly stated his defense of the familial subject matter in a lecture to American scholars of Scandinavian studies. "Vi skriver i ruinene av kjernefamilien, familiestrukturene har vært i enorm forandring i de siste tiårene, og det er bare naturlig at dette nedfeller seg i litteraturen" ["We are writing in the ruins of the nuclear family. Family structures have been through enormous changes in the last decades, and it is only natural that this

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[45] Marte Stubberød Eielsen, "En sosial vending?" Klassekampen 22 Mar 2003, 24 March 2003 <http://www.klassekampen.no/goto?lik=174667&view=print>.
[46] Eielsen.
[47] Eielsen.

materializes in the literature"].[48] Renberg thought it logical that the family should appear in the literature of our times; however, he distanced himself from a moral interpretation of its manifestation reminiscent of Hverven:

> Felles for flere av disse bøkene, er at de ved de problemene de tar opp, krever etiske og moralske funderinger av leseren. Ansvar, omsorg ... et fellestrekk er alvoret. De etiske fordringene, til og med imperativene. De gir ingen svar, men legger problemene frem. [...] [S]elv om alle til alle tider er dømt til å ha en far og en mor, så har vi vokst opp med helt andre strukturer enn de gjorde på 50- og 60-tallet [Common for many of these books is that they, with the problems they take up, demand ethical and moral speculations from the reader. Responsibility, compassion … a common theme is the seriousness. The ethical demands, even the imperatives. They give no answers, but set forth the problems. […] Even though everyone always will be sentenced to have a father and a mother, we have grown up with completely different structures than they did in the 50s and 60s].[49]

Renberg told a captive audience that the most innovative Norwegian literature was being written by authors aged 20-45 (himself included!). Renberg optimistically hoped for a balance between "sak—70-tallet—og estetikk—80-tallet—forent i våre følelser. Dette er et optimistisk standpunkt. For meg er det en ideell litteratur" ["cause—70's—and aesthetics—80's—combined in our feelings. This is an optimistic standpoint. For

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[48] Tore Renberg. "Tale for den samtidige norske romankunsten," Vinduet 3 Mar. 1999, 8 Oct. 2002. 1-15. <http://www.vinduet.no/tekst.asp?id=166>.
[49] Renberg 7.

me, this is an ideal literature"].[50] The family was not a new topic, but it provided the perfect opportunity for authors to mix realism, minimalism, religion, and gender under the umbrella of one strained social condition.

Realism

A few years after the visit to the USA and the debate with Behn, Renberg revised his perspective and published a literary manifesto in the newspaper, advocating for more diversity within Norwegian novels. Renberg found it alarming that so many of his contemporaries continued to write from inside "en temmelig realistisk normalprosa, og benytter seg av tidens metaforer" ["a rather realistic normal prose, and employ contemporary metaphors"].[51] Renberg called for an anti-realism movement and a stylistic rejection of normal prose. "Flat realisme har stått til rors 90% av tiden vår litteratur har eksistert. Dette preger oss, og det gjør bøkene tørre og kjedelige. Man har overvurdert det re-presenterende, umiddelbart gjenkjennelige elementet ved litteraturen" ["Flat realism has been at the helm 90% of the time our literature has existed. This influences us, and it makes the books dry and boring. We have overestimated the re-presenting, directly recognizable element with literature"].[52] Contrary to Renberg's analysis of realism, this dissertation argues that realism facilitated the feminist turn in 1990s Norwegian literature by embracing the everyday realm and allowing mothers to tell their stories of the daily conflict and struggle within

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[50] Renberg 3.
[51] Renberg 9.
[52] Tore Renberg, "12 tanker om litteraturen," Dagbladet 28 Nov. 2000, 14 Oct. 2002 <http://www.dagbladet.no/print/?/diskusjon/kultur/230245/index.html>.

a literary framework. The 'flat' realism, when read with a feminist lens, can become a space of transformation and rebellion, as some 1990s Norwegian literature managed to do. This study tentatively offers a working definition of realism in a 1990s context that relies on an alienation of reality as the vehicle for investigating the everyday, intimate realm of the family.

In addition to advocating for realism, Irene Engelstad argued for the rebirth and renewal of narrative in her reading of 1990s literature. The new emphasis on narrative implied the aesthetic components of "minimalismen, eller fåmælthetens retorikk, om den nye realismen som er kalt skittenrealismen, og om det motsatte av minimalismen; den urene romanen preget av sjangerbladning og store språklig utfoldelse" ["minimalism, or the rhetoric of terseness, about the new realism that is called dirty realism, and about the opposite of minimalism; the impure novel characterized by genre blending and great linguistic bravado"].[53] Engelstad gave an overview of dirty realism, mentioning that critics excluded women from this discussion, and tend to discuss male authors as the exclusive producers of these kinds of naturalistic stories from hometowns and districts of rural Norway. "Det skyldes en fordom hos kritikerne, som ikke ser de kvinnelige forfatterne som faktisk finns innenfor dette feltet" ["It is due to a prejudice among the critics who do not see the female authors who exist in this field"]. Engelstad made comparisons between contemporary realism and its forerunners in Norwegian literary history, judging the 1990s realism as much less pessimistic as 1880s naturalism because of the lack of scientific determinism. "Den nye realismen representerer en

[53] Engelstad, Irene. "Familie, identitet og fortelling i 1990-tallsromaner." Samtiden 2 (2003).

interessant brobygging mellom bestrebelser etter språklig renhet og ønsket om en språklig utfoldelse. Det ligger som nevnt også en eksistensiell og mytisk bestrebelse i denne realismen, en søken etter mening" ["The new realism represents an interesting bridge-building between desire for linguistic purity and linguistic bravado. As mentioned previously there is also an existential and mythical stride in this realism, a search for meaning"].

Engelstad expressed further interest in the connections with realism in an interview with Trude Rønnestad and Ane Haukebø Aasland, arguing that it was productive to think of form and theme as two separate entities in 1990s literature. "Forfattere med en realistisk holdning til språket og virkeligheten er opptatt av relasjonene i familien. Og det er veldig mange mannlige forfattere ... Det er vanskelig å trekke skillelinjer mellom noen av de minimalistiske forfatterne som også skriver i en slags nyrealisme" ["Authors with a realistic approach to language and reality are concerned with the relationships in the family. And many male authors are... It is difficult to draw lines of division between some of the minimalist authors who also write in a kind of new realism"].[54] Engelstad found the regional and familial focus on space and time refreshing, but worried that the hype about the family overshadowed the sibling relationship in many of these novels. Engelstad's argument for the appropriation of this male genre was in keeping with Knut Hoem's thoughts on dirty realism. "Kvinnenes litteratur har utvilsomt lidd under skittenrealismens hegemoni. Sjangeren har holdt kvinnelige forfattere på avstand, og definert deres litteratur—

[54] Trude Rønnestad and Ane Haukebø Aasland, "Tendenser i litteraturen: En samtale med Irene Engelstad og Tom Egil Hverven," Bøygen 3 (2001) 8.

"følelseslitteraturen"—som triviallitteratur. Derfor er jeg så glad for at hegemoniet nå blir utfordret" ["The women's literature has undoubtedly suffered under the hegemony of dirty realism. The genre has held female authors at a distance, and defined their literature—"emotional literature"—as trivial literature. Therefore I am so glad that the hegemony is being challenged"].[55]

It is possible to write about trivial matters without becoming trivial literature as shown by the contemporary authors featured in this study. A citation from Anne Oterholm's Avslutningen [The Conclusion] reads as a programmatic affirmation of the presence of realism in 1990s literature, a realism that portrays the subversion of the everyday as the standard goal:

> Det er litt overraskende at realismen er så fjernt fra den biografiske litteraturen. Det føles overhodet ikke som om forfatteren ønsker at leseren skal tro at dette er sant. Ingen, selv ikke tilsynelatende, selvbiografiske påstander noen sted. Forfatteren vil ikke annet enn at leseren skal gjøre et forsøk på å innbille seg at det som skjer kunne ha skjedd … Men ikke tro … Det er nøytralt. Det er det som gjør det realistisk. Mangelen på misjon. Fraværet av virkelighet (86) [It is a little surprising that realism is so distant from biographical literature. Overall, it doesn't feel like the author wants the reader to believe that this is true. No autobiographical assertions, not even feigned, anywhere. The author wants nothing more than the reader to make an attempt to imagine that

[55] Bendik Wold, "En antikvert sjanger?" Klassekampen 28 Aug. 2002, 27 Apr. 2003 <http://www.klassekampen.no/kultur/146154/146203?view=print>.

> what did happen could have happened … But don't believe … It's neutral. That's what makes it realistic. The lack of a mission. The alienation of reality].[56]

The stories of motherhood told by Oterholm and her peers are so familiar that the reader can almost identify with the character, but the defamiliarization of certain acts prevents that identification from happening. The ordinary becomes abnormally strange in the renewal of the everyday. The conglomeration of polarized opinions and everyday images within the narratives enables a discussion of motherhood by revealing the tensions of literature, gender, and society.

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[56] Anne Oterholm, Avslutningen, (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1998).

Chapter II: Re-envisioning Mother as Subject

Mothers in Norway

Labeled as a worldwide leader in family welfare, Norway trumpets their progressive attitudes towards mothers and babies with pride to global communities. It would seem that the flexibility and support given to mothers has been required to change to keep up to the evolving status of that role, but many signals suggest that the idealization of motherhood, bound by patriarchy, saturates that liberal image perception. From daily media reports to governmental programs, Norwegian mothers are barraged by traditional images motherhood, for the disagreement about the role of the mother is omnipresent in newspapers, television programs, music, comic strips, commercials, films, and most pointedly contemporary Norwegian literature. A brief look at the January 25, 2003, weekend magazine from Dagbladet will serve as an example of these tensions. The magazine's main articles featured women who felt pressured to defend their professional identities as women according to a social standard of motherhood, regardless of differences in age, location, occupation, interests, or anything else that distinguished them. The first woman, a comedian, could not understand why public reception of her humor would change if she succumbed to the media's desire to photograph her with her newborn baby. At the end of a long article on her successful career, the second woman, former executive in Norway's oil industry and current director of Save the Children, had her life's work summarized by her indebtedness to her husband and children. Commended for the many books examining religion, women,

and sexism in her bookshelves, the third woman, a bishop with a passion for reading, was chastised for the profound lack of cookbooks. The fourth article, a survey of mother-daughter pairs, affirmed the complexities of this relationship by claiming that mothers, not fathers, teach their daughters the "masculine" values of aggression, individualism, and independence. Perhaps the (male) editors of this magazine were merely publishing for their assumed audience, or perhaps the week's unofficial theme was the career woman's dependence on the family. Regardless, the presence of the maternal preoccupation shown in this random issue of a weekly newspaper magazine verifies that Norwegians vacillate between enchantment and exasperation on the issue of motherhood.

The obsession is well founded and logical, for mothers permeate social realms as well as cultural. The Scandinavian states, Norway in particular, often serve as global models for family social welfare programs. Norwegian mothers are entitled to paid leave at the birth of their child, and they can choose which program fits them best (most often 42 or 52 weeks at varied salary rates).[57] It is popular, trendy, and comfortable to be a mother in Norway, and many choose to do so outside the legal realm of marriage. Norwegian societies do place less emphasis on marriage than many other communities do, and samboerskap [cohabitation] stands in its stead as a more popular alternative to tying the nuptial knot. Whether or not they are married, mothers and fathers receive financial benefits from the state when becoming parents. There is no question of societal acceptance for this lifestyle, and the majority views the level of commitment

[57] Arnlaug Leira, Working Parents and the Welfare State. Family change and policy reform in Scandinavia, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Mothers in other Scandinavian countries receive less maternity leave, from Sweden's 450 days to Finland's 26 weeks.

between partners as equal, although this topic has also been under debate recently. The evolution of this tradition decreases the power of the official institution of marriage, but the institution of motherhood and the family retain their traditional values. In hopes of equalizing the imbalance of parental care and edifying the nuclear unit, the government stepped in to regulate gender participation within the family. Fathers, since 1993, have been legally required to take paternity leave—two weeks of "pappa perm" ["daddy days"] after the birth of the baby and the option for an additional four weeks.[58] If the father does not take his paternity leave, the state penalizes the mother's maternity leave. It is questionable whether the Norwegian parental leave system actually succeeds in further liberating mothers and fathers in the country's quest for equal parental opportunity, or if it is a repackaged nation building "opportunity" supported by reigning governments for women to stay home and raise children. How successful has this action been to correct disproportionate responsibilities for mothers? Attention to fathers and paternal care has raised consciousness for parenting as a shared responsibility for mothers and fathers. Mothers who chose to return to work can obtain childcare, and many do manage to work, raise children, and remain loving wives. However, despite these advancements, the idealized image of motherhood remains the stay-at-home mother with child, and this study argues that the legal imposition of parental leave strengthens the role of the nuclear family at the expense of individual women. The government's attempt to defend the nuclear family by offering financial rewards to socially defined parental roles set a growing tidal wave in motion for disgruntled

[58] As an interesting side note, many travel firms advertise an eight-week vacation: four weeks of "pappa permisjon" ["paternal leave"] and four weeks of summer holiday make for a long "vacation" from the everyday responsibilities of parenting.

mothers who experienced a dichotomy between theoretical and practical notions of motherhood in Norway.

One sign that points to this ironic conflict is the troubled appearance of the "family literature" of the 1990s. While "real mothers" are tangible proof of this dilemma, the goal of this study is to elicit the tensions inherent in the literary representations of mothers. This sociological evidence presents one way to explain the flood of Norwegian novels featuring mothers that started in 1993 and continues to the time of this writing. When the law began to regulate motherhood and subsequently revitalized debate on the responsibility as a contested political topic, authors reacted to the general social unrest by undermining the idealization of motherhood in their novels. The critical reception of these novels was mixed, and the majority of critics were either bored or confused by the repeated image of the broken family and bad mothers. This reaction serves as evidence that literature had taken a huge, uncomfortable step toward the heart of the problem—the deep-seated nature of ideal motherhood. Tensions in contemporary literature suggest that the institution of motherhood in Norway remains influenced by patriarchy in theory, language, and practice. Mothers appeared in Norwegian novels as agents, and as reprehensible women who rebelled against or forsook their maternal responsibilities. The varied accounts of the fictional individuals created in these novels challenge the essentialism of this fundamental belief, and suggest that it is possible to escape this patriarchal stamp without denying mothers completely. Nevertheless, it requires a rebellion against the traditional norms for mothers to embody mothering as a holistic, feminist practice. This literary revolt is one

of many markers that signal unrest and dissatisfaction with the situation of mothers in Norway, even in a supposedly liberated society where cultural images repeatedly tell women and mothers that they are empowered and equal. This dissertation argues that the superficial maternal force in Norway is really a cover for their powerlessness, and the literary emphasis on mothers in the 1990s dismantles cultural constructions of motherhood in response to the feeling or perception of futility.

As Norwegian authors started to feature mothers as primary characters in their novels, feminist scholars renewed their energies to redefine mothers. Second and third wave feminists publish widely on the topic, illuminating a multitude of perspectives. Historically, motherhood has been used as a socially constructed institution that regulates and justifies women's subjugation. Scholars now attempt to dispel that fact by destroying, defending, envisioning, creating, and vitalizing motherhood anew in society, culture, film, and literature. This chapter examines the theoretical aspects of the junction between mothers, feminism, and literature to unearth a working definition of "mother" in current feminist theory to contextualize the following literary analysis. It begins with a discussion of motherhood as an impasse, and offers a cursory glace at some of the strongest theoretical voices talking about mothers today, including Andrea O'Reilly, Lynne Huffer, Nancy Gerber, E. Ann Kaplan, and Elaine Tuttle Hansen. The final theorist discussed is Toril Moi, who stands apart from the other feminists for she rarely addresses motherhood. On the other hand, her re-reading of Simone de Beauvoir has been particularly influential in Norway, elevating Moi as somewhat of a feminist prophet in her own country. This is a mixed blessing for Norwegian feminists; she is an

undisputable powerhouse in feminist theory, bringing insightful theories and reading to an easily stagnated milieu. Yet Moi's strain of feminism disregards some of the most essential elements of womanhood so wildly celebrated in her homeland. This study discusses this contradiction by drawing on Moi's emphasis on the prosaic power of the lived situation. The section on feminism concludes with Rita Felski's thoughts on feminism, literature, and the everyday as compared to Gary Saul Morson's reading of the prosaic. The argument then focuses specifically on feminist literary criticism to examine how this selected body of literature responded to the theoretical maternal controversy. The chapter ends with a discussion of mothers in Norwegian literary history as a precursor to the literary analysis chapters, which present a feminist reading of some of the mothers in contemporary Norwegian literature to see if this body of literature advocates traditional or progressive feminist mothering.

Mothers in Feminism and Theory

The underlying premise of this dissertation is the belief that feminist mothering is possible. While that sentence may seem quite obvious and almost expected in today's society, there are many definitions and questions that must be asked in order to fully understand the breadth of that straightforward comment, beginning with a clarification of the distinction between motherhood and mothering. Thirty years ago, Adrienne Rich cited two veins of motherhood in her influential book Of Women Born, and her insightful analysis of the chasm between these trends still maintains its validity at the turn of the millennium. Rich described the dueling factions of motherhood as "the

potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution,* which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control."[59] Twenty years later, Andrea O'Reilly has encapsulated those two clefts into her definitions of motherhood and mothering, which symbolize the two most prominent perspectives of mothers operating in society today. Motherhood for O'Reilly means "the institution of motherhood, which is male-defined and controlled" by societal powers beyond the control of individual women.[60] Mothering stands in contrast to this, encompassing "the experiences of mothering, which are female-defined and centred" and reflect the individual realities of how women mother.[61] Despite substantial progress achieved by feminists to date, this dissertation works from the assumption that motherhood remains defined by patriarchy and must reform; however, it is unnecessary to jettison mothers completely to shed the patriarchal influence. Rather, alternative images of mothering must act as a catalyst for a maternal revolution in public and private life. The image of the perfect, universal mother must be replaced with attainable images of mothering, not as a means of settling for less but as empowerment for mothers to define positive models that welcome multiplicity.

Every decade of the twentieth century placed a different emphasis on motherhood and a woman's identity construction, and the 1990s is no exception. Tracing a definition of mothers through feminism is a daunting task, and this chapter's

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[59] Adrienne Rich, Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986) 13.
[60] Andrea O'Reilly, "Across the Divide: Contemporary Anglo-American Feminist Theory on the Mother-Daughter Relationship," Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns, ed. Sharon Abbey and Andrea O'Reilly (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1998) 74.
[61] O'Reilly 74.

brief summary does not attempt to cover all of the literature on mothering written in the last 30 years of feminist scholarship. It does purport to amalgamate key trends and impulses at the beginning of the 1990s, and to investigate mothers as an artificial obstacle in theories on women, gender, and literature. The continuation from woman to mother is curiously absent in many recent discussions on gender and subjectivity, leading to the hypothesis that motherhood exists as an unmentionable fate in some recent feminist and gender theory. When mothers do appear in feminist theory, opinions about them seem divided neatly in half between those who see mothers as entrapped and constructed by patriarchy, and those who see mothers establishing new boundaries. Why would feminist theorists exclude the mother from feminism? There are residual strains of a belief that a woman who succumbs to motherhood has missed the point of the entire feminist debate, and that progressive, informed woman yield to the dominant trend if they choose to have children. Another repelling factor is that mothers are too tangible, too real, too vulnerable, too messy, too mundane, and too emotional to theorize as subjects.

The psychoanalytic approach to motherhood has been seductive for many years, and this dissertation turns to the literature to listen to the fictional voices who are speaking about mothering in a non-Freudian way and asking different questions about mothers from other feminist perspectives. Is it possible to imagine the mother as beyond the familiar logic of opposites, as somewhere between paternal and maternal, or presence and absence? What kind of maternal figure emerges from the repetitive, daily creation of the body under these conditions? The term "mother" is heavily clichéd,

emotionally laden, biologically determined, and socially constrained, making its plight much like the word "woman" in feminist theory. How has motherhood become a cliché and where do we need to do to rid it of that label? What kinds of subversive acts need to happen to revitalize this role and reinstate the word "mother" with meaning?

Third Wave Feminism

How does the generational difference among feminists affect this understanding? When feminists turned their criticism inward and deemed it insensitive and obtuse to tell the universal story of woman, the emphasis of feminist studies shifted to tell the local, individual stories of women of all ages, classes, cultures, professions, races, and sexual preferences. As practiced today, feminism embraces multiplicity and celebrates diverse voices coming together to tell women's stories. Scholars characterize this general tendency as the transition from second to third wave feminism, a change that shifted the feminist agenda away from defending women as a cohesive unit to recognizing differences between women. As Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier describe in their book Catching the Wave, feminists began to criticize the homogeneity and whiteness of feminism and to advocate for an identification of diversity and dissimilar attitudes.[62] Rebecca Walker coined the term "third wave" in a 1992 essay in Ms. Magazine, where she countered the media suggestion that the 1990s were an era of "postfeminism" in the wake of the sexual harassment trials of Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill. Since then, the phrase has burgeoned to represent the changing concerns of the newest generation of

[62] Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier, Catching the Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003).

feminists who came of age during the glory days of 1970s feminists.[63] The success of the preceding generation has changed the environment for the newest generation of feminists and given them a new set of concerns and issues. In the words of Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, feminism for the youngest generation of feminists "is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it—it's simply in the water."[64] This internal generational conflict is troubling to many, but it confirms the growing pains of a successful feminist movement. Astrid Henry views the breech between generations, or "waves," of feminists as a mother/daughter trope that imitates familial structures.[65] Henry argues that second wave feminists had to break with their mothers to achieve distance, but then they "mothered" the feminists of the third wave. Henry speculates that the dissatisfaction within the "daughters" of the third wave results from inheriting feminism rather than creating it; therefore, feminists today struggle with balancing a connection to feminist "mothers" and reorganizing feminism from within with our own agenda.[66] Elaine Tuttle Hansen speculates that second-wave feminism has created the ambivalence toward motherhood, both as a mother in conflict with her children and a daughter at odds with her mother. She reads for the woman in literature who is "barely able to imagine herself as a feminist mother or to represent anything but the anguish of motherhood that threatens from all sides."[67]

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[63] Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier, introduction, Catching, 10.
[64] Dicker and Piepmeier 11.
[65] Astrid Henry, "Feminism's Family Problem: Feminist Generations and the Mother-Daughter Trope," Catching the Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003) 213.
[66] Henry 227.
[67] Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Mother Without Child, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 19.

This generational struggle between feminists is yet another reason why classifying mothers as one entity is a difficult challenge for feminist theorists today. The role of the mother is not and has never been static, and it ought to continue to grow with the advancing front of feminist movements. The timing of this change is not accidental. A new discussion of mothering emerged as feminism entered this transition in the early 1990s. The editorial board of the feminist journal Signs took up this very question, and they produced a special issue on questions of motherhood and patriarchy in the spring of 1990.[68] They stated their explicit goal as liberating the many voices of mothering from the story of motherhood authored by predominantly white, middle-class, Western patriarchs:

> In critiquing the ideology of mothering, we see the limitations and dangers of one particular cultural story. We see, too, the limitations in privileging a version that reifies and overburden the mother's role, omitting the influential nurturing and shaping effects of other women in women's lives. Finally, it is not the story, or a story, that must be told, and crucially, must be heard. It is the stories: stories of mothering, of daughtering, of history, of this minute, stories of all classes and cultures, stories of experience and possibility.[69]

This summary paragraph of their editorial article affirms that it is impossible to understand the complexity of motherhood until all mothers tell their own stories, and the challenge is to allow all voices to speak freely without exclusion. The increased

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[68] Deborah Pope, Naomi Quinn, and Mary Wyer, eds., spec. issue of Signs, 15.3 (1990).
[69] Deborah Pope, Naomi Quinn, and Mary Wyer, "The Ideology of Mothering: Disruption and Reproduction of Patriarchy," editorial, Signs 15.3 (1990): 441-446.

volume of stories in the 1990s that contained alternative images of mothering adheres to the call for diversity and multiplicity, providing mothers with space to develop their bodies and subjectivities and, in so doing, redefine social norms and patterns free from molds of biological and social determinism. This study investigates the maternal body inescapably embedded and simultaneously enabled by the omnipresent inherent structures surrounding it. The tension in the dual components is obligatory for a continuous becoming.

Multiple Perspectives on Mothers

Many scholars contribute to the debate on mothering in current feminist theory, and this survey touches on a few key thinkers who exemplify the breadth of the discussion in North America, including Andrea O'Reilly, E. Ann Kaplan, Nancy Gerber, Elaine Tuttle Hansen, and Lynne Huffer. These theorists draw on literature, film, art, and philosophy as their primary sources, and each scholar reflects on the dominant mother imagine and investigates alternative readings or constructions. This study briefly addresses these theorists' take on mothering, and then speculates on their relevance to the motherhood debate in Norway. Because Toril Moi has been such an influential contributor to feminism in Norway and the United States, her stance is discussed at length as a contrasting voice to the other aforementioned scholars.

Andrea O'Reilly advocates for a positive view of mothering, and gives many examples of how mothers do and should continue to adapt to the present social challenges. O'Reilly accomplishes her goal of unraveling the master narrative of

motherhood by revealing old traditions as mere narratives, and thereafter constructing a new story to fill the space. O'Reilly construes much of today's feminist theory as antagonistic towards mothers, even among the theorists who have supposedly been their advocates:

> Mothering is profoundly an experience of both powerlessness and power and it is this paradox of motherhood that helps explain women's ambivalence about motherhood. This ambivalence about maternal power, along with fear of the maternal, mother-blame, cultural devaluation of motherhood and matrophopia, distance daughters from their mothers and scripts the relationship of mother and daughters as one of disconnection and estrangement.[70]

The loss of the maternal voice via the mother-daughter bond is a specific example discussed by O'Reilly of the disintegration of maternal empowerment. She claims that daughters loose touch with their maternal history, a term Naomi Ruth Lowinsky dubs the motherline, due to cultural pressures such as "the devaluation of motherhood and the reinforcement of maternal powerlessness, fear of the maternal, mother-blame and matrophobia."[71] O'Reilly aspires to facilitate the "recovery of the maternal voice" and modify it "to make the maternal story narratable."[72] O'Reilly draws a clear line between motherhood and mothering, defining motherhood as an institution that is typically controlling and defined by males; mothering, on the other hand, is experiences that are typically local and defined by females. O'Reilly wants to dismantle motherhood as a

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[70] O'Reilly, "Across" 78.
[71] O'Reilly, "Across" 85.
[72] O'Reilly, "Across" 86.

patriarchal institution and reclaim it as a matriarchal force rather than perpetuating patriarchy. O'Reilly calls for mothers to talk back and "challenge both patriarchal imperatives: women are to serve both men and children."[73] Failing to rebel reinforces the patriarchal continuation of a gendered society safely within the confines of the middle class. Some of contemporary Norwegian novels have begun to reclaim the maternal voice, as O'Reilly wishes. Authors like Trude Marstein and Anne Oterholm empower the mother as narrator, and show us her struggles and challenges from her own perspective. There is a clear lack of the motherline in newer Norwegian literature, however, perhaps suggesting the degree of disempowerment present in these novels.

E. Ann Kaplan started her book on representations of mothers in pop culture in response to this same problem—the overwhelming presence of mothers who were never allowed to give their own point of view. As soon as mothers began to gain ground in the public sphere, the power passed over them from men to children. Kaplan argues that at "the very moment when mother-subjects start to gain attention, this subjectivity is displaced into concern with the foetus."[74] Due to technological advancements in reproduction, Kaplan hypothesizes that the new visibility of the fetus will continue to marginalize the mother's body and subjectivity both in reality and in the fictional world of literature and film. The electronic age has irrevocably affected mothering for Kaplan, who locates maternal anxiety in a loss of power and assumed role of women as mothers. "The feminist movement has itself contributed to the destabilizing of the mother, in turn

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[73] Andrea O'Reilly, introduction, Mothers and Sons: Feminism, Masculinity, and the Struggle to Raise Our Sons, ed. Andrea O'Reilly, (New York: Rutledge, 2001) 1-21.
[74] E. Ann Kaplan, Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama, (London: Routledge, 1992).

creating a renewed desire to occupy the mother position."[75] Kaplan states that postmodern representations of mothers in film, television, and advertising portray the full spectrum of contradictions surrounding mothers. Some cling to the nostalgia of motherhood and the nuclear family while others reject domesticity and prove that women with children can still be sexy. Contemporary representations cannot, however, merge all these spheres and grant women fulfillment as sexual, working, mothering beings. In sum, Kaplan names the 1990s an agonizing period of transition for the role of the mother, a phase that struggles to expose mothering as "one part of any specific subjectivity, not the all-consuming entirety of it ... [and yet] no longer a fixed, essentialized quality."[76]

In her refreshing look at class and mothering in contemporary American literature, Nancy Gerber claims that the middle-class feminist belief that work is liberating for women is counterproductive to lower-class mothers.[77] Inscribed in this and other middle class values are the firmly rooted beliefs of domesticity as success, and children as individual security. Domesticity ensures economic security for wives, who also happen to be mothers, usually riding on the wings of a breadwinning husband. "While the domestic serves a site for the enactment of sexism in both middle-class and working-class texts, domesticity does not provide leisure, privilege, financial security,

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[75] Kaplan 182.
[76] Kaplan 219.
[77] Andrea O'Reilly, foreword, "Writing Out of the Margins: Maternity, Marginality, and the Emergence of a Maternal Kunstlerroman," Portrait of the Mother-Artist: Class and Creativity in Contemporary American Fiction, by Nancy Gerber, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003) ix-xiv.

or social status in the latter."[78] When children are viewed as private property and the responsibility of the individual, Gerber maintains that childcare develops into an unnecessary luxury for the well-to-do and not a necessity for working families.[79] That negative pallor affects the status and availability of childcare for working-class moms who cannot function without it. Gerber's project looks at mothering narratives in contemporary American fiction to rescue the mother-artist from her invisible location in the domestic sphere. The heroines of these texts must balance work outside and inside the home, as underpaid employees and exhausted mothers who crave artistic self-expression. Gerber finds that these writers construct something new with attention to race and social differences. "These writers destabilize the construction of families as white, heterosexual, middle class, and male dominated. A different narrative of motherhood emerges, one that is matricentric rather than patrifocal, which places the mother at the center of her own story."[80] The class and race-specific situation described above is more of a phenomenon in the United States than in the Norwegian social welfare state, but Gerber's questions do resonate with Norwegian situation where mothers stay home with the kids because their husbands' salaries are higher. Gerber's destabilization of the middle class also prompts a question not asked by Norwegian authors, which is the absence of attention to race and social difference in the literature.

Elaine Tuttle Hansen turns her attention to the relational aspects of motherhood in contemporary fiction in her book on the mother without her child. She traces

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[78] Nancy Gerber, Portrait of the Mother-Artist: Class and Creativity in Contemporary American Fiction. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003).
[79] Gerber adopts this notion from Patricia Hill Collins, who investigates the middle-class assumption that children are private property.
[80] Gerber 14.

developing discussions on mothers from the 1970s to the 1990s through a polarized path of disavowal and recovery, with the 90s functioning as a pragmatic solution to the two. The only consensus still possible in this decade, according to Hansen, is "that conventional sentiments about motherhood inadequately describe and serve to mystify the actual circumstances of most women who mother, even as they may also sublimate the fear and resentment of men who cannot be mothers."[81] Even amid this sentiment, the 1990s brought about the emergence of mother as subject in literature, and Hansen deliberately limits her study to the women of contemporary literature who have negative encounters with motherhood. These mothers murder, abandon, neglect, give up, lose, or cannot have their child. These tragic stories, in Hansen's view, reflect societal anxieties about mothers but also "insist that we reconsider our assumptions about what motherhood is 'really' like, that we resist fundamental theories and practices that would oppress mothers and divide women, and even that we pause before assuming that 'the' maternal voice or an autonomous maternal subject can or should be sought."[82] Furthermore, Hansen argues that literary representations of mothers neither affirm nor negate one story of motherhood:

> On the contrary, it leads towards demystification, denaturalization, and reevaluation of the norms and needs of motherhood. It insists that the position of the mother without child is not only a traumatic present reality but also a logical impossibility, a taboo, and therefore a site of

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[81] Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 3.
[82] Hansen 19.

> instability that facilitates thinking about motherhood and women beyond official logic and conventional possibility.[83]

These stories of the "not good enough" mother increase a reader's understanding of a mother's situation, in Hansen's perspective, often because the creator of the story writes from an informed location where s/he has been forced to grapple with the same conflicts.

On a different note, Lynne Huffer theorizes the relationship between the mother and meaning construction in Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures.[84] Huffer does not intend to destroy the mother, but merely to question the meaning structures surrounding her position as expressed in the "Franco-American conversation" in 1980s feminism as a benchmark for discussions of sex and gender in the 1990s.[85] Building from Beauvoir's positioning of the mother in a male-dominated world, Huffer posits the mother as a negativity which "is never meaning itself, but only that which allows meaning to come to be" for the Western male.[86] The mother also stands as a two-part metaphor for nostalgia for Huffer. The first sense is as the patriarchal longing for origins that includes woman as womb, or the elusive "lost mother," and the second is as a tool for the internal revision of feminism. The second encourages "a moment of contention within feminism [that] can open toward a more constructive vision" of lesbian desire, or the desire for another woman who is not the mother, which will release women from the

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[83] Hansen 26.
[84] Lynne Huffer, Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures: Nostalgia, Ethics, and the Question of Difference, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[85] Huffer 13.
[86] Huffer 10.

mother trap of patriarchy.[87] Huffer's work scrutinizes the notion of the mother in American and French feminism and insists on giving increased attention to ethics as a means of fortifying our moral commitments to one another. "The future of feminist ethics, then, lies in the elaboration of a bridge between the moral commitments … and the fractures realities of our past and present lives. […] Our challenge is to hear both the voice and the silence of the other."[88] Huffer's work encourages a point of conjuncture between mothers and lesbians that offers a real alternative to both options.

As evidenced in this cursory look at feminist theories of mothering, there are many alternatives to motherhood. Queering motherhood would increase the possibilities of multiple interpretations even further, but contemporary Norwegian authors are not writing about lesbian mothers or gay fathers. It is striking to note the absence of homosexuality in these Norwegian novels, where neither the family nor the role of the mother has been able to break free of the heterosexual hegemony present in Norwegian literature and theory. It is clear that a discussion of lesbian mothers is almost non-existent, and this absence speaks volumes.[89] While American theorists are promoting and developing arguments over differentiations between sex and gender, many Norwegian theorists are discussing ideas of sexual difference. Why is the Norwegian literary scene afraid of tackling questions of sexual identity? It is obvious that the discordant voices in this literature are not talking about women and the gender struggles

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[87] Huffer 19.
[88] Huffer 139.
[89] Tore Renberg's publication in 2003 of Mannen som elsket Yngve [The Man who Loved Yngve] was forbidden from high school literature courses because of its content. The story tells of a young boy's infatuation with Yngve, but there is no sexually overtly language or substance. Even the author vehemently denies any kind of homosexual underpinnings in the books and adamantly rejects in as a homoerotic novel. Investigating this homophobia also offers the potential for losing the gender distinction between men and women as parents. Tore Renberg, Mannen som elsket Yngve, (Oslo: Oktober, 2003).

they face as lesbian mothers; quite the opposite, the overwhelmingly heterosexual texts testify that the authors of the latter half of the 1990s are primarily concerned with revising the role of the heterosexual mother. That important question must be addressed in another forum, in order to concentrate on the discrepancies between the occurrences of theoretical and literary debates on motherhood in Norway. The emphasis on mothering and not just mothers in this study is one small step towards opening mothering to alternative gender realities, but this dissertation draws on the real and not the ideal literature of the 1990s.

Toril Moi on Feminism

The theorists presented above advocate for the recovery of the maternal voice, the empowerment of creative mother-artists, the acceptance and understanding of mother as multifaceted woman, and the recreation of the maternal as feminine desire. The majority of these theorists address Simone de Beauvoir and her troubled relationship to the mother in some fashion, but all propose an alternative way to reclaim mothers and motherhood by defying the patriarchal forces oppressing them. It would seem logical that some of these theorists would mesh well with the mother-based Norwegian society, or the Norwegian take on feminism. However, one feminist theorist has been most influential in shaping the discussion of feminism in Norway in the 1990s, and that theorist is Toril Moi. Moi has recovered the voice of Beauvoir for feminists at the turn of the millennium, rescuing "woman" from a theoretical abyss. Moi wants women to enjoy all of the rights and liberties, but she scarcely acknowledges a mother's right to

the same benefits. Before continuing the discussion on Moi's stance on the question of mothers, her theories must be situated in current feminist theory. Extra space is devoted to Moi because her great influence on Norwegian feminism has arguably encouraged the unwillingness to engage on the notion of motherhood in literary and feminist theory in Norway.

In her recent book "What is a Woman?" Moi examines a wide selection of Beauvoir's primary and secondary texts in her quest to rewrite the interpretation and reception of Simone de Beauvoir in feminist studies.[90] Moi's goals are to refresh Beauvoir's position among feminist scholars, and to distance it from poststructuralist gender theories, a trend Moi believes has misdirected the current debate on sex and gender rather than revolutionized it. Moi reminds her readers that freedom is the central concept in Beauvoir's feminism, and that Beauvoir understands the body as a situation that historically and socially contextualizes the living body in her quest to understand subjectivity. The body is not in a situation, searching for identity, but creating meaning while living everyday life. Moi argues that thinking of the body as a situation saves Beauvoir and her fellow existentialists from the dichotomy of the subject/object.

Because Beauvoir thinks of the body as a situation within a total lived experience, Moi claims that the sex/gender distinction is useless, as is the 1990s gender debate of essentialism versus construction. Moi directly targets Judith Butler as her main target in this latter project, a theorist whom she sees as responsible for the impasse in the poststructuralist sex/gender debate. Moi resists Butler's insistence on the

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[90] Toril Moi, What is a Woman? And other essays. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

distinction between sex and gender, and discredits this divide on the grounds of its fabrication. Moi argues that this theoretical discussion will not bring us closer to a concrete discussion or understanding of what it means to be a woman in a given society. Butler deems sex as transient as gender; Moi views this differentiation as an unnecessary solution to the pointless problem of refuting essentialist claims, such as biological determinism. As an example of the futility of the sex/gender divide, Moi argues that even though the Norwegian language does not have two separate words for this term, Norwegians do not succumb to biological determinism because of their terminology. Language is a critical factor, but it has limitations that cannot supersede the power of political action. Building on her argument that the sex/gender debate is a mere linguistic construct, Moi claims that Butler's equation of language and bodies to "materiality" cannot replace the material value of concrete social issues like health, employment, education, and legal rights. "The belief that the words 'material' or 'materialist' alone, without further specification, can secure any political claims is destructive to serious discussion of feminist politics."[91] Moi wishes for tangible, individual realizations of women living their lives as political, historical, and subjective examples.

Although Moi criticizes Butler for her reliance on the construction of language, her own version of feminism also hinges on language and definitions. Moi calls for the reincarnation of the subject as a thoughtful agent in society, unafraid to identify herself

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[91] Moi 51.

as "woman." Moi uses history and society to contextualize and reclaim the "woman" as a term:

> An individual's encounter with such social norms has consequences for the way she will experience her body and for the kind of subjectivity she will develop. [...] Different individuals will respond in different ways to the same coercive pressure. [...] We are continuously making something of what the world continuously makes of us: our subjectivity is always a becoming that neither precedes nor follows from the encounter with the Other.[92]

Moi argues that we should never fear using the words "woman" and "man," for speaking the words does not necessarily fulfill a stereotype nor bind speakers to a prefabricated pattern of behavior of how to act or be. Instead, it evokes the tangible everydayness of being a woman in community. A woman forms herself from the pressures exerted on her by the world, not from adhering to an outdated mandate or calling on a hidden essence buried somewhere inside. "Subjectivity is neither a thing nor an inner, emotional world; it is, rather, our way of being in the world. [...] To Beauvoir the relationship between one's body and one's subjectivity is neither necessary nor arbitrary, but contingent."[93] This contingency is life affirming for Moi, and allows women the freedom to create their own subjectivity as women, without fear of the living up to some essential expectation. These are the freedoms described by

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[92] Moi 117.
[93] Moi 81-82.

Beauvoir and denied by Butler, according to Moi, and on this premise, she builds her argument:

> However bizarrely a woman may behave, Beauvoir would not dream of denying her the name of woman. The logic of Butler's argument, on the other hand, implies that someone who does not behave according to the dominant 'regulatory discourse(s)' for femininity, is not a woman. To behave like a woman comes to mean 'to behave like an effect of patriarchal power'. In this way the term 'woman' is surrendered to the patriarchal powers feminists wish to oppose. The fact that Beauvoir refuses to hand the concept of 'woman' over to the opposition, is precisely what makes *The Second Sex* such a liberating read. Here, finally, is a book that does not require women somehow to prove that they are 'real' women, to prove that they can conform to someone else's criteria for what a woman should be like.[94]

Moi refuses to propagate of the patriarchal definition of "woman" and insists on reclaiming it from within feminist experience, advocating for a renewed understanding of womanhood that proudly announces and reclaims lost ground from what she views as a misdirected feminist movement.

Toril Moi on Mothers

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[94] Moi 77.

Moi's motive and rationale to renew feminism is strikingly similar to the rhetoric used by the aforementioned theorists to reclaim motherhood. Moi's argument could easily be extended to mothers, but Moi never grants that extension. The framework is in place to deny that biology necessitates how and why women mother. Since the biology of women's bodies has no direct implication or connection to the social pressures on women to be mothers, it should also be possible for a woman to assert that choice by the same rationale. Arguing for a contingent relationship between biological and social functions of a woman's body, Moi insists that both components work in tandem to shape a woman's situation in life. Woman must be accepted "som et menneske uten å forvandle henne til en abstraksjon og uten å frata henne hennes kvinnekjønn" (78) ["as a human without transforming her to an abstraction and without depriving her of her female gender"].[95] The same holds true for mothers and the overarching theoretical goal for mothering among 1990s feminists, but Moi refuses to allow mothers to encroach on her take on women's freedom. If Moi allows a liberated woman to make choices vis-à-vis Beauvoir, those choices must also include motherhood as an option, even if it is undesired according to Moi and her own interpretation of Beauvoir. It is no less controversial to say that scholars can reclaim "mother" from feminism in the same fashion that Moi rescues "woman." Her argument for the repossession of the term "woman" for women does not prohibit an acceptance of "mother" by any means, although Moi would never concede to endorse motherhood. She seldom states this claim directly, but elements of this personal philosophy emerge in many of her writings:

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[95] Toril Moi, "Corinne—kvinnenes grunnleggende modernitetsmyte," Samtiden 2 (2002): 72-83.

> As long as technology has not made the usual method of human reproduction obsolete, the biological requirement of pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare will have to be accommodated within any social structure. [...] It follows from Beauvoir's analysis that although our biology forces us to organize human societies with child rearing in mind, it does not impose any *specific* way of doing this. There is nothing to prevent us from placing an extremely high or an extremely low social value on the task. [...] What we may *not* do, is to claim that it follows from the fact that women give birth that they should therefore spend twenty years of their lives doing nothing but child-rearing. One might just as well claim that since men impregnate women, they should spend the rest of their lives looking after their offspring. Although our biology places certain limitations on culture, our specific cultural arrangements cannot be read off from our biology.[96]

This quote is one of the few where Moi clearly addresses mothers, yet she does not even mention the word in the page-long passage. The only way Moi can seemingly recognize mothers is by their silence and absence. Moi stresses that we cannot expect to eliminate difference between the sexes, just the differentiation of societal pressures and expectations created by and surrounding the sexes in hopes of creating a non-oppressive society. "To deny someone the right to behave in 'masculine' ways just because she is female, is to reinforce the sex/gender system. Such stereotyping is oppressive to

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[96] Moi, Woman 79.

women, and also, albeit to a lesser degree, to men."[97] This statement could easily extend to support the men who wish to shoulder more of the responsibility of childcare, not only in this present campaign to revive mothers. To base societal norms and behaviors on physical differences would be to encourage oppression; nevertheless, essential physiological traits inform the formation of a woman's socially and historically contextualized body but have "no *necessary* social and political consequences."[98] Moi adamantly restates and repeats her claim that biological facts are an important and essential part of a woman's situation, both historically and in the present, but they do not comprise her destiny:

> Our bodies are an outline or sketch of the kind of projects it is possible for us to have, but it doesn't follow from this that individual choices of social and ethical norms can be deduced from the structure of the human body. [...] The human body is fundamentally *ambiguous*: it is subject at once to natural laws and to the human production of meaning, and it can never be reduced to either one of these elements.[99]

For Moi, "woman" is a human being in the constant process of becoming, a being shaped by her actions until death ends her meaning creation.

Why does Moi refuse to extend that same freedom to mothers? Is it her reading of Beauvoir, a personal refusal, or some combination of the two? If it is possible to trace Moi's reaction back to Beauvoir, then it is helpful to consider various interpretations of Beauvoir's own conflicts with motherhood. Alison Fell reads Beauvoir as unable to

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[97] Moi 27-8.
[98] Moi 37.
[99] Moi 40, 69.

carry out the project she so strongly decried, and argues that Beauvoir's take on mothers stems from "her existentially grounded beliefs about the socially constructed nature of maternity and femininity, but also on her understanding of her own experience as a daughter."[100] Fell criticizes Beauvoir for creating her fictional mothers as the negative counterparts to daughters and husbands rather than autonomous subjects in their own right, thus committing the same mistake Beauvoir was trying to correct by "allowing women no identity other than that of mother."[101] On another occasion, Fell names the maternal body as Beauvoir's vehicle for social criticism:

> As powerful, moving testimonies, [Beauvoir's] representations of the mother's body bear witness to the extent to which women's bodies are the sites on which culture prescribes female identity--whether this be in terms of femininity and sexuality, or as vulnerable and sexless bodies which are refused agency in old age.[102]

Moi would disagree, even though she admits that Simone de Beauvoir's texts are "haunted by a destructive mother imago" that contests Beauvoir's own philosophies.[103] In earlier readings of Beauvoir's obsession with the mother, Moi describes Beauvoir as unable to imagine anything other than the "omnipotent and malevolent archaic mother

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[100] Alison Fell, "Double Vision: Mother(s) in Simone de Beauvoir's Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter and A Very Easy Death," Representing Lives: Women and Auto/biography, eds. Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 251.
[101] Fell 254.
[102] Alison Fell, "'Il fallait que ma mère devienne historie': Embodying the mother in Simone de Beauvoir's Une mort très douce and Annie Ernaux's Une femme," French Literature Series: The Mother in/and French Literature, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 177.
[103] Moi, Woman 66.

threatening to devour her daughter."[104] Killing the mother in the first novel of her French literary debut was an act of liberation for Beauvoir. "To kill the fantastmic mother by writing gave Beauvoir total control."[105] While Fell investigates this maternal fascination, Moi reacts to the troublesome relationship with the mother by denying and ignoring the issue completely within her own work on Beauvoir. This study reads Moi as a feminist who gives the strong impression that it is feminist not to become a mother, for once a woman succumbs to motherhood she has forsaken her freedom as a woman and entered the same vicious cycle from which Beauvoir struggled so hard to break free.

With this philosophical background, Moi reacts strongly to the celebration of the mother in Norwegian society. Challenging "the fuss about motherhood" in a recent article in Norway's cultural newspaper Morgenbladet, Moi criticized the double standard of motherhood inherent in Norwegian culture.[106] Moi argued that the hype about mothers exists because of propaganda to reinstate "den hellige norske kjernefamilien" ["the holy Norwegian nuclear family"] above all other options, thereby effectively squelching women's true freedom of choice.[107] Gender equality is non-existent in Norway, according to Moi, for the system of paid maternity leave works contrary to women' rights and freedom, deceiving Norwegian women that it is paramount to forgo a career and be content with a smaller financial package than men.

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[104] Toril Moi, Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 118.
[105] Moi Beauvoir 124.
[106] Toril Moi, "Moderskapsmaset," Morgenbladet 2 Jan. 2004, 2 Jan. 2004 <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=1007845>.
[107] Moi "Moderskapsmaset."

Women without children are simultaneously pressured into believing that they live a meaningless life, and women who go against the grain and decide not to have children are labeled with "det hjerteløse karrierekvinnestempelet" ["the heartless career woman stamp"].[108] Yet Moi points to the irony that single or lesbian women who want children do not qualify for state assistance for using reproductive technology. The gender discrimination between these positions is alarming, but Moi's push for motherless feminism is ignored in her motherland. Feminism is a freedom Moi disingenuously extends to all women:

> Feminisme handler om frihet. Den handler dermed både om friheten til å få barn og friheten til å la være. Men abstrakt frihet er ikke nok. I dag har vestlige kvinner stort sett oppnådd abstrakte rettigheter. Da må feminisme handle om konkret frihet, altså friheten til å gjøre i praksis det en i prinsippet har rett til. Vi må spørre *hvorfor* kvinner ennå ikke fullt ut bruker den abstrake friheten de har oppnådd. En viktig del av svaret har med ideologier og sosiale normer å gjøre [Feminism is about freedom. It is about both the freedom to have children and the freedom to refrain from it. But abstract freedom is not enough. Western women today have almost entirely attained abstract rights. Therefore feminism must deal with concrete freedoms, in other words the freedom to practice that which one in principle has the right to do. We must ask *why* women do not yet completely utilize the abstract freedom they have attained. An

[108] Moi"Moderskapsmaset."

important part of the answer has to do with ideologies and social norms].[109]

Mothers are the embodiment of the "concrete freedom" for which Moi advocates—mothers construct meaning through the everyday application of their actions, and continue to make something from what the world has made of them. Arguably, patriarchal ideologies and social norms are persuasive in Norwegian society, and Moi is right to identify those injustices. Moi's refusal to use her equally persuasive take on feminism to alleviate this pressure from the inside is a betrayal of the very women she strives to empower. Moi argues that the point of feminism is to learn to live life contrary to the norm of the heterosexual nuclear family, but she will not concede that feminism can change motherhood and the family from the inside.

This is obviously a personal issue for Moi, but her solution to deny the buzz about motherhood in Norway does nothing to further the freedoms of women and mothers in her homeland or any other culture where similar discussion are taking place. "Det er riktig at det ikke finnes noe eksplisitt mas om moderskap. Men et samfunns dypeste ideologiske normer uttrykker seg bare eksplisitt når de kommer under press. Det er de ikke i dag. Vi fores med propaganda om moderskap og familieliv" ["It is correct that there is not any explicit nagging about motherhood. However, a society's deepest ideological norms express themselves only explicitly when they come under pressure. They are not today. We are fed propaganda about motherhood and family life"].[110] Norwegian society *is* worried about motherhood and these fundamental

[109] Moi "Moderskapsmaset."
[110] Moi "Moderskapsmaset."

societal norms are in distress, whether Moi is willing to admit it or not. The intense focus on the everyday lives of mothers and family in newer Norwegian literature and the propaganda issuing from the media are two of the many factors that confirm the tenuous position of these traditional roles, and exhibit their dire need of renovation.

Mothers, Literature, and the Everyday

Motherhood encompasses the conflicts of everyday life and is therefore an ideal location for the practical application of feminism from the theoretical page to daily life. Toril Moi is one of many critics to expound the transformative power of the everyday, and this section examines the everyday as interpreted by Moi and literary critics Rita Felski and Gary Saul Morson to consider the interaction between feminist scholarship on mothers and diverse approaches to the everyday. Moving beyond a patriarchal understanding of motherhood opens the path for a new interpretation of mothering where women tell the stories. In this transition, discussions of feminist theory must also be brought down to an everyday, pragmatic level that can influence and shape the ordinary situations of women by asking and answering important questions that effect gender implementation in our changing societies.

Moi's respect for the everyday is yet another reason why her theories on women ought to include mothers. Moi assumes Beauvoir's banner of advocacy and maintains that it requires all aspects of everyday life to know what a "woman" is and can be. "What we need today more than ever is a feminism committed to seeking justice and equality for women, in the most ordinary sense of the word. Only such a feminism will

be able adequately to grasp the complexity of women's concrete, everyday concerns."[111] Adding seriousness and credibility to the oft-scoffed realm of the everyday, Moi includes Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell in her close reading of Beauvoir to strengthen and validate her argument for increased attention to the prosaic. "On Cavell's understanding of the ordinary and the everyday, the ordinary is the arena where human struggle takes place. [...] Feminist analysis of sexism and the oppression of women is usually located within the sphere of the ordinary."[112] The everyday is a powerful space of potential transformation that can overcome mindless repetition of oppression for women and mothers. Another advocate for the everyday is Ludwig Wittgenstein; Moi cites Wittgenstein's belief that philosophy is therapeutic, bent on diagnosing our all-consuming problems and presenting healthier alternatives that cause the original to fade. "Once we manage to escape from the picture that held us captive, we are released from the futile task of trying to answer questions that can have no answers because they do not make sense."[113] Escaping from the patriarchal image of motherhood, feminist theorists can move beyond Moi's perception of the mother as the suffocating and threatening mother, feared by an insecure daughter, to allow the mother to speak for herself as a woman from her location in the domestic sphere of the ordinary.

Rita Felski has called attention to the everyday in feminist theory, and this study relies on Felski as a model to suggest how the obsessively realistic Norwegian literature gives not lethargy but purpose to the daily routine and ritualistic details of mothers'

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[111] Moi, Woman 9.
[112] Moi 211.
[113] Moi 119.

lives. Topics like motherhood must be negotiated constantly through an understanding of the conflict and the potential of the everyday for Felski in a manner that Moi does not tolerate. Felski believes that metaphors of the everyday are tightly interwoven with metaphors of gender, so by extension the meaning of motherhood within a gendered society is in constant flux. Theories of the everyday invite a discussion of motherhood as women's lives invite connection to the repetitive and mundane tasks of the household and everyday realm. It is in this powerful nexus that mothers primarily exercise their influence, and a closer look at these everyday habits elevates "a repertoire of acquired abilities and practical skills" from task to theory.[114] Mothers optimize the potential in this dynamic location, typically characterized by everydayness, known for dichotomies of ritual and revolution.

Felski offers an inclusive approach to the everyday, and argues that an in-depth examination of the duplicity of prosaic actions, behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts reveals not only the struggles but also the "doubleness of everyday life."[115] The richness of the everyday will emerge when one considers the underlying components of seemingly unremarkable events, bringing meaning back to the intimate sphere by this act of revision. "The everyday must be rescued from oblivion by being transformed; the all too prosaic must be made to reveal its hidden subversive poetry. The name for this form of aesthetic distancing is of course defamiliarization."[116] Norwegian literature from the 1990s facilitated this alienating transformation by questioning the complacent and overlooked role of the mother, quietly hiding under the blanket of idealized

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[114] Rita Felski, introduction, New Literary History 33.4 (2002): 607-622. 614.
[115] Felski 607.
[116] Felski 608.

motherhood in Norwegian culture, politics, and society. These novels overturned the complacent maternal figure and showed her dissatisfaction with maternal expectations as a kind of emergency alarm to an enchanted reading society. Promoting defamiliarization, Felski states that the "all-too-familiar numbs and pacifies us, lulling us into a trance-like forgetfulness."[117] Citing examples of historical appearances of this dialectic of renewal, Felski calls for the affirmation of the prosaic to revive the ordinary as remarkable and strange. This kind of revolution that needs to take place with motherhood; this study argues that the natural acceptance of mothers has anesthetized society to the critical condition of her situation. Norwegian literature challenges that apathy and forces readers to take stock of their understanding of what it means to mother at the turn of the millennium.

Felski's call to estrange the everyday also helps to explain the overwhelmingly negative images of the mother in this body of literature. Applying Felski's logic to the literary situation facing contemporary Norwegian authors, writing about a string of good and ideal mothers would do nothing to promote and support the radical change underway in the redefinition of mothering. Rather, readers need to encounter the plethora of bad mothers in these novels to accentuate the defamiliarization on this topic in accordance with Felski. Readers identify with these female protagonists as lovers, friends, colleagues, and children, but when readers attempt to connect as mothers, the unexpected element of violence or estrangement or neglect usually prohibits that association. The subsequent hostility exposes the contradictions and the potential

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[117] Felski 607.

concealed within an individual's ideology of motherhood. Elaine Tuttle Hansen states that stories of bad or non-traditional mothers increase a reader's understanding for the situation of mothers.[118] Besides, which other alternatives exist? Felski provokes her readers to imagine other possible kinds of rebellion available for women. Women can lash out against themselves, their friends, and their lovers, but then they only harm themselves or another adult in those situations. The gravity of such abuse increases when women are on the offensive against their children, for then the parent turns offender and the child the ultimate victim. It is in their role as a mother that women capitalize on their power and potential either to do good or evil. Because these bad mothers are the most painful to observe, Felski argues that it is the strongest way for women to rebel in today's society. By exploiting the bad mother scenario, authors can investigate and undermine the inherent ideal of motherhood by developing outrageous fictional stories that challenge traditional maternal conceptions. Such novels empty the term "mother" and require readers to refill it with a newly created, alternate definition. The hidden "subversive poetry" in this literature flows from the lips, minds, and bodies of the female characters as their intimate essence as mothers becomes estranged and unfamiliar. Following Felski's argument, this type of rupture "may reveal more about the ingrained attitudes and attachments of a cohort of modern intellectuals than about the essence of daily life."[119] So too with Norwegian literature; the realism in these novels concentrates more on the renegotiation of the theoretical understanding and literary meaning of mothers than on the life experiences of "real" women, but the

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[118] Hansen 19.
[119] Felski 611.

validity of the question of motherhood is still paramount to the reader experience. The detailed portrayal of the everyday lulls the reader to indifference, only to recapture the reader's attention through the subversion of those recognizable situations.

Felski advocates for a feminist reading of the everyday, but Gary Saul Morson attributes similar transformative power to the reader based on his interpretation of Mikhail Bakhtin. Morson coined the phrase "prosaics" in 1987 as an umbrella term for the two general motifs he recognized in Bakhtin's theories, namely the prominence of prose to poetics and the elevation of everyday, ordinary actions to grand catastrophic ones.[120] Morson gives added dimension to the discussion of the Bakhtinian present by defining a literary mechanism that he terms sideshadowing. This narrative technique opens up an oft hidden zone of opportunity around every choice, for it "projects—from the 'side'—the shadow of an alternative present. It allows us to see what might have been and therefore changes our view of what is."[121] This technique casts doubt on the privileged actual event of the linear storyline, insisting that what might have been also deserves a place in the telling. Two or more alternatives are now present and, even though only one is ever chosen, all the possibilities now reside in the mind of the reader, leaving a series of potential questions to follow the plot of the tale. Morson defines this as a middle realm of interpretation and insists the following: "to understand a moment is to grasp not only what did happen but also what else might have happened [...] a temporal world consists not just of actualities and impossibilities but also of real though

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[120] Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) 15.
[121] Gary Saul Morson, Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time (New Haven: Yale, 1994), 11-12.

unactualized possibilities."[122] An excess of facts or possible actions casts disbelief on the presence of just one linear story, for an abundance of inessential information leaves gaping holes in the plot. The text has not one but many possible stories, calling into question the proposed principal incident because "the sideshadows crowd out the actual event [so that] nothing may have happened, in which case the sideshadows themselves are all there is."[123]

Morson understands sideshadowing and temporal opportunity as a vehicle of change that encourages the reader to see beyond the social criticism of a novel to find incentive for a personal re-evaluation of beliefs and values.[124] Morson finds truth in the prosaic rhythms of everyday life and in ordinary responsibility, endowing every moment of our lives with moral value since we are constantly creating our selves. Transferring this theory of ethical decision making directly from literature in to our everyday lives, Morson believes that literature serves as a tool of social betterment that has the power to shock readers out of literary and personal apathy into a heightened awareness of the present. In combination with Rita Felski and Toril Moi's thoughts on the power of the ordinary, these theorists make a strong case for the inclusion of the everyday as a viable force within the neo-realism of this literature to bring out the maternal voices in these contemporary narratives.

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[122] Morson, Narrative 119.
[123] Morson, Narrative 122.
[124] Morson, Narrative 119.

Mothers in Norwegian Literature

Motherhood is a concept that has obsessed the creators of Norwegian literature for generations, and the annals of literary history pay tribute to the many ways literature has portrayed mothers in keeping with the tendentious familial attitudes of the time. Some marginalized voices still need an audience, such as the voices of Norwegian immigrant and indigenous mothers, who rarely appear in the representations of mothers featured in the nation's literature. This newest generation of Norwegian authors has started to allow the mother to speak for herself, not always relegating her to recognition or definition powers of a man or a child who feels threatened by her power. While this study reads 1990s literature from this specific angle, scholars are approaching the mother in Norwegian literature from many other perspectives. The following section briefly presents a representative sample of some of the other research conducted on mothers in Norwegian literature.

Turid Sverre published an article on mothers and daughters in Norwegian literature in 1983, analyzing daughters' repressed anger and subsequent unhappiness in novels by Camilla Collett, Amalie Skram, Nini Roll Anker, Cora Sandel, and Magnhild Haalke. Sverre argues that daughters directed their anger inward when they were unable to accept their mothers' complacency in their roles as wives and mothers, thus thwarting their attempt at self-realization. "Mothers lie to silence the truth; daughters are silent to silence the lie."[125] Sverre contrasts the resignation in these earlier novels to the unleashed anger present in author Merete Wiger in her novel Slik spiller mødrene våre

[125] Turid Sverre, "The Barrenness of Silence: The Difficult Heritage of Mothers and Daughters in Norwegian Women's Literature," Edda 6 (1983): 329-338.

liv [This is the Way the Mothers Play Our Lives].[126] Not until the publication of this 1974 novel, according to Sverre, had daughters been able to liberate their power, a "tremendous rage necessary to finally break away from her mother's sphere of influence."[127] Yet Sverre deems this raw anger equally as misdirected as the repressed anger of previous generations. Mothers themselves were not the target in any generation of Norwegian literature, but the impression of the mother always triggered reaction. These novels featured "the scapegoat of the evil mother; it is not the mother we must kill, but the myth of a mother's role, which in our society has made her The Innocent Person."[128] Sverre seeks to soothe the painful rift between mother and daughter of her day by quelling the daughter's anger. Only 20 years later, that conflict has been more-or-less settled. Negative mothers still abound, but the daughter is no longer the antagonist as she had been just decades before. The novels of the 1990s expose a mother's lack of innocence and purity on her own terms, without the angry reaction of a grown daughter.

Ingrid Nymoen views the mother from a religious standpoint in her critical project where she traces the icon of motherhood from secular to sexual. Nymoen interprets motherhood as "et vitalt møtepunkt mellom religionens meningsunivers og jordelivet, mellom subjektet og det hellige" (315) ["a vital juncture between the religious domain and earthly life, between the subject and the holy"].[129] In the feminization of religion, the sacred role of motherhood has been renewed as "et sosialt

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[126] Merete Wiger, Slik spiller mødrene våre liv, (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1974).
[127] Sverre 335.
[128] Sverre 336.
[129] Ingrid Nymoen, "Om mødre, menn og meining i litteraturhistoria," Edda 4 (1992): 306-326.

og psykologisk forankringspunkt for metafysiske verdier" (317) ["a social and psychological point of anchor for metaphysical values"] within the constitution of a masculine subjectivity. Nymoen reads 1980s literature as heavily populated by both perspectives in a "feminine symboliseringer av mannlig subjektivitet hos mannlige forfattere" (323) ["feminine symbolization of masculine subjectivity among male authors"]. Nymoen identifies the fissure in contemporary images of motherhood from a religious perspective; that gap still exists, but this study departs from that viewpoint and takes a secular stance that privileges female subjectivity to that of the man or child.

Monika Zagar reads the novella "Invaliden" by Dag Solstad as harboring the image of a threatening mother who challenges the male protagonist/artist. The mother's body intrudes on the space and creativity of the ailing protagonist, and according to Zagar, he acts out against her to overpower her. Describing the scraping sound she makes on the door, Zagar writes that "tida, mora, kroppen og døden blir kombinerte. Når invaliden legg sin eigen kropp i reimer og kontrollerer mora, kan ein her tolke det som eit forsøk på å skyve frå seg frykta for tida og døden" (195) ["time, the mother, the body, and death are combined. When the invalid constrains his own body and controls the mother, one can interpret this as an attempt to distance himself from the fear of time and death"].[130] Zagar's reading of motherhood harkens back to second-wave feminism and highlights the fear of the mother as the catalyst of the novella. Elements of this debate remain in some strains of feminist theory on mothers.

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[130] Monika Zagar, "Å kvitte seg med mor? 'Invaliden' av Dag Solstad," Norsk Litterær Årbok, (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1998) 191-198.

Mothers in 1990s Norwegian Literature

Motherhood as a theme is certainly not new from a literary point of view, nor is the reaction to oppressive social conditions. Countless novels in the 1970s recorded the fictional trials and successes of the surging women's movement of that decade, a wave that left nuclear families overturned as women abandoned their posts as mothers and housewives and went to work. These novels rarely included the stories of what happened to the children of those born-again women, but after a period of incubation in the 1980s, their stories appeared in the 1990s in a new form. The generation of children reared by liberated mothers has now become adults with families of their own. As they tackle the challenges of parenthood themselves, they have taken up their pens to sort out their own complicated emotions on motherhood and the family. Rather than re-establish the nuclear family or revive a familial structure from their childhood, they are attempting to renegotiate a working definition of these roles. Authors test the limits and boundaries of traditional perceptions and idealizations in hopes of expanding the inclusiveness of family life.

Contemporary Norwegian authors make a strong argument for this openness as they expose the maternal in their novels of the 1990s; however, their literary subjects are far from any kind of maternal ideal. On the contrary, this body of literature resists nostalgic notions of ideal motherhood by allowing individual maternal voices to speak from their location in the everyday. This perspective produces a countermovement that reacts against the idealization of motherhood. Literature should not be a moral beacon offering positive mother figures, and critics ought not to discredit it for failing to

provide such images. Quite the opposite, it is worthwhile to investigate the images this body of literature presents to coax out collective misgivings enveloping motherhood rather than judging against an ingrained societal standard. This study argues that these novels and the authors who wrote them seek to make the maternal story easier to narrate by encouraging mothers to speak. Mothers must tell their individual stories of the fears, successes, traumas, and elation experienced while mothering and these narratives need not endorse an inaccessible ideal. These mothers' stories are the tales left untold by the overwhelming forces of patriarchy that surface even in a gender equal society like Norway. In the final decades of the millennium, motherhood has become a truism for Norwegian women, and the radical voices insisting on rebellion from inside feminism come to life in 1990s literature.

Beyond the nostalgia for the nuclear family and opposed to a universal image of perfect motherhood, the majority of these novels counter those perspectives with images of subversive mothers. At the very moment when literature seems to embrace the mother and the maternal body, it apparently rejects any alliance with the topic by presenting mothers as childless, absent, and obsessive. Although it may seem counterproductive, the negative slant of this literature does not undermine the position of mother, but fortifies it by challenging readers to renegotiate their own opinions of what it means to mother well. The feminist agenda in this literature is to expose the idealization of motherhood and re-open the debate in hopes of encouraging alternative images that resonate with a new generation. The 1990s focus on the family in general and the mother in particular is a literary attempt to elevate private beings into public

spaces, and broadcast the revision of motherhood and family values as a national debate. Arguably, the image of motherhood in these novels is not rosy, and the controversial "bad mothers" depicted therein have been troubling to many; however, questioning the dream of maternal bliss jars women from accepting the idealization of motherhood that constantly confronts them.

So much of the criticism about mothers in 1990s literature in Norway revolves around a moral measure of "bad mothers" in contrast to an absent but vivid "good mother" image. Few critics manage to escape the reverence of this nostalgic picture, like Tom Egil Hverven, as discussed at length in the previous chapter. Hverven's interpretation of this maternal trend as the reincarnation of the image of the Madonna with child is problematic on many levels. Hverven used this image to fortify the religious aspect of the family as an undeniable force in contemporary authors, basing his ethical restructuring on the shattered remains of the nuclear family. Other critics mourn the loosened, jeopardized, or severed maternal ties with a slightly different slant. Irene Iversen, among others, explains the trend of the "bad mother" in contemporary literature as an indication of a cultural crisis in Norwegian society but gives no rationale as to why this may be the case. According to interviewer Trude Hansen, Iversen states that young female authors like Hanne Ørstavik, Trude Marstein, and Linn Ullmann "problematiserer morsforholdet og presenterer negative morsbilder gjennom sine tekster. Men årsaken til at de gjør det, har Iversen ikke funnet noe fullgodt svar på foreløpig" ["problematize maternal relationships and present negative mother images in

their texts. But Iversen hasn't found a good answer for why they do that"].[131] Unable to explain these derivations in typical feminist issues, Iversen maintains that "det tyder på en kulturell krise i vårt samfunn, at mødrene i mye av denne litteraturen framstår som iskalde. Dette er ikke bare et individuelt fenomen, men en dimensjon ved denne litteraturen som er blitt neglisjert" ["it indicates a cultural crisis in our society when the mothers in so much of this literature come across as ice cold. This is not just an individual phenomenon, but a dimension within this literature that is being neglected"].[132]

Iversen is not alone in her bewildered stance to the complex relationship between women, feminism, and motherhood in this literature. Marta Norheim believes that the women in "den nye norske kvinnelitteraturen er egoistiske, forfengelege og sjølvhevdande. Dei er blotta for tradisjonelle kvinnelege dygder som omsorg og innleving" ["the new Norwegian women's literature are egoistical, vain, and self-assertive. They are void of the traditional female moral virtues of compassion and insight"].[133] It is troubling that so few Norwegian scholars address this relationship or examine it from something other than the default feminism practiced in literary Norway. Asking questions of feminist theory and reading these texts as a "third wave" feminist literary critic can facilitate a reconsideration of the established societal beliefs, and increase attentiveness to the emerging dialogue at work modifying the role of the

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[131] Trude Hansen, "Etterlengetet feminist," Afrodite: kvinner, Kjærlighet, og kultur, Oct. 2002, 22 Nov. 2002 <http://www.media.uio.no/nettavis2002/na10/html/etterlengtetfeminist.html>.
[132] Hilde Østby, "Feminisme på papiret," Dagsavisen Mar. 2002, 22 Nov. 2002 <http://www.dagsavisen.no/kultur/litteratur/2002/03/643770.shtml>.
[133] Ottar Fyllingsnes, "Vonde kvinner og tafatte karar," Dag og Tid 16 Nov. 2002, 22 Nov 2002 <http://www.dagogtid.no/arkiv/2002/46/kultur>.

mother. Truly, there is much to discover within the maternal image in 1990s literature that cannot be dismissed with an easy claim of bad mothering. Ironically, these scholars' reactions to the figure of the rebellious Norwegian matriarchs are, in the bigger picture of feminist literary studies, rather tame in their outrage.

As outlined in the introduction, the following chapters turn to the literature to see how the novels exhibit mothers as childless, excessive, and absent. The ability to mother is the moral gauge for the protagonists of these novels, and all struggle to live up to the standards set by society. Highlighting unifying themes, these mothers are quite homogenous. They overwhelmingly choose mothering over marriage. None of the young mothers is married, and few have solid relationships to give them extra support with childcare or any emotional issues. Most mother characters are independent, somewhere between 20-30 years old, have prioritized education and culture, and now work in profitable jobs. These women crave fulfillment as lovers, career women, and mothers, but all are denied the realization of that vision on some level.

Chapter III: Mothers Without Child

The bond between mother and child stands as the logical beginning for any discussion of mothering, but what happens to the mother when the child disappears. How does the mother deal with the loss and disconnection from her child? Elaine Tuttle Hansen reads 20th century American literature for stories of the mother without child to hear the voices of bereft mothers or mothers who cannot maintain that bond. Hansen believes that these mothers present a new kind of maternal story, one that allows them to "subvert these categories of criminal or victim, bad or good mother, by not fitting comfortably into either or by occupying both at the same time."[134] Hanne Ørstavik and Anne Oterholm write two such stories that culminate in the image of the mother without child. The plots of Kjærlighet [Love] from 1997 and Avslutningen [The Conclusion] from 1998 revolve around the relationship between the mother/child pair, but the novels reveal how the mothers lose their children to death. The narrative presents the protagonists of these stories, the educated and successful women Vibeke and Mona, as negligent mothers whose inattention indirectly causes the children's deaths. They fail to uphold the expected standards of a "good" mother, yet these women are not entirely "bad" mothers either. By counteracting both ideals these women unravel the myths of the sacrificial and the self-centered mother. This chapter addresses the case of the mother without her child as identified by Hansen.

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[134] Elaine Tuttle Hansen 27.

Reading functions as a catalyst on several levels inside and outside the text. Both female protagonists are avid readers, and reading is an escape from the everyday that allows both women to imagine a life quite unlike their own. For Vibeke, that life consists of corporeal luxury, measured in ageless beauty and fashion. The omniscient narrator casts Vibeke's reading habits as negative and demeaning, and her character therefore comes across to the reader as foolish and sentimental because she idealizes men and their fantasies of feminine beauty. In contrast, a lifestyle based in the patriarchal 'ideals' of feminine physical beauty repulses Mona, and as the narrator, she demeans her sister's choice to live with that superficial material focus. Mona's ideal life, before motherhood, adheres to the analytical life of the academy. Exemplifying how drastically motherhood changes her life as a mother, Mona eventually adopts the very ideals she detests by the end of the novel. Each of these lifestyles projects a masculine ideal of womanhood rooted in patriarchy, placing value on a woman as an object of beauty, and an ideal mother. This leaves no room for a woman to experiment with alternative mother roles. Reading and storytelling are critical tasks that pull both female protagonists away from their mothering duties, and are substitutes for any other large-scale action or violence in the texts. Yet these non-violent actions have fatal consequences; the mothers' passion for fiction indirectly results in the death of their children. This tragedy elevates reading to a form of rebellion for the mothers and, by extension, for the reader, even though the perspective of the narrator seduces the reader to privilege both child and partner before the considering the woman as a mother.

Therefore the reader's interpretation of the text can expose both the narrator's ideology of ideal motherhood and the reader's own preconceptions.

Although they are surrounded by conformity, the ways in which these women choose to mother conflict with both patriarchal visions of woman as an object of 'beauty' and as a 'perfect mother.' Oterholm's character Mona more closely resembles a dedicated mother, for she quits school and work to be a full-time mom and selflessly dedicates all her time to her son. Ørstavik's character Vibeke is Mona's antithesis; although she is far from evil, her nonchalant attitude signals a disinterested mother. Well-educated and employed, Vibeke pampers herself and gives little thought to the welfare of her son, yet both women leave the maternal for the romantic as their thoughts turn to love. In the course of Ørstavik's narrative, Vibeke abandons her maternal responsibilities and follows her fantasy on her date. Her daydreaming prevents her from noticing her date's disinterest, and later her son's absence and death. The story ends without conveying her response at the discovery of her son Jon's death. Because Oterholm's narrative covers several years instead of just several hours like Ørstavik's, the reader can track the development in Mona's behavior over an extended period. Attracted to an intelligent professor, Mona has an affair and forgoes her scholarly pursuits when she becomes pregnant with the professor's child. Her academic goals disappear as the due date approaches, and after the birth she dedicates her life to the child. When the bubble of maternal bliss bursts and Mona loses her son, she cannot cope without her reading, research, or child. Both mothers respond differently to the

pressures of mothering and the forthcoming reading of these two novels will show the ways in which the mother without child complicates the maternal ideal.

Hanne Ørstavik's Kjærlighet

Ørstavik builds her novel Kjærlighet around a night in the life of Vibeke and Jon, a single mother and her young son, and their inability to communicate with each another. The entire novel spans a mere 100 pages, and it chronicles the events of one winter evening. With the brief exception of Jon's opening dream, the narrator oscillates without pause between Jon and Vibeke's stories in the third person present. The mesmerizing banter is almost exclusively comprised of third-person pronouns, often forcing the reader to re-examine each sentence in order to determine which character matches the action of the pronoun in the text. Ørstavik's terse and compact style engages the reader, and the drama that unfolds ends tragically in death. The irony in such a claim is that nothing catastrophic happens in the overall storyline of the novel until the very end, a sign of Ørstavik's skill at making the prosaic so powerful. The story spans eight hours, but the tragedy stays with the reader much longer because it pivots on an emotional maternal failure based on a series of unfortunate choices and assumptions made by both mother and child. On the eve of his birthday, Jon leaves home for a while without his key or his mittens to give his mother the opportunity to begin his birthday preparations. Jon's birthday never enters Vibeke's mind as she constructs her evening plans and departs for the library. Jon leaves home without telling his mother, and Vibeke leaves home without checking on her son. Both mother and son

are at fault, but Vibeke receives the blame because she has disregarded her mothering responsibilities without remorse. Jon's death leaves Vibeke as a mother without child per Hansen, even though it could be argued that he was absent to her while he was alive.

This chapter examines Vibeke's portrayal as a "bad" mother and then looks at narrative style and use of time to alleviate the pressure of ideal motherhood on Vibeke. Time is a crucial element in this novel, and Ørstavik's language use becomes even more pronounced when it is considered as a narrative force. The simplicity of this novel invites the reader to return to the text and examine the storyline more closely. When Gary Saul Morson's concept of sideshadowing informs the reading, the latent plurality of the everyday transforms the apparent condemnation of motherhood into an invitation for the reader to reconsider her own opinions on the topic. Ørstavik directs our attention to the mother in this novel to show how the lives of Vibeke and Jon are constrained by the institution of motherhood. Ørstavik renders the everyday unfamiliar in order to cast doubt on the standard maternal image, portraying the alienation of mother and child as a direct consequence of repeating learned behaviors of mothering. Vibeke's absolute denial and ignorance of the maternal sharply contrasts Jon's idealistic opinions of the same role. Although specific examples of mothering receive very little attention in the dialogue of the story, the general emphasis of the mother is an underlying force that drives the narrative and exposes the narrator's prejudices. Presumed to give a neutral perspective of the situation, the narrator speaks from a position of patriarchy that gauges

the actions and thoughts of Vibeke and Jon. This gendered conflict within the narrative calls attention to the plight of the mother and forces the reader to articulate her opinion.

Norwegian critics have stressed elements of this kind of reading, but the critical literature on Ørstavik's fiction separates into three main categories, covering her language use and narrative style, family focus, and feminist tendencies. Many praise the precision and clarity of her language, which explains her classification as a minimalist, while others focus on the open-ended linguistic play in her narratives. Several critics reacted to Ørstavik's inclusion into Tom Egil Hverven's study on the family, defending and denying her classification under that rubric, while other critics completely bypassed the family label and concentrated on the feminist strains in Ørstavik's novels. Before continuing with a reading of the mother in Ørstavik's text, this study presents a representative sample of the criticism produced by Kjærlighet.

Critical reception

Following the publication of her first three prose pieces, many were quick to commend Ørstavik for her exceptional linguistic play. Geir Vestad includes Ørstavik in his grouping of 1990s minimalists in his programmatic article on the topic. Vestad interprets Ørstavik's use of language in Kjærlighet as a defense mechanism for her characters, allowing them to create a linguistic buffer of isolation from the world. Vestad reads Ørstavik's narrative style as a descriptive, non-dramatic account of the mundane everyday that accents a larger search "etter et språk som ikke bare er et dekke

for virkeligheten" (162) ["for a language that isn't just a cover for reality"].[135] While Vestad's pronouncement is the result of his critical view of Ørstavik's first two books, it is fair to say that even Ørstavik's longer novels maintain a linguistic terseness that justifies this definition. Øystein Rottem also names Ørstavik a minimalist, and cursorily describes her breakthrough novel Kjærlighet as "en mer 'tradisjonell' og enklere episk tekst" (755) ["a more 'traditional' and simpler epic text"] in his edition of Norwegian literary history.[136] Other critics take a different stance on her language use and emphasize the multiple realities and readings they produce, reminiscent of Morson's concept of sideshadowing. Interrogating the gap between text and reality, Tone Velldal summarizes the novel as showing "hvordan språket former virkeligheten, hvordan ulike språklige erfaringer skaper ulike tolkninger av hva som skjer, av hva som sies" ["how language forms reality, how dissimilar linguistic experiences create dissimilar interpretations of what happens and what is said"].[137] Bjarne Markussen builds his reading around the abuse of power and language in parental love, condemning Vibeke for her lack of compassion toward her son and failure to teach him how to understand reality. "Han kapsles inn (eller stenges ute) av hennes fraser. Slik blir tekstens betydningsrom et rom som på en gripende måte fremviser kvinnelig symbolsk vold" (81) ["He gets bottled up (or locked out) by her phrases. In this way the meaningful space of the text becomes a space that illustrates female symbolic violence in a gripping

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[135] Geir Vestad, "Minimalismens tiår," Norsk Litterær Årbok, ed. Hans H. Skei and Einar Vannebo (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1999) 150-168.
[136] Øystein Rottem, Etterkrigslitteraturen. Bind 3. Vår Egen Tid, 1980-1998. (Oslo: Cappelen, 1998).
[137] Tone Velldal, "Den gode viljen," Morgenbladet 26 Sept. 1997. 2002 <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=3306>.

manner"].[138] Markussen uses the absence of past or present history in their relationship to support their spatial juxtaposition and distance in the story.

Reflecting in an interview on the clarity of her narrative voice, Ørstavik ruminates on the truthfulness of words and her lack of trust in them. "Jeg har en klar opplevelse av at det sanne knytter seg til noe konkret, noe man kan kjenne på. Følgelig har jeg også en slags mistro til ordene. Da kan man jo stille spørsmålet om hvorfor skrive når man ikke har tillit til ord, men det er vel for å si at det faktisk finnes noen ord som holder" ["I have a clear sense that the truth is connect to something concrete, something you can touch. Therefore, I have a kind of distrust of words. Of course then you could ask the question of why write when you don't have access to words, but I suppose that is to say that there are in fact some words that manage"].[139] Ørstavik argues that she writes to find the words that are truthful and that can convey meaning, a comment that can be interpreted as her attempt to reinstate meaning in overused words and phrases like 'mother' and 'love.' "Kjærlighet er i hvert fall et av de mest problematiske ordene overhodet. Det blir veldig fort et av de aller tommeste" ["Love is in any case one of the most problematic words of all. It quickly becomes one of the emptiest"].[140] Ørstavik describes her book as "et naivt forsøk" ["a naïve attempt"] to create a love relationship between the reader and the book, more specifically between

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[138] Bjarne Markussen, "Romanens rom: Teoretiske perspektiver med eksempler fra Jarvoll, Kjærstad, Ørstavik, og Lønn," Edda 1 (2001): 70-84.
[139] Catherine Sandnes, "Å skape sannhet med skrift," Arbeiderbladet 15 Sept. 1997.
[140] Sandnes.

the reader and the boy, to prove that language still carries meaning and can reach someone.[141]

Regarding her frequent label as a "family author" of the 1990s, Ørstavik concedes in another interview that it angers her to be included in Hverven's project. She insists that she is not just talking about the family, but "oppteken av relasjonane som formar oss. […] [Dei tre romanane] set spørsmålsteikn ved om me er frie til å velja. Dei tek i større grad opp spørsmålet om avhengigheit og plikter enn familien som system" ["captivated by the relationships that shape us. […] [The three novels] question whether we are free to choose. They primarily take up the question of dependence and duties rather than the family as a system"].[142] To another journalist, Ørstavik expresses that she chooses to investigate family relations "for å vise fram ting man ikke alltid har lyst til å se" ["in order to expose things that one doesn't always want to see"].[143] This includes the negative and painful images of mothers that fall outside the perfect ideal. Others are also unconvinced by her family brand, including Mari Lending, who is unwilling to allow Like sant som jeg er virkelig [As If I Was Real] to be rubberstamped by Hverven's theory.[144] "At Hverven i sin anmeldelse av Like sant som jeg er virkelig igjen velger å lokalisere kjernefamiliens kollaps som en grunnleggende generasjonserfaring som repeteres i den nye romanen, fortoner seg mer som en kritikers 'fiks idè' enn som et vesentlig trekk ved teksten" ["That Hverven in his review of Like sant som jeg er virkelig again chooses to localize the collapse of the nuclear family as a

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[141] Sandnes.
[142] Ottar Fyllingsnes, "Dei infantile 68-foreldra," Dag og Tid 9 Nov. 2000.
[143] Simen Ekern, "Hemmeligheter og løgner," Dagbladet 9 Dec. 2000.
[144] Mari Lending, "Truende om mor og barn," Aftenposten 22 Oct. 1997.

basic generation's fundamental experience that is repeated in the new novel, seems more like a critic's 'fad' than as an essential characteristic of the text"].[145] However, in her review of Kjærlighet, Mari Lending lauded Ørstavik for creating a powerful alternative to the cultural icon of the mother/child bond. In Lending's words, Ørstavik portrays "en ganske annerledes versjon av fortellingen om mor og barn-symbiosen, som blir betraktet som en så grunnleggende relasjon i vår kultur" ["a rather different version of the narrative of mother and child symbiosis that is regarded as a fundamental relation in our culture"].[146] By embracing the appearance of the mother and child bond in one novel and denying its presence in the second, Lending exemplifies the troubled reception of this theme by literary critics.

Taking an alternative stance on the family, Per Thomas Andersen categorizes Ørstavik's authorship as a homebuilding project, and he extends the metaphor to encompass the entire body of 1990s Norwegian literature:

> Drømmen om 'tunet' er et meget tydelig eksempel på en tematisk trend i norsk 1990s-tallslitteratur: å bygge tunet er en form for *nesting*, mor og datter skal bygge et *rede* sammen. Men dette er ikke et rede eller et hjem for en vanlig kjernefamilie. Det er et rede for en symbiose. [...] Uro i redet er et gjennomgangstema i den nye 1990-tallslitteraturen (561-562)
>
> [The dream of 'the homestead' is a very evident example of a thematic trend in Norwegian 1990s literature: to build the homestead is a form of *nesting*, mother and daughter shall build a *nest* together. But this is not a

[145] Mari Lending, "Ubehagelig innblikk i sårbarhet," Aftenposten 23 Feb. 1999.
[146] Mari Lending, "Truende"

> nest or a home for a normal nuclear family. This is a nest for a symbiosis. [...] Unrest in the nest is a pervasive theme in the new 1990s literature].[147]

Andersen elaborates on his reading of Ørstavik and the 1990s in Tankevaser [Tangled Thoughts], and equates his metaphor for nesting with the general sense of insecurity inherent in the postmodern lifestyle. "Det er de nære følelsemessige forholdene til andre mennesker som gjøre oss i stand til å leve med risiko" (103) ["It is the close, emotional relationships to other people that allow us to live with risk"].[148] Norwegian literature's concentration on the family functions for Andersen as a portion of a larger search for nearness and connection in an increasingly dysfunctional and dangerous world. With psychological argumentation, Andersen identifies global social problems as justification for the family focus in novels written by Ørstavik and her Norwegian contemporaries. "Uroen i redet handler om den eksistensielle utfordringen ved å leve under betingelser der identitiet, tilknyting og orientering er blitt problematiske på en ny og prekær måte" (105) ["The unrest in the nest has to do with the existential challenge to live a life under conditions where identity, attachment, and orientation have become problematic in a new and precarious way"]. Ørstavik fits neatly into Andersen's canon of newer Norwegian literature since her novels tend to have a psychological undercurrent that meshes well with his literary perspective. The family connections easily lend themselves to a Freudian reading when "foreldrefigurene svikter og den sikre basen ikke fungerer" (106) ["parental figures fail and the secure base no longer functions"].

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[147] Per Thomas Andersen, Norsk litteraturhistorie, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001).
[148] Per Thomas Andersen, Tankevaser: Om norsk 1990-tallslitteratur, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2003) 103.

On the whole, Andersen's argument for narcissism is unconvincing and cries for an interpretation that does not rely on psychoanalysis. "Jeg tror Hanne Ørstavik beskriver personer og personlige relasjoner der tilknytningsevnen er forvansket av trekk som kan oppfattes som narsissistiske" (108) ["I think Hanne Ørstavik describes people and personal relationships where the ability to connect is corrupted by currents that can be interpreted as narcissistic"]. Andersen's identification of narcissism interferes with his interpretation of the nesting trend in this literature, for self-centered individuals do not turn to others for support when their worlds are challenged. In particular, Anderson describes the mother/daughter bond as a symbiosis where the two women live and support each other, but not necessarily in a mutually beneficial relationship. Following his interpretation, the relationship is usually destructive, leading me to question his preconceptions of the mother, who is predictably always at fault. Part of the acknowledged insecurity with the postmodern lifestyle is the inability to adapt to changing behaviors and attitudes. Andersen's interpretations also appear unfalteringly constant in their belief that the mother or any familial relation is able to function in non-traditional ways. Per Thomas Andersen seems unwilling to acknowledge that the unrest in the nest could be a positive signal of a transformation, perhaps akin to housecleaning, getting rid of the old to make way for the new.

Several literary critics read Ørstavik's novels from a feminist perspective to highlight the linguistic and social tensions in her female characters. Christine Hamm compares Ørstavik to Amalie Skram and views them both as creators of melodrama, where the female characters are unwilling or unable to express themselves in everyday

language. "Ørstaviks romaner anskueliggjør språkets store betydning for menneskelig samliv, og i den forstand kan en si at romanene forfølger et språk*bekreftende*, snarere enn et språkkritisk, prosjekt" ["Ørstavik's novels illustrate language's central role in human relations, and in that sense one can say that the novels pursue a language *confirming*, rather than a language criticizing, project"].[149] Hamm supports the notion that Ørstavik is out to refill outdated words and relationships. Kristin Lande emphasizes the irony in the twofold choice that she sees Ørstavik offer, between a dissatisfaction with the current language and an intolerance for apathy. "På den ene siden vil hun avslører klisjeene, de tomme frasene og løgnene. [...] Samtidig insisterer hun på at vi ikke har noe valg; vi må finne fram til et språk som samsvarer med det vi føler og erfarer—hvis ikke kan det gå oss riktig galt" ["On the one hand she wants to disclose clichés, the empty phrases, and the lies. [...] Simultaneously, she insists that we do not have a choice; we must find a language that corresponds to that we feel and experience—if not things can go seriously wrong"].[150] Both elements are crucial feminist readings of Ørstavik's texts that challenge the ordinary to evoke the new.

Focusing specifically on Vibeke's role as a mother, critics highlight the collaboration of space, language, and everyday time. Aasta Marie Bjorvand, in her thesis on space in Kjærlighet, postulates that Vibeke and Jon's analogous lives meet negatively on their respective driving tours, described by Bjorvand as parallel in space and time but not place.[151] Bjorvand's reading adds merit to Vibeke and her choices as a

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[149] Christine Hamm, "Tåreperse eller språkkristikk?" Vagant 2/3 (2001): 41-47.
[150] Kristin Lande, Hanne Ørstavik: Forfatterhefte, (Oslo: Biblioteksentralen AL, 2002).
[151] Aasta Marie Bjorvand, "En reise inn i romanens rom: Rom og romlighet i Hanne Ørstaviks roman Kjærlighet," diss., University of Oslo, 2003.

mother, by equating the vulnerability of the mother and the child. On a darker note, Irene Engelstad comments on Vibeke's reading habits as proof of the presence of superficial overtones in Ørstavik's language, a result of the intrusion of consumerism in close relationship and everyday life. "Moren i boken er invadert av ukebladspråket" (15) ["The mother in the book is invaded by magazine language"].[152] This complacent mentality complacency provoked the author herself in an interview, where Ørstavik admitted that she wanted to investigate female violence and the abuse of power through negligence and passivity. Instead of concentrating on physical violence, Ørstavik tries "å skriva om det ekstreme i det normale. Det vert mykje farlegare og mykje meir relevant for dei fleste. [...] Det har vore viktig for meg å visa noko som det har vore skrive lite om; korleis kvinner er djevelsk gode til å manipulera med språk" ["to write about the extreme in the normal. It was much more dangerous and much more relevant for the majority. [...] It has been important for me to show something on which little has been written; how women are devilishly good at manipulating with language"].[153] The exploitation of power and language are fundamental elements to investigate when exposing the contradictions of the daily lives of women, especially when considering women's responsibilities as mothers.

Mothers

Vibeke is a single mom, working full-time in a new and exciting job. She wants a partner, but finds most pleasure in reading about rather than searching for love. Vibeke

[152] Trude Rønnestad and Ane Haukebø Aasland, "Tendenser i litteraturen: En samtale med Irene Engelstad og Tom Egil Hverven," Bøygen 3 (2001) 6-15.
[153] Ottar Fyllingsnes, "Mor, barn, og djevelsk manipulering," Dag og Tid 18 Feb. 1999.

emerges as the bored housewife looking for escape in dreamy romance novels, although she is far from the stereotype. Affected by the dreamy affairs of a typical romance plot, Vibeke's daydreaming emerges as a consequence of her vulnerability to fiction. Her reading times are autoerotic and luxurious, and she savors candlelight, long baths, and body care. Vibeke's long, internal monologues on skin care and detailed grooming are peppered with flirtatious thoughts of meaningful eye contact and latent chemistry she feels for new colleagues. These qualities make Vibeke appear as a superficial woman for fulfilling the ideal of woman as an object of beauty. The narrator grants her no other reflection to prove the contrary. Her chatter is acceptable for a single woman, but unacceptable for a mother, and therefore the reader judges her for failing to live up to one patriarchal expectation while embodying another. Cast as a hopeless romantic when she misinterprets her date's intentions, Vibeke exhibits moral failure when she misinterprets her son's behaviors by assuming that he has gone to bed for the evening. The moment of climax for Vibeke's crisis as a mother comes at the novel's end when she, asleep in her bed, is oblivious to Jon's peril, as he freezes to death in the snow outside their front door.

Jon, on the other hand, emerges as the tragic victim and hero of the story for adoring the image of the idealized woman as the perfect mother. When Jon misreads Vibeke, he makes a factual error free of the moral overtones that affect Vibeke's situation. The narrator forgives the male child for making the same mistake for which the mother is condemned. Jon daydreams often about his mother and he, with photographic memory, recalls their conversations and future plans; the narrator regards

these fantasies as innocent and loyal and not naïve as in Vibeke's case. As a young boy, Jon 'naturally' views Vibeke as a mother and not as a woman, a colleague, or a lover; nevertheless, he does not appear to be suffering excessively from Vibeke's choice not to be an ideal mother who cooks and cleans and dotes exclusively on her child. The reader has no textual proof of Vibeke's prior negligence as a mother earlier in Jon's life; on the contrary, evidence of her close connection with Jon affirms that she has been a good enough mother in the past. Vibeke has raised Jon to be independent, has taught him how to take care of himself, and has now started to lessen the maternal control in Jon's life to allow him to grow up and act independently of her. Jon desires this closeness and responds to this mature treatment by creating nostalgic dreams of their past and present life together, including plans for an ideal birthday celebration. That is not the birthday surprise awaiting Jon, however, and thus Jon's expectations of the perfect birthday hosted by the perfect mother bring about his demise.

The narrator's conflicted portrayal of the mother in Kjærlighet forces the reader to judge Vibeke as a mother and thereby revealing her own interpretation of motherhood. With so few textual examples of Vibeke's recognition of her responsibilities as mother or her love for Jon, it is hard for the reader to escape the narrative's skeptical view of her maternal failures. Yet it is precisely in its absence that motherhood comes to the fore of this novel. When the narrator denies Vibeke the chance to tell her own version of her mothering history, it increases the reader's desire to hear her side of the maternal story. There are a few instances of Vibeke's affection and love for Jon, but Jon communicates them all. He tells that she buys him a new pair

of slippers shortly after they move, and she makes him dinner in the evening once they are both home from school and work. Both are practical care giving acts, but their normality proves that Vibeke is a normal mother, taking charge of everyday chores and providing for her child. The fact that her meal is only boiled hot dogs speaks less to her ability to be a compassionate mother, and more of her unwillingness or inability to cook. The only direct conversation recorded between mother and son takes place during this evening meal. The narrator reports that they have been talking together back and forth while eating their hotdogs, but the storyline records none of that dialogue. Therefore, the passage below sets the tone for their entire evening, and by extension, their entire relationship, portraying Vibeke as a shallow and inconsiderate mother. In a brief exchange of affectionate dialogue and caresses at the dinner table, Vibeke shows concern for Jon and then thinks immediately of her nails:

> Hun strekker ut hånden og stryker ham over håret. –Har du begynt å få venner her? Håret hans er tynt og mykt. –Jon, sier hun, –aller kjæreste Jon. Hun gjentar bevegelsen, ser på hånden sin. Hun har lagt på en lys beige neglelakk med litt rosa i, hun liker å være diskret på jobben (13)
>
> [She reaches out her hand and strokes him over the hair. "Have you started making friends here?" His hair is thin and soft. "Jon," she says, "my dearest Jon." She repeats the movement, looks at her hand. She has put on a light beige nail polish with a hint of pink in it; she likes to be discrete at work].[154]

[154] Hanne Ørstavik, Kjærlighet, (Oslo: Oktober, 1997).

The narrator never allows Vibeke a chance to reflect on Jon's situation or her responsibilities as a mother. The same maternal behavioral pattern repeats later in the evening when she decides to go to the library. Without going to his room to talk to him, Vibeke hollers at Jon twice and then leaves, nonchalantly reflecting that he has been putting himself to bed lately without her help. "Hun bøyer seg inn i gangen og roper på Jon, hun ser tilbake i speilet. Det ble til at hun nesten ikke tok på noe sminke. Han svarer ikke. Hun roper en gang til, hun ser på klokka, det er en knapp halvtime til det stenger" (28) ["She leans into the hallway and yells at Jon, she looks back in the mirror. It turned out that she almost didn't put on any make-up. He doesn't answer. She yells one more time, she looks at the clock, it's only a half-hour until it closes"]. With that parting thought on page 28, Vibeke locks the door and leaves for the library, and that is the last time that she thinks of her son for the remainder of the book. These factors paint a very negative image of Vibeke as a mother, and her Vibeke's self-centeredness is a central factor in her purported failure as a mother.

Vibeke is rarely given an opportunity to express her own opinions on mothering, but Jon paints a different picture of her that includes more positive images of her abilities. These favorable glimpses do little for altering Vibeke's status as a better mother, for Jon's images compare her behavior to his idealized vision of a perfect mother. Jon recalls the nostalgic image of story time, and remembers those moments fondly. This memory again shows Vibeke's penchant for fiction and her expectation or hope to lead a fairytale life:

> Hvordan så det ut der, spurte alltid Vibeke da prinsessa hadde flykta inn i et fremmed slott. Fortell du, Jon. Han husker at han satt på fanget hennes og beskrev store, tomme rom med åpne vinduer og lange, lette gardiner. Tente lys og myke tepper. Du vet hvordan det skal være, du Jon, pleide hun å si (11) [What did it look like there, Vibeke always asked when the princess had moved into a strange castle. Tell me, Jon. He remembers that he sat on her lap and described big, empty rooms with open windows and long, light curtains. Flickering candles and soft rugs. You know how it should be, Jon, she used to say].

Vibeke may have prompted this voyage into fantasyland to cultivate her love for fiction in Jon. Encouraging Jon to dream about princesses and castles planted and fed the image of the ideal home and fairytale romance that established Jon's own dreams and castles in the sky. Alternatively, Vibeke may have tried to distract Jon from unpleasant circumstances at home or frightening moves to new places with these same stories, creative tactics of a thoughtful mother. Each instance of mothering in the text has several possible interpretations.

For the reader, it is perhaps easiest to side with Jon and against Vibeke, for Jon is portrayed as the tragic victim emphatically neglected by his 'responsible' mother. Yet Jon does not completely fill the role of the victim either, as the previous quotes have suggested. Other community members in their small town neighborhood unknowingly assist Vibeke in the story, but they are equally negligent. Jon makes friends with several new neighbors and even befriends a stranger earlier in the evening. Each encounter

provides an opportunity for the adults to act responsibly and help the young boy. The old man does his part, when he invites him inside and tells him stories of skating competitions. His female classmates play with him, share their mittens, and invite him home for a while. However, the girl's parents send him home late at night without a single question about his well-being. A woman with a white wig, an outsider and a skeptical stranger, showers compassion on Jon by picking him up and taking him for a drive when she knows that his mother is out with the carnival worker Tom. Each encounter prolongs his life by rescuing him from the freezing cold, but like Vibeke, none of the community members can fulfill the ideal expectation of 'mothering' either. The tragedy of this story occurs not just from Vibeke's failure as a mother, but also as a general failure of community to support one of their own. The label of "bad mother" placed on Vibeke exposes the latent societal notions of ideal motherhood that shape that characterization. The thematic agenda collaborates with time as a narratological force, and the combination furthers the understanding of mothering in the text.

Jon

Ørstavik creates a tension of time in Kjærlighet by penning a great number of short sentences that detail a surplus of facts and actions. Ørstavik's choppy, near run-on sentences, give fragments of facts, thoughts, stimuli, rationalizations, ideas, and feelings that emphasize a contingency of events tinged with mystery and trepidation. The story tells the specifics of their evening together, but employing Gary Saul Morson's ideas on sideshadowing heightens the reader's awareness of other things that could have

happened in the story. This study uses Morson's concept of sideshadowing as the interpretative potential of a text that produces multiple meaning by asking questions of the narrative. In keeping with the character portrayal in Ørstavik's story, the reader knows that nothing extraordinary needed to happen to direct either the single mother's mind toward romance or the lonely boy's mind to his fantasies, but something else may have happened in both cases. This mode of interpretation leads the reader to conclude that the manipulative carnival employees used Vibeke and Jon both. As the carnival workers took advantage of the characters' time, so too does the narrative manipulate the reader's sense of time. It seems as though time moves slowly when Jon and Vibeke are out on their adventures because, in Morson's words, the narrative makes "time itself [...] a succession not just of points of actuality but also of fields of possibilities."[155] Vibeke's time at the bar and Jon's never-ending car trip feel even longer because of the sheer number of events that could have happened in both situations. The following passage is rather banal on the surface, but the contents become much more perplexing and compelling when reconsidered with the potential of time. Jon walks around his neighborhood after dinner and tries to sell raffle tickets for his sports team. The reader is privy to the same stimuli that Jon feels on his walk up to the neighbor's house, and stands with him in the electric present where each moment is charged with possibility:

> Han tar loddboka i hånda og fortsetter tvers over veien, opp den lille måkte stien. Det knirker under skoene. Den gamle mannen har et overbygg ved inngangsdøra, under der står det stabler med ved. Det har

[155] Morson, Narrative. 11-12.

blåst snø mellom kubbene. Utelampe er ikke slått på. Jon finner ringeklokka i mørket. Han presser den inn, men han kan ikke høre noen lyd. Det er så stille, tenker Jon. Plutselig åpner den gamle mannen døra, det kommer så brått at Jon skvetter. –Vil du kjøpe lodd, spør han og holder fram loddboka. –Det er for idrettslaget. Den gamle mannen ser på ham, så ser han bak ham ned mot veien. Øynene hans beveger seg fort. Det er lenge siden det kom noen biler. Det er for kaldt til at folk bare er ute og går. Han vinker Jon inn. Han stenger ytterdøra og går inn ei annen dør. Jon tramper av seg snøen og følger etter (15) [He takes the book of raffle tickets in hand and continues to cross the street, up the little shoveled path. It squeaks under his shoes. The old man has an awning beside the entry door; under it stands a stack of wood. Snow has blown in between the logs. The outside light is not on. Jon finds the doorbell in the dark. He pushes it, but he cannot hear a sound. It is so quiet, Jon thinks. Suddenly the old man opens the door, it happens so suddenly that Jon jumps. "Do you want to buy raffle tickets?" he asks and holds out the book of tickets. "It's for the sports team." The old man looks at him, then he looks behind him toward the road. His eyes move quickly. It has been a long time since any cars went by. It is too cold for people just to be out and walking. He waves Jon inside. He closes the outer door and goes in a second door. Jon stomps the snow from himself and follows after].

Ørstavik's stark text is wide open for potential episodes and possible questions that the reader experiences with Jon as he walks up the path. Alternative storylines arise when the reader poses questions of the text, and Jon's walk to his neighbor's house becomes ridden with tension when these kinds of questions are asked. Was it too quiet? Should the dark lamp have signaled danger? What if the old man had opened the door holding a hatchet? Would the man have allowed Jon to enter his home had it not been for the raffle tickets? What if the man's glancing up and down the street was a sign to a team of conspirators, waiting to run back and attack an unsuspecting Vibeke? Most importantly, what kept Jon from running away from the encounter at any one of these possible moments? When the reader considers the multiplicity of each split second in the narrative, events as benign as crossing a street and ringing a doorbell take on the new dimension of Morson's middle realm of temporality. Jon lives a life composed of one set of events that does happen and another that does not. None of the scenarios suggested by this list of questions did take place, but Ørstavik's text leaves the door open for any one of these developments to occur. The opportunity of the present is a powerful factor in the life of the young boy Jon, and it allows the reader to see Jon's acts as one of many potential alternatives that he did not choose.

Other scenes have even more ambiguity than the one presented above, leaving many unanswered questions as to the truth of the plot and the narrator's reliability. In the following segment, the reader traces the record of Jon's thoughts as he falls asleep in the car of the woman with the white wig:

> Han lukker øynene igjen. Hun fortsetter å snakke. Han tenker seg at lyset og prikkene han ser bak øyelokkene er en uoppdaget galakse, han prøver å tenke ut hva han skal gjøre, om han skal lande noe sted eller om han er på vei til et slag og må forberede seg på en hard kamp. Det klør i nakken, men han orker ikke å klø. Han hører at hun nynner på en sang. Det forstyrrer ham, men han bestemmer seg for ikke å bry seg om det, han prøver å mane fram en kraft. Romskipet hans eksploderer i en stjernestorm, han drysser utover som kosmisk støv (82-83) [He closes his eyes again. She continues to talk. He thinks to himself that the light and dots he sees behind his eyelids is an undiscovered galaxy, he tries to decide what he shall do, if he shall land somewhere or if he is on the way to a battle and must prepare himself for a tough fight. His neck itches, but he manages not to scratch. He hears that she is humming a song. It distracts him, but he decides not to worry about it, he tries to call forth a force. His spaceship explodes in a shower of stars; he is strewn outwards as cosmic dust].

The reader wonders whether the narrator is telling the whole story, and begins to question the passages that may have been omitted. Can readers account for this passage as a pre-slumber dream? Why does he see lights and dots behind his eyelids, and why does he want to scratch his neck? There is no rationale or explanation given to help the reader associate this thought with any of the others. Then suddenly, in spite of Jon's certain "ace maneuverability" as the hero of his own story, his spaceship explodes and

disintegrates. What is going on here? The narrative is inconclusive to the specific events of the car trip, but considering this interpretative potential opens the possibility for a new reading of this passage. As Vibeke's earlier coaching prompted Jon to envision a fairytale castle, perhaps this quote presents a well-behaved boy trying to survive a terrifying ordeal by wishing himself a galaxy away.

Jon later naps in the car, and again the potential for something other than or in addition to the novel's written account enters the realm of interpretation:

> Jon våkner av at det kommer varm luft mot ansiktet hans, det lukter rart og han åpner øynene. Damen med de hvite klærne sitter nesten helt over ham, det er pusten hennes som kjennes varm. Han merker at bilen står stille, det er mørkt overalt, så mørkt at det lyser fra snøen, øynene hans kan se det nå som de har vært lukket en stund. Han tenker at egentlig er det ganske lyst. —Du har siklet noe veldig nedover setet her. Stemmen hennes høres trøtt ut. Han kjenne seg stiv i kroppen, som om han har sovet lenge. Han er tørr i munnen. Han bruker det tørkepapiret han har krølla sammen i den ene hånda, tørker seg nedover det venstre kinnet mot haka, nedover halsen. Han kjenner det kalde spyttet når han gnir ned med papiret. —Jeg pleier aldri å gjøre sånn, sier han. -Har vi stått lenge her? (84) [Jon awakens from the warm air against his face, it smells strange and he opens his eyes. The woman with the white clothes is sitting almost entirely over him; it's her breath that feels warm. He notices that the car is standing still, it is dark everywhere, so dark that it

> is illuminating from the snow, his eyes can see that now, as they have been closed for a while. He thinks that it actually is quite light. "You have really drooled something over the seat here." Her voice sounds tired. He feels stiff in his body, as if he has slept for a long time. He is dry in the mouth. He uses that paper towel he had crunched up in the one hand, dries off the left cheek down toward the chin, down the throat. He senses the cold spit when he rubs with the paper towel. "I usually never do that," he says. "Have we stood here for a long time?"]

Although this is not a case of kidnapping, the woman in white has picked up Jon from the side of the road, and taken him for a long ride around the deserted roads outside of town. The fact that this woman is a transvestite increases the confusion and double meaning the reader takes from the dream sequence in the text. Is the reader to believe that Jon sits patiently in the passenger seat, keeping himself occupied while the woman drives around, smokes, and philosophizes about a life with the carnival? Abuse or misconduct is certainly suspected, not because it is mentioned directly but because it appears indirectly from the narrative. The text of Jon's awakening *does not* record any foul play, but recalling Jon's spaceship story prior to his nap, this brief tale could be the invention of a boy who needed to think positive thoughts to cover up something unpleasant. The text does not confirm abuse as a plausible event, but precisely because of its non-confirmed status, it becomes a possibility. These highlighted events propose an alternative rendition of Jon's night. When the reader approaches motherhood with this attitude toward reading, the same degree of doubt and potential enter the text. The

text does not present Vibeke as a 'good' mother, but because the narrator only gives one side of Vibeke's maternal story, there are many other possibilities that are left unexplored.

Vibeke

The similarity between the son and mother's experiences is striking, for both are manipulated by the strangers from the carnival. The mother has been "picked up" as well, taken for a ride to an outlying pub where she essentially is forsaken by the drinking carnival worker. Enamored by a crush that is but two hours old, Vibeke admires the new love of her life with contentment and pleasure, constructing a life for them together in the dream world of her mind. She reads volumes in the depth of his eyes, which are more often than not checking out the barmaid, and catches herself just as she is about to profess her love for him. Like her son, Vibeke relies on her imagination to see the positive and to get her through a disastrous date that just will not end. Mother and son do eventually end up at home, outwardly unscathed from their respective evening adventures. Leaving her car in town, Vibeke's date drops her off at her house. She sleepily crawls into bed and sets the alarm while dreaming not of her date but of a handsome co-worker. Jon feels the freezing cold creep through his body as he stumbles home from town. He finds the house dark and Vibeke's car still gone, and imagines that she must have been in a terrible accident during her trip to town. Blaming himself and his birthday for causing the accident, he collapses onto the snow:

> Han lukker øynene. Han ser bilen for seg. Den er hel og fin. Han ser hjulene som ruller på snøen. [...] Han strekker seg ut på magen, finner sovestillingen sin. Inni hodet er det mørkt og stort og stille. Han venter på henne her (111) [He closes his eyes. He sees the car before him. It is shiny and nice. He sees the wheels rolling on the snow. [...] He stretches out onto his stomach, finds his sleeping position. Inside his head, it is dark and big and quiet. He waits for her here].

The consequences of the narrative potential of time in this instance make the "what if" and "if only" questions of the non-chosen actions even more powerful. What if Vibeke had checked in on her son? If Jon had only knocked, rung the doorbell, or tried to wiggle the door, what would have happened then? Would Vibeke have heard him? Why did he remain silent outside and accept his situation?

Vibeke's inability to measure up to an ideal mother does not make her solely responsible for Jon's death. Reading the story for that which has not been said introduces the reader's desire to obtain more information. "Actual events might just as well not have happened" according to Morson; this sentiment casts doubt on Vibeke's maternal behaviors and Jon's experience of the entire evening.[156] The reader cannot attribute the situation to a systematized societal failure that produces the image of the bad mother, but it is definitely a component of the action. A certain degree of neglect and unfortunate miscommunication play into the evening's events, but the events are based on contingent decisions not based on the malice of an evil mother. Vibeke's

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[156] Morson, Narrative. 118.

status as a mother without child comes about from the kinds of prosaic decisions and events that comprise the everyday, but this time her maternal actions—potentially—had fatal consequences.

Anne Oterholm's Avslutningen

Anne Oterholm chronicles a single woman's attempt to balance an academic career and motherhood in Avslutningen [The Conclusion]. Mona, the first-person narrator, is an independent, well-educated woman in her early thirties, with clear goals and direction in her life. Her story is a blend of internalized monologue and brief dialogues with a small cast of secondary characters. Consumed by researching and writing her master's thesis on hate in Caligula, Mona has little time for her sister Jone's gossip and the stories of her traumatic social life, and even less time for her similar descriptions of Nina, Jone's best friend. Tables turn when Mona seduces Jon, Nina's ex-boyfriend, in a secret and short affair. As their brief relationship sours and Jon redirects his passions to Nina, the now-pregnant Mona leaves town and loses contact with Jone, Jon, and Nina. Pregnancy begins Mona's gradual loss of control in the text, a sense of powerlessness that motherhood exasperates even more. In the end of the novel, the linear storyline becomes increasingly fragmented and time begins to pass at a sporadic rate in contrast to the fluidity of the first half. She gives birth in exile to their son Johnny, and devotes her life to the child while living alone and isolated in a small town. Two years as a mother heightens her insecurity, and her mental stability snaps when Johnny dies on her

birthday. Mona's inability to accept this event compounds her instability and prevents her from gaining control of her life once she returns to the city life she knew as a student. Mona wanders around the city looking for Johnny, and narrates the internal monologue of her distressed experience as a mother without her child.

Retelling the stories of her maternal experiences enables Mona to define mothering on her own terms. Whereas Vibeke did not lose her son until the end of the story, Mona loses her son partway through the story. Since Mona is also the narrator, in contrast to the narrated Vibeke, she has the ability to embody more fully Elaine Tuttle Hansen's notion of the mother without child. From that location of bereavement, she tells her stories of grief and guilt. Hansen suggests that stories of the mother without child confront hate "as a way of exorcising fear and guilt and even 'playing' with aggression, although the stories may not look 'playful' in any recognizably light-hearted sense."[157] The protagonist's return to literature vis-à-vis maternal storytelling sustains her as a grieving mother, and allows her to deal with the loss of her child. The endorsement of the idealization of mothers and literature encourages the reader to investigate the preconceptions of each image. Motherhood makes an impulsive entrance and abrupt departure in the novel, leaving Mona as a childless mother for most of the story. It is completely absent in the beginning, and then a full-blown obsession at the end of the novel, a contingent phenomenon that the novel's first sentence explains. "Det vil si at jeg må skrive inn en sammenheng, selv om den ikke er der fra før av. Selv om det ikke virker som om det er nødvending at den er der" (7) ["You could say that I must

[157] Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 21.

create some sort of connection, even though it is not there from before. Even though it doesn't seem like it's necessary that it's there"].[158] Motherhood is the link that holds the two parts of Mona's life together; even though she is childless for most of the story, her relationship to motherhood must be evaluated in context.

Mona's thesis examines representations of hatred in fiction, and her intellectual curiosity probes the consequences of hate as a motive for violence and death. As a student, Mona reads and thinks about hate and its consequences in lieu of acting on her own impulse to alienate Jone at the beginning of the novel. However, her pregnancy instigates the beginning of her "real life" literary experiment—to measure the cause and effects of hate that she experiences as a mother. Motherhood provides the backdrop for a study of hate, violence, and death as Mona projects her literary analysis onto the narrative of her own life. Her stories follow Hansen's example, probing the emotions of maternal loss. Mona surrenders completely to the ideal of mother with child in her two years of isolation after his birth, and then unravels the nostalgic image by introducing hatred into her relationship with her son. This instance of maternal hate shakes the foundational beliefs of how to mother, asking if it is possible to hate a loved one, especially if it is a mother and her young child. By presenting the troubled descriptions of Mona without her child, Oterholm's text subverts an idealized representation of motherhood by allowing readers unmediated access to the hateful maternal voice of a distressed mother. After the death, her subsequent stories and dreams trace the consequences of this act of maternal aggression.

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[158] Anne Oterholm, Avslutningen, (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1998).

The dichotomy presented in Mona's life is the split between the serious reading of her academic career and the trivial storytelling of Jone's social life. Oterholm embellishes the lifestyles of the academic and the mother, exposing both as hollow when Mona fails to live up to each ideal. Mona cannot finish her thesis, and she cannot raise her child. As a graduate student, Mona favors the intellectual and disapproves of the emotional, primarily represented by her younger sister Jone. Mona abandons her student life to become a mother, and her maternal story becomes a new fiction of the trivial and emotional everyday as she tells it. The change in narrative tempo from life as a student to life as a mother signals the beginning of the transition into the new mode of reference. In place of her linear intellectual narratives, Mona's maternal narratives are disjointed tales of the petty details of life, written and told in the fictional realm of her imagination. She fantasizes about Johnny's life after his death, and wanders the streets in conversation with herself about her maternal instincts. As the narrator, Mona calls attention to her struggles as a mother by rendering the everyday newly strange. Mona commits a hateful act against a beloved child, forcing the reader to reconsider her own preconceptions of motherhood amid a story of maternal loss. This study discusses hate in the various phases of Mona's life as a student, as a pregnant woman, and as a mother with and without her child.

Critical reception

Critics have focused on narrative style, use of language, twisted plot, and the problematic portrayal of women in Oterholm's novel, but few seem to grapple explicitly

with the disturbing mother figure. Although she does not mention the mother, Edel Bakkemoen reads the novel as the final component of a trilogy of troubling women, in which the psyche of the main character unravels and becomes "så grotesk omseggripende at både historie og fortellermåten forandrer karakter" ["so grotesquely expansive that both the story and the narrative style change character"].[159] Anne Cathrine Straum hails the manic narrative voice of this unsettling female psyche as the most gripping element of the story. "Måten Mona forteller historien på, der handlingen avslører en helt annen virkelighet enn den Mona forsøker å fastholde, [er] nærmest manisk" ["The manner in which Mona tells the story, where the action unveils a completely different reality than the one Mona tries to maintain, is almost manic"].[160] Straum awards the novel praise for its language, while Øystein Rottem denounces it as idle chatter. "Det hele er formidlet i et irriterende slapt, upresist og til dels anstrengt 'avansert' språk" ["The whole thing is mediated in an irritatingly lax, imprecise and partially strained 'technical' language."][161] The only critic willing to engage with the nontraditional woman is Nora Simonhjell. She argues that Oterholm's strength is to play with the familiar and create contemporary female types that are "flate, ein dimensjonale, lette å kjenne att på gata og lette å møte seg sjølv i" ["flat, one-dimensional, easy to recognize on the street, and easy to find yourself in"].[162]

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[159] Edel Bakkemoen, "Sammensatt, intens roman," Aftenposten 1 Oct. 1999.

[160] Anne Cathrine Straume, "Avslutningen," NRK P2 Kulturnytt 20 Sep. 2000. Straume credits Oterholm's originality, but ends the article with a low blow: "På sitt beste kan Anne Oterholm minne om Hanne Ørstavik—formmessig, men også tematisk." Straum obviously regards Ørstavik as the original predecessor and stylistic master.

[161] Øystein Rottem, "Lausprat," Dagbladet 11 Oct. 1999.

[162] Nora Simonhjell, "Dirty Details—meir enn tilfeldig attrå," Vinduet 18 Jun. 2001. Simonhjell also writes that Avslutningen is "romanen om kor ille det kan gå dersom du ikkje greier å gjere ferdig hovudfaget ditt i litteraturvitskap … Skrive hovudoppgåva. Ta eksamen og det vil gå deg (meir eller

Simonhjell praises Oterholm for facilitating recognition between the reader and the novel by creating characters that struggle with the difficult issues of our time. Motherhood is one such example, and Mona's encounter with mothering voices the questions that society forbids mothers to ask. Simonhjell further summarizes Oterholm's method as "ei gjennomført tømming av situasjonane og dei trivielle klisjeane" ["a thorough emptying of the situations and the trivial clichés"] of everyday life. Oterholm is not afraid to confront the intrinsic dark side of such cherished relationships as the mother-child bond.[163]

Rationality and Reading—Mona's student life

The binary between the intellectual and the emotional constitutes the contrasting lifestyles present at the onset of this novel. Mona idealizes the intellectual and privileges rational thought. She aspires to write a thoughtful and serious thesis, and therefore directs great energy and creativity to her reading and research. She lives in an apartment on the outskirts of the city to ensure peace and quiet for her contemplative study. In the first two chapters of the book, Mona focuses completely on her reading and writing projects. Although she does not begin writing her thesis, she is busy reading and taking notes in the organizational phase of her research. She is an academic who takes the world very seriously, allotting little time to her feelings. A passionate reader, Mona does not fit the typical patriarchal image of a reading woman as Vibeke did. Vibeke reads to escape her lonely life and to inspire her romantic imagination. Mona is

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mindre) godt og du vil leve arbiedslaus og pengelens, heilt til skuleverket, eller helsevesenet igjen omfamnar deg og ler av utdanningda di." I can truly take this interpretation to heart!

[163] Simonhjell, "Dirty Details."

not a housewife, does not read romantic novels, and is not bored with her life. Mona is a critical and thoughtful reader, who spends her time contemplating academic texts and the literary canon. She has no time for dreamy notions of love at the onset of the story. She admires Jon for his intellect and idealizes him for his cognitive abilities, and their affair is a meeting of equal minds.

In contrast to Mona, Jone favors the emotional realm as her sister's alternative. She spends her days working at the shoe store, analyzing fashion and talking about men and romance with her friend Nina. Worrying only about minute details of love and her friends' romances, Jone's superficial lifestyle exasperates Mona. "Jeg orker ikke disse fjortishistoriene hennes. Jeg greier ikke engang å skjønne om der er noen logisk sammenheng i enetalen hennes. Livet mitt er sannsynligvis nærmest litterært i forhold til hennes og Ninas" (13) ["I can't stand these teenage stories of hers. I can't understand for the life of me that there is any logical connection in her monologues. My life is more literary in comparison to hers and Nina's"]. Like Trude Marstein's protagonist in Plutselig hører noen åpne en dør, Oterholm's main character analyzes her speech and thoughts and looks down upon those who do not lead such a reflective life, especially those nearest to her. She abhors Jone's storytelling and obsession with stories from Nina and Jon's love life. Mona rationalizes that Jone repeatedly interrupts Mona's studies because she cannot understand the seriousness of her scholarly dedication. Mona speculates that she will need to write her thesis about Jone and Nina since she will be more familiar with their story than with the text of Caligula. "Ettersom jeg ikke får anledning til å finne ut noe som helst om det litterære hatet, så må det jo bare bli noe

annet: Jone og Nina … Hvis jeg noen gang skal få skrevet noe som helst" (13) ["Since I don't get the opportunity to find out anything at all about literary hate, then it must be something else: Jone and Nina … If I ever get the chance to write anything at all"]. This comment prepares the reader for Mona's dramatic shift from reading a text to telling her maternal story when the questions surrounding the capacity for hate from her literary analysis are inserted into the framework of mothering.

Mona recognizes that life is full of stories, but admits that most are predictable and dull everyday clichés. She scoffs at Jone and Nina for their shallow lifestyles, and equates their language and metaphors to meaningless chatter. Mona marvels at their fascination as she laments how Jone's poor storytelling consumes her work time. "Hvis Jones historie skulle vært en mer ordentlig roman eller dramatisk framstilling, så måtte den helt sikkert blitt forandret ganske mye. Hvis den ikke hadde noe med virkeligheten å gjøre. Var en fiksjon" (15) ["If Jone's story would've been a more respectable novel or dramatic account, then it probably would've been changed a great deal. If it didn't have anything to do with reality. Was a fiction"]. In a playful mood while riding the bus to work, Mona acts on her creative impulse and analyzes Nina's story as if it were a novel with Jone as the narrator. Her pronouncement is grim. "Nina Barrier er så farget av fortellerens egne tanker, at andre ikke har noe å komme med, fordi fortelleren overhodet ikke er til å stole på" (17) ["Nina Barrier is so colored by the narrator's own thoughts that others have nothing to say, because the narrator on the whole can't be trusted"]. Jone is an unreliable narrator, unable to distance herself from the emotion of Nina's story, and her narration lacks the necessary disruptive element that negates

overused clichés. Mona reflects on hatred as one such disturbance, and admires its ability to complicate such simple relationships in a closed literary system. "Det som gjør det vanskelig er at hatet er for uavsluttet til at det kan settes inn i et system. Helt, helt ulikt klisjéhistoriene til Jone som alltid er fullstendig fikserte. Alltid virker avsluttede nærmest før hun har fullført setningene sine" (36) ["That which makes it difficult is that hate is too inconclusive to be placed in a system. Totally, totally unlike Jone's clichéd stories which always are entirely established. Always seem finished almost before she has completed her sentences"]. Hate disrupts expected patterns and traditional logic, convoluting the motive and rationale behind individual acts. For Mona, hate can be masked as love and indifference, complicating the clear lines of cause and effect that are so prevalent in Jone's stories.

Mona experiences hate first-hand in an incident at her job at the nursing home. In a routine nightly interaction with Mrs. Kristiansen, the typically docile resident attacked Mona's face as she helped her to the bathroom. Mona reeled from the physical pain of the scratches and the mental shock of Mrs. Kristiansen's abnormal behavior. Later that evening, when Mona observes Mrs. Kristiansen sitting peacefully in the dining hall as if nothing had happened, she decides that Mrs. Kristiansen's violent mood swing was caused by a momentary realization of her loss of freedom. "En frihet som helst bør gå mot det uendelige … Mot det umulige. Mot hat" (33) ["A freedom that above all else ought to go toward the infinite … Toward the impossible. Toward hate"]. Mrs. Kristiansen has taken the chance to act on a fantasy of aggression in an immediate response to her feeling of futility. Mona rationalizes this event as a confirmation that

hate is an automatic reaction to a loss of freedom, and not anger directed specifically at an individual. The woman's unexpected brutality therefore is not a premeditated reaction to Mona's poor care or mistreatment, but rather an involuntary response to the futility of her trapped situation. Mona realizes that Mrs. Kristiansen does not hate her personally, but that she has been the unlucky recipient of her revolt against the status quo. This underlying principle explains Mona's rebellion toward the confines of motherhood. She does not hate her son, but Johnny becomes the unfortunate victim of her impulsive and frustrated reaction to the impossible pressures of an idealized image of motherhood.

Pregnancy and transition

Mona's growing passion for motherhood replaces her intellectual aspirations, and she is equally defensive of the integrity of the role. Consumed by thoughts of her unborn child, Mona completely estranges herself from her sister Jone and her student life in the city. The sisters' time together is short and tension-ridden during Jone's visit at Johnny's birth. Mona rationalizes that Jone has no greater understanding for her life as a mother than she did as a student, and therefore she cuts all ties to her to prevent continued unnecessary disturbance in her life. "Vi hadde selvfølgelig ikke snakket noe bedre sammen nå enn vi gjorde før jeg fikk Johnny. Hun hadde aldri greid å forestille seg hvordan det er å ha barn. Det hadde ikke gått an å forklare henne det. Hvis ikke man har barn selv, er det umulig å skjønne noe av det" (103) ["Of course we hadn't spoken any better together now than we did before I had Johnny. She would've never managed

to imagine what it's like to have children. It wouldn't have worked to explain it either. If someone doesn't have kids themselves, it's impossible to understand any of it"]. Mona processes Jone's lack of understanding for her choice as an inability to understand the emotional wealth of mothering on par with her misunderstanding of the intellectual satisfaction of her literary studies. By placing literature and motherhood on a pedestal, Mona prepares for their dramatic fall when the foundations supporting them become challenged and begin to dissolve. Literature and motherhood are Mona's scapegoats for her own inability to function within community, and constitute her refuge from the pressures of relationships and everyday life.

Mona becomes completely engrossed in reading and mothering, but her pregnancy completes the transition from literature to motherhood. While pregnant, she has no desire to leave her new apartment but relishes sitting indoors, reading, and watching television. Nothing else matters when she nestles in her cocoon of studying or mothering, and a sense of timelessness envelops her everyday tasks. Mona's change in behavior registers in her use of narrative time as well. A comparative reading illuminates the parallels in Mona's behaviors as a student, a pregnant woman, and as a full-fledged mother. The enthusiastic tone remains constant in her voice, but the steady decline in intellectual curiosity mirrors her increasing disengagement with the external world as she approaches motherhood. The first example from her student days reflects her idealized view of literature and the satisfaction she gets from reading:

> Jeg har faktisk sittet og lest og tenkt i over en time allerede. Det er deilig. Jeg elsker å lese så tidlig om morgenen. Alt glir så lett. Dagen blir så

> ekstremt behagelig uendelig. Det føles som om det er bare meg som har stått opp. Som om jeg får et forsprang det er umulig å miste. […] Det er deilig å lese. Deilig å tenke. Deilig å merke at det sannsynligvis er mulig å finne det ut. At man beveger seg (7, 34) [In fact I've sat and read and thought for over an hour already. It's delightful. I love to read so early in the morning. Everything flows so easily. The day becomes so extremely pleasant without end. It feels as though I am the only one who has gotten up. As if I get an advantage that's impossible to lose. […] It's wonderful to read. Wonderful to think. Wonderful to notice that it's of course possible to notice it. That one changes].

Her wide-eyed admiration for literature and the analytical life begins to recede during her pregnancy. The creative energy she exudes in the quote above softens in tone, and a lazy contentment laces her responses. The change appears in her attitude toward and during acts of reading, expressed by when she reads, how she sits, how she holds her book, and how productive she manages to be. This is also the first mention of her childhood in the text, and it is certainly ironic that she recalls it as a time of ease and peace. No other evidence in the text supports or negates this claim, yet her relationship with Jone is not exactly a sign of her strong family bonds. Mona's use of the peaceful childhood cliché could be just another sign of her mental preparation for life as a mother:

> Det er merkelig å kunne lese så løsrevet. Uten at jeg må. Ingenting skal brukes til noe som helst. Jeg lener meg inntil putene i sofaen. Det er

> deilig. Det er selvfølgelig fordi jeg har flyttet. Fordi jeg har forandret på så mye i det siste. I bunn og grunn kan jeg gjøre hva som helst. Jeg må ingenting. Det minner meg om da jeg var liten. Jeg sitter og blar litt fram og tilbake (86) [It's amazing to be able to read so isolated from context. Without being required to. Nothing will be used for anything in particular. I lean back into the pillows on the sofa. It's wonderful. It's surely because I've moved. Because I've changed so much lately. I can truly do whatever I want. I don't have to do anything. It reminds me of when I was little. I sit and page back and forth].

Time is slowing down, and Mona's world is narrowing in focus to include ultimately a family of two. She remarks on the change of pace as she wanders around her new apartment. "Det er akkurat som om jeg ikke har noen tidsfølelse lenger etter at jeg kom hit" (87) ["It is just as if I don't have any sense of time anymore after I moved here"]. Motherhood engulfs her and steals the energy she used to devote to reading and thinking in the first half of the book, making her unable to delight in reading in the same way. Whereas the book began with detailed descriptions of everyday events, time passes without such significant documentation when she becomes a mother. The reader is not privy to the details of Johnny's life, and two years pass by in the one page description of his childhood:

> Jeg greier ikke å la være å løfte ham opp. Jeg har ikke lyst til noe annet. Vi sitter helt stille i timevis. Jeg bare stryker over ham. Jeg elsker ham sannsynligvis helt hinsides. Det er nesten sjokkerende. På en måte er det

> akkurat som om det aldri har vært annerledes, heller. Som om jeg ikke behøver å huske noe som helst som ikke har med ham å gjøre lenger. […] Vi har et hav av tid. […] Det er ingenting som tar slutt. Ingenting som noen gang kommer til å ta slutt. Det er han som er all overskuelig framtid. En slags ubegrensethet (96-7) [I can't stop lifting him up. I don't want to do anything else. We sit completely still for hours. I just caress him. I love him quite possibly completely beyond anything else. It's almost shocking. In some ways it's as if it's never been different either. As if I don't need to remember anything that doesn't have to do with him anymore. […] We have a sea of time. […] There's nothing that ends. Nothing that will ever come to an end. He is the foreseeable future. A kind of boundlessness].

Time slows to a standstill and becomes an insignificant measure for Mona because the everyday responsibilities of the new role absorb her. The narrative grants the reader limited access to Mona's enclosed world as a mother, but in the few short paragraphs about her life with Johnny, Mona tells of her boundless happiness and love for her son. Before the birth, she admitted to herself that she knew nothing of being a mother, but that she understood it as a liberating choice. "Jeg vet selvfølgelig ingenting om å bli mor. […] Men det er en slags frihet" (89) ["I know nothing of course about being a mother. […] But it is a kind of freedom"]. She adores him and the daily pleasure he brings to her everyday life, and cannot image putting him in a daycare where "all friheten ville forsvinne" (97) ["all the freedom would disappear"]. As with her

experience with Mrs. Kristiansen, Mona needed to know and discover what motherhood was like before she could use it as an arena to experiment with the loss of that freedom.

Love and Hate

The brevity of the idyllic years as a mother signal how quickly motherhood disenchanted Mona. Like her abrupt departure from academia, Mona is removed unexpectedly from her role as a mother. Whereas she only thought about the consequences of hatred in her studies, Mona interjects hatred into the closed system of her daily life of the ideal mother/child bond. She loves Johnny, and the hate she exercises is not physical misconduct or other forms of violence. Mona subtly ignores Johnny instead, refusing to go and look for him once he disappears in the park. She does not physically abuse him or hurt him; however, by not reacting to his lengthening absence, she employs hatred as a substitute for any gross aggression and violence. Remembering her explanation of the situation with Mrs. Kristiansen, Mona's maternal violence toward Johnny becomes a similar non-meditated, unthinking response to her loss of freedom. She has spent every day of Johnny's life devoting her time and her self to him; on her birthday, she counters their previously celebrated intimate and natural bond by remaining inactive. Mona grants him the independence of a much older child, and does not get concerned when he disappears. The reaction is controlled and subtle, but Mona's refusal to check on Johnny in his extended absence appears as an act of calculated aggression.

Mona wonders where Johnny is and what he is doing, but she makes excuses to subdue every nagging maternal thought that enters her mind. She responds to one of the first reactions of his disappearance by arguing that Johnny knew it was her birthday and that "jeg ikke hadde noe imot å være litt alene" (108) ["I didn't have anything against being alone a bit"]. She watches people around her, like the participants at the church picnic and a pair of arguing lovers, and creates her own versions of their stories to pass the time. Her mind drifts when she notices a good-looking, suntanned man standing near her, and she unconsciously thanks Johnny for giving her some space to herself to exercise her freedom. "Det er selvfølgelig helt normalt at det fører til en slags ambivalens når man er så mye sammen med barn som jeg er. Man er tross alt voksen. Det er ikke til å unngå at man blir litt lei innimellom. At det av og til kan være deilig å gjøre noe helt annet" (109) ["It's of course totally normal that ambivalence arises when one is around children as often as I am. One is after all an adult. It can't be helped that one gets a little tired of it every so often. That it can be delightful now and again to do something completely different"]. Mona's switch from the first to the third person attempts to distance her actions and marks her departure from the ideal behaviors and expectations of motherhood. She also reconfirms her detachment from literature in a lonely interlude during Johnny's absence. "Jeg sitter helt stille og leser. Ser opp innnimellom. Bruker fingeren som bokmerke. Jeg husker ikke hvor langt jeg kom i går. Husker ikke plottet. Jeg kan ikke ha konsentrert meg så veldig bra. Jeg tenker litt for mye på Johnny" (122) ["I sit completely still and read. Look up every once in awhile. Use my finger as a bookmark. I don't remember how far I got yesterday. Don't

remember the plot. I must not have been able to concentrate very well. I'm thinking too much about Johnny"].

Starved for physical and intimate contact with other adults, Mona succumbs to her physical desires in a brief tryst with the strange man. Even in her distraction, Mona notices that a child has fallen down from a nearby statue of a horse, and that the accident might be serious. "Blikket mitt treffer folen. Det har kommet en sykebil for å hente det barnet som falt ned for litt siden. Den har kjørt helt inn i parken. Det må ha fått en hjernerystelse eller noen sånt" (114) ["My gaze meets the horse. An ambulance has come to pick up that child that fell down a while ago. It has driven all the way into the park. It must have gotten a concussion or something"]. The intensity of the sun drops as her lover abruptly departs. The change in weather breaks the spell of love and hatred that brought about Mona's passive mothering in the park, and suddenly Mona begins to worry in earnest about Johnny's absence. While she waits for him to return, she wanders around looking for him, unable to comprehend the possibility of his disappearance or death. As Mona's hysteria increases, she begins to tell maternal stories of Johnny's likes and dislikes, and of their favorite and future activities. Amid her anxious searching, Mona's memories and imagined present measure her current behavior as Johnny's mother to an idyllic image of the caring mother she had been up to this point. Adherence to the demands of idealized mothering has affected her person and pushed her so close to the edge that she introduced hatred into the mother/child relationship. She acts on a general fantasy of maternal aggression, not as a direct act of

hatred against her son but as a reaction against the confines of motherhood, thus beginning the alteration of her own notions of what it means to mother.

Death and Storytelling

Roses and parrots are two symbols that occur repeatedly in these stories, and these images are the clues as to how Mona understands Johnny's death. Mona takes special note of the gorgeous roses in the park where they are celebrating her birthday. She wants to pick some of them, and imagines that no one would notice if she stole a few to decorate their living room. She tells herself that Johnny, even though he has been gone for several hours, would also enjoy picking them to decorate his room. The day after Johnny's death, Mona wakes up early, still in the park and in shock. She imagines how Johnny has slept (probably in the sandbox), how hungry he is, and then notices a crowd of costumed foreigners playing music and celebrating. After unsuccessfully attempting to read, Mona decides that she might as well take some of the roses home with her. She picks several of the deep red roses and two of the yellow.

On her way back to the blanket, she notices a parrot in a flash of vivid green and red. "Noen kan ha glemt å lukke et bur et eller annet sted i nærheten. Jeg ser den igjen. Den kommer sikkert til å fly rundt her resten av dagen. Det går ikke an å fange den igjen nå. Det er kanskje ikke så farlig. På en måte passer den inn her" (123) ["Someone could've forgotten to shut a cage somewhere in the vicinity. I see it again. It'll certainly fly around here the rest of the day. It won't be possible to capture it again now. Perhaps it isn't so dangerous. In some ways it fits in here"]. The parrot is an image dear to

Mona, taken from the death of the female character Madame Bovary in Flaubert's novel. Mesmerized by the woman's death vision of a gigantic parrot in the story, Mona reread that very segment several times during her pregnancy. "Jeg aner ikke hvorfor jeg alltid leser det. Alltid venter på at det skal komme tilbake. [...] Jeg leser det om igjen dagen etter. Enda en gang noen flere dager seinere" (94) ["I have no idea why I always read that. Always waiting that it will come back. [...] I read it again the next day. One more time a few days later"]. She has committed the scene to memory from her repeated readings, and reenacts it in the park just before giving birth. She lies in the grass, staring at sky, searching for the parrot as it had appeared in the novel. The parrot materializes in the park on the day after Johnny's death and it disappears immediately after Mona spots it. In her disturbed state of mind, she recognizes the bird and its meaning and goes home from the park. The appearance of the bird suggests that Mona has somehow registered the death of her son. She leaves the park and tries to resume "normal" life, even though she continues to speak of Johnny in the present tense as if he is alive.

Mona passes her time after Johnny's death by telling stories about him. She creates fictions about the people around her to take her mind away from her aching pain. She flees the small town where she and Johnny have lived and moves back to the city looking for distraction, since "alt her nede skjer på en gang. Jeg behøver ikke å tenke på noe" (130) ["everything down here happens at the same time. I don not need to think about anything"]. Fleeing the small town did nothing to erase Johnny from Mona's mind, and thoughts of him continue to permeate her running internal

monologue. Jone re-enters Mona's life, but this time as a source of income and an unpleasant reality check. In a heated exchange between the hurt sisters, Jone screams at Mona that Johnny is dead. The symbolic cutting of the roses and parrot sighting have suggested this already, but this is the reader's first "truthful" confirmation that Johnny did indeed die. Mona's commentary has unwaveringly included him since the day in the park, and her storytelling narrative weaves an intricate blend of fiction and reality for their collective life story. The consequences of her experimentation with hatred are painful, and Mona only finds solace after that by voicing her stories.

Mona relives the fateful birthday in the closing scene of the novel. After wandering through the streets of a peaceful neighborhood of the city, she sleeps outside again, drunk this time. When she wakes, she notices the sky and the rising sun, comments on the weather, sees a little boy Johnny's age playing in a sandbox, smells the roses, and spots a now-silent carnival arranged in the parking lot. All of her sensory images recreate the setting of Johnny's death, and the nagging question at the end of the novel is whether she lives or dies. Her maternal instincts are so strong and have such a grasp on her that she is unable to cope without constantly reminding herself of her responsibilities to Johnny. "Johnny burde vært her. Han ville likt det. Det kunne vært et slags marked. Et slags karneval. Vi kunne bare gått rundt. Noe som fantes for lenge siden. Vi kunne lekt at vi også var med. Uten noen profeti. Uten at noen av oss …" (160) ["Johnny should've been here. He would've liked it. It could've been a kind of market. A kind of carnival. We could've just walked around. Something that happened long ago. We could've played that we took part, too. Without any prophecy. Except that

some of us …"]. The novel ends with these words and the unfinished phrase signals Mona's resignation and remorse from losing her child. The open ending leaves the reader with several potential interpretations for the closing lines. One ending points to Mona's desire to return to that day in the park and to revoke her act of maternal hatred and the subsequent events of that day, in hopes of bringing Johnny back to life. The inclusion of hate in the mother/child bond changed her life dramatically, altering her status as a mother by excluding the child. Her desire to go back in time to recapture her life as a mother suggests that she would do it differently this time, and not be tempted to interject hatred as she has done. The ending implies change in that Mona's understand of what it means to mother:

> Jeg greier ikke å la være å smile. Johnny sover nå. Sover under dyna si. Han elsker meg, uansett. [...] Jeg er som regel alltid litt ulykkelig på grunn av Johnny. Jeg kan jo ikke være sammen med ham hele tiden. Selv om man ikke elsker barn på samme måten som man elsker voksne. Selv om der er små. Selv om man kan unnvære dem. Jeg blir alltid ensom til slutt når han ikke er der (157, 158) [I can't stop smiling. Johnny is sleeping now. Sleeping under his comforter. He loves me, regardless. […] I am as a rule always a little unhappy because of Johnny. Of course I can't be with him all the time. Even though you don't love children the same way you love adults. Even though they are small. Even though you can manage without them. In the end I'm always lonely when he isn't there].

The experience as a mother without her child prompts Mona to re-evaluate her understanding of motherhood. This same process occurs, by extension, within the reader.

Chapter IV: Excessive Mothers

Excessive mothers and mothers in excess consume the stories of Trude Marstein and Tore Renberg. Marstein's Plutselig hører noen åpne en dør [Suddenly Hearing Someone Open a Door] from 2000 and Renberg's Matriarkat [Matriarchy] from 1996 tell companion stories of a woman who obsesses about her role as a mother in particular and a man who obsesses about women's roles as mothers in general. Renberg's sensitive narrator Kjeran desires mothers as sexual beings, and finds purpose and meaning in his life through the lives of his mother and sister. Marstein's rational, unnamed narrator desires to be an intelligent and rational mother. Although she prides herself on her love and devotion to her daughter, she keeps minimal ties to her own mother and brother. Renberg experiments with boundaries of linear time and narrative sequencing in his novel, while Marstein meticulously details everyday situations, including routines and deviations. Both novels incorporate and challenge clichéd images of motherhood throughout each novel. Whereas Marstein's narrator intends to reinstate motherhood with meaning, Renberg's narrator thrives on and propagates a mythical image of motherhood. Writing serves as an outlet for the mothers in these novels, instead of reading and storytelling as for Ørstavik and Oterholm, offering the women a means of escape and reflection. The stories take differing perspectives on writing; one attributes solace to the process while the other seeks redemption in the content. The thesis functions like another child for Marstein's narrator as a full time graduate student, and working on it competes with her child Sara for time and attention.

The diaries of his mother haunt Kjeran with a 'true' and untold maternal story that threatens to infringe on and correct his imagined past.

The narrators are rather similar creatures. Both authors create single narrators in their twenties who are educated and living in urban Norway. They each have a different sex, but they contest and succumb to various elements of patriarchal and matriarchal institutions in their lives. Like the educated women Oterholm and Ørstavik create, Marstein's narrator values her education and governs her life by the rules of rationality. She is a thesis-writing, stay-at-home, single mom who directs her intelligence to an investigation of the role of the mother to fight the romantic and emotive images of idealized motherhood. Despite her goals to dismantle the icon, she strives to become a 'perfect' mother and conforms to the very model she tries to subvert. Marstein's narrator wants to reform motherhood so that it incorporates an even balance of rationale and emotion, independence and dependence, and love and freedom between mother and child. Marstein's narrator attempts to find the balance within the everyday as interpreted by Rita Felski, which is a negotiation between the conflict and potential of the prosaic. Motherhood receives special attention in Marstein's novel as the location of this mediation, as the narrator attempts to reform the role from within. It is a noble project, destined for failure; however, the compelling perspective of the first-person narrator gives allows the reader access to the conflicted mind and heart of the young mother as she undergoes the process.

Renberg's narrator confronts a maternal story marked with a strong presence of the Oedipal conflict, another clichéd image of the mother. Driven by his desire for and

longing to return to the mother, Kjeran lives his life by reacting to the maternal impulses of the women around him. While the reader may easily identify the Oedipal current, its excessive use suggests an irony or parody intent on undermining that patriarchal understanding of mothers. It may even be possible to extrapolate this reading to a subversion of gender. Kjeran dreams of inhabiting a woman's body, a desire he articulates in the novel by wanting to grow breasts, lose body hair, soften sharp contours, and wear women's clothing. He desires mothers and wants to be a mother by the end of the novel. Perhaps Renberg's narrator overcomes the Oedipal conflict by striving to be a woman, or at least as close as he can get by becoming a transsexual. These perspectives and others will be contemplated in this chapter.

Trude Marstein

Trude Marstein builds the plot of her first novel Plutselig hører noen åpne en dør on the everyday routines of a mother and daughter. Marstein investigates the possibility of a female subjectivity that can be anchored in the everyday world and simultaneously amend that everyday language. Motherhood is the nucleus of such a female subjectivity in Marstein's text, and the novel examines the power of motherhood in the daily thoughts, language, and actions of a young Norwegian academic who is struggling to balance the demands of finishing her thesis, raising her daughter, and finding a partner. These everyday situations of the female narrator can be read as a woman's attempt to overcome traditional images of motherhood and replace them with her own lived experiences of mothering. The narrator's effort to replace the clichés in her life and

language represents a feminist project to rid her linguistic and emotional world of the nostalgic image of the ideal mother, for a functional model of a good enough mom. To do so, she must fill the routine, daily events in her life with modified meaning and intent. By thoroughly analyzing through her thoughts, comments, and actions, the narrator believes that she accomplishes this task. However, she ultimately fails at both projects, unable to escape completely from the old image and unwilling to fully embrace something new. Instead, the mother is left suspended in the balance in between the two poles still in transition. Other conflicting voices in the novel illuminate her success and failure in her maternal projects, including secondary characters such as her daughter Sara, her friends and lovers, and even her thesis.

Mimicking the narrator's parental skills, the novel is very methodical in genre and style. Time progresses in a linear fashion with syncopated pauses, and the story develops over the course of an academic year that begins in the autumn and ends in the spring. Each description is like a meticulous journal entry, relating the events of the day in minute detail. There are no chapters in this first person narrative, but there are sudden, unexplained breaks between images and scenes, akin to the passage of time experienced when flipping through a photo album or experiencing the abrupt endings while watching a home video. This is a logical choice for Marstein in a literary project of this kind. The acute attention to detail adheres to the requirements of realism favored by this generation of Norwegian authors, and compartmentalizes the descriptive scenarios into familiar and manageable units of time, although they are saturated with information. It is no surprise that the narrative reads like the script of a reality-TV show,

where contestants are asked to speculate and reflect on their every act. Marstein's narrator engages in the same kind of evaluative project, assessing her strategies and skills as a mother to gauge her personal worth and progress. It is the intense focus and exact descriptions of each realistic moment that makes Trude Marstein an interesting read. This section begins by discussing the structure of Marstein's text, as well as its reception and the criticism leveled against it. The argument continues by examining the main character's attitude toward motherhood as expressed in relation to clichés, the writing process, and her thesis. The everyday is a useful notion for investigating each of these aspects. The narrator's contempt for clichés prompts her revision of daily maternal tasks in order to free them from the patriarchal censorship that exasperates her. Examples like this permeate the narrator's life, as she is constantly evaluating her speech and behavior to ensure that it is proper and appropriate. Her dedicated thesis work has an antagonistic relationship to her mothering; the intellectual work encourages open-mindedness and desire for modification, but the writing process itself infringes on her ability to be fully devoted to motherhood. Both perspectives will be addressed, including speculations on the thesis as a surrogate or second child for the narrator.

Critical reception

Critics brought out Marstein's style, language, plot, and societal relevance in their reviews of the novel. Few discussed the female narrator as a mother, and when they did, the mother appeared as a negative and destructive force. According to Hege Steinsland, who focuses on the controlling aspect of the narrator, the mother in this novel is

impersonal and calculating. "Det er en urovekkende og ubehagelig opplevelse å følge det forsvarsløse, nærmest språkløse barnet som utsettes for den kjølige, distanserte og manipulerende moren" ["It is a disturbing and uncomfortable experience to follow the defenseless child, almost without language, who is exposed to the cool, distanced, and manipulative mother"].[164] Steinsland's sympathies rest with the child, leaving little patience for the mother. Morten Abrahamsen praises Marstein for creating a startling maternal tension in her text without relying either on poverty or absent fathers. Abrahamsen appreciates Marstein's style and the "tett, nærmest klaustrofobisk leseropplevelse" ["dense, almost claustrophobic reader experience"] created by the narrator, and pronounces the novel "et imponerende håndverk, skremmende, suggererende på en innadvendt måte, helt renset for 'vanlige' dialogpartier eller luft" ["an impressive piece of work, scary, hypnotic in an introspective way, totally purged of 'normal' dialogues or air"].[165] These comments highlight the controlling nature of the mother and accentuate her total indulgence in analyzing her daily routines. Due in part to the distinct voice of her female narrator, Geir Vestad argues that Marstein's second book establishes her position as one of the most central authors of her generation:

> Romanen er tettere, språkelig rikere, bredere i tematikken, mer omfattende i menneskeskildringen og mer mangfoldig i de litterære grepene, uten at det går ut over verken den komposisjonelle stramheten eller den underliggende intensitetet i skildringen av en kvinnelig jeg-

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[164] Hege Steinsland, "Kontroll og maskerade," Aftenposten 7 Mar. 2000, 5 Sept. 2002 <http://tekst.aftenposten.no/forfindeks/fi.cgi?fiart+AFT2000+AFT200003070104&>.
[165] Morten Abrahamsen, "Litterær prevensjon," VG 7 Mar. 2000, 22 Nov. 2002 <http://www.vg.no/pub/skrivervennlig.hbs?artid=6911394>.

> personens konfliktfylte forhold til sine omgivelser [The novel is denser, linguistically richer, thematically broader, more comprehensive in character descriptions, and more complex in the literary tactics without affecting either the compositional tautness or the underlying intensity in the description of a female narrator's conflict-ridden relationship to her surroundings].[166]

Vestad does not venture further remarks on the female narrator as a mother, but motherhood can certainly be included as an element of her "conflict-ridden" environment. It is telling that all three of these critics note the intensity of the narrator, but neglect to develop the commentary on the female narrator as a mother. Critics' unwillingness to address the mother figure in this novel suggests their general reluctance to engage with the topic of motherhood as a serious and timely undertaking for contemporary Norwegian literature.

Marstein received the approval of the Norwegian literary establishment in addition to her reception in the daily press, but again the mother is almost completely ignored in the criticism. Per Thomas Andersen devotes an entire chapter in his essay collection Tankevaser to a discussion of Plutselig hører noen åpne en dør and Elin og Hans [Elin and Hans]. He contrasts the thematic and literary elements of the texts, and emphasizes Marstein's authorial skill in constructing a narrative that gets under the reader's skin. With Plutselig hører noen åpne en dør in particular, Andersen expresses his own frustrated reader experience as an uncomfortable sense that the book was better

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[166] Geir Vestad, "En av de sentrale," Hamar Arbeiderblad 7 Mar. 2000, 22 Nov. 2002 <http://www.hamar-arbeiderblad.no/bok/vis_bok.asp?refnum=77>.

than he wanted to admit. "Det er bare noe jeg syns fordi jeg ikke liker å høre det boken forteller meg" (142) ["It is just something I think because I don't like to hear that which the book tells me"].[167] It is the voice of the mother that Andersen refuses to hear. He goes on to explain his reading of narcissism in the text as a universal phenomenon, glossing over any direct discussion of his difficulty with "jeg-personens forhold til morsrollen" (142) ["the narrator's relationship to the role of the mother"] that he states is the essential theme of the novel:

> Marstein skildrer et menneske med et gjennompsykologisert selvbilde. Perspektivet er narsissistisk og språket lukket inne i selvutviklingens og selvterapiens klaustrofobiske rom. Men alt er—nesten—tilforlatelig. Hun likner ikke helt, men nesten på deg og meg. Det er nok dét som er provoserende. I hvert fall så provoserende at det blir viktig å tenke: Det der ville jeg aldri ha gjort med min unge! Sånn er jeg i hvert fall ikke! (142-143) [Marstein portrays a person with a completely psychologized self-image. The perspective is narcissistic and the language entrapped in the claustrophobic space of self-development and self-therapy. But everything is—almost—permissible. She is not quite, but almost like you and me. It is probably that which is provoking. At least so provoking that it becomes important to think: I would never have done that to my child! I am not that kind of person!].

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[167] Per Thomas Andersen, Tankevaser: Om norsk 1990-tallslitteratur, (Universitetsforlaget: Oslo, 2003).

Although the female narrator irritates him as a reader and provokes him to assess his own beliefs toward parenting, Andersen does not include motherhood as a viable entity inside or outside the novel. Andersen stresses shame, disgust, and the lost desire for life as the thematic threads connecting the noncommittal characters in Marstein's novels, and awards his highest praise to Marstein's skill as a "språkkunstner" (161) ["language artist"] for convincingly writing from the standpoint of two remarkably different narrators in her first-person novels. Andersen commends Marstein's ability to embody a twenty-something, single mom and then a fifty-something, widowed husband as narrators, and allow the idiosyncrasies of each individual consciousness to characterize the novel.

Another point of contention for critics in Marstein's novel is the exaggerated realism of the intense and detailed everyday conflicts, a dividing element for many. Erle M. Stokke has written one of the most scathing reviews of the novel, criticizing the everyday situations for their lack of irony and the overabundance of detail. Stokke accuses Marstein of trying to formulate the "novel of the 90s" as her own literary cliché:

> Jeg har kjent for mange hovedfagstudenter med pleieassistenterfaring, sittet for mange timer med en surrende pc mellom kneippbrødsmuler og legoklosser, drukket for mange kaffekopper og opplevd for mange barn bryte sammen foran skjokoladehyllen på Rimi, til at jeg leser detaljtunge skildringene av dette med særlig entusiasme. [...] Det skal noen litterær kraftanstrengelser til for å løfte det dit, for å få det til å

> gjøre noe annet med meg enn min egen pc, min egen kaffetrakter, min egen fireåring gjør med meg. [I have known too many graduate students with care giving experience, sat too many hours with a humming computer between white bread crumbs and Lego blocks, drunk too many cups of coffee and experienced too many children break down in the candy aisle at the grocery store to read heavily detailed passages of this with any enthusiasm. [...] It will take even more literary exertions of power to lift it to that level, in order to get it to do something else with me than my own computer, my own coffee pot, and my own four-year-old already do].[168]

Stokke's reading of the text alludes to the same kind of personal reaction that Andersen experiences as a reader, namely distress at the recognition of the conflict of the everyday. As Rita Felski states, reactions to the estrangement of the ordinary reveal more about the reader than about the actual situation.[169] In this instance, Stokke and Andersen's comments suggest something about their relationship to motherhood that they are unwilling to say, and point to the narrative's success at defamiliarizing the everyday act of mothering so much that it dislodges the apathy toward the mundane. These two critics ignore the feelings of discomfort produced by this novel.

What Stokke interprets as claustrophobic functions as a liberating element for Kåre Glette, who labels Marstein's commitment to the prosaic as a kind of "Ikea

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[168] Erle M. Stokke, "Hverdagsanalyser," Morgenbladet 10 Mar. 2000, 24 Sept. 2002 <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article7756>.

[169] Rita Felski, introduction, New Literary History 33.4 (2002): 611. As discussed in Chapter 2, Felski states that a reading of the everyday "may reveal more about the ingrained attitudes and attachments of a cohort of modern intellectuals than about the essence of daily life."

realism."[170] Glette coined this metaphor in his congratulatory speech to Marstein upon her receipt of the Vestfolds litteraturpris [Vestfold's Literature Prize]. Commenting on the similarities between the thematic contents and the Ikea-like assembly instructions pictured on the cover of her book, Glette praises the characters of Marstein's novels for their quest for completeness:

> Denne illustrasjonen fører oss rett inn i Trude Marsteins forfattarskap—som handlar om kvardagen, trivialitetane, detaljane, rituala, nullsituasjonane, det oppstykka og tilsynalatande uviktige og uvestentlege, slik det kjem til uttrykk i parforhold i vårt moderne liv. [...] Marstein har ei sjeldan evne til observasjon [... av] mimikk, gestikk, tonefall, snakkemåte, handlingar [... og] greier det kunststykke å skriva om det trivielle utan at det blir triviallitteratur. [This illustration brings us right in to Trude Marstein's authorship—that deals with the everyday, the trivialities, the details, the rituals, the zero-situations, the divisions and the apparently unimportant and insignificant, as expressed in pair relationships in our modern life. [...] Marstein has a seldom talent for observation [... of] expression, gesture, intonation, manner of speaking, events [... and] manages the feat of writing about the trivial without it becoming trivial literature].

In contrast to critics who disregard the potential of the everyday, Glette compliments Marstein's uncanny ability to recognize rituals and describe the characters' relationships

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[170] Kåre Glette, "Pristale: Vestfolds litteraturpris 2002," Tønsberg og Nøtterøy Biblioteket, 3 Nov. 2002, 22 November 2002 <http://www-bib.hive.no/galleri/litteraturpris/marstein.html>. This prize was awarded at Tønsberg and Nøtterøy Library.

to them as something that creates meaning. The comparison between Marstein and Ikea highlights their join goal to make the everyday important again. Ikea encourages assessment of one's interior use of space and suggests feasible solutions for change. When the time comes to replace old, worn out furniture, Ikea is there with functional alternatives for replacement. This study interprets Marstein's project along similar lines by evaluating how the reader assesses and disregards worn-out societal traditions and definitions of motherhood, and then begins with a revisionist project that constructs an alternative image. In this novel, the reader encounters one fictitious mother who changes her life and daily rituals to accommodate such a renovation. These suggestions, like Ikea furniture, are not permanent or ideal solutions, but they contribute to a short-term change and renewal.

Mothers

Marstein's novel portrays a mother who balances between traditional and experiential mothering, wanting to reform the concept but still yielding to elements of the patriarchal image. Marstein's mother figure does not fit comfortably in the scenario of either the 'good' or the 'bad' mother all the time, leaving her to in the realistic position of straddling both most of the time. Renegotiating the role of the mother must include the freedom to make mistakes and not always feel bound to one description of what a mother should or should not be. By giving readers access to the narrator's voice and mind, Marstein allows the reader a first-hand look at the difficulties inherent in this task from a mother's perspective. The main character struggles to create the role to fit her

individual needs rather than allowing the institution of motherhood to remain static and unchanged. Wanting to overcome the nostalgia of the mother/child bond as established by paternal norms, the narrator experiments with alternative approaches to mothering to revitalize the relationship, and reformulate the understand acquired via the daily trials of that role. The everyday becomes a challenging arena for establishing a new knowledge of what it means to mother.

The main character craves power and rationality in her life, and believes that, as an academic, she has overcome the pitfalls of motherhood with her thoughtful evaluation of her various roles as a woman. Marstein's female narrator dismantles the ideal of motherhood by challenging and re-enacting those assumed roles, making her experience as a mother quite non-traditional in her empowerment. The irony is that in the narrator's desperate attempt to avoid a nostalgic image of the mother, she creates her own new ideal as a replacement, perpetuating her inability to live up to a perfect standard. She constantly measures her behavior to that imagined model, circumscribing her progress and repeating old habits in her attempt to find a new balance. She feels powerful as a mother, and her excessive mothering is vulnerable to the misappropriation of that might. She sensed this feeling of absolute maternal power immediately following Sara's birth, and it tormented her even in her sleep. She remembers the nightmares she had just after the delivery. "Det var redselen for ansvarsforsømmelse, tenker jeg, den skremmende vissheten om dette livets *totale avhengighet av meg*, og derav min enorme makt" (256) ["It was the fear of the neglect of responsibility, I think, the terrifying

certainty of this life's *total dependence on me*, and from this my enormous power"].[171] Throughout the text, the maternal narrator is in dialogue with herself to keep this power in check, adjusting and justifying her individual decisions, actions, and responses regarding her daughter Sara.

The female narrator struggles with a split definition of motherhood that includes an institutional component and an experiential component. In a café one afternoon, while mechanically removing Sara's rain pants and boots, she reflects on her automatic motions. "Jeg føler meg som en institutsjon" (32) ["I feel like an institution"]. She recognizes the difference between motherhood as something created and admired by a patriarchal system and as something that mothers experience and create themselves, but this realization has only come with time and practice. She bemoans the frustration of this discovery to her boyfriend while out on a date:

> Jeg sier: Før jeg fikk barn så jeg for meg et bilde av meg selv som mor, omsorgsfullt bøyd over en vugge. *Smilende,* sier jeg, med den *matte gløden* mødre med stor m har i ansiktet. [...] Jeg forberedte meg lenge, og jeg gjør en fabelaktig prestasjon, jeg ser meg selv utenfra hele tida, selv i de ømmeste situasjoner, alt blir scener og bilder (79-80) [I say: Before I had kids, I imagined a picture of myself as a mother, compassionately bent over a cradle. *Smiling,* I say, with the *dull glow* mothers with a capital m have in their face. [...] I prepared for a long time, and I give a fantastic presentation, I watch myself from the

[171] Trude Marstein, Plutselig hører noen åpne en dør, (Oslo: Oktober, 2000).

outside all the time, even in the tenderest situations, everything becomes scenes and images].

Her dissatisfaction with even the most sincere moments stems from her insecurity of how and when to be a mother to Sara. "Jeg vil at hun skal kjenne meg som noe annet enn en perfekt mor som gjennomfører en korrekt barneoppdragelse på siden av sitt eget liv. Hun skal se meg som et menneske" (11) ["I want her to know me as something other than a perfect mother who accomplishes a correct child upbringing on the side of her own life. She will see me as a person"]. She wants Sara to know that she has faults and therefore cannot and will not always live up to the expectations of a perfect mother. Yet her immediate response is that she cannot allow Sara to see that more human side of her. "Jeg burde egentlig alltid spille roller for Sara, fordi det å være naturlig vil for meg si det samme som å være ukontrollert og temperamentssvingende, og et barn har ikke godt av å se sin mor så ustabilt" (11) ["Actually I ought always play roles for Sara, because for me, being natural would be the same as being uncontrolled and temperamental, and a child shouldn't see her mother so unstable"]. In this quote, the main character admits that her preconceptions of an ideal mother prevent her from completely expressing her own emotion and feelings to her daughter.

The narrator must redefine motherhood to accept it, and she resents the emotional components that cloud her analytical assessment. She cannot talk about mothering without belying her confliction emotions about it. The account of motherhood that she presents to her best friend Tonje is a telling example of this

frustration, and her inner conflict with the dichotomy emerges in her calculated answer to Tonje, who has just expressed her desire to be a mother:

> Det er å anbefale, sier jeg og ønsker jeg kunne sagt det med langt større inderlighet. Det er en klisjé, sier jeg, men jeg har virkelig en følelse av at det å føde og oppdra et barn er meningen med livet. [...] Ikke i biologisk forstand, sier jeg, men Sara og hovedfaget er virkelig det som gir livet mitt mening (22) [I recommend it, I say and wish that I could have said it with much more sincerity. It is a cliché, I say, but I really have a feeling that giving birth and raising a child is the meaning of life. [...] Not in a biological sense, I say, but Sara and my thesis are really that which give my life meaning].

Her recommendation contains the undertones of rebellion that she experiences, which she finds difficult to voice, even to her best friend. Tonje retains a romanticized image of motherhood, and the narrator tries to temper Tonje's enthusiasm with a better understanding of the complexity of contemporary motherhood. She wishes for genuineness in her counsel to Tonje, but the trace of insincerity that she detects in the tone of her own voice mocks the statement that motherhood is the meaning of life even as she defends the choice to enter into the role. Responding that life is meaningful because of her daughter and her thesis confers her thesis with the importance of a second child. Both thesis and child require care and attention to make them grow. This is an argument that will be further developed later in this chapter.

Rewriting maternal clichés

The main character abhors clichés as overused phrases void of meaning, and tries to recreate her language to be meaningful again. One manifestation of this understanding occurs during a cross-country ski outing with her daughter and her boyfriend Johan. Although she is thoroughly enjoying the ski trip, the natural surroundings, and the smell of winter, she feels unable to express her pleasure without making her responses sound hollow and insincere. "Det er så umulig å formidle det vakre, uten å bruke klisjeer, sier jeg. […] Vi burde øve oss på det, sier jeg, å bruke klisjeer på en inderlig måte […] spørsmålet er om de *lekte med tradisjonen* eller var *knyttet til den*" (115, 117) ["It is so impossible to effect the beautiful without using clichés, I say. […] We ought to practice that, I say, to use clichés in a sincere way. […] the question is whether they *played with the tradition* or were *connected to it*"]. Her attempt to use the old words and phrases without modification leaves her with a sense of dissatisfaction, for she cannot tell if it has been a successful manipulation or just an unmediated repetition. This example highlights the double challenge inherent in reforming everyday life and language, and illuminates the difficulties in her project to reform motherhood. She knows that the double standard exists in both cases, and that an overused phrase or image can both be empty and still convey meaning. This thought comes to her while watching television commercials of a happy mother/child pair. "En vakker, smilende mor løfter barnet sitt opp i armene i en reklame for vaskemiddel, det berører meg ikke. For det første tenker jeg ikke at vi burde hatt det så romantisk-idyllisk, for det andre, tenker jeg, har vi det faktisk sånn av og til" (133) ["A beautiful, smiling mother lifts her child up in her arms

in a commercial for laundry detergent, it doesn't move me. In the first place, I don't think that we ought to be so romantic-idyllic, in the second place, we are like that sometimes"]. These thoughts are juxtaposed to her own situation, where she sits watching TV in the living room in an attempt to drown out the sound of Sara's screaming.

Convinced that clichés are void of meaning, the narrator combats their overuse in her thesis writing, her conversations with lovers and friends, and in her daily performance of motherhood. The narrator is a keen observer and keeps a running tab of the lazy speech patterns of the people around her. Rarely does she express her analysis of others in public, but sometimes she lets her interlocutors bear the full brunt of her opinion on the unreflective use of language. While out for a beer one night with Mikkel, a former colleague, she loses patience with his sloppy use of the phrase "ekstremt asosial" ["extremely asocial"] in their casual conversation, and tries to explain to him the danger of casually repeating such mismatched words:

> Noe som virkelig begrenser språkets muligheter, sier jeg, er misbruk av sterke ord. Han nikker, later som han forstår selv om han ikke aner hva jeg snakker om, som Sara når jeg irettesetter henne. […] Men skjønner du ikke, sier jeg, litt mer opphisset nå, men ikke særlig høyrøstet; du utvanner språket, sier jeg, ordene mister sin opprinnelige betydning og snart har vi ingen ord igjen når det virkelig gjelder (48, 49-50)
>
> [Something that really limits the possibilities of language, I say, is the misuse of strong words. He nods, pretends as if he understands even

> though he has no idea what I'm talking about, like Sara when I reprimand her. […] But don't you understand, I say a little more agitated now, but not especially loud; you dilute the language, I say, the words lose their original meaning and soon we won't have any words left when it really matters].

His inability to understand her insistence on preserving meaning within language refers directly to his lack of comprehension or feeling of urgency to redefine language. On a larger scale, this exchange speaks to a general insensitivity to a much-needed renewal of linguistic and social images regarding the term 'mother.'

The main character struggles with the implementation of this theory herself, rationalizing what she should tell her daughter about the linguistic conflict of their everyday lives, and when she will be able to understand it. "Jeg har stadig lyst til å formidle større innsikter enn det som er naturlig for et barn, jeg vil hun skal forstå mer enn det hun har forutsetninger for å forstå" (19) ["I constantly want to effect greater insights than those that are natural for a child, I want her to understand more than what she has the capacity to understand"]. She is in constant conflict between mothering Sara well, and wanting her to know how hard she is working to accomplish those mothering goals. "Jeg vil si til henne at jeg vet mer enn mange andre mødre, men er redd for hva hun kan si videre, tatt ut av sammenhengen" (19) ["I want to tell her that I know more than many other mothers, but am afraid of what she might say next, taken out of context"].

The narrator strikes a tone in the quote above that suggests two possible interpretations. The first interpretation implies a contemplative woman who uses time and energy to remake the mother role to the best of her ability. This discussion could be written off as the characteristic Norwegian "janteloven" mentality that immediately surfaces in the narrator—I am just as simple, average, and unremarkable as everyone else—but this mother fights against that unofficial 'law' of Norwegian society. She refuses to accept anything substandard in language or life due to her pride as an educated individual and informed mother. She wishes that she "kunne være en litt mer ufornuftig og prinsippsvak mor, men det er for seint nå" (54) ["could be a bit more irrational and flexible mother, but it is too late for that now"]. Her attempt to downplay her knowledge paradoxically results in an affirmation of her intellect. The second interpretation makes her a rather arrogant academic who feeds her own ego with her inflated intelligence. She believes that her intellectual acumen allows her to see through the difficult situations of mothering that dupe average people. "Jeg forstår ikke hvordan alminnelig bevisste foreldre, for ikke å snakke om alle de ressurssvake der ute; hvordan de greier å håndtere slike barn. Jeg setter meg ned og skriver, Sara hyler" (75) ["I do not understand how average conscious parents, not to mention all the resource challenged out there, how they manage to handle such children. I sit down and write, Sara screams"].

And yet, overwhelmed by the responsibilities of motherhood and writing, the narrator loses control and abandons her noble principles. After ten minutes of Sara's non-stop screaming, the narrator storms up out of her chair, grabs Sara, shakes her, and

bangs her head against the wall to get her to stop crying. Immediately shocked at her behavior, the mother feels guilty for this mistreatment. "Jeg blir bevisst på at jeg av og til legger skylda for alle problemer over på Sara, mens jeg vet godt at moren i alle tilfeller må ta på seg all skyld, når barnet er så lite som det Sara er" (76) ["I am convinced that I sometimes place the guilt for all problems onto Sara, while I know full well that the mother has to take on all the guilt in all situations when the child is as young as Sara is"]. Her subsequent thoughts absolve her from her guilty feelings as she rationalizes that Sara gets these same kinds of bumps just from everyday play. This incident features the narrator's hypocrisy, professing beliefs she cannot put into practice. The narrator repeatedly convinces herself that she has not overstepped any boundaries, and she usually repairs things with Sara by asking for forgiveness, though always in a rather convoluted way. As in the examples by Ørstavik and Oterholm, the violence accompanying the image of the 'mother without child' undermines the ideal image of maternal behavior. Acts of hostility conceal the tensions of mothering and turbulent feelings that surface in the narrator, and point to her internal position somewhere between these two contradictions of the ideal and experiential.

Writing

Marstein questions the connections between writing and mothering in theory and in practice. Like the division Rita Felski highlights between everyday knowledge and know-how, Marstein's narrator emphasizes the cerebral over the tangible in her

mothering and writing.[172] The reader knows that she writes and completes her thesis during the course of the novel, but never learns the subject matter; thus, the reader realizes that details and end-result of the project are less important than the actual process of writing and contemplating the content. Similarly, the narrator reflects on the theoretical knowledge of mothering and rationale behind each act, but most often excludes the banal, practical details of cooking, cleaning, and care taking in daily routines. The focus is not on the content of the daily processes, but on the repetition and cognizance of them. This study's understanding of the everyday reflects that position. By showing the intense rationalization of the mother's every act and decision, Marstein makes the daily acts of mothering new again by exaggerating the thought processes that go into each task. The main character's status as a work-at-home student mother compounds everyday routines and adds more anxiety to the home situation since the apartment doubles as living and working space. The narrator must work diligently in order to complete her thesis on time, and this tension creates a natural conflict between writing and mothering.

The main character prides herself on her ability to intellectualize motherhood, and believes that the recreation of the role of the mother requires contemplation before, during, and after each maternal act. Writing elevates the narrator from the daily struggles of motherhood, and she writes to forget her exhaustion and frustration with parenting and dating. She considers herself an intellectual, and as such is overly conscious of the theoretical framework surrounding her analysis and intellectual work.

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[172] Rita Felski, introduction, New Literary History 33.4 (2002) 615.

For the narrator, knowledge is the ultimate goal in all of her tasks: motherhood, scholarship, and relationships. Her reflections do not always produce the desired result, even though she prides herself on her ability to rationalize even the most emotional situations. As the following series of quotes shows, the narrator fluctuates between her perspectives on mothering. Most often she prioritizes mothering, but she often bemoans her lack of time, skill, and energy with the job. Sometimes she feels like everything is equally balanced, while other times she curses her maternal responsibilities for their distraction. The two usually stand inversely proportional to each other.

On her way to meet her thesis adviser, the narrator gets frustrated over her general lack of time to think and work, and how that stress interferes with her ability to mother:

> Jeg skulle ønske jeg kunne være mer bevisst på morsrollen, jeg har ikke kapasitet til å tenke igjennom hver replikk, hver handling på forhånd, og flere ganger om dagen handler jeg spontant på måter som ikke er gunstig for Saras oppdragelse, fordi jeg ikke har oversikt til i stor nok grad å beherske det jeg sier og gjør (71-72) [I wish I could be more deliberate in the mother's role; I don't have the capacity for thinking through every response, every action before hand, and many times during the day I act spontaneously in ways that are not propitious for Sara's upbringing because I don't have the perspective to a great enough degree to control that which I say and do].

Accustomed to writing and re-writing her thoughts in the systematic manner encouraged by her academic training, the narrator craves the same kind of authorial control to polish her everyday interactions with her daughter. "Jeg sier til meg selv igjen og igjen at jeg har oversikt og kontroll og kjenner verken oversikt eller kontroll" (163) ["I say to myself again and again that I have perspective and control and feel neither perspective nor control"]. She feels insufficient in her role as mother, especially when she is frantically finishing her thesis. She has these thoughts as her ex Henning drops off Sara: "Ta henne med deg igjen, ikke gi henne til meg før jeg er blitt snill. Jeg kan bli en god mor igjen, men nå skammer jeg meg så jeg ikke kan se på henne" (230) ["Take her with you again, don't give her to me until I'm nice again. I can be a good mother again, but now I feel so ashamed that I can't even look at her"]. Still she decides that she is a better than average mother because she so rigorously analyzes her actions.

Very little of the text is in dialogue form, featuring instead the protagonist's stream of consciousness that convolutes narrative time. These circular thought patterns juxtapose her life as a writer and as a mother; she is rarely able to separate one completely from another, so both tasks infiltrate and affect the other. An example of this fluctuation surfaces in the following quote where the narrator sits at home alone, daydreaming, unable to concentrate on her writing:

> Jeg gleder meg til Sara kommer, i bakrus er Sara trygghet for meg, et 'fast holdepunkt', tenker jeg. Jeg tenker at kjærligheten min sjelden har strukket seg særlig utover det egoistiske, og det sies at morskjærligheten er så altruistisk og ikke kjenner noen grenser, jeg tror ikke min er sånn og

> det gjør vondt. [...] Jeg skal skrive en uvanlig god hovedfagsoppgave, jeg tror den blir veldig god, tenker jeg (62) [I'm happy that Sara is coming, Sara is security for me when I'm hung over, a 'solid anchor,' I muse. I realize that my love has seldom extended very far into the egotistic, and it is said that a mother's love is so altruistic and knows no bounds; I don't think mine is like that and it hurts. [...] I've got a guilty conscience and don't know what for. I'm going to write an uncommonly good thesis, I believe it'll be very good, I think].

Mothering and writing co-exist as the key responsibilities for the narrator. Guilty from going out last night and getting drunk, she reprimands herself for being a 'bad' mother. She compensates for her shortcomings as a mother by complimenting her own skill as a writer.

At other times when she is "on duty" with Sara, she loathes motherhood for the ensuing responsibilities that distract her from her work. "Jeg blir motløs når jeg husker at jeg stoppet midt i en komplisert utlegning da jeg måtte hente Sara. Jeg hadde begynt å få klarhet, og nå er det helt umulig å komme inn igjen" (153) ["I become despondent when I remember that I stopped in the middle of a complicated exegesis when I had to pick up Sara. I had begun to get clarity, and now it is absolutely impossible to get back into it again"]. Writing typically helps her cope with mothering when she is not sure how otherwise to handle the situation, but this does not free her from doubt and insecurity, wondering if she is doing the right thing. In a bitter moment, the narrator

condemns distractions by her family time as it affects her writing and interrupts progress on her thesis:

> Pc-en durer. Jeg er rastløs, jeg har endelig tid alene til meg selv og oppgaven, Sara er hos Henning, jeg har sagt til Johan at jeg ikke kan treffe ham i kveld, at jeg må skrive. Jeg har sittet her hele dagen med bare noen få korte pauser, men egentlig ikke fått gjort noe særlig, eller i hvert fall lite i forhold til hvor mye tid jeg har brukt (117) [The computer hums. I am restless, I finally have time alone to myself and the thesis, Sara is with Henning, I have told Johan that I cannot meet him tonight, that I must write. I've sat here the entire day with just a few short breaks, but actually haven't done very much, or in any case nothing in comparison to how much time I've used].

Although she has such noble visions of her role as a mother, she cannot maintain the perfect model she strives to uphold.

When her new lover Johan enters her life, the tensions between mothering and writing are stretched even further to encompass the newest demand on her time. She wants to make room for a lover in her life, but struggles to distribute her time evenly between Johan, Sara, and her thesis. While involved in her relationship, the narrator's thoughts focus on her lover at the expense of her writing and her mothering. This always evokes guilty feelings when she feels she should be spending time either with Sara or her thesis. Her writing and mothering suffers, and she becomes unhappy with

herself, Sara, and her relationship. The irony of this is that the narrator is not happy without all three, even though she convinces herself that being a mother is paramount:

> Jeg skriver litt, og jeg snur meg og ser på Sara, hun har krøpet opp i sofaen igjen, jeg ser på henne til ser det, og smiler. Jeg må være mor bestandig, til enhver tid, aldri glemme at jeg er mor, aldri koble ut et minutt mens Sara er hos meg, alt jeg gjør og er må henge sammen med dette ene; å være mor, konstant (107) [I write a little, and I turn around and look at Sara, she has crawled up onto the couch again, I look at her until she sees it and smiles. I must be a mother constantly, at all times, never forget that I am a mother, never disconnect one minute while Sara is with me; everything I do and am must hang together with this one thing; to be a mother, constantly].

Once she finally breaks up with Johan, things flow smoothly again with Sara and the thesis. She delves into an intense cleaning stage and purposefully purges the house of reminders of him. She then does the same kind of revision with her thesis, as writing again becomes her salvation:

> Jeg setter meg foran pc-en, drikker små slurker av vannet. Jeg holder rundt musa, klikker meg inn på filen og ser teksten jeg har skrevet. Høyremargen er ujevn, jeg markerer alt og klikker i vinduet for blokkjustering. Jeg kan skrive: jeg skriver nesten uten å tenke. Jeg tenker at jeg ubevisst kontinuerlig arbeider mellom skriveøktene. Nå har jeg kveld etter kveld (146) [I sit down in front of the computer, drink small

> sips of water. I grasp the mouse, click my way into the file and look at the text I have written. The right margin is uneven; I highlight everything and click on the icon to justify. I can write; I write almost without thinking. I think that I unconsciously work constantly between writing spurts. Now I have evening after evening].

Again, the content of the writing is not important; only the aesthetic value of the text carries meaning. It must be justified and equalized, with all the excesses trimmed and shortcomings supplemented, but she can write once that visual balance is in place. She knows she has the ability to write, and congratulates herself for being able to stop everything and write, whenever need be. Thinking of the upcoming lonely nights in which she will now be able to work, her stoic façade breaks and she bursts out crying over her broken relationship, only to calm herself down once again by thinking about her thesis. Once again she reveals the traditional opinions that rest at the base of her purported values.

The narrator edits Johan out of her life and her text for the last time, but finds out that Sara's father Henning has a new girlfriend. Her writing suffers again upon learning this bit of news; the task gets easier, but she finds no connections in her text. The holidays also wreck havoc on her writing, interrupting her daily routine with a visit to her mother for a short four-day holiday break at Christmas. She longs for her computer in the midst of the touching but conventional holiday celebrations, mostly as a break from reliving memories of the past and contrasting her parents' success in raising her with her parenting skills with Sara. Their New Year's Eve celebration mirrors her

own parental assessment when she and Sara travel to Henning's for a New Year's party with his new girlfriend. The separated parents are stuck in uncomfortable, compromising situations. The evening's alcohol-induced events come out in the light of the following day in one of the only instances in the novel not told in the present tense. Before she loses herself in her drunkenness, the last recorded thoughts of the narrator still relate to writing her thesis: "Jeg er ikke i tvil om at jeg får ferdig oppgaven og at den blir god" (194) ["I have no doubt that I will finish the thesis and that it will be good"]. It comes as no surprise that her first waking thoughts are also centered on her thesis. More drunk than hung over, fear replaces the alcohol-induced confidence from the night before. "Jeg tenker på oppgaven og blir kald og varm om hverandre, det er bare åtte uker til jeg skal levere, og nå mangler jeg fullstendig oversikt" (194) ["I think about the thesis and get warm and cold all over, it is only eight weeks until I need to turn it in, and now I lack a complete overview"]. These thoughts precede any concessions or regrets about her behavior towards Sara and Henning the night before, indicating that the prioritization of her thesis is as equally valuable as her daughter.

The panic persists in the subsequent weeks, and her writing and the lurking possibility of failure, closure, and dissolving bonds to the thesis consume the narrator. Like her premature fright about the absolute powers of motherhood, the gravity of finishing the thesis disturbs the narrator. "[Jeg ser] en løsning som består i å flykte, isolere meg, at alt jeg trenger er pc-en og bøkene mine, og ved den tanken blir jeg vettskremt. […] Jeg skrur på pc-en, det er en god lyd, trygghet uten meningsløshet" (197) ["I see a solution that consists of running away, isolating myself, that everything I

need is the computer and my books, and with that though I get scared out of my wits. […] I turn on the computer; it is a good sound, security without meaninglessness"]. Her worries about being a good parent are intricately entwined with to her concerns about writing well.

Thesis as Child

Daughter and thesis battle as two powerful contenders for the mother's love and affection, competing with the already strong pull between mother and intellectual woman. The duality of the idolized thesis surfaces often in one of the narrator's inner monologues. The comparisons are troubled when Sara and her mother are alone, but Johan's arrival makes the associations even more vivid. Suddenly, the rearrangement of her priorities drastically affects her levels of productivity, and she berates herself for the decline in the pace of writing. Whereas the manuscript had shown daily growth and change, the narrator now feels stagnation. Interpreting the thesis as an unborn child, the narrator compares her writing to childbirth:

> Jeg anstrenger meg for lite og velger stadig enkle løsninger. Jeg tenker på den høygravide kvinnen med det kanskje innbilt døde fosteret på helsetjenestens venteværelse. Jeg vil tro at dersom man får vite en måned før terminen at barnet er dødt, kan man ikke vente med å få fosteret ut og vekk, selv om barnet har vært etterlengtet. [...] Jeg tror kvinnen vil forestille seg at forråtnelsesprosessen snart vil starte, innelukket i kroppen hennes, at hun vil tenke på barnet med avsky, som et lik, et

> cadaver. Jeg skriver litt ... (106-107) [I exert myself too little and steadily choose simple solutions. I think about the very pregnant woman with the perhaps imagined dead fetus at the clinic's waiting room. I would think that if you found out one month before the due date that the child was dead, you could not wait to get the fetus out and away, even if you longed for the child. […] I think the woman would image that the decay process would soon start, trapped in her body, that she would think of the child with disgust, as a corpse, a cadaver. I write a little …].

Admitting to herself that having a boyfriend takes away from her writing time and dampens her enthusiasm to work, she immediately makes the connection from her dormant thesis to a dead baby. The remarkable leap in her thoughts, shows the seriousness she attaches to her work and to the responsibility of mothering. Interpreting her thesis as the obvious child in this pregnancy metaphor, the thesis is nearly ready for birth and suddenly the whole process has come to a dreadful end. As her relationship with Johan grows stronger and as she gives more of herself to him, she has less time to give to her writing. However, her need to write and to mother overpowers her and she musters the energy to end the relationship and start to write again.

The narrator's emotions interfere with her ability to write even after the relationship with Johan ends. Realizing that her period has just begun, she gets up from the computer, goes to the bathroom, mourns and curses the irrational feeling of not being pregnant with Johan's baby, and then goes back to her computer and attempts to work again:

> Livmoren verker, Sara klikker med tunga mens hun tegner. Jeg prøver å lese gjennom teksten, men greier ikke å konsentrere meg, lyden gnager i ørene og i panne. Det er to måneder og en uke igjen. Jeg merker ved slutten av et avsnitt at jeg leser det for andre gang, og jeg har virkelig ingen idé om hva jeg skriver om her. […] Jeg markerer og undestreker noen helt uvesentlig, mens jeg hører klikkene når vakuumet mellom Saras gane og tunge slipper. Jeg fjerner understrekningene igjen (153)
>
> [My uterus aches; Sara clicks her tongue while she draws. I try to read through the text, but can't manage to concentrate; the sound corrodes my ears and my forehead. There are only two months and one week left. I realize at the end of a paragraph that I am reading it for the second time, and I have really no idea what I'm writing about here. […] I mark and underline something completely irrelevant, while I hear the clicks when the vacuum between Sara's palate and tongue releases. I erase the underlining again].

This excerpt brings out the tensions between the main character as an author and mother, confined to one single room, forced to share her working space with her daughter and the ghost of her lover. Concentrated on the symbolic and physical cleansing of Johan from her body, she fights the nagging presence of her maternal responsibilities to Sara and her thesis. Time is running out, and she can only take time to concentrate on the essential tasks of mothering and writing. Like the cleansing of her

uterus, she clears her mind by erasing the fantasy of an imagined life with Johan as just another revision in her process of writing.

The narrator tries to prepare herself for the emotional letdown at the inevitable end of her writing project and the eventual 'birth' of her thesis, but cannot imagine life without it. The humming of the computer is a comforting sound, more so than the din of the television or the noise of Sara playing. It is a constant for her, like motherhood, and she cannot comprehend anything else that could replace it.

> Jeg ser på den hvite skjermen med den svarte teksten. Jeg tror jeg kommer til å få den ferdig, det er snart over, det er vanskelig å innse; jeg har så lenge sett på det som noe evig, uendelig, aldri ferdig. Jeg tenker at jeg kommer til å savne dette; dette som oppstår i hodet mitt, tastes ut gjennom fingrene, dukker opp på skjermen og blir til et objekt, skapt av meg (198) [I stare at the white screen with the black text. I believe I'll be able to finish it, it is soon over, it is difficult to comprehend; I have looked at it for so long as something eternal, unending, never finished. I think that I'll come to miss this; this that pops up in my head, is typed out through my fingers, shows up on the screen and becomes an object, created by me].

As with preparation for birth, the narrator tries to imagine what life will be like without the fertility of an ever-working mind and the productivity of writing. Confronted by the coming end of her thesis, she transposes her writing into the maternal sphere of her life with Sara.

The text becomes more than just an accomplishment, but also a thing of aesthetic beauty. Like a healthy baby, she assesses and praises the finished thesis for its wholeness and perfection. Counting every page and measuring the margins, the visual analysis of the physical text resembles the first inspection of a newborn by its mother. As she stated in her conversation with Tonje, motherhood/authorship gives her a sense of purpose in life:

> Jeg ser helheten; begynnelse, midte og slutt, hver avsnitt på korrekt plass, jeg grøsser faktisk av lykke. Eller, i hvert fall fryd, tenker jeg. Klokka er snart sju, jeg har jobbet i ti timer i dag. Alt jeg har spist er tre knekkebrød uten pålegg og noen bokstavkjeks. Jeg ser inn i skjermen, klikker meg opp og ned. Teksten er estetisk vakker, innholdet fullkomment. […] Jeg rammes av en plustelig, neste ekstatisk følelse av sammenheng, den slår i bølger gjennom brystet. Jeg holder hendene mot hodet og bare nyter. […] Følelsen av velbehag og selvtilfredshet her foran den nesten ferdige oppgaven har derimot inntruffet som et resultat av noe annet enn objektive kriterier. Jeg kjenner *meningen med livet* (201-202) [I see the entity; beginning, middle, and end, every paragraph in correct place, I shudder from happiness. Or, in any case delight, I think. It is soon seven; I have worked for ten hours today. All that I've eaten is three dry rye crisps and some animal crackers. I stare into the screen; click my way up and down. The text is aesthetically beautiful, the contents complete. […] I'm struck by a sudden, almost ecstatic feeling of

> connection; it rolls in waves through my chest. I hold my hands to my head and just enjoy it. [...] The feeling of delight and self-contentment here in front of an almost finished thesis on the other hand has happened because of something other than objective criteria. I understand *the meaning of life*].

Even though the narrator feels pride over this accomplishment, the end of the story leaves the reader with a sense of doubt as to how long this euphoria will last. The narrator unconvincingly begins to redirect her life back to Sara as the only object of her intense love and direction, ready to pour all of her energies into her role as a mother.

Tore Renberg

Tore Renberg's novel Matriarkat begins with an epigraph that pleads for a child's vulnerability, since the human child "preges av en nesten total hjelpløshet når det ser dagens lys" ["is characterized by an almost complete helplessness when it sees the light of day"].[173] The novel covers Kjeran's dependence on his mother and the women of his life. This theme resonates with the entire novel, which is cleverly divided into three sections entitled "Industri" ["Industry"], "Kongenital" ["Congenital"] and "Distribusjon" ["Distribution"]. If the chapter headings are taken as phases of development in the life of the novel, industry stands then as a history and past experiences, a time of copulation, planting the seeds and getting the story started by

[173] Tore Renberg, Matriarkat, (Oslo: Tiden, 1996).

with proper preparation and care. The second phase refers to the time of birth, the climax, where the story or main character is the weakest but grows stronger day by day. The final phase is the actual development of the story when the helplessness of the protagonist subsides.

Kjeran follows this natural progression through the novel. The beginning provides the basic history of his life at home, at work, and at play (or in love) along with hundreds of short stories and reflections, from his past, present, and imagined future, as well as the imagined pasts of others. The basic information gathered is that Kjeran is 24 years old, he fell in love with Signe and she left him, he got fired from his job at a nursing home after he developed a relationship with Synnøve, his parents managed to stay married although his dad is paralyzed from an accident, and his sister Miriam now lives in London. The middle section fleshes out some of the stories previously started, and also contributes some new tales. Kjeran's dysfunctional family suffered from infant death and the terror of an alcoholic and abusive father, Signe left him because she suffered from a severe hormone imbalance, and Kjeran met a new lover Birgit who knows of him through rumors at her mother's nursing home. The third and final section shows his growing strength and independence after such a tumultuous time of incubation and birth. Kjeran tells the truth about Synnøve, he goes to London to see Miriam and discovers she is 8 months pregnant, he reads his mother's diary, his mom misses him and comes to visit, and he just wants to love all women and still be the nicest guy on the planet.

The real time of this story runs from late January to late April 1996, but driving force behind the narrative starts in 1995 with Signe's departure in late November and Synnøve's death at Christmas. The novel is interspersed with stories from the past and from the future, for Renberg creatively experiments with time as the narrator inserts bits of information at will in his novel. Signe assessed Kjeran's understanding of the present as an inability to internalize the now. "Signe pleide å si jeg ikke tok samtiden innover meg. Jeg tenker det som konvertering til fortid nærmest på instinkt. Øyeblikkelig omdannelse til historikk, som virksomt minne" (85) ["Signe used to say that I didn't take the present inside me. I think of it as conversion to the past almost instinctively. Momentary conversion to historical, as active memory"]. Present actions become history immediately, thereby allowing Kjeran to make past moments present. Past memories overtake his narration of the present, and constructed memories that he builds from possible future actions. This chapter assesses the past, present, and future of Kjeran in relation to women and how they mother, concentrating on his excessive interactions with mothers and general obsession with women.

Critical reception

The overall reception of Renberg's novels has been very positive, and most critics are quick to label his edgy prose captivating and sexually charged. According to Aage Storm Borchgrevink, Renberg stands out from his contemporaries because he found his own voice by adopting sex as his main theme rather than using sex as one of many elements to investigate identity. "Renberg har skapt eller valgt seg en identitiet. Han vet

hvem han er, og det gjør ikke de andre" ["Renberg has created or chosen an identity for himself. He knows who is he, and the others don't"].[174] Knut Faldbakken reads Renberg's attention-grabbing literary project as "et underholdenede og uortodokst innlegg" ["an entertaining and unorthodox contribution"] to the gender debate between masculinity and femininity.[175] Elin Brodin looks specifically at the main character Kjeran, described by Brodin as alternatively brooding and sensitive, to show how Renberg creates characters of our time. Kjeran is clearly a product of the feminist debates of the 1970s who infuriates the reader, irritated by his lack of self-discipline and strong egocentrism, but still feels sympathetic to his sense of responsibility and emotional attachment. "Kjeran er ute av stand til å se en kvinne ute å oppfatte henne som både morsskikkelse og seksualobject [...] Han er barnet som på grunn av vår moderne tids stress og uro aldri fikk tilfredsstilt sitt behov for nærhet" ["Kjeran is incapable of looking a woman without seeing her as both mother and sexual object. [...] He is the child who, because of the stress and strife of our modern time, never had his need for closeness satisfied"].[176] Kjeran is a walking gender conflict, embodying the antagonistic issues of second and third wave feminism.

Nøste Kendzior, on the other hand, reads the novel as man's attempt to regain independence from the violent power women have over men, in a world completely controlled and influenced by women. Kendzior displaces Kjeran's obsession with

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[174] Aage Storm Borchgrevink, "Virkeligheter," Vinduet 17 Jun. 1998, 8 October 2002. 1. <http://www.vinduet.no/tekst.asp?id=133>.
[175] Knut Faldbakken, "Besatt av kvinner," VG 23 Sept. 1996, 20 Mar. 2003 <http://leonora.vg.no/vg/96/anm/bok/0923besatt.html>.
[176] Elin Brodin, "Originalt om morsbinding," Aftenposten 30 Sept. 1996, 20 Mar. 2003 <http://tekst.aftenposten.no/forfindeks/fi.cgi?fiart+AFT96+AFT9609300041&>.

women and sex into a fixation on the body, the only reliable, unchangeable concrete object that Kjeran has at his disposal and therefore the site of all meaning-based action. "Kroppens mysterier og sårbarhet, kroppen som skueplass, som *det stedet hvor handlingen foregår*, er en tendens man rett ofte møter i dagens yngre nordiske litteratur" ["The body's mysteries and vulnerability, the body as a stage, as *that place where the action takes place*, is a tendency one quite often meets in today's younger Scandinavian literature"].[177] Øystein Rottem details his graphic, unabashedly psychoanalytic interpretation of the novel as an environment where it is not the phallus but "den kvinnelige vagina som suger alt til seg og dominerer derved hele verden" ["the female vagina that sucks everything to it and thereby dominates the entire world"]. As if this threat is not scary or fantastic enough in his eyes, Rottem continues to describe the unbearably strong "vaginamisunnelse" ["vagina envy"] that makes readers worry and expect that the young and rash Kjeran "tar saksen fatt og klipper av seg pikken til slutt" ["takes the scissors and cuts off his dick in the end"].[178] Fortunately readers are saved from this catastrophe as the author "beveger seg suverent mellom ulike tidsplan etter noe som likner en fri assosiasjonsmetode" ["moves expertly between various time frames following somewhat of method of free association"] in his "desperat forsøk på å bevare et mannlig selvbilde og en mannlig selvkontroll under dette sterke kvinnepress" ["desperate attempt to preserve a masculine self image and masculine self-control under this strong female pressure"]. With all the defensive responses to the threatened manhood, few have taken time to analyze the women or the mothers in Renberg's text.

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[177] Nøste Kendzior, "Tore Renberg: Matriarkat," Kritikk (1996).
[178] Øystein Rottem, "Sterkt om damer," Dagbladet 4 Oct. 1996, 20 Mar. 2003 <http://www.dagbladet.no/print/?/kultur/1996/10/04/125540.html>.

This study attempts to remedy that, reading Kjeran's sex obsession as a window through which to view his understanding and renew of the mother's role.

Mothers

A pertinent question to consider in the context of this novel is why it is impossible to see women as both mothers and sexual objects as Brodin claims in her review. Do they need to be separated or must they be mutually exclusive? Kjeran argues that mothers are sexy and powerful, both before the birth of the baby and after the fact, even though he can go over the top in his manic quest for them. This is not a book about incest, as Knut Faldbakken and others have so strongly emphasized, but it is uncomfortable when Kjeran asks to suck his pregnant sister's lactating breast or tells his mother of his sexual fantasies for her. This novel celebrates mothers as even greater sex objects for this woman-crazed man Kjeran. Is Kjeran, as a son of a "child of the 60s," more susceptible to such deliberations than men from other generations? Alternatively, does he better understand and express his emotions because of his upbringing? These questions are and should be left open to speculation for Kjeran Fevang cannot be pigeonholed into a period. He and his fellow seducers are timeless and can be found in many centuries and cultures. In addition, there is no danger of this man falling prey to women—to do so would be to die a perfect death. The thought is not a nightmare, but a vivid dream and fantasy.

Five women comprise the main circle of Kjeran's affections. Nearest and most beloved are his mother, Kathrine, and younger sister Miriam. He and his mother have a

close relationship, in part because he is the oldest sibling, and because they united for protection against the alcoholic and abusive father. He and Miriam are inseparable from each other's during their childhood, and throughout the novel they remain soul companions, relying on one another for support and reinforcement in their life. Because Kjeran has no relationship with his father, his familial universe centers on his mom and sister. Infuriated when moments of mother-daughter bonding exclude him from the women he loves most, Kjeran resents their relationship growing closer without him. One of the earliest examples of his exclusion and subsequent jealousy comes out in a scene from their stay in Denmark. Kjeran comes home from the university to find them sitting close, on the couch, crying, and he interrupts their moment by dumping the contents of his backpack on the floor. "Sånn er det for dem og sånn er det aldri for meg. De sitter i en historisk tetthet, *vi to, kvinner*" (22) ["That's the way it is for them and that's the way it never will be for me. They sit in a historical closeness, *we two, women*"]. This female closeness controls Kjeran's familial and sexual relationships his entire life. He rationalizes that the timeless relationship of mother-daughter will always exclude and somehow differ from the mother-son or sister-brother relationship that he has with each woman.

Kjeran loves his mother and sister to the point of obsession, a topic that surfaces in all of his affairs. There are many casual relationships for Kjeran, but only those between Signe, Birgit, and Synnøve will be discussed here. Competing against Kjeran's powerful and ever-present love for his sister and mother is no easy task, and each of his lovers reacts differently to this challenge. Signe eventually leaves Kjeran because she

cannot handle the juxtaposition of his mixed messages: his constant comparison of her to his mother, his refusal to have children, and his wish for her maternal devotion to him as a son. Birgit, on the other hand, willingly accepts the role as mother/lover, partly because she is a mother and has a son Kjeran's age, and partly because she receives such unwavering devotion (and good sex) from the young Kjeran. Synnøve is also a mother, but she makes few references to her son; Kjeran conjures up the birth as a point of reference for Synnøve playing his role as her husband during the seduction. The generation gap between each lover also affects each woman's encounter with him.

Kjeran has recently broken up with his girlfriend Signe at the start of the novel. The reader learns more about their relationship as the novel progresses, but it becomes evident that their relationship was quite happy except for the issue of motherhood. According to Kjeran, Signe leaves him because she wants children and he does not; he prefers to always be the son to a (any) woman. Even though they are the same age and she has not yet borne a child, he calls her "Signemor" (53) ["Mother Signe"] against her wishes. Birgit Tollefsen becomes his next partner, after he helps her carry home her groceries. The 45-year old woman is a new resident in his building, and Birgit turns out to be the daughter of one of his former charges at the nursing home, Mona Sejerstad. This element connects factions of his life together, and adds complexity to the motherhood nuances in their relationship as lovers. The state paid Kjeran to do the job that she was no longer willing to do, caring for her aged mother on a daily basis. Birgit has a son Kjeran's age, and this point plays out in their sexual fantasies during their relationship. The final, but in many ways central, woman is Synnøve Reifling. Synnøve,

one of the old women at the nursing home where Kjeran works, suffers from memory loss and therefore glides in and out of present and past times. In her less cognizant moments, Kjeran assumes the role of her dead husband by creating stories and dialogues about them. He eventually seduces Synnøve on little Christmas eve, a trauma that brings about her death on the second day of Christmas; after passing out in the park a few days later, he is put on sick leave and given three months off to pull himself together.

The stories of his relationship with these women entwine through the entire novel, but he admits to his mother that one thing could possibly change his perspective on life. After all that he has been through in the past six months—with Signe, Synnøve, Birgit, his mother, Miriam, and all the other fleeting women in his life—Kjeran admits to his mother that the one thing is a child. Holding hands on their walk back to his apartment, he quietly concedes to her that "jeg skulle ønske jeg hadde en liten datter. Barn en liten datter. Alenefar. Jeg tygger i tannkjøttet og vokser. For første gang: husker ingenting av fremdtiden som fortid" (171) ["I wish I had a little daughter. Just a little daughter. Single father. I chew on my gums and grow. For the first time: remembering nothing of the future as past"]. This is a huge concession for Kjeran in two ways, first for wanting to become a parent and second for changing his sense of time, signalling a growing sense of responsibility or personal contentment. To remember nothing of the future as past would require him to give up writing and creating stories of times to come, no longer infiltrating his journal/life story with created thoughts and imagined futuristic events. His relationships thus far have all revolved around his wish to be the

one cared for, not the caregiver. Wanting a child, if indeed the narrative voice can be trusted, signals a drastic change of heart for Kjeran. It is no surprise that he wishes a daughter for himself—he is crestfallen when Miriam tells him she will have a baby boy—for he has never identified with men at any level.

Writing the Diary

Kjeran possess the gift of storytelling, and he weaves his tales between past, present, and future, mixing fact and fiction on all time levels. Kjeran always creates truths about himself and other people, but feels no responsibility to a given or proven truth. "Et annet problem er når jeg selv skal fortelle. Ingen tror på meg. Bare mamma. Ja, Kjeran" (31) ["Another problem is when I'm supposed tell a story myself. No one believes me. Just mom. Yes, Kjeran"]. His mom's diary is an exception for it houses the real truth of his childhood. In their open relationship, Kjeran talked to his mother about almost everything as a child, but early in the novel the reader learns that Katherine has kept a diary that Kjeran has been forbidden to read. Whenever he thinks of it as a boy, he speculates as to what he might find in that diary. "Man kunne tro jeg smugleste mammas dagbok. '17.desember 1971. Rier. Hvordan ser han ut? Det blir en liten gutt'" (18) ["You might think that I secretly read Mom's diary. 'December 17, 1971. Contractions. What does he look like? It's a boy"]. The diary takes on a life of its own in his mind, existing somewhere out there, as a powerful force of identity just waiting and challenge Kjeran's constructed autobiography. His love and devotion to his mother

prohibit him from denying the truth of her written word, yet he is terrified ever to read the pages written by his mother's own hand.

In London, Miriam confronts him with a section of his mother's journal, and he changes his perspective. Suddenly the written text is much scarier to him than it ever has been, and he almost refuses to read it or confirm its existence:

> Jeg vet mamma skriver dagbok. Hun har skrevet dagbok siden folkeskolen, nesten hver dag. Jeg tenker meg et veldig dokument, et historisk øye, en selvangivelse, en familietekst. Hun vil ikke snakke om det, hun sier nåde den som går og leser i det. Jeg lette etter dagboken hennes i hele barndommen, Miriam sa alltid hun visste hvor den var, men at hun skulle vokte den som om det var mamma selv. Miriam sier hun aldri har skrevet dagbok. Jeg tror ikke på henne, det er jeg som aldri kan skrive dagbok. Men mamma har sagt Miriam og jeg skal arve den, hele verket, hele mamma. Nå skremmer det meg, før gjennomsøkte jeg hele huset (149) [I know Mom writes in a diary. She has written in a diary since high school, almost every day. I imagine a substantial document, a historical eye, a personal statement, a family text. She doesn't want to talk about it, she says mercy to he who finds and reads it. I searched for her diary my entire childhood, Miriam always said she knew where it was, but that she was supposed to guard it as though it were Mom herself. Miriam said she has never written in a diary. I don't believe her, I am the one who never manages to write in a diary. But

> Mom has said Miriam and I will inherit it, the entire collection, all of Mom. Now it scares me, before I ransacked the entire house].

Kjeran responds that he has never been able to write down his life story and keep a diary as his mother did. As the narrator of this story, however, he records the events of his life in a stream of consciousness report that comes to life more vividly than any daily diary could do. The creation of his own story has fed him during his sick leave, and kept his mind running when all other elements of his life are crumbing around him. The fact that he began telling this narrative of this novel after Christmas, processing through the difficult days and weeks of his time with Synnøve, makes it easier for him to read his mother's diary when Miriam confronts him with it in her London apartment.

When faced with reading the diary, Kjeran forces himself to encounter the truthful text. During breakfast with Miriam, he reads the span from August 16-21, 1976. Miriam has been sick, and Kjeran has started acting sick to show empathy for his ill sister. His mother is beside herself, not knowing how to help either of her children during this difficult time:

> Mot slutten av notatene blir håndskriften styggere, råere. Den 20.august 1976 står det at far slår meg. 'Jeg stod bare og så på,' skriver mamma. 'Han slo til Kjeran.' Den 21. står det at Miriam begynner å spise, at jeg beginner å spise, at far reiser til Danmark på konferanse. Jeg husker ingenting av dette (164-65) [Towards the end of the notes the handwriting gets uglier, stranger. The 20th of August 1976, it says that Dad hit me. 'I just stood and watched,' Mom writes. 'He hit Kjeran.'

> The 21st it says that Miriam starts eating, that I start eating, and that Dad goes to Denmark for a conference. I remember nothing of this].

Kjeran cannot remember the event either, so the diary becomes less threatening because he can dismiss it as just another constructed fiction. When Miriam asks him if he thinks it sad, he responds with indifference. A few weeks later, when his mother is visiting him in Oslo, she searches for his response as she asks about the diary. "At det hadde vært som å lese noe jeg ikke visste at jeg kunne utenat. Som om det var en barnesang jeg hadde lært i søvne i 1974. Fælt, sier mamma og ser trist ut. Neida, sier jeg. Bare sånn det er. Det er bare sånn det er" (169) ["That it'd been like reading something I didn't know that I'd memorized. As if it was a children's song I'd learned in my sleep in 1974. Terrible, Mom says and looks sad. Nope, I say. Just how it goes. That's just how it goes"]. The combined power between his love for his mother and his belief in the written word help him accept the less-than-ideal circumstances of his youth. Kjeran does not measure his childhood up against an ideal image that he carries, and he holds no grudge toward his mother for her shortcomings. Mothers themselves are the perfect images, regardless of how they perform in that role.

Kjeran's Women

Katherine K. Fevang is the center of Kjeran's world. "Jeg elsker min egen mor, mer enn noen kjæreste jeg har hatt (jeg har alltid løyet for dem: jeg elsker deg høyest, Signe)" (29) ["I love my own mother, more than any girlfriend I have had (I have always lied to them: I love you most, Signe)"]. That Kjeran thinks about her incessantly as a grown

man is strange but not surprising; even in play as a boy, Kjeran emulated his mother. When he and Miriam played dress up together as children, his only desire was to be his mother. Mimicking a photo, he put on her shirt with the yellow pelicans and allowed Miriam, dressed like their father, to add makeup to complete the transformation. Home alone later that autumn he dressed up again. This could be Kjeran's puppy love, or it could also be his first experience dressing drag, strengthening his identification with women.

As he grows up, Kjeran thinks often of his mother and worries about her, calling her for reassurance that she is okay and thereby confirming that he is okay as well. Twice he impulsively calls his mother, once after finding the suicidal organist hanging in the church, and once after watching a television interview with a bereft mother in a documentary on teenage suicide in Finland. Both situations are traumatic for Kjeran; the phone calls ground him in reality, calming him down and centering his life again after each disconcerting experience. The only record of the first call is Kjeran asking his mother if she is standing in front of the potted plant, and then if they still have little black parasites on them. She answers both questions affirmatively, and Kjeran is reassured that life is still in balance. The second phone call is also only briefly mentioned: "Jeg ringte hjem til mamma, sa alt var bra, det går fint, bare fint" (43) ["I called home to Mom, said everything was fine, it's going great, just great"]. He must have been more agitated during this phone call, for his response to his mother is clearly trying to reassure her of his well-being. Watching the grieving mother on television, the

possibility of losing his own mother shook Kjeran so much that he called home immediately to confirm her safety.

This is not the first or only time that he worries about his mother and wishes himself home safe beside her. Kjeran receives a package from her one day and reading the worry in her letter reminds him of days past, which subsequently evokes sentimentality and anger with his violent father. He reacts to her concern by shouting out in anger against him: "Jeg hater deg, jeg hater deg for alt du har gjort mot alle mine og mamma. Mamma, når du tar av deg morgenkåpen din er jeg alltid der" (97) ["I hate you, I hate you for everything you've done to all of my loved ones and Mom. Mom, when you take off your bathrobe, I'm I always there"]. The first-born son, Kjeran flips between wanting absolute attention from his mom and wanting to be her sole protector. Yet even he is unable to protect her from death. He imagines what it will be like after she dies and leaves him.

It is one of the most poignant images in Kjeran's constructed memory. He fantasizes about his fortieth summer, thinking back and remembering 2009, the year that his mother died, and all the pain he put her through in his lifetime. "Fødselen hennes med meg i seg. Eneste tanken jeg makter å tenke under tvang: all smarten jeg ga deg, kjære, aller kjæreste mamma. *Og så likte du det*" (131) ["Her birth with me inside her. Only thought I'm able to think under duress; all the pain I gave you, dearest, most beloved Mom. *And then you liked it*"]. He also imagines what it will be like burying her, and the thought scares him. "Å stå foran en stein de kaller gravstein, du tenker alltid: hun *ligger* her, under den jorden der, det er moren min, mens det er livet hennes i

deg du piner frem? (57) ["To stand before a stone they call a gravestone, you always think: she *lies* here, under that earth there, it is my mother, while it is her life in you that you are tortured by?"]. She has given him the ultimate gift of life and sacrificed herself, yet he is dissatisfied with the gift and the lasting power of the unyielding connection between them.

For the time being, Kjeran can still bask in her eartly generosity even though he takes advantage of that as well. His mother worries about Kjeran since he rarely comes home any more, and announces that she is coming for a visit in the spring. "Kommer utpå våren, sier hun i telefonen, må jo se hvordan du har det, sier hun, hvordan *det er med deg*, sier hun" (125) ["Coming in the spring, she says in the telephone, got to see how you are doing, you know, she says, how *everything is going for you*, she says"]. She arrives and mothers him during her stay, cleaning and cooking for him, talking and going out on walks with him. She meets his lover Birgit on a surprise encounter. As mother and son sit talking on the couch, Birgit strolls into the open apartment wearing nothing but a t-shirt. The scene is tense but it passes. Later that evening she sneaks in to sleep with Kjeran while his mother is restlessly sleeping on the couch. Kjeran lies awake listening to her discomfort. "Jeg vil gå inn til henne, jeg vil si at alt jeg er, mamma, er deg. Jeg vil tvinge henne til å innrømme at hun lever for meg, at hun elsker meg og lever bare for meg" (173) ["I want to go in to her, I want to say that everything I am, Mom, is you. I want to coerce her to admit that she lives for me, that she loves me and lives only for me"]. The conflicting powers of the two matriarchs in the house humble Kjeran, and reveal his fundamental dependence on his mother.

Kjeran's relationship with Miriam counters the strength of his relationship with his mom. Although Kjeran is two years older than Miriam, she takes on the role of the more responsible sibling and caretaker for her brother, oftentimes surpassing the maternal duties of their mother. The attention shifts to their father when a car accident paralyzes him, forcing Katherine and Miriam to care for him completely. Kjeran's distrust for his father overshadows him even in his misfortune, for Kjeran remains jealous of the accident as an "attention getting" trick dreamt up to monopolize the women's love and attention. "Mamma og Miriam liker det. Stakkars deg, sier de, du kan jo ikke gjøre noenting lenger. Lam, du er lam og kan ikke bevege deg, du må ha hjelp til alt, her er jeg, bare for deg, det er oss to nå" (51) ["Mom and Miriam like it. Poor you, they say, you can't do anything anymore. Paralyzed, you are paralyzed and can't move, you need help with everything, here I am, just for you, it's us two now"]. As eluded to in the opening reference of the novel, this image of complete helplessness and required dependency on a woman is Kjeran's dream, especially if it were his mother and sister tending him.

Kjeran need not be jealous of this competition, for he knows Miriam inside and out, never incestuously but from the combined openness in their household and their childhood curiosity. Miriam and Kjeran slept in the same bed until their father forbade it when she turned twelve. They played "Mother, Father, Child" when they were little, a fact of which Miriam reminds Kjeran when he is visiting. Kjeran clearly remembers their game, but will not admit as much to Miriam until she begins telling the story of her ex's (the child's father) anger upon hearing the story. "Miriam fortalte ham om mor

og far og barn, som alle gjør, hadde hun sagt til ham. At vi hadde alle klærne på, at vi bare pirket litt i hverandre" (160) ["Miriam told him about mother and father and child, which everyone does, she had said to him. That we had all of our clothes on, that we just poked each other a bit"]. Kjeran is overly protective of his sister as well, and he becomes depressed when she returns home one night and tells him that she just had sex for the first time. "Jeg husker at jeg ble trist, jeg strøk Miriam på kinnet og sa noe sånt som at det trenger du vel ikke fortelle til meg. Jo, nettopp deg og ingen annen, sa hun, ikke gå, bli litt hos meg" (55) ["I remember that I got sad, I caressed Miriam on the cheek and said something like you don't need to tell me this. Yes, just you and no one else, she said, don't go, stay with me a while"]. He feels ownership and possion over her youthful body despite their innocent connection.

Kjeran's preoccupation with Miriam's body started with their childhood games and continued in his adolescent and adult life; however, his fascination with Miriam's pregnant body was an intense force he could not anticipate. The London visit started with repulsion and quickly turned to adoration. He is speechless when he sees her for the first time, stunned and shocked that she has kept such a big secret from him for so long. "Magen er enorm, jeg synes den må sprekke bare jeg ser på den. [...] Jeg står i bue og klemmer henne, jeg er livredd for å komme nær den usannsynlige magen" (157) ["Her stomach is enormous, I think it might explode even if I look at it. [...] I stand arched and hug her, I'm scared to death to get too close to that unbelievable stomach"]. The transformation Kjeran undergoes from loving mothers to actually seeing his sister pregnant and about to become a mother is a revolutionary experience for him. His

protective nature overcomes him, as he remembers thoughts of the impurities and dangers to which his sister and the unborn child have now been exposed. "Bare Miriam utskutt, deformert eller forøket, invadert. Mongoloiden, vannhodet eller det kjernesunne barnet. Du kan ikke se det. Bare den kjempestrukne huden, de veldige brystene og ringer under øynene" (158) ["Just Miriam rejected, deformed or increased, invaded. The mongoloid, hydrocephalus, or the healthy baby. You can't see it. Just the overstretched skin, the enormous breasts, and rings under the eyes"]. He is so overcome with repulsion, love, compassion, disbelief, and fear over his sister's ascension into the realm of motherhood that he, for the first time, feels fear for a woman. He whispers to himself that he "er redd deg, det er det du ikke forstår" (159) [" is afraid of you, that is what you don't understand"]. He no longer knows how to treat or handle his sister, but feels like an outsider, an invader, and a dirty thief. Kjeran berates himself and all of mankind for their disservice and injustice to women by impregnating them. Most of all he imagines himself as her ex-boyfriend, "som om jeg er *han*, tenker jeg og tvinger øynene igjen. Kjenner meg brutal i lårene [...] Jeg prøver å synes det er fint, et barn i min søsters mage, et barn i en familiemage" (159) ["as if I'm *him*, I think and restrain my eyes again. Feel brutal in my thighs [...] I try to think this is going to be okay, a child in my sister's stomach, a child in a family stomach"]. When they get ready for bed, the beauty of Miriam's naked body pushes him over the edge and his desire for a maternal body trumps his fear. "Hun tar høyrehånden min bort til det store brystet. Jeg skjelver, jeg hardner, jeg får ståpikk, jeg klemmer beina sammen, jeg er redd det skal gå for meg. Jeg holder hånden helt i ro på brystet" (164) ["She pulls my right hand over to her enlarged

breast. I tremble, I stiffen, I get an erection, I squeeze my legs together, I'm afraid I'm going to come. I hold my hand perfectly still on her breast"]. Fear of the maternal quickly subsides, and lust for the pregnant body takes over.

These are the emotions that Kjeran never dared explore with Signe. Their two-year relationship quickly led from dating to cohabitation, but their breakup in mid-November has been difficult for both parties. She is constantly in Kjeran's thoughts, despite his self-argumentation that he is over her. Reminiscent of Peer Gynt and Solveig, Kjeran admired Signe as a many sided woman, wanting her to be both his lover and his mother. He never mustered the courage to admit the latter to her, but it always deterred their discussions of parenting when he said he could not explain his rationale for not wanting children. "Jeg kunne ikke fortelle det til henne, at det var på grunn av mamma. Jeg vil være sønn, ikke far. Det skal ikke være guttebarn lenger inne enn jeg noen gang kommer" (60) ["I couldn't say it to her, that it was because of Mom. I want to be son, not father. There will not be a boy child further inside than I have ever been"]. His sense of jealousy and possession for his women is overpowering, so strong that he cannot voice it to anyone. He imagines this as the ultimate reason why she left him, although the text also gives other justifications for her departure. Kjeran learns from Signe's sister that Signe was suffering from a severe hormonal imbalance that increased her instability during their relationship. He was largely unaware of this fact at the time, even though his memories of their years together contain scenes of her raging and violence that pass without explanation.

Kjeran's was hardly a contingent factor in her behavior, judging from his physical and psychological treatment of her. Kjeran's breast obsession repulsed Signe, and many times, he recollects her denial of the act as a pleasing touch. While hanging up curtains, she could almost feel his gaze directed at her breasts. "Du dier. Ring mamma din du, sa hun" (17) ["You suckle. Call your Mom, she said"]. In a drunken, angry message on his answering machine after the breakup, she assumes that he is out with other women. "*Jeg er full, klokken er, det er torsdag, den er halv to og du er vel ute og får deg noe, du ligger vel og sutter på en pupp*" (23) ["*I'm drunk, the time is, it is Thursday, it is one-thirty and you're probably out getting some, you're probably lying and sucking at a breast*"]. Kjeran's attraction to Signe as a childless woman is remarkable, for all of his infatuations tend to be with mothers. It is no surprise that he overemphasizes the point with her and eventually drives her away in his excessive enthusiasm for this kind of woman. As with many of Signe's responses, Kjeran remembers them as poetry. "Vet du, Kjeran / du har ødelagt meg, Kjeran / du vet ikke hva du gjør / du er en liten gutt / med de hendene dine / hundeøynene dine / siklingen din / alle tror du er en snill / liten gutt / men meg, du har ødelagt meg" (88) ["You know, Kjeran / you've destroyed me, Kjeran / you don't know what you're doing / you are a little boy / with your hands / your puppy dog eyes / your drooling / everyone thinks you are a nice / little boy / but me, you've destroyed me"]. This disturbs Kjeran more than he admits.

Kjeran moves quickly from sleeping with Signe, whom he wishes was his mother, to sleeping with Birgit, someone who could be his mother. He is ecstatic to

have sex with a 45-year old woman, and looks back on the date of their first encounter on March 14, 1996, as an amazing day that will forever be frozen in his mind. He envisions himself as a 72-year old man, reflecting on the date as a fantasy day "da han fikk brev fra mamma, oppdaget en død mann på taket, fikk ligge med en femogførti år gammel dame" (105) ["when he got a letter from Mom, discovered a dead man on the roof, got to sleep with a forty-five year old woman"]. Their relationship is reciprocal and allows them both to live out fantasies—Kjeran seducing and sleeping with a middle-aged mother, and Birgit rescued from her everyday routine by a younger man. Birgit fulfills the maternal desire for Kjeran, and he feels younger and younger (like a son) because of it. The years fall off as he carries her groceries up to the neighboring apartment into which she has moved. "Jeg blir tyve, nitten, atten. Hun går bak meg, klikker i høyhælene, hun ser på meg [...] vi lå med hverandre på stuegulvet femogtyve minutter senere" (103) ["I turned twenty, nineteen, eighteen. She walked behind me, clicking in her high heels, she's looking at me [...] we had sex on the living room floor twenty-five minutes later"]. Discovering that Birgit is Mona's daughter makes the affair even more appealing to Kjeran, for now Birgit connects him to Synnøve again. Birgit still manages to turn him on by feeding his sexual fantasies for mothers and making him the center of her universe, wanting always to please him above all else. His crass comments are either shallow remarks showing how little she means to him, or of how any woman/mother might fulfill the same role. "Det hun ikke forstår, det ingen forstår er at det er enkelt, kongenitalt, jeg kunne ha det *godt* med hvemsomhelst" (116) ["What she doesn't understand, what no one understands, is that it is simple, inherent, I would

be *happy* with whomever"]. He likes the sex but berates himself for doing so—he occasionally turns violent toward her and she laughs at his mishandling, and thinks it charming when he calls himself her son and accuses her of being a bad mother. This is unnerving for Kjeran, and he reacts violently the next time she begins the role-play. "Du er faen ikke min mor, sier jeg. Du er faen ikke min mor. Hører du. Du er faen ikke mor til den egen sønn en gang" (144-145) ["You're fucking not my mother, I say. You're fucking not my mother. Do you hear me. You're fucking not a mother to your own son either"]. Yet Birgit is the first person to whom Kjeran confesses the entire Synnøve saga, perhaps a remnant of his mother/child relationship with her and representative of his need to come clean to the matriarchs in his life.

The story about Synnøve is another amazing twist in Kjeran's tumultuous relationships with women. While Kjeran lavished attention on all of the old women at the nursing home, he singled out Synnøve Reifling as the primary object of his affection. She often mistook Kjeran for her husband on account of her failing memory, so Kjeran took on the role of her dead husband and "fortalte henne om vår felles fortid" (13) ["told her about our common past"]. Synnøve was a devout catholic, a mother, a widow, a resistance worker during the war, and a beautiful and intelligent woman. Reading her good days and bad days, Kjeran would slide in and out of character with Synnøve's changing moods, enticing her with made-up stories of their past, about the war, about their child, and about their relationship. Perhaps as a reaction against Signe leaving him, Kjeran intensified his connection to Synnøve as the holidays approached. Signe left in November, and in December Kjeran was caught by a co-worker embracing

and kissing Synnøve on a couch in the activities room. In the events preceding their embrace, Kjeran admired Synnøve's appearance. "Den gamle kvinnen, stolt, i en Marilyn Monroe-positur hvor hun måtte skape luftstrømmen, løftet skjørtet omtrent samtidig som hun presset det kokett ned igjen mens hun siterte bergprekenen" (37-38) ["The old woman, proud, in a Marilyn Monroe-pose where she had to create the air currents, lifted her skirt almost simultaneously as she pulled it coquettishly down again while she quoted the Sermon on the Mount"]. Kjeran weaves his narrative convincingly enough so that he achieves his goal: he has sex with 79-year old Synnøve on Little Christmas Eve, December 23. She dies three days later.

Body

Kjeran loves his mother and sister, but his love extends to all women. His desire to inhabit a woman's body signifies his deep identification with the female race and perhaps helps the reader better understand his desire for and admiration of all women. Many times, he comments on his disappointment at having been born a man. Like a magician, he wants to "gro eggstokker mens du ser på" (25) ["grow ovaries while you watch"] and wishes that he had pliable "jentehud, jentekropp" (124) ["girl skin, girl body"] instead of his boxy boy body. He even imagines physicians might find inverted breasts in him if they did a mammogram, and he eagerly checks his chest daily looking for any sign of developing breasts. Kjeran told Signe this desire so many times that she called him a "kjønnsforherligende feminist" (111) ["gender glorifying feminist"] when he told her about his dreams. "Jeg fortalte jeg alltid har ønsket meg bryster, svære

hofter, myk hud og ikke alle disse klumpete musklene, alt dette håret omkring på kroppen. Jeg vil at det skal komme noe levende ut av meg" (111) ["I said that I have always wanted breasts, big hips, soft skin, and not all of these lumpy muscles, all this hair over my body. I want something living to come out of me"].

This has been his plight since birth. Instead of playing as a small child, Kjeran liked to walk around outside in the neighborhood, talking to housewives and watching them hang up laundry. His father constantly grumbled about Kjeran's meekness, and his mother was always quick to jump to his defense. "Herregud den der unge er vernet, sa far, overbeskyttet, det er det han er. Hysjpådeg, sa mamma, han er bare så sensitiv" (61) ["Dear god that child is so sheltered, Father said, overprotected, that's what he is. That's enough, Mom said, he is just so sensitive"]. At 14, his family thought he was gay. His mother was worried because it was unnatural, his sister thought it was cool, and the thought embarrassed his father. There is never any actual proof behind the claim, for it apparently springs from observing his behaviors and physical characteristics. Although this is the only mention of homosexuality in the text, it is plausible that Kjeran's obsession with women and mothers feeds his identification with them. Women never unwillingly coerced into these relationships, for he happily searches for them to satiate his constant desire to discover the female body. Women are a positive force he voluntarily seeks; perhaps Øystein Rottem's assessment may be the closest to the truth. The excessive number of women and mothers in Kjeran's life reflect the transition from maternal pasts to feminist futures that may be underway in Norwegian literature.

Chapter V: Absent Mothers

Absent mothers characterize the disturbing plots of two novels by Anne Oterholm and Roger Kurland. Oterholm's ikke noe annet enn det du vil [nothing more than what you want] from 1995 and Kurland's Lekestue [Playroom] from 1997 explore motherhood through female characters who are absent in body, mind, and soul. Both novels feature a male narrator who views and judges the world according to his traditional image of ideal motherhood, evaluating women for their ability to adhere to the classical maternal figure that each man treasures. Both narrators are unmarried brothers, speaking from within a family situation and reaching out to help a loved one with this knowledge. The narrator in Oterholm's novel concentrates on his sister and her children, trying to monitor her behavior and prevent her from failing her maternal duties. Kurland's narrator embarks on an equally daunting task to remedy all the mothers he encounters in urban Oslo, in the lives of his family and friends as well as the families of his kids at the daycare center.

Oterholm's trilogy of the self-destructive woman embraces an image of motherhood not discussed by the Norwegian mainstream.[179] Her characters are barren of emotional value, and they openly show their disregard for maternal responsibility. Oterholm examines mothers in the sterile solitude that remains, and shatters the assumption that motherhood defines a woman or constrains her. Severing all of the sentimental connections associated with the institution of motherhood, Oterholm

[179] The unofficial triology includes ikke noe annet en det du vil, Avbrutt selskap, and Avslutningen.

sterilizes the relationship in an attempt to disassociate it from the standard emotional baggage. Oterholm neglects any biological preferences of woman as mothers, advocating with Toril Moi that biology informs but does not confine womanhood. The mother in Oterholm's novel detaches from her children and maternal role whenever possible, and not even the imposition of state laws affects her actions. She resists all societal and familial pressure, unwilling to change her lifestyles or beliefs to accommodate an idealized image of motherhood.

The narrator gives readers a direct view into the sister's life, and readers take his point of observation as a voyeuristic peeper, unable to detach from the woman's daily struggle. Oftentimes violence breaks out as an expression of this imprisonment, and this novel's violence is fittingly subtle—the violence of motherhood. While this could be read as the violence against the family unit, this study shows the disregard for the role of the mother. Motherhood does not limit the unnamed female, yet her deviations are measured against it as the constant control. Although the woman never gets a chance to tell her own side of the maternal story, the reader judges the woman as a mother because the narrator grounds her identity there.

Anne Oterholm

Anne Oterholm's debut novel ikke noe annet enn det du vil tells a poignant story of a brother's love for his alcoholic sister, which he expresses in his desire to redeem her as a good mother. The nameless protagonist builds his life around the actions of his sister in an attempt to monitor and protect her, but his irrational obsession results in the loss

of his job and his new girlfriend Kristine. The sister is unemployed, unattached, and unaffected by the pressures and standards of the patriarchal community. She refuses to care for her children and takes sexual and reproductive liberties without regard for their consequences. She is alienated from her children and the reality of daily life. This chapter examines how absent mothers influence motherhood vis-à-vis love, sex, and time. Oterholm creates an informed narrator who desires maternal love and projects that desire onto his sister, the mother and silent anti-heroine of the story. She breaks every rule of maternal law without remorse, and ignores the laws governing motherhood. Yet her brother steps in as her guardian and conscience, intent reconstructing her sense of maternal responsibility. He wants to reawaken her to the obligations of motherhood in hopes of rescuing her from her decadent lifestyle. He is unable to ignore her maternal bonds and allow her to step into absolute nothingness, no longer defined as a mother.

The story begins in late summer and ends approximately one year later, and the sibling narrator chronicles the daily events of the sister's life from his dual insider/outsider perspective. The narrator uses short, descriptive sentences to create the space and stop the time of each event. The terse present-tense descriptions are factual, or at least true in his imagination. While some of his stories recount actual visits with his sister, he fabricates most encounters as he stares at her through the window or across the bar. There are no recorded dialogues or conversations, but the brother expresses his thoughts and emotions as he traces the sister's drinking binges, unexplained travel, and various lovers. Even when his stories describe real events in his sister's life, the explanations behind each act are his. The title describes the parasitic attachment to his

sister that feeds his primary goal in life: to do nothing other than whatever she wants. The irony in this sentence is that the brother wants the sister to do what *he* wants, namely to resume her life as a mother and snap out of her antimaternal complacency. The narrator is disturbed by her disregard for time, which this study understands as a metaphor for her attitudes torward motherhood. He views her life as unnatural and suffocating while she is unphased by the monotony. Time returns to "normal" for a while when the brother falls in love with Kristine, a newly arrived colleague. They move in together after three months, but he does not tell Kristine about his sister. Soon his secret creates an unspoken barrier between the couple. He resumes spying on his sister and never explains his lengthy absences, abrupt departures, or disinterest to his girlfriend. Not surprisingly, the relationship turns platonic but Kristine remains remarkably tolerant as his oddity increases. His sister gives birth to another child, and he lives with her until the postpartum depression and euphoria have passed. The novel ends with the narrator's surprising return to Kristine at their apartment after an emotional disavowal of his sister. This section discusses the novel's critical reception, and then elaborates on rejected motherhood and concurrent themes of love, sex, and time as experienced by the brother and sister.

Critical reception

The stylistic indeterminacy of Oterholm's texts intrigues critics and their comments focuses on diverse subheadings like minimalism, meaninglessness, and triviality. Per Thomas Andersen, who calls her style "stram og stilsikker prosa" (564) ["tight and sure

prose"], includes Oterholm in a new generation of 1990s authors who adhere to an ideal of minimalism.[180] Categorizing her along the same lines, Øystein Rottem highlights her objective and "masculine" descriptions of the everyday as the most characteristic traits of her minimalism. "Med sin underforståtte skrivemåte og sin opptatthet av de ytre relasjonene mellom mennesker er Oterholm en 'minimalist' som ligger tett på den objektivt beskrivende stilen som mange yngre mannlige forfattere har dyrket" (756) ["With her implied style of writing and her concern with the external relations between humans, Oterholm is a 'minimalist' who closely adheres to the objective descriptive style that many younger male authors have cultivated"].[181] Perhaps Oterholm's male narrator encourages these "masculine" stylistic traits, for his voice and perspective mesh well with the minimalistic trends Andersen and Rottem commend.

Geir Vestad pronounces Oterholm as one of the leaders of the new generation of authors—the first in Norweigan literary history where women are in the majority.[182] Vestad identifies Oterholm's disturbing images of mothers and children as a manifestation of her attentiveness to the alienation of the subject from reality. He emphasizes the stagnation in the brother-sister pair in the novel, arguing that it is not an incestuous relationship, but an alliance formed by necessity and fueled by monotony, repetition, and a desperate search for meaning within the everyday. The alliance may be in place, but it functions on troubled premises and opposing goals. The sister seeks

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[180] Per Thomas Andersen, Norsk litteraturhistorie (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001).
[181] Øystein Rottem, Etterkrigslitteraturen. Bind 3. Vår Egen Tid, 1980-1998, (Oslo: Cappelen, 1998). I would be interested to learn why objective descriptions correlate only to the young male authors in the newer Norwegian canon.
[182] Geir Vestad, "Minimalismens tiår," Norsk Litterær Årbok, ed. Hans H. Skei and Einar Vannebo (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1999) 150-168.

release in the chaos while the brother wants to stop it. Vestad also discusses the prominent male gaze in the novel, a point that Geir Gulliksen continues to investigate. Gulliksen comments on the reader's unproblematic consumption of the masculine perspective of the lethargic woman. "Leseren må være villig til å la seg forføre av en slags insisterende intensitet; leseren må, i likhet med den begjærende broren, la seg forføre av den typen kvinnelighet som lar seg fremstille som sykdom, som forfall" (36) ["The reader must be willing to be seduced by a kind of insistent intensity; the reader must, like the lusting brother, be seduced by the type of femininity that lets itself pose as a sickness, as decay"].[183] Gulliksen's fascination with the novel orbits this jarring portrait of a woman outside of mainstream social understanding, a hallucinatory text that is "underforstått, innforstått, intimt, og immanent" (36) ["implicit, implied, intimate, subjective"]. Gulliksen identifies key points in his criticism, but the discomfort with the non-traditional female role honestly assesses the novel's power to examine and question motherhood.

Gulliksen is intrigued and confused by the despondent woman, but Nora Simonhjell compliments Oterholm for creating a female portrait of our time. Simonhjell cheers the proactive female seducer who acts just as bold and ruthless as her male contemporaries.[184] These modern characters thrive on the trivial, the banal, and the everyday; they appear to Simonhjell as participants in a literary version of a reality television program. "Det er romanene sitt grep og Oterholm sin metode: ei gjennomført

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[183] Geir Gulliksen, "delete skrive og stryke," Kritikk (1995): 34-36.

[184] Nora Simonhjell, "Dirty Details—meir enn tilfeldig attrå," Vinduet 18 Jun. 2001. 3. "Anne Oterholm er ein viktig forfattar! Ho skriv flotte bøker! Ho er ein medviten stilist! Teknisk utfordrande! Romanane hennar er gode! Dei er svært interessante og spenstigare enn Ørstavik og Marstein sine til saman!"

tømming av situasjonane og dei trivielle klisjeane" (6) ["It's the grip of the novels and Oterholm's method: a consistent emptying of the situations and the trivial clichés"]. Simonhjell celebrates the pure exclusion of morality assessments in Oterholm's literature and wishes for the same in the literary criticism. Audun Lindholm treats the sexually active mother as an intellectually stimulating topic within the trivial in Oterholm's literary style, "et erklært anti-metafysisk, anti-poetiserende, anti-projiserende og anti-dramatiserende meningsunivers" ["a declared anti-metaphysical, anti-poeticizing, anti-projecting, and anti-dramatizing universe of meaning"].[185] These comments allow the discomfort of the negative female to disturb the reader and encourage an individual assessment of the maternal reaction she produces abnormal mother figures.

In an interview, Oterholm discusses her personal fascination with the trivial and meaningless and defines her authorial stance to literature. "Eg er fascinert av det stillestående. Eg ynskjer å utvide noet, å vise at det verkeleg ikkje går framover. Det er sjeldan det skjer noko i livet. Vanlegvis skjer berre slike ting som dette" ["I am fascinated by the static. I want to expand something, to show that it really does not move forward. It is seldom that something happens in life. Usually things like this just happen"].[186] Meaning springs from the quotidian, and even within the apparent stagnation, movement occurs. Time is one such unstoppable event, and Oterholm admits that she understands time as chaotic and repetitive. "Eg trur ikkje på lineær tid. Det er meir gjentakingar enn rette liner bortover i tid, forskyvingar. Vi opplever det

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[185] Audun Linholm, "Mor er aldri bare mor," Morgenbladet 7 Nov. 2002.
[186] Tiril Rem, "Eit liv med døden," Dag og Tid 31 Oct. 1996, 20 Mar. 2003 <http://www.dagogtid.no/arkiv/1996/44/oterholm>.

same om att gong etter gong" (3) ["I do not believe in linear time. There is more repetition than straight lines going out in time, displacement. We experience the same thing over again, time after time"].[187] This is due in part to her proclaimed antiauthoritarianism, a belief that carries over from life into literature as one-sided interpretations and closed dialogues. Instead, Oterholm advocates for freedom and a Bakhtinian appreciation of the world—polyphonic and unfinished. "Når jeg fjerner den dømmende instansen i romanene mine, er det nettopp for å gi leseren frihet. Jeg ønsker at lesernes babbel skal være like ambivalent og flerstemt som romanens" ["When I remove the judgmental institution in my novels, it is precisely to give the reader freedom. I want the reader's babble to be as ambivalent and polyphonic as that of the novel"].[188] Oterholm repeats this demand in a recently published programmatic essay, heavily influenced by Bahktin encouraging readers to be open to a polyphonic literary text and to be aware of the narrator's influence. Many of her ideas correlate with Gary Saul Morson, including her idea that "leseren på sett og vis blir i sentrum for de moralske avgjørelsene" (10) ["when you come right down to it the reader stands at the center of the moral decisions"].[189] The potential to reform and debate rest in the reader, and this interpetation encourages a revisionary look at the absent mother in the novel to analyze her contribution to changing the norms of traditional motherhood.

Mothers

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[187] Rem.
[188] Bendik Wold, "Friheten i det urferdige," Morgenbladet 20 Dec. 2002, 18 May 2003. <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index/php?cmd=pring&show_article=1005740>.
[189] Anne Oterholm, "Det herreløse," Vinduet 1 (2003): 2-10.

Mothering is the nucleus of the novel, yet this is not a positive story of mothering or of women at first glance. This reading encourages rebellious mothers' strength continues to inspire change. Another intriguing component of this novel is that it is told by a male narrator but created by a woman. This combination offers a complex interaction of gender perspectives and perversions. It tells the story of absent mothers, purged of the expected emotional reactions but laced with a clear moral imperative of what it means to be a good mother. Ideal motherhood crumbles at her refusal to adhere to regulations of maternal caregiving and love, sexual responsibility, and the regulatory force of time. Each of these failures falls under consideration in this chapter.

The first paragraph of this novel depicts a mother who has taken her tired child into a bar "to look for someone." Returning to the opening scene of the novel, further investigation of the motherhood analysis continues by uncovering his view of women and mothers. Sitting in a pub in the wee hours of the morning, the narrating brother introduces two women—two mothers. The first, an insignificant bystander, brought her child along to the pub. She stayed so long that the child fell asleep. Caught in a rare moment observing someone else, the narrator brusquely denies that this woman consumes his attention, and refocuses on the second mom, the real object of his affection. Readers learn that the sister is also in the bar, has been in there the longest, and that she too is a problematic mother. The sister is a single mother of an untold number of nameless children, at least one boy and one girl. This first paragraph gives an indication of the kinds of maternal scenes to follow, and it sets the stage for the continued presentation of the sister as a mother.

Maternal love

Bringing a child into the bar becomes less vile once the reader discerns that she left her children alone at home to come to the pub. The scenario worsens as the reader learns of her behavior as a parent in comparison to her fellow drinker:

> Han vet hvordan hun pleier å la dem gå omkring inne i stua deres og ødelegge ting som de finner. Hvordan hun lar dem gjøre det som faller dem inn. Hvordan hun går fra dem for å sove. Etterlater dem alene der inne. Nesten alltid mer eller mindre påkledt. Fordi hun ikke orker å finne fram klær. […] Forstår ikke at hun må være sammen med dem. Hun går bare rundt der inne. Forsøker å ikke høre at de roper. Han har sett hvordan gutten hennes skriker seg nesten sanseløs. Hvor rød og svett han blir. Hvordan han slår mot henne. Slår for å treffe henne i ansiktet. For å gjøre henne vondt (6) [He knows how she usually lets them walk all over their living room and destroy whatever they find. How she lets them do whatever strikes their fancy. How she leaves them to sleep. Abandons them alone in there. Almost always more or less undressed. Because she just can't handle the thought of looking for their clothes. […] Doesn't understand that she must be together with them. She just walks around inside. Tries not to hear that they scream. He has seen how her son almost screams himself senseless. How red and sweaty he gets. How he hits her. Strikes out to hit her in the face. To cause her pain].

This quote cites the unthingable acts of which the mother is guilty: she does not discipline, leaves them alone, and ignores their basic needs completely. The brother is enraged, pondering this information in the opening pages of the story. He resents her choices but keeps his tone tolerable, building a case against her for her outright refusal to care.

Home is a battleground, but the pub offers solace and peace. Sitting with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in another, flirting with a man, she is warm and happy inside the pub. Away from the confining walls of her apartment, immersed in a cloud of inebriation, she laughs. This side of her personality rarely emerges at home, where her children constantly remind her of her expected obligations. In the pub, she is free to be herself without her role as mother infringing on her freedom. Readers learn more about her troubled relationship to her children as the narrator follows her home from the bar that night:

> Hun har glemt den lille gutten sin nå, hvisker han. Jeg vet det. Gatene han går i er helt folketomme. Det er nesten rart når det er så stille. Han er redd for at noen skal kunne gjøre henne noe. Noe hun ikke selv vil fordi hun glemmer. Fordi hun er lykkelig når hun glemmer gutten. Han har sett at han sitter og venter på henne. Innerst på et gulv. Sitter urørlig. Leker med klossene sine selv om det er natt. Det er som om han ikke kan tenke på noe annet enn henne. Ikke kan elske noe annet enn henne, selv så liten han er. Det går an å høre hvordan han ler når tårnet raser. Men han vet at hun ikke går inn til ham for det. Vet at hun ikke tenker på

> ham. At hun er altfor opprømt. Fremdeles full når hun kommer. Synger. Mens gutten hører på henne (11) [She has forgotten her little boy now, he whispers. I know it. The streets he wanders are completely empty. It's almost strange when it's so still. He's afraid that someone could do something to her. Something she doesn't want because she forgets. Because she's happy when she forgets the boy. He's noticed that he sits and waits for her. Far in a corner on the floor. Sits immobile. Plays with his blocks even though it's late at night. It's as if he can't think of anything other than her. Can't love anything other than her, even though he's so little. You can almost hear how he laughs when the tower crumbles. But he knows that she won't go to him because of that. Knows that she doesn't think of him. That she's too elated. Still drunk when she returns. Sings. While the boy listens to her].

Adding fuel to the fire, the brother further incriminates her for intentionally forgetting the boy, although he sits at home and wiats for her drunken arrival. The narrator imagines that the son harbors a wealth of unconditional love for her despite her nasty behavior toward him, and this injustice angers the brother further. The reader can only assume these perspectives, of course, because it is only the brother's own opinion that they story conveys. He projects his image of an ideal mother on to the woman, never allowing her a chance to speak or defend her behavior. She is a desired absence in her children's lives. All reports of mother-child bonding are fabrications of a biased narrator, assessing a love that may or may not exist.

The narrator romanticizes a model his sister's family and the role of the mother, yet he is cynical when she actually confirms his expectations and cares for the kids. Almost as if he watches a mirage, he knows this vision cannot last for long. Early on in the text, the mother gives her children a seldom shower of compassion, and the brother observes the foreign burst of affectionate behavior:

> Det er nesten uvant. Det er som om de plutselig er blitt sterkere. Som om hun har gitt opp å finne taxisjåføren. Hun drar dem med seg overalt hvor hun går. […] Det er vanvittig. De roper som i en rus fordi hun leker med dem. Fordi hun kysser dem. Fordi de får lov til å gjøre det samme med henne. De ligger inntil henne om natten. Klemmer seg mot henne. Som om det er de som eier henne nå. De vekker henne allerede tidlig på morgenen. Ler. Det vil ikke vare. Han vet at det ikke vil vare (13-14)
>
> [It's almost unheard of. It's as if they've suddenly become stronger. As if she's given up looking for the taxi driver. She takes them with her everywhere she goes. […] It's insane. They scream as if intoxicated because she plays with them. Because she kisses them. Because they get permission to do the same with her. They snuggle close to her at night. Nestle in to her. As if they own her now. They wake her early in the morning. Laugh. It won't last. He knows that it won't last].

And it does not. Later that day she bakes them a cake, lets them eat the entire thing, and then goes out to find her taxi-driving lover. This theme of unending versus indifferent love continues to run through his mind. A memory of the children comes to him and the

coundlessness of their uncoditional love for their negligent mother overwhelms him. "Barnet hennes, hvisker han. Det som hun skal få nå. Det vil elske henne. Det også vil elske henne" (48) ["Her child, he whispers. The one she'll get now. It wants to love her. It also wants to love her"]. Even when he cannot see the affection first hand, he imagines how love can affect what the family does inside:

> Han innbiller seg at han kan se henne foran fjernsynet. At ungene er der også. At de løper rundt henne. Lykkelige. Jeg vet at de pleier å være lykkelige når hun er der, hvisker han. De er lykkelige fordi de elsker henne (65) [He imagines that he can see her in front of the television. That the kids are there, too. That they run around her. Happy. I know that they're usually happy when she's there, he whispers. They're happy because they love her].

This intense insistence on the love theme is not lost on the reader. Perhaps it is the brother's insecurity with his sister's love that causes him to see the children as a threat to his connection with his sister. Perhaps it is his inability to understand anything other than a perfect mother as happy and loved that prompts such bewilderment. Even in her absence, the sister's actions are the determinate factors for the brother. In her silence, she has control over the situation; she treats her brother as nonchalantly as she treats her children.

He records her behavior with them as a mirror of her treatment of him, deflecting the pain of her denial to another equally vulnerable source. Her love goes in spurts, hot for a short period and ice cold for the majority of the novel. He stalks his

sister to force her to remember him and keep her in sight. Knowing that her children are not compelling enough to keep her home, he fears that if he does not exert an extraordinary pressure on her she will forget him, too. She who "aldri har brydd seg om å forstå. Aldri har tenkt på å elske ham slik som han elsker henne" (20) ["never has bothered to understand. Never has thought to love him like he loves her"]. Sitting at the pub, watching her, he imagines her children waking up to an empty house and discovering their mother's absence. "Så vil de glemme. Som henne vil de glemme. Glemme det de ikke kan se" (16) ["Then they will forget. Like her, they will forget. Forget that which they cannot see"]. This quote from the pub illustrates his fear, and he recognizes that fear a few pages later in the text when he tries for a moment to lose track of her intentionally. "Han legger ikke merke til om hun er der lenger. For et øyeblikk er det som om han har glemt henne, han også" (19) ["He doesn't notice if she is there anymore. For a moment it's as if he has forgotten her, even he"]. Of course, he has not; this rhetorical ploy cannot be convincing.

When the detached mother abandons and neglects her children, the state takes them away from her. The mother has repeatedly neglected her children in this story, and when officials discover her disregard, the family unit dissolves without fuss. The state does not detain nor reprimand her, as they take her children in her absence. The narrator tells of the unexpected sighting of the abandoned children and their subsequent removal from the apartment:

> Han tror det går flere dager. Ungene hennes holder på å sette fyr på leiligheten deres. De blir oppdaget av en mann fra lysverket som er i

> bygningen for å kontrollere en måler. Det er tydelig at han har ringt etter hjelp. Ungene virker rolige. De ser ikke på ham. Men de ser ikke på noen. Ikke på de som er kommet for å hente dem heller. Som om de ikke forstår. Som om de likevel venter. Men moren deres vil ikke komme. Han vet at hun er full. At hun ikke kommer hit nå. Hun er bare ute i gatene. Går mellom kafeene (21) [He thinks several days pass. Her kids are busy trying to set fire to their apartment. They're discovered by a man from the electric company who is in the building to inspect a painter. It's obvious that he has called for help. The kids seem peaceful. They don't look at him. However, they don't look at anyone. Not at those who have come to get them either. As if they don't understand. As if they wait anyway. But their mother doesn't want to come. He knows that she's drunk. That she doesn't come here now. She's just out in the streets. Walking between the cafés].[190]

Neither the mother nor the family is sacred to the woman, and she nonchalantly accepts this dissolution without comment.

Maternal sexuality

As if her refusal to give and take maternal love were not outrageous enough, the sister also has a liberal interpretation of her sexual and reproductive rights. In an extended romantic absence, authorities discover and remove the children from home. The

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[190] Anne Oterholm, ikke noe annet enn det du vil (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1995).

children are gone and the mother has been missing for several days; had it not been for the sibling relationship, the mother and children would have been forgotten by society. The narrator attempts to objectify and depersonalize the mother and children in every instance, but his descriptions fail to empower the forlorn children with emotion and spirits enough to increase the gravity of her actions. No consequences are dire enough to make her alter her life and fight to get them back. Sex leads to kids, skipping work results in termination, lack of communication brings about separation; she becomes pregnant again during her affair with a taxi-driver. Little time elapses between the removal of her children and the discovery that she is pregnant again. The brother anxiously visits them in the hospital once the child is born, but not before the third visit does he manage to touch the child:

> Han smiler. Rører såvidt borti babyen. Som om han egentlig liker den. Men det er som om hun ikke er interessert hun heller. Ikke bryr seg om hva han måtte mene om den. Sitter bare og drar kammen gjennom håret (78) [He smiles. Pokes around a bit over by the baby. As if he actually likes it. But it's as if she isn't interested either. Doesn't care about what he might think about the kid. Just sits and pulls the comb through her hair].

The juxtaposition of the sexual freedom and reproductive success constrasts the blatant scorn for the unwanted child. As one might expect, the newborn son does not return home with the mother when the hospital releases her. The birth affects her, however, for she goes through a period of post-partum depression upon her return home from the

hospital. The brother stays there to take care of her, but she remains morosely silent in the apartment "som om hun hater alt det som lever" (80) ["as if she hates everything that lives"]. As her mood brightens, his attitude improves; he begins acting like a little boy in her presence, whispering to her and wanting to share in her returning emotion and ecstasy.

Time and Motherhood

Motherhood shapes the narrator's sense of time, not as a waste of time, but rather as living a kind of stagnant time where nothing happens and nothing changes. His sister is simultaneously timeless and time-consuming, filling the days of her life by defying change and the passage of time. When the narrator is with or near his sister, time is elongated and always present. He constantly discusses how time stands still and contemplates existance of nothingness. "Som om tid ikke eksisterer for henne. Ikke viser seg for henne. Som om det ikke finnes annet enn henne der hun er" (17-18) ["As if time doesn't exist for her. Doesn't show itself for her. As if only she exists wherever she is"]. When the narrator meets Kristine and they begin a relationship, time becomes irrelevant to him. He no longer notices the passage of time, nor does he heed its repetitive monotony as when he is near his sister. Once his relationship sours with Kristine, he starts to take note of time again as his lifestyle returns to the pattern of endless repetition.

Motherhood and time are both measured by their absences, and the narrator measures both with negativity and inaction. "Han merker at dagene virker stillere. Mer

like. [...] Dagene virker som om de forsvinner. Ingenting hender" (17) ["He notices that the days seem quieter. More alike. [...] The days seem as though they are disappearing. Nothing happens"]. Reflections of time contrast observations of his sister, and the metaphors he chooses to illustrate the loss of desire to describe her apathetic attitude toward life and her children. "Tiden liger helt stille. Det er som om det som driver den er blitt brutt i stykker. Som om en slags drivaksel ved en feiltakelse er blitt kastet" (49) ["Time stands completely still. It's as if whatever drives it has been crumbled to bits. As if a kind of drive shaft was discarded by mistake"]. Not only does the time stand still but she remains motionless, as if unaware of the crisis escalating around her. He feels this insulation from action and movement, prompting another metaphor to surface during his stay with his sister. "Det er et vann. Alt er stille der. Ingen som snakker. Tiden står stille. Det er som om de svømmer i et vann uten vind. Som om vannet er vissent" (76) ["There is a lake. Everything is quiet there. No one speaks. Time stands still. It's as if they swim in water without wind. As if the water is dried up"].

Even when a break in routine comes along, the sister remains encased in a protective sheath of timelessness. Unexpectedly traveling to an outlying village, the brother trails his sister and discovers her in a little town. They stay for a few days, and the brother resumes spying on and tracking her in the new location:

> Som om dette stedet holder på å bli en del av en monotoni nå. Som om det er slik det må være bestandig. Som om det aldri har vært mulig å forhindre det. Han ligger stille under dynen. Derfor kommer de samme hendelsene på nytt og på nytt, hvisker han. Derfor blir det denne sirkelen

> (42) [As if this place begins to be a part of monotony now. As if it has to be this way forever. As if it never has been possible to prevent it. He lies unmoving under the duvet. Therefore, the same actions happen again and again, he whispers. Therefore, this circle exists].

Reading a maternal metaphor into this quote, it appears impossible to shed the traditional understanding of either, unable to break free from the cyclical domination of normalcy. Upon his return to the city, he comments that everything is the same; the death-like autumn mood still encompasses the city, and it feels as though he had not left.

This relationship to time changes when the narrator meets Kristine so that only one month after his trip to find his sister, the narrator has drastically changed his tune. "Det er som om han ikke lenger merker så mye til at tiden går. Som om han ikke bryr seg noe særlig om det" (57) ["It is as if he no longer notices the passage of time as much. As if he doesn't really care about it"]. The relationship that has taken his mind from his obsession with time and his sister dissolves in five short pages of text. Their loving relationship lasts until the end of January, and something snaps during their vacation to the Mediterranean. Tha attitude change surfaces in his renewed calculation of the passage of time. Complaining about the constant sun and monotony of every day, the glow falls from his love and he recognizes his descent into stagnation and nothingness. "Det er til og med greit når dagene blir helt like. Det er ikke nødvendig å prøve å forandre på noe som helst. Han vil ikke at noe skal skje" (61) ["It's actually okay when the days become completely alike. It isn't necessary to try to change

anything. He doesn't want anything to happen"]. They return home, he stops going to work, and he stays contently confined in their apartment. "Det er stille. Han sitter bare der. Han går ingen steder lenger. Ingenting hendte, hvisker han inne i den tomme leiligheten. Ingenting hendte. Det er stille" (61) ["It's quiet. He just sits there. He doesn't go anywhere anymore. Nothing happened, he whispered into the empty apartment. Nothing happened. It's quiet"]. He is not the agent, and he argues that he loses nothing from continuing this lifestyle. He is convinced that something will happen, something that will change everything. Moving in with his very pregnant sister quells this need for strictness.

Although her sheer resistance is a means of escape and depersonalization, the sister takes on new energy as she views alternative realities on TV programs:

> Hun trykker på fjernkontrollen. Sitter urørlig selv om ingenting hender. Venter helt fram til den engelske talen fra et eller annet program til slutt når henne. Klokken er ett eller to. Hun er rolig, hvisker hun. Som om hun ikke er redd lenger. Som om hun selv finns inne i en av disse seriene. Ikke lenger sitter og ser. Men snakker. Går fram og tilbake mellom ulike mennesker slik de der inne gjør (25) [She presses the remote control. Sits immobile even though nothing happens. Waits until the English speech from some program or another eventually reaches her. It's one or two o'clock. She's peaceful, he whispers. As if she's no longer afraid. As if she finds herself inside one of these series. No longer sitting and

watching. But speaking. Walking back and forth between different people as they do in there].

The sister finally gains a voice in this poignant scene, if only for a moment. Liberated from her silence, she experiences elation and animation as she escapes her own situation and embodies another. She becomes a confident, speaking woman, brave enough to ineract with people and engage in relationships in a meaningful way. The correlation here to Vibeke is clear. She places herself into the romance of a TV series life much like Vibeke places herself into the romantic milieu of her novels. The sister searches for release and freedom from her everyday situation.

Building on the power of the TV identification, the brother wants to buy her a book to entice her out of depression. At a complete loss for how to handle the sister or ease her pain, he turns to literature for help. Finding his sister sedentary in the apartment, he decides to run out and buy her a book, immediately, while nothing is happening. He gambles on an appropriate selection since he has never noticed what kinds of books she reads. The choice proves difficult when he finally reaches the store, and he wanders through the shelves unable to make up his mind with the clerk's help. Science fiction is the choice that provides something fantastic to combat the mundane, to take her mind of the coming baby, her taxi-driver lover, and her drunkenness, to stretch her mind and scare her soul about a potential future reality. He hurries home to her apartment and finds her content in her own world. Reading. "Han går inn til henne. Det er ingen andre lyder enn radioen og de han lager når han går. Hun leser. Plutselig vet han ikke hvorfor han er der. Han stirrer bare på det tomme fatet. Står helt stille. Hun

ser ikke opp" (73) ["He walks in to her room. There are not other sounds than the radio and those he makes when he walks. She is reading. Suddenly he does not know why he is there. He stares at the empty plate. Stands completely still. She does not look up"]. Reading isolates her further and excludes the brother in an impenetrable way, taking her to a place of fabled time far away from the realistic pressures surrounding her.

Roger Kurland

Roger Kurland's novel Lekestue is narrated by a twenty-something male, who is finished with his psychology studies at the University of Oslo and waiting for acceptance into the graduate school program. To survive the period of unemployment, he acts on a suggestion from one of his one-night stands, Helene, to apply for a job at the campus daycare where she works. Half of the story deals with his relationships with the female employees and children at the daycare, while the other half of the story revolves around his personal life and the tales of friends and family. He shares an apartment in Majorstua in Oslo with three other male students, Endre, Kjell, and Thomas, and they have another good friend, Glør, who lives nearby with his girlfriend, Anja. The narrator's family consists of his father, Geir-Olav, his stepmother Nina, his half-brother Robert, and his stepbrother Simen. His mother lives nearby, but her only form of contact with him for the past 17 years has been by telephone.

His personal life is complex but fulfilling, packed with the energy of study life. Shortly after the brief encounter with Helene, the main character meets Indira, a beautiful immigrant woman, and falls in love with her. Their relationship quickly gets

serious, despite the white lies he tells. Helene makes his work life difficult whenever possible, and takes revenge on his personal life by falling in love with his brother Robert. Glør writes and publishes a novel about the neglect of teenage boys in society, and after a breakup with Anja, develops an after school club for teenage boys in the lower class neighborhoods of Oslo. Geir-Olav and Nina separate when Nina learns that Helene has been sleeping with her husband Geir-Olav. Robert commits suicide when he fails his exams and finds out about Helene's affair with his father. The narrator, who never had a strong relationship with Robert, decides to pay more attention to his younger brother, Simen, and offers to watch him when Nina cannot. Simen forgets his mission to find his test-tube father when he becomes a follower of Glør's youth movement. After uncontrollable conflicts, the main character earns the trust the now-pregnant Indira once again, and they make plans for their future family as the novel ends

The main character is not so lucky in his work life, however. Hired as a token minority in a large female staff, he finds himself targeted by the powerful matrons of the daycare center and constantly battles the changing rules of the employers. Although half of the staff dislikes him, the kids adore him. He scorns administrative rules that exist for rules' sake and consume the time and energy he should be devoting to the children. Together with the new substitute Josef (last name Stalin, child of communist parents), he attempts to dismantle the hierarchical matriarchy in power. The main character intervenes in the private lives of his small charges when he feels that the lackadaisical parents ignore the welfare of their own children. These blunt actions

irritate parents, children, and administrators, and lead to his eventual dismissal. This chapter selects some of the perspectives the narrator exhibits in his interactions with the various women in his life to show how he treats motherhood. After reviewing the secondary literature, this section discusses the portrayal of absent mothers in Kurland's novel.

Critical reception

Lekestue became an immediate success after its publication in 1997. The title takes inspiration from a Norwegian children's television program from the 1970s, and it describes and reflects many levels of society portrayed in the novel.[191] Shortly after its publication, Tor M. Tørstad made the story into a TV series on NRK; later, the novel was adapted for high school students (videregående VK2) and republished in a classroom edition complete with comprehension questions and a concluding article by Øystein Rottem. Rottem discusses Kurland's choice to write an unabashedly autobiographical novel, using his own friends and personal experiences as the basis of his narrative. Rottem uses Kurland as a generational example of the 1990s turn from the irony-laden narratives of the 1980s to the hyper-realistic accounts of contemporary times still laced with a moral or ethical inflection. "68'erne har fått de barna de kunne vente seg når de har oppført seg slik de har gjort. Både som foreldre og på de fleste andre livsområder viser det seg jo at barna deres er blitt minst like ansvarløse som de selv har vært" (299) ["The 68'ers have gotten the children they could expect when they

[191] Øystein Rottem, afterward, Lekestue, by Roger Kurland (Trondheim: Cappelens, 1997) 287-310.

have behaved like they have done. Both as parents and in the majority of other areas of life it seems that their children have become just as irresponsible as they themselves have been"].[192] Rottem's criticism unproblematically groups Kurland as a member of a 1990s "family" generation because of his thematic concentration. Stylistically however, Kurland's novel differs greatly from most of the stories considered in this study. Kurland's novel is a coming-of-age novel that captures the flavor of university life in Oslo in the 1990s with an unmistakable detail; however, the classical form of the novel is much less revolutionary than the subject matter and the perspectives on motherhood are the least flexible and progressive.

Kurland's novel received modest literary critique in the daily media, although the public reacted sharply against his harsh criticism of Norwegian daycare centers. Knut Ameln Hoem reports that it "vakte reaksjoner i flere barnehagekretser da den kom. Den inneholdt noen så sjeldent som en krikk av hvordan barnehagen oppdrar barn i dag" ["provoked reactions in many daycare circles when it was released. It contained something so seldom as a critique of how the daycare raises children today"].[193] Several critics comment on that hype, such as Unni Solberg, who praises Kurland's critical satire of society and his ability to reveal the narcissism of his generation. Solberg points to Kurland's heavy-handed disapproval of women within the featured elements of society. "Det virker ifølge teksten som om det er kvinnene som først og fremst må bære ansvaret for sviket overfor barna" (29) ["According to the text, it seems as if it's the

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[192]Rottem.

[193] Knut Ameln Hoem, "Lekestue fikk hard medfart," NRK.no 24 Jan 2002, 20 Mar 2003. <http://nrk.no/redskap/utskriftsvennlig/1585778.html>.

women who must bear the responsibility of the betrayal of the children"].[194] Brikt Jensen expresses a similar sentiment, highlighting Kurland's negative portrayal of the female power politics within the daycare.[195] Susanne Hedemann Hiorth admires Kurland's choice of the daycare milieu that combine "briljant satire med en hardtslående institusjonskritikk" ["brilliant satire with a hard-hitting institutional criticism"]. Hiorth argues, however, that the other half of the story about the main character's private life is too improbable, and therefore detractes from the overall genius of the novel. Morten Abrahamsen lauds Kurland's ability to write such a complex novel as a young and inexperienced author. "Det er imponerende at en debutant klarer å skape en så mangslungen fortelling – uten å bruke tusen sider – og samtidig samle sammen alle ballene til slutt" [It is impressive that a debutant manages to create such an intricate narrative—without using a thousand pages—and simultaneously tie all the loose ends together at the end"].[196] The complexity of Kurland's storyline and cast of characters produced mixed responses among reviewers, but the unflattering images of women and mothers disturbed them most.

As critics note, Kurland speaks out strongly against the plight of daycare in Norway today in his novel, an argument he stated more bluntly in the press. To the University of Oslo student newspaper, Kurland conveys his opinion that children are better off at home with their parents. "Venstresidas materialistiske menneskesyn gjør ansvaret for barna til et offentlig anliggende istedenfor et privat. […] Får man barn, må

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[194] Unni Solberg, "Debutant Roger Kurland: Lekestue," Kritikk (1997): 28-29.
[195] Brikt Jensen, "Vemodig om ansvar," Dagbladet 24 Sept. 1997, 9 Sept. 2002 <http://www.dagbladet.no/anmeldelser/970924-anm-bok2.html>.
[196] Morten Abrahamsen, "Roger Kurland: Lekestue," Morgenbladet 29 Aug. 1997. 3 Jan. 2004 <http://www.morgenbladet.no/index.php?cmd=print&show_article=3429>.

man ta seg av dem" ["The Left's materialistic view of human beings makes the responsibility for the children into a public affair instead of a private one. [...] If you have children, you must take care of them"].[197] This statement and others like it reflect the author's belief in the nuclear family, and the novel's agenda attempts to repair the dysfunctional families therein. Considering his self-declared conservative, nationalistic perspective on the family, it is quite surprising that Indira's immigrant family becomes the most positive family image given in the entire novel. They are the undisputed role models for the main character, and serve as a measure to which he compares his family and friends. Kurland defends his choice to exemplify the patriarchal family model in another interview with the student paper. "Jeg forsvarer ikke nødvendigvis den mulimske kulturen, hvor faren kontrollerer døtrene sine. Men det finnes positive aspekter ved det også" ["I am not necessarily defending the Muslim culture, where the father controls his daughters. But there are positive aspects of it also"].[198] Kurland's support of immigrant and interracial association is suspect when one considers the stated aims of his overall project.

Tom Egil Hverven comments on this very situation in his discussion of Kurland and the demise of the family. "Den eneste virkelig positive framstilling av en familie jeg har funnet i 1990-tallets debutantlitteratur, skildrer en asiatisk innvandrerfamilie" (71) ["The only really positive portrayal of a family I have found in 1990s debutant

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[197] Sindre Bremnes and Trond Brubak, "Fruktbar venting," Universitas 3 Sept. 1997, 8 Oct. 2002 <http://universitas.uio.no/Arkiv/1997/20/kultur2.html>.
[198] Anders Waaler Kemp and Åshild Støylen, "Lekeonkel," Universitas 16 Jan. 2002, 8 Oct. 2002 <http://universitas.uio.no/reportasje/1259.shtml>.

literature, depicts an Asian immigrant family"].[199] Obviously influenced by Kurland's outright defense of the nuclear norm, Hverven distances himself from a whole-hearted acceptance of the work. He curtails his enthusiasm twice by first describing the novel as "en underholdenede, om enn noen sjablonmessig form" (68) ["an entertaining, even if somewhat unoriginal form"], and then calling Kurland's style "kjapp og pedagogisk" (71) ["pert and pedagogic"]. Hverven cites Kurland's repeated frustration with split families; they cause adults to focus on their own needs at the expense of the children. Hverven commends Kurland for giving an affirming alternative in Indira's family, for "det ligger et etisk imperativ i å oppleve partneren som en del av en familie, forankret i en tidsforståelse, en kontinuitet" (71) ["it implies an ethical imperative to experience the partner as a part of a family, anchored in an understanding of time, a continuity"]. This praise reflects the family structures depicted in the narrative, rather than the choice for a multicultural perspective in general.

Family in the student co-op

There are a plethora of relationships to follow, but the central players in the modern day playroom share an apartment in the center of Oslo. The narrator introduces the guys in the apartment as a family: Endre as the father, Kjell as the ambitious model brother, Thomas as the dependent baby, and himself as adopted brother. Glør and Anja are the beloved cousins, the ones who rescue them from tight financial and moral situations when necessary. Endre is "en estetisk katastrofe. Barne- og familieministerens mareritt.

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[199] Tom Egil Hverven, Å lese etter familien: Forsøk om norsk litteratur på 1990-tallet (Oslo: Tiden, 1999).

Et eksempel på hvordan den nye mannsrollen definitivt ikke skal være" (10) ["an aesthetic catastrophe. Nightmare of the Secretary of Children and Family. An example of how the new man's role definitely should not be"].[200] Thomas, who never learns to take the world seriously, depends completely on his unmarried mother; he takes the friends' dirty dishes home to her dishwasher when his turn on kitchen duty rolls around. She has enabled his dependency for 15 years, and appears willing to extend it another 15. While Thomas never knew his father, Glør had a constant flow of new stepfathers; his mother "jobba hardt for å skaffe Glør en mannlig rollemodell i mange år" (23) ["worked hard to find Glør a male role model for many years"] without success. The main character has a decent relationship with his father, but not overly emotional or deep. "Forholdet oss imellom er kanskje ikke så intimt, men det er i alle fall bygd på respekt. Klart det. Alle barn respekterer en far som interesserer seg for hva de driver med" (21-22) ["The relationship between us is perhaps not so intimate, but at least it's built on respect. Absolutely. All children respect a father who is interested in what they are doing"].

The contrasting caricatures of the friends' parents and families and their own "familial" roles in the apartment cover a wide spectrum of alternative family patterns. No one escaped completely unscathed from his non-traditional family, for each friend carries some kind of baggage or personality marker that the narrator attributes directly to each individual childhood. He freely judges his friends' behaviors with this in mind, but seldom reflects on his own acts and their connected to his background and life

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[200] Roger Kurland, Lekestue, (Trondheim: Cappelen, 1997).

history. A pattern of criticism emerges from his wide-ranging assessment. Men are taken to task for their distanced and detached relationships to their children as fathers, but women elicit the strongest criticism from the narrator primarily for their disinterest or insincerity as absent mothers. Whether they stay or leave home, mothers never measure up to the narrator's ideal image of what a mother should be. His criticism implicitly judges his childhood while directly affecting other's lives and choices. All are imperfect, most embarrassingly so, and the main character takes it upon himself to recreate motherhood as he sees fit. This determination and belief is admirable, but the direction in which he intends to take the reform remains governed by traditional images of motherhood. There is very little irony or depth to the realistic portrayals of these mothers.

Maternal Models and Monsters

Geir-Olav's wife Nina begins as the most positive mothers in the novel. Impressed with Nina's abilities in all aspects of life, the narrator and Robert admire her as a perfect woman. "Jeg og Robert kaller henne wonder-woman. Hun har en god jobb også. Dama tjener bra. Hun har firmabil. Geir-Olav er god i matte. Både addisjon og geometri" (22) ["Robert and I call her wonder-woman. She has a good job too. The woman has a good salary. She has a company car. Geir-Olav is good in math. Both addition and geometry"]. Her body and brain merge into a model woman for her two stepsons, but the fact that she cares about Simen trumps her physical characteristics in the narrator's eyes. With help from parenting classes, she has raised Simen to be a normal 12-year old

boy, despite his artificial conception; consequently, Nina's performance as a perfect mother garners a higher compliment than her beauty and intelligence. When Nina and Simen move out after Geir-Olav's affair, Nina misconstrues the narrator's close relationship with Simen as an act done for her benefit and not his. The narrator begins to notice her fallibility while visiting Simen on his birthday. He suspects her superficial responses to Simen are just automatic replies "har hun lært på kurset" (223) ["she has learned at class"]. Nina opens a bottle of wine, and reveals her penchant for manipulation as she starts to seduce the narrator. "'Jeg fikk min eks-mann til å erklære seg impotent,' fortsetter hun, 'fordi jeg foretrakk en donor isteden. Det er perfekt, jeg har full kontroll, ikke sant'" (223) ["'I got my ex-husband to declare himself impotent,' she continued, 'because I preferred a donor instead. It is perfect, I have full control, you see'"]. Motive exposes this ideal mother and condemns her behavior as immoral and calculating. The narrator thinks less of her, but he adds her to his list of one-night stands and promptly forgets about the affair until his next visit to meet Simen. She falls from grace completely at their next meeting when she exposes her position as a calculating mother:

> 'Du kjønner, jeg har lenge hatt lyst på et barn til. Ei jente.' Jeg rynker på nesa. Hun smiler. 'Jeg har bare ikke funnet noen adekvat donor ennå, ikke sant.' Jeg svelger. 'Men etter å ha vurdert ditt utseende, personlighet, intelligens, og … seksuelle kapasitet …' Hun smiler forlegent. '…så lurer jeg på om du kanskje kunne tenke deg å gjøre meg den tjenesten?' Magen min krymper seg. Jeg reiser meg brått fra sofaen.

> 'Jeg vil ikke ha barn,' stotrer jeg. Nina ser forbausa ut. 'Jammen … det har da ikke noe med *deg* å gjøre?! Babyen vil selfølgelig være mitt barn, ikke sant!' (234-235) ['You know, I've always wanted one more child. A girl.' I wrinkle my nose. She smiles. 'I just haven't found an adequate donor yet, you know.' I swallow. 'But after having considered your looks, personality, intelligence, and … sexual capacity …' She smiles shyly. '… I'm wondering if perhaps you would consider doing me the service?' My stomach knots up. I jump up from the sofa. 'I don't want to have kids,' I stammer. Nina looks surprised. 'Yes, but … it doesn't have anything to do with *you*! The baby will be my child, you know!'].

The narrator's noble belief that parenting skills ought to be shared between the father and mother cannot be faulted. The criticism emerges as less balanced since this belief comes as the response to maternal shortcomings. Nina's controlling, all-powerful consumption of men turns her into a supermom machine in the narrator's eyes, and no longer the perfect mother he once believed. Even though she is still young, beautiful, and successful, wonder woman becomes a fallen angel once her impeccable maternal merit is smudged.

In contrast to the beautiful, trim, and intelligent Nina, the narrator describes the matrons at the daycare as obtuse in body and mind. Those employed in room 5 where he works include Janne, a very pregnant, fashion-conscious teenage girl, and Sølvi, an aging woman with long, permed hair, tanning bed skin, and a pink jogging suit. Anita, in room 3, is "ei svær dame med høy åttitallsfrisyre og sløvt, pløsete ansikt" (112) ["a

large woman with a tall 80's hairdo and dull, bloated face"]. These women are stereotyped and physically undesirable to the narrator, not to mention their flaws as surrogate mothers in the daycare system. When the narrator inquires whether Janne's unborn child will taint her joy for the job, she admits that there is a difference in caring for her own child and for the children at work. "Hun ser forundra på meg. 'Det er noe helt annet med egne unger! Dem er man jo glad i!'" (78) ["She looks at me in amazement. 'It's totally different with your own kids! You love them!'"]. With this chilly introduction to his job responsibilities, the narrator quickly bonds with the children and becomes their favorite caregiver in the entire daycare.

All of the matrons watch him like a hawk, but Anita has a special dislike for him primarily because he enjoys the kids. Her personality is particulary calculating and manipulative, making internal politics almost unbearable. "Hun har funnet mitt svake punkt. Unga. Stalin har jo sagt at Anita misliker meg fordi jeg bruker mer tid på unga enn tariffen tilsier. Jeg stiller disiplene hennes i et dårlig lys. [...] Og jeg har ikke engang noen modell å skylde på (207) ["She has found my weak point. The kids. Stalin has said that Anita detests me because I use more time with the kids than the table says. I cast a shadow on her discipline. [...] And I don't have a model to blame it on"]. Even the supervisor who tolerates him disapproves of his meddling actions and tries to set him straight.

> 'Du er snart uvenner med samtlige av foreldrene, jo!' Jeg kremter. 'Det er fordi de er dårlige foreldre. Faren til Oskar gir jo regelrett faen. Tenk å sende en taxi etter sønnen sin på fem år, da?!' Gerd rynker på nesa. 'Joda,

> men det er ikke noe å gjøre med. Du kan jo ikke adoptere gutten heller. Vår oppgave er å gi foreldrene valuta igjen for den barnehageplassen de kjøper. Det er alt.' (195) 'You are soon enemies with all of the parents, you know.' I clear my throat. 'It's because they are terrible parents. Oskar's father doesn't give a damn. Imagine sending a taxi to get your five year old son?!' Gerd wrinkles her nose. 'I know, there's nothing you can do. You cannot adopt the child either. Our assignment is to give the parents the daycare spot they've paid for. That's all'].

These behaviors elucidate and confirm the general concensus of the protagonist and his friends, namely that the declining interest in parenting permeates all levels of society and harms children most. "Poenget er at sosialdemokratene har omgjort barndommen til en arbeidsplass!" (256) ["The point is that the social democrats have remade childhood to a workplace!"]. Motherhood has become a quantity bought and paid like any other, a despicable development in the eyes of the narrator.

The parents paying for the daycare are not much better than the average employee is. The narrator analyzes them as he gets to know their children, in his mind learning their strengths and weaknesses far better than most parents do. After removing a stubborn boy from a hiding place at the day's end, he grumbled his opinion of spineless parents. "Fy faen så lei jeg er av disse hobbyforeldra. De burde finne på noen annet. Frimerker, for eksempel" (129) ["Oh fuck am I tired of these hobby parents. They ought to try something else. Stamps, for example"]. As he grows closer to the children, some of them mistakenly call him 'pappa' when they are excited or anxious to

show off their projects. He sometimes blurs or forgets that boundary himself when he steps over into the private lives of the children and their parents. Regardless of how good he is for and with them, they will always go home with a parent at night. In a shocking wave of reality, he struggles to understand this fact. "Personligheten til Nora er låst fast i mora sitt genmateriale og dagligliv. Jeg kunne aldri erstatte mora hennes. Det er bare å innse. Jeg har så vidt kapasitet til å mate jenta. Det er alt" (185) "Nora's personality is frozen solid in her mother's genes and daily life. I could never replace her mother. That must just be understood. I barely have the capacity to feed the girl. That's all"]. This is the injustice and the irony in his perspective toward mothering.

Despite this, the narrator and Glør campaign for children to remain with their parents. Out in downtown Oslo with a pair of gay friends, the narrator and his friends take up adoption as a discussion topic. Glør explodes when the couple expresses their desire to adopt a child, and they angrily defend their ability to parent. Glør's outspoken and crass remarks stem less from concern with their sexual orientation and more from the fact that they will deny a child of the mother-child bond. "'Dere er avhengige av at et menneske gir bort barnet sitt! Hvordan ville dere føle hvis mora deres ga dere bort, hva?!'" (36) ["'You are dependent upon a person giving up their child! How would you feel if your mother gave you up, huh?!'"]. Outbursts of this kind are crucial in understanding Glør's frustration with apathetic parents whose declining interest in and time for their children result in feelings of abandonment. Glør believes that daycare harms children since it "skaper et vakuum blant barn og unge, et rop etter oppmerksomhet og omsorg" (121) ["creates a vacuum among children and youth, a cry

for attention and compassion"]. His book builds on these personal feelings, and by creating his after-school program, Glør intends to prove to parents how little effort it takes to inspire children when they lack role models. The goal and underlying motive primarily benefits the boys, but Glør adds a cynical edge to his agenda to convince parents of his infallible judgment. He plans to win the boys' respect, fill the existing ethical, moral, and religious gap left untreated by parents, and educate them to be gallant gentlemen and dedicated community servants.

Although highly controversial, his pseudo-parenting project is wildly successful, and Glør soon has a following of several hundred neighborhood teenage boys. Parents, instead of feeling threatened by his power, embrace Glør for taking responsibility for a needy age group. Mimicking the way Glør criticizes parents for their lack of concern, the parents redirect his statements to the state and express their anger over the "parental" state's failure to reciprocate love and support for this generation of citizens vis-à-vis financial aid. Glør, too, strikes out against the social democratic state and the claim made by the Secretary of Children and Family that Norway needs another new man's role; he convinces his young followers that she has incorrectly dismissed masculine characteristics as caregivers, and that individuals give better care than institutions. "'Verden er fremdeles hard og brutal utafor vår lille sosialdemokratiske lekestue'" (232) ["'The world is still hard and brutal outside our little social democratic playroom'"]. Glør commands his audience, to bring about change through benevolent actions while still upholding the tough guy façade. "'Bare mennesker kan elske, ikke institusjoner. Derfor må omsorg utøves av mennesker, ikke barnehager og aldershjem'"

(255) [“‘Only humans can love, not institutions. Therefore compassion must be given by humans, not daycares and nursing homes’”]. As with most well intended messages, every boy in the audience interprets Glør’s point differently, including Simen. He grossly misinterprets Glør’s message and twists it to the justification for physically abusing one of his teachers who speaks critically of the youth movement. Endre and the narrator intervene at the nick of time to save Simen from making a bad situation worse, causing Simen to feel betrayed and abandoned again by all of his older male role models.

Conclusion: Encouraging Mothers to Speak

This dissertation posits the mother as the nexus of the "family literature" that emerged at the end of the millennium, and gives a sample of some of the strongest voices speaking in Norwegian literature in the 1990s. It began with the premise that there was something more to the "family" label than previously recognized; although the generational tag created a vast quantity of criticism in response, critics still searched for a more settling answer to many of the questions that the label evoked. The stylistic return to realism coincided with the increased attention to familial relations.

Further investigation of the topic asserted a definite maternal shift in voice and focus provided the elusive element of these novels. Recognizing the renegotiation of the mother as a cyclical occurrence, this reading incorporates these novels as literary contributions to a larger cultural debate happening in feminist theory and public arenas. The 1990s marks the start of a new generation's deliberations on the meaning of motherhood, and this literature adds an important element to those debates by challenging the preconceptions of the readers. This debate differs slightly in the United States and Norway, and the theoretical divide between the two cultures creates notable consequences on both sides in terms of theories of gender and mothering. The focus on the potential of the everyday gives a natural venue in which to facilitate the mother's use (and abuse) of her creative energy and power.

The literature presents confrontational mothers who are unwilling or unable to meet the demands of ideal motherhood required either by their own standards or by

those of an opinionated other. Some novels within this body of literature allow mothers to speak for themselves, and the resulting stories detail the honest emotions of the conflicted and stressed mothers of our times. The accounts are harrowing, and their collective rebellion against engrained nostalgic ideals provide unsettling images of non-traditional or bad mothers who go against the imagined norm. Others were less radical but yet remarkably different from one another, supporting the argument for multiplicity in the definition. Only by increasing and extending the concept of mothering will continue to reform. By creating mothers without children, obsessive mothers, and absent mothers, the youngest generation of Norwegian authors stimulated debate on the status of mothering and the family among readers and critics. These insightful novels, written by Roger Kurland, Trude Marstein, Anne Oterholm, Tore Renberg, and Hanne Ørstavik, invite readers to return to the text and rethink relationships and language use in everyday situations.

This dissertation offers a one-sided story of the phenomenon of "the family" in Norwegian literature from the 1990s. By focusing exclusively on the mothers, the voices of the fathers and the children have not been allowed to speak. Until these voices are heard, there cannot be a holistic account of the full worth of these stories. Teasing out the preconceptions encased in representations of fatherhood and childhood in Norwegian literature would undoubtedly offer similar challenges and opportunities for a renegotiation of meaning of these terms, and nicely compliment this study of mothering at millennium's end.

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I. Education

Ph.D. 2004. Scandinavian Language and Literature; Comparative Literature, Theory and Criticism Program
University of Washington; Seattle, Washington
M.A. 2000. Scandinavian Language and Literature
University of Washington; Seattle, Washington
B.A. 1998. Scandinavian Studies, Biology; Cum Laude
Concordia College; Moorhead, Minnesota

II. Publications—Articles

"In the Shadows of Love: Sideshadowing in Hanne Ørstavik's Kjærlighet"
International Association of Scandinavian Studies—2002 Conference Proceedings

III. Fellowships and Awards

Teaching Assistant Award; Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington. 2004
PEO Sisterhood Scholarship, Seattle AO Chapter. 2004
Conference Travel Grant; Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington. 2004
Presidential Grant; Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study. 2004
MLQ Research and Travel Grant; University of Washington. 2004.
Graduate School Fund for Excellence and Innovation Travel Award; University of Washington. 2003
Fulbright Fellow, Norway. University of Bergen. 2002-2003
Travel Grant; Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norwegian Information Service in the US. 2002
King Olav V Norwegian-American Scholarship; Sons of Norway. 2002
Maud Berggren/Lars Nærland Scholarship; Pacific Northwest Chapter, Nordmanns Forbundet. 2002
Synnøve Lien Fielding Scholarship; Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington. 2002
IASS Conference Travel Grant; Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington. 2002
Presidential Grant; Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study. 2002
Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellow, Norway. University of Oslo. Summer 2000
Norwegian Commercial Club Scholarship. 2000
Faculty Scholar; Concordia College. 1994-1998

IV. Teaching experience

A. Graduate Student Teaching Assistant, University of Washington

NORW 101-103: Beginning Norwegian. 1999-2002, 2003-2004
NORW 150: Intensive Beginning Norwegian. Summer 2001, 2004
SCAND 100: Introduction to Scandinavian Culture. Spring 1999
SCAND 230: Introduction to Folklore Studies. Winter 1999
SCAND 370: The Vikings. Autumn 1998

B. Instructor, Bellevue Community College

NORW 100-103: Beginning Norwegian. 2000-2001
NORW 200-203: Intermediate Norwegian. 2000-2001

C. Instructor, "Skogfjorden" Concordia Language Villages

NORW 103: High School Credit Course. Teacher and Counselor. Summer 1999

D. Guest Lectures

"Norwegian Folklore." Village Charter School, Anchorage, Alaska. March 20-27, 2004
"1990s Norwegian Literature." Literature Seminar, Nordisk Institutt, University of Bergen. April 28, 2003
"Norwegian Literature and the Family in the 1990s." Fulbright Conference, Oslo. February 20, 2003
"American Integration in Norway." NRK radio program 'Jul I P1 Stua', Oslo. November 29, 2002

V. Conference papers and presentations

"Homoerotic or Homophobic? Teenage bodies in Mannen som elsket Yngve"
The Gendered Body, Aesthetics, and Experience; Kristiansand, Norway. June 2004
"New Scandinavian Sagas? Mothering in 1990s Norwegian literature"
Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study; Redondo Beach, California. April 2004
"Ibsen's Brand in Drag: Pastiche and Performativity in Cecilie Løveid's Østerrike"
International Ibsen Conference; New York, New York. June 2003
"In the Shadows of Love: Sideshadowing in Hanne Ørstavik's Kjærlighet"
International Association of Scandinavian Studies; Aalborg, Denmark. August 2002
"Outsiders in Arne Garborg's Fred"
Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study; Salt Lake City, Utah. May 2002

"'She Flew the Coop' or Metaphor and Metonymy in Henrik Ibsen's Vildanden"
Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study; Chicago, Illinois. April 2001
"'She Flew the Coop' or Metaphor and Metonymy in Henrik Ibsen's Vildanden"
Comparative Literature Conference; Seattle, Washington. March 2001
"The Politics of Literary Influence: A search for the cultural left in Richard Rorty's America and Jan Erik Vold's Norway"
Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study; Madison, Wisconsin. May 2000
"Herman Bang's Women: Portrait of Danish Dames in Katinka"
Nineteenth-Century Studies Conference; Seattle, Washington. May 2000
"Peer Gynt's Life as a Rortyian Self: An interpretation of Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt and Richard Rorty's thoughts on selfhood"
Pacific Modern Language Association; Portland, Oregon. November 1999
"The Quest for Piety in Knut Hamsun's Growth of the Soil"
Nineteenth-Century Studies Conference; Seattle, Washington. May 1999

VI. Service

A. University

Lead Teaching Assistant; Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington. 2001-2002
Norwegian Textbook Review Committee; Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington. 2001-2002
Advisor; Den Norske Klubben, University of Washington. 1999-2002, 2003-2004
Senator; Graduate and Professional Student Senate, University of Washington. 2000-2002, 2003-2004

B. Community

Vice President; Pacific Northwest Chapter, Nordmanns Forbundet. 2001-2003
Director; Pacific Northwest Chapter, Nordmanns Forbundet. 2000-2001
Ballard Seventeenth of May Committee. 1999-2002
Young Nordics Committee, Nordic Heritage Museum. 2004.
Nordic Heritage Museum. 2001-2004
Nordmanns Forbundet. 2000-2004
Sons of Norway. 1997-2004

VII. Languages

Native: English
Near native: Norwegian
Advanced high: Danish, Swedish
Reading: French, German, Old Icelandic

VIII. Professional Memberships

Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study. 1998-2004
International Association of Scandinavian Studies. 2002-2004
The Ibsen Society of America. 1999-2004
Norwegian Research and Teachers Association of North America. 1999-2004
Modern Language Association. 2001-2004
Center for Women and Democracy, University of Washington. 2002-2004

IX. References

Jan Sjåvik, Assistant Professor, Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Washington
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